

Asiatick Researches: English Sources for Oriental Studies in Göttingen University Library, 1735-1800

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The University Library of Göttingen, founded in 1734, had, by the turn of the nineteenth century, built a comprehensive scholarly collection for study and research. Within the collection, books printed in the English-speaking world played an important role and, among these, sources for oriental studies are prominent. Through the systematic acquisition of antiquarian and current printed material, Göttingen's librarians ensured that readers had access to the great majority of "canonical" titles in the field and were able to follow in some detail the expansion of British imperial interests in the East.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, a reader or researcher seeking a comprehensive and accessible collection of printed materials about Asia, in English, might have done worse than consider traveling not to one of the great libraries of Britain or America, but rather to a small and somewhat obscure town in north central Germany. By 1800 the university library at Göttingen had assembled what was almost certainly the largest collection of books in English (or printed in other languages in English-speaking countries) outside the Anglophone world. Works of scholarly merit had been acquired methodically for nearly seventy years. New accessions were recorded systematically in a subject catalogue for easy accessibility, and the library was widely recognized as a model of its kind. Indeed, it is doubtful whether readers in London, Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh, or Harvard had better access to information on oriental topics or current affairs in Asia than readers in Göttingen.

The Georgia Augusta at Göttingen was founded in 1734 and formally opened in 1737 as the university of the Hanoverian electorate. Detailed planning of the new university had been carried out under the supervision of Gerlach Adolph, Freiherr von Münchhausen (1688-1770), the senior minister in the Hanoverian government, who also served as its first *Kurator* or chancellor. Its foundation was regarded by contemporaries as a parallel to the establishment of a university on the most up-to-date

principles at Halle an der Saale, in the electorate of Brandenburg, in 1694.

Münchhausen was able, over a period, to attract leading scholars in almost every branch of knowledge to his new foundation. During the second half of the eighteenth century, the University of Göttingen achieved an international reputation as a center of teaching and research in a wide range of subjects. This reputation was enhanced by the work of the Royal Society of Göttingen, the published proceedings of which (the *Göttingische Gelehrten-Anzeigen*) became the most influential German reviewing periodical of the period. Göttingen's scholarly community proved remarkably adept in disseminating its ideas throughout the German-speaking world and beyond.

In Münchhausen's concept of the new university, which he never formally laid down, the university's library played a central role.¹ Books had been acquired by the government and earmarked for the library even before the formal foundation of the university. The acquisition of the collection of Baron Hinrich von Bülow (1650–1724) in 1732 was one of the first indications of this policy. By 1748 some 16,000 volumes had been assembled. A description of the university in that year mentions book chests, one or more of which would arrive from Holland or England each month.² By 1800 some 133,200 volumes had been accumulated, at a time when typical university libraries in Europe or America rarely had more than twenty or thirty thousand volumes. In that year alone 2,069 books were acquired.³ In only seventy years Göttingen had assembled one of the largest collections of scholarly materials available anywhere.

The library's extraordinary success in developing its collections so comprehensively and in such a relatively short space of time can be explained in both financial and organizational terms. What made Göttingen's position unique among contemporary German university libraries were the "extraordinary allocations" made available by the government for acquisitions.⁴ In Christian Gottlob Heyne, who directed the library's affairs from 1763 until his death in 1812, it also found an indefatigable scholar and librarian, with a clear vision of the library's purpose. Heyne stated the principles behind its acquisition policy in 1810; the library would acquire,

continually and systematically from the daily accretion of native and foreign literature only that which, in the perpetual progress of scientific culture, was necessary for a library that was instituted with a scientific intention.⁵

The importance of books imported from England in the development of the library's collections as a whole has long been recognized, but it has

only now become possible to begin to quantify the numbers of books imported and to describe the system by which they were acquired in any detail. A catalogue of the holdings of English books printed before 1801 was published in the late 1980s.⁶ It can now be shown that around 17,000 English items had been acquired by 1800, well over 10 percent of the total holdings. Supplementary volumes containing the archival records relating to English books enable the scholar to trace the acquisition of a large proportion of them from the London bookseller to the library's shelves. Even a cursory glance through the pages of the published catalogue will show the importance of oriental studies within the Göttingen collection of English books as a whole. Books on related topics appear on almost every page.⁷

