

Searching for Manuscripts

In the beginning of the project I tried to fit in visits to European libraries in search of Kashmirian manuscripts. In practice this is more difficult than it sounds, since our aim is to disregard everything known and printed, so the proof that a text, of which you neither know the author nor the name is a Kashmirian text, is not that simple. One method that leads to a large number of hits is to search for Śāradā manuscripts, searching for Kashmirian Nāgarī unfortunately does not work, but can be bypassed by looking at the collection in Jammu, where this type of Nāgarī was used. Manuscripts of unknown Kashmirian authors in other scripts can not be searched systematically with the data provided by most catalogues.

We must even say that for searching new Kashmirian works normal library catalogues are of moderate help. Indologists know the typical Indian catalogues and sometimes wrinkle their nose at the inexactitudes. Who has not seen that a cataloguer has placed a Tantric work into Vedānta, a small metrical work he did not understand under Stotra, and so forth.

Nevertheless, I must say that these cataloguers have my full sympathy. They managed to deal with an enormous volume, on which our European approaches to cataloguing would probably have failed. Usually we tend to think that European catalogues are more up to academic standards. Perhaps, but the emphasis on exactitude and thoroughness has one disadvantage. Cataloguers who strive to produce a highly informative catalogue are usually not fond of new texts, because there is not

much they can write about them, and they often do not feel comfortable in revealing their ignorance about a text. The facade of academic omniscience, which has no value except in personality cults, here reveals its full anti-scientific potential.

In Germany, where attention to detail often widely exceeds common sense, many scholars, myself included, thought that the prestigious series VOHD¹ had covered all Sanskrit works kept somewhere in Germany. What we could not know was that the Cologne Indologist Janert and his team had selected mainly known texts for description, whereas unknown texts were not mentioned.

A change was introduced through the more recent catalogues of a collection of Śāradā manuscripts acquired by the Staatsbibliothek Berlin from the bequest of Janert. This by the way is an absurdity, for Janert did not only exclude from consideration important unknown works from his catalogues, he even had further manuscripts in his private collection, which he kept secret. Ehlers, in these catalogues, did not shy away from stating that he could not find this author or that title. This is exactly what we are looking for, and I do not understand what is gained by omitting manuscripts, because a cataloguer could not give more than a name, or a title. With a bit of luck a reasearcher can later find and identify precious unknown texts. Nobody expects the cataloguer to do this type of research while cataloguing, unless in a fully financed Indological dream land where everyone has endless time and is in no hurry to publish. Unless

¹ <https://rep.adw-goe.de/handle/11858/00-001S-0000-0023-gA93-8>

of course your name is Theodor Aufrecht, who promised to produce a catalogue within weeks.²

It must sound like a joke that the closest manuscript library, where we could find new texts, lies only 140km from Marburg university, the location of the project. I am talking of the substantial collection of Śāradā manuscripts in Göttingen, purchased via the *Benares Hindu University*, which has remained almost unknown because Janert decided not to touch it. Perhaps the fact that a large collection of Kashmirian manuscripts could be purchased in the sixties would have raised questions about similar collections (even his own?).

In any case, when our project started, I went through the manuscripts in Göttingen, in Berlin, and made a first assessment in Oxford. Then this February (2025), one of the editors, Nils Jacob Liersch, made a trip from Srinagar to Pune to acquire scans of what we hoped would be unknown texts. In order to prepare my younger colleague for the tricky task of negotiating with libraries I thought that ignorance of all the stories of famous scholars, Indian and European, who were turned away by Indian librarians, was indeed bliss. I did not only want to avoid spoiling his enthusiasm, I also thought that with a new generation on both sides the outcome might now be different. In fact, the outcome exceeded expectations. In some places it was still a hard fought battle to get complete scans. When dealing with the BHU he stayed for more than a week going from librarian up the whole ladder to the Vice President of the university and back to get a special permission for accessing

²Anett Krause: "But all for science!" – Theodor Aufrecht in the Light of His Correspondence as Cataloguer of the Leipzig Sanskrit Manuscripts. <https://od-portal.hypotheses.org/>

complete scans of all Śāradā manuscripts we were interested in. Those who tried in the past will realize that this is quite an accomplishment.

The manuscripts collected in the last months from these places as well as from public sites like archive.org or pandulipipatala.nic.in have provided us with enough material for quite a few volumes of first editions.