Oriental materials had been collected by major German libraries from an early date. The famous *Bibliotheca Palatina*, removed from Heidelberg to Rome during the Thirty Years War, contained a number of oriental items apparently acquired for their curiosity value, including a unique copy of a Chinese novel which nobody in sixteenth-century Heidelberg could read. The library's acquisition by the papacy was seen as a great gain by Catholic scholars, who recognized its biblical and oriental manuscripts as a particularly valuable resource in the ideological struggle with Protestantism.⁸ Imperial campaigns against the Turks, and increasing success in rolling back the Ottoman Empire in southeastern Europe, brought Turkish, Persian, and Arabic manuscripts back to the German courts as the booty of war. Later in the century the English traveler Edward Browne (1644–1708), the eldest son of the author Sir Thomas Browne, was shown a variety of items on a visit to Vienna. He observed "There can scarce be a more admirable collection than the Manuscripts in part of the first Chamber, of *Hebrew*, *Syriack*, *Arabick*, *Turkish*, *Armenian*, *Æthiopick*, and *Chinese* Books. . . ." Among further curiosities was "a letter of the present Emperor of China, in the *Chinese* and *Tartarian* Languages."⁹

A further motivation for the acquisition of oriental materials is demonstrated by the Pietist August Hermann Francke (1663–1727). Francke was founder of the famous *Waisenhaus* at Halle, which, having begun as an orphanage for the poor children of his parish, had developed by the time of his death into an extraordinary network of educational, medical, and other charitable institutions. He also retained a teaching position at the university. Associates of Francke residing in London became influential members of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), and the work of the *Waisenhaus* became widely known in England through their accounts as published and distributed by the society. The SPCK also supported Francke's activities in India, where a Lutheran mission was established in the small Danish settlement at Tranquebar

on the Coromandel Coast. The foundation's biblical researches and missionary activities ensured that Halle became one of the leading centers of oriental studies in central Europe during the first half of the eighteenth century.

If Renaissance and Baroque libraries collected oriental items as potential weapons in religious conflict, tools for missionary endeavor or simply for display, then the Göttingen of the *Aufklärung* was wholly concerned with building a collection of practical scholarly value as materials for teaching and research. The library contains relatively few bibliographical curiosities, and it would have been contrary to the intention of its founders and librarians to acquire texts in languages that could not be understood.

The study of oriental languages and cultures at Göttingen in the eighteenth century is closely associated with the biblical scholar and orientalist Johann David Michaelis (1717–1791). Michaelis was born in Halle, the only son of a professor of divinity and oriental languages. The young Michaelis traveled to England where he remained for some eighteen months. A month of this sojourn was spent at Oxford, where he made a particular study of manuscripts at the Bodleian Library, which he attended every day from ten o'clock in the morning until half past one in the afternoon.¹⁰ In 1745 Münchhausen invited Michaelis to Göttingen, where he remained until his death.¹¹ From Göttingen, Michaelis conducted an extensive correspondence with foreign scholars and remained in especially close contact with developments in England.¹² He also undertook the scholarly supervision of an expedition to Arabia under the patronage of the King of Denmark (1761–1767). Michaelis chose its members and drafted a list of queries for the expedition to resolve. In the spirit of inquiry, these were intended to address certain problems of biblical interpretation by practical observation.

It would be convenient to be able to relate Göttingen's very extensive holdings of the works of English orientalists directly to Michaelis's influence. Certainly few works in this subject area were acquired with the foundation collection of Baron Bülow. The archival records provide little evidence to support such a direct connection, however, with certain significant exceptions. Heyne ordered works on oriental topics extensively both before and after Michaelis's death. If surprisingly few books in the field were obtained for the library through the contract of sale agreed with Michaelis's heirs in 1791, or at the later auction of his books, this was presumably because holdings were already very strong.

During the earliest phase of the library's development, from the 1730s to about 1760, a core collection was built up through the acquisition of mainly antiquarian materials, often purchased at auction on the continent. Direct purchasing from England began in 1746; Göttingen's major

London supplier in this period was the specialist antiquarian bookseller Thomas Osborne. Many of the library's copies of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century British authors were acquired either on the continent or through Osborne. The systematic manner of their acquisition shows that, from the beginning, those in command of the library's fortunes were determined to build a comprehensive collection.

Works acquired in the field of oriental studies provide ample examples of this systematic approach. The library holds, for example, editions of all of the major published works of William Beveridge (1637–1708), Bishop of St. Asaph, one of the earliest scholars to point to the necessity in biblical studies of learning ancient oriental languages. The works of Thomas Hyde (1636–1703), orientalist and Bodley's librarian, are similarly well represented. Göttingen's holdings of the various editions of oriental authors prepared by the Oxford orientalist Edward Pocock (1604–1691) are similarly extensive. The library also acquired a number of early English editions of biblical and liturgical texts in oriental languages.

After 1760, when a core collection had largely been assembled through antiquarian purchases, Heyne continued to acquire works by contemporary English orientalists quite as systematically, basing his selection on notices in the London monthly reviews. Few significant omissions can be detected. Göttingen continued to enjoy a close business relationship with a succession of London booksellers after Thomas Osborne's death. These included John Ridley of St. James's Street (d. 1782). Contact was maintained through the offices of diplomats in the Hanoverian legation where Wilhelm Philipp Best (and later his son, Georg August Best) acted as London agents for the library from the 1750s until the Napoleonic wars.

A comparison of the Göttingen catalogue with E. G. Cox's *A reference guide to the literature of travel*¹³ will show how extensive Göttingen's holdings were in the field of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century oriental travel. Travel books such as Captain Robert Knox's *An historical relation of the island Ceylon*, Henry Maundrell's *A journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem at Easter, A.D. 1697*, or Richard Pococke's *A description of the East* are often present not only in original English editions but also in German (and sometimes French) translations.

Accounts of Earl Macartney's celebrated embassy to the Emperor of China may be mentioned as one example of the depth of the collection of later eighteenth-century oriental travels. They were acquired systematically by Heyne as they appeared in London, including Aeneas Anderson's *Narrative* (London, 1795; available at Göttingen in May of that year), the *Authentic account* (London, 1797) by Sir George Staunton (1737–1801), secretary to the Embassy, and the *Copious account* in William Winterbotham's *View of the Chinese empire* (published in parts and obtained

by Göttingen in 1798–99). German translations of the works of Anderson and Staunton were also acquired in collections of travels. Only *A complete view of the Chinese empire* (London 1798), and the *Journal* by Samuel Holme on which it is said to be based, were not purchased. As apparently trivial works, they presumably did not fulfill Heyne's criteria for selection.¹⁴

Holdings of books relating to India are particularly strong in the Göttingen collection, reflecting Britain's widening commercial and imperial interests in south Asia throughout the eighteenth century. The library acquired several hundred items on Indian topics printed in English during the second half of the century. They range in scope from British parliamentary papers, through atlases and illustrated books, to scholarly works on Indian languages and culture. A reader at Göttingen at the end of the eighteenth century would have been in an excellent position to survey current knowledge about the subcontinent from a British perspective.¹⁵

Göttingen readers were able to consult exhaustive accounts of recent events almost as soon as they were published in London. The Library obtained, for example, the articles of impeachment against Warren Hastings and his defense as issued by Ridgway and Stockdale, respectively, in 1786. The *Minutes of the evidence taken at the trial*, issued in parts between 1788 and 1795 (comprising nearly five thousand pages), were also collected, as well as accounts of the trial published by Ridgway (a rare edition of the first months' proceedings supplied by Harlow in 1789) and Debrett (published in 1796).

The library's collection of works by (or translated by) Sir William Jones (1746–1794), perhaps the best known British orientalist of the period, are similarly extensive. Heyne ordered the earliest published works of "Oriental Jones," including his *Dissertation sur la littérature orientale* (London 1771) and *Poems consisting chiefly of translations from Asiatick languages* (Oxford 1772), as soon as they were published. He continued to obtain Jones's publications systematically until the appearance of the *Works*, announced in the *Critical Review* in June 1799, ordered on the seventeenth of that month and available at Göttingen in August. Periodicals edited by Jones, such as *Asiatick researches*, were collected assiduously. Heyne also ordered the edition of selections that appeared in London in four volumes between 1792 and 1798.

Jones's standing in Göttingen can perhaps be demonstrated by reference to *An elegiac and historical poem, sacred to the memory and virtues of the Honourable Sir William Jones* (London, 1795) by Thomas Maurice (1754–1824), an oriental scholar and later assistant keeper of manuscripts at the British Museum. Heyne ordered and re-ordered the book repeatedly during 1796 before a copy was finally delivered by the London bookseller. Maurice's other major works, *The history of Hindostan* (London, 1795–1798)

and *Indian antiquities* (1793–1800), were similarly ordered volume by volume as they appeared.

Although comprising fewer than fifty items, the Göttingen collection of early Indian printing is highly significant. Outside English-speaking countries, it is comparable among eighteenth-century collections only with those at Halle and the national libraries at Paris and Copenhagen.¹⁶ These items were certainly not acquired as examples of printing in India *per se*. Most should be seen in the wider context of the increasing interest in oriental philology in contemporary Germany. Others reflect the library's policy of collecting material relating to British colonial affairs, while some appear to have been acquired more or less by chance.

As examples of chance acquisitions, Göttingen's holdings of books printed in German, Portuguese, or Tamil at the Lutheran Mission in Tranquebar may serve. These include a number that were previously unrecorded.¹⁷ Printing in Portuguese (the *lingua franca* of South Indian Christians) began there in 1712, using a printing press supplied by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in London. Tamil types cut in Halle arrived in 1713, enabling the press to print texts in the South Indian vernacular. Among later items in the collection associated with South India is an Armenian work of moral theology printed at Madras in 1773. Göttingen's imperfect copy is one of only very few to have survived, 100 of the 110 copies printed having been lost when the ship carrying them sank in the Indian Ocean. A Portuguese almanac, printed at Tranquebar in the same year, was previously unrecorded.

Göttingen's acquisition of later works printed in those parts of India that had passed into the control of the East India Company by the last quarter of the eighteenth century clearly shows a systematic approach. As Calcutta developed into the focus of British commercial and administrative activity in south Asia, it also became the major center of English-language publishing.¹⁸ Heyne and his colleagues in Göttingen found information about Calcutta publications in the English monthly journals, enabling them to order new publications systematically through the London book trade as they were announced. Books on Indian languages and literatures appear to have been given the same priority as other aspects of oriental studies, presumably reflecting the philological interests of Michaelis and Heyne.

The library holds a fine selection of pioneering works on Indian philology, including the Bengali grammar by Nathaniel Brassey Halhed (1751–1830), printed at Hoogly in Bengal in 1778; the Urdu grammar by John Borthwick Gilchrist (1759–1841), printed in Calcutta in 1796; and Johann Philipp Fabricius's Tamil-English and English-Tamil dictionaries, printed at the Lutheran Mission Press in "Wepery [or Vepery]

near Madras" in 1779 and 1786, respectively. Göttingen's very rare copy of Henry Harris's dictionary of Dekani Urdu published in Madras in 1790 is of particular interest: it is bound in the original paper wrappers inside of which is a printed list of subscribers.¹⁹

Significantly, editions or translations of oriental imaginative literature printed in India are not as well represented in the library's collections as the linguistic works, but there are a number of works relating to Indian history or contemporary affairs.²⁰ Among this material is a small number of items printed in India itself, including Warren Hastings's *A narrative of the insurrection which happened in the zeemadary of Banaris* (Calcutta, 1782). Such items were acquired by the library using its usual channels in London. For example, the archival records show that Heyne noted the appearance of the first volume of Roderick Mackenzie's *A sketch of the war with Tippoo Suldaun*, which had been published at Calcutta in the previous year, in 1794, and received it in December (a month before a notice appeared in the *Monthly Review*). The second volume appeared in Calcutta in April 1794, was ordered by Heyne on 8 August 1796, and was supplied by the London bookseller Thomas Reed later in the same year.

On the evidence available, about two years was the average time required to obtain a Calcutta book through the London book trade during the 1780s and 1790s. The first volume of Francis Gladwin's translation of the *History of Hindostan* was published at Calcutta in October 1788, noted in Heyne's 1789 list, ordered during 1790, and received in Göttingen on 16 October in that year, apparently supplied by William Remnant, the English bookseller at Hamburg. Remnant was also the supplier of the first volume of the Asiatic Society of Bengal's *Asiatick researches*, edited of course by William Jones, which appeared at Calcutta in January 1789 and was received in Göttingen via Hamburg on 11 December 1790. Typically, annual volumes were supplied by different booksellers each year, including, during the 1790s, Elizabeth Harlow, John Heydinger, and William Stewart.

Among other Indian serials acquired was *The Calcutta Monthly Register, or India repository, instruction and entertainment*, printed by Charles Lewis Vogel, which started publication in November 1790. The first issue notes that it

may also prove to be the publication best adapted for sending to Europe, as opportunities may offer;—being more select and comprehensive in subject,—more portable and convenient in size,—and less expensive by far to subscribers than any of the newspapers printed in this part of the world.



Designed and Engraved by J. Alexander 1791.

Figure 1. Titlepage and Frontispiece of the *Calcutta Monthly* 1790; the original is owned by the Göttingen University Library.

Nevertheless, the register appears to have ceased publication in mid-1791.

Göttingen's systematic and painstaking acquisition of English and Indian works of scholarly value in the field of oriental studies ensured that, by the end of the century, the library had accumulated probably the most extensive collection of its kind in Europe. But the library's holdings served a wider purpose: through the *Göttingische Gelehrten-Anzeigen*, the university's reviewing periodical, notices of new English publications reached a scholarly audience throughout central and eastern Europe. Only now, through the careful collation of archival evidence and a better appreciation of its context, are we beginning to understand the processes that enabled this great library in a small German town to play such a major role in the enterprise of the Enlightenment.

Notes

1. Bernhard Fabian, "Die Göttinger Universitätsbibliothek im achtzehnten Jahrhundert," in *Göttinger Jahrbuch* (Göttingen, 1980), 111–3.
2. Johann Christian Claproth, *Der gegenwärtige Zustand der Göttingischen Universität* (Göttingen, 1748), 61.
3. Christiane Kind-Doerne, *Die Niedersächsische Staats-und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1986), 27, 147.
4. Hugo Kunoff, *The Foundations of the German Academic Library* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1982), 108.
5. *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen*, 851 (translated by Bernhard Fabian).
6. G. Jefcoate and K. Kloth, eds., *A Catalogue of English Books Printed before 1801 Held by the University Library at Göttingen* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1987–). The catalogue was edited for the library by Bernhard Fabian. The forthcoming final part, compiled by Gusti Grote, encompasses the archival records relating to English acquisitions.
7. Although relevant items may be found scattered throughout the subject arrangement of the *Realkatalog*, much material is concentrated under *Historia Turciae* ("H. Turc."), *Historia Asiae* ("H. As."), *Poetae Asiatici* ("P. As"), or *Itineraria* ("It."). A detailed breakdown of the subdivisions within these groups will be found in G.-J. Bötte and D. Sickmüller's *Übersicht über die Systematik des Band-Realkatalogs der Niedersächsischen Staats-und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen* (Göttingen, 1993).
8. Elmar Mittler, ed., *Bibliotheca Palatina. Katalog zur Ausstellung vom 8. Juli bis 2. November 1986. Heiliggeistkirche Heidelberg*, textband (Heidelberg, 1986), 458 ff.
9. *An Account of Several Travels through a Great Part of Germany* (London, 1677), 90–2.
10. *Lebensbeschreibung* (Rinteln and Leipzig, 1793), 34. See also A. H. F. von Schlichtegroll's account of Michaelis's life in *Nekrolog auf das Jahr 1791* (Gotha, 1791).
11. Strangely, Michaelis never held the title "Professor of Oriental Languages" (*Lebensbeschreibung*, 43).

12. Some of this was printed after his death in *Literarischer Briefwechsel* (Leipzig, 1794–1796). Much of the correspondence relates to oriental philology.

13. Seattle, 1955.

14. Lowndes considered Holmes's work to be a "meagre journal kept by a menial servant." See Cox, *A reference guide*, vol. 1, 345.

15. In the *Realkatalog* books on Indian philology are grouped together at "Ling.II,4220–5868." Books on Indian history are grouped with other areas of eastern Asia at "H.As.II."

16. According to the criteria established by the Eighteenth Century Short Title Catalogue project, which were applied in the selection of material for inclusion in the Göttingen *Catalogue of English Books*, all eighteenth-century Indian printing (but not Sri Lankan) is recorded, regardless of whether or not it originated in areas controlled by the East India Company during the eighteenth century.

17. The standard bibliography is Graham Shaw, *The South Asia and Burma Retrospective Bibliography* (SABREB), Stage 1: 1556–1800 (London, 1987), 7–8. I am grateful to Mr. Shaw for his assistance in the preparation of this article.

18. SABREB, 10–1. Graham Shaw, *Printing in Calcutta* (London: British Library, 1981).

19. Unfortunately, no record of the provenance or acquisition of these items has been traced among the library's archives.

20. In the *Realkatalog* works on contemporary Indian affairs are mostly concentrated at *Historia Asiae* II ("H.As.II").