

The Library of the Royal Asiatic Society and Its Collections Relating to Southeast Asia

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Before describing the southeast Asian collections in detail, I would like to say something about the society and its library. The Royal Asiatic Society is a learned society which was founded in 1823 by men, most of whom had spent some time in Asia as civilian administrators or in the army. It was founded to provide a forum in which new discoveries regarding Asia could be announced and discussed by like-minded people. Its strength, and at times its weakness, is that it has always been entirely independent of outside sources of money, whether government or commercial, and therefore independent of pressure to follow any particular course of research. The library is primarily for members of the society, but visitors with a serious interest in Asia may make appointments to see items in the collections.

The society has occupied premises in six different buildings during the 172 years of its existence. The current building into which it moved in 1988 is the first one which it has owned. Until 1869 the society also maintained a museum which reflected its commercial and scientific as well as its historical and antiquarian interests. It soon came to include coins, clothing, stuffed birds and animals, insects, and specimens of vegetable products from Africa, Oceania, and Australasia as well as Asia. In 1828 a Captain Marryat deposited temporarily in the museum his collection of Burmese curiosities, which were the subject of several lectures. Donations in 1849 included Malay and Fijian weapons. In 1831 one of the exhibits gave trouble. A mummy had been partially dissected and "in consequence of the unpleasant smell" the council agreed to offer it to the Museum of Kings College, London University, which received it with thanks.

In 1869 when the society had to move to smaller premises in Albermarle Street, most of the museum objects were transferred to the India Office in the hope that they might be amalgamated with similar material from the old East India Company Museum. However, within a few years

these items were dispersed to other museums in London. It is still possible to trace the location of many of the objects formerly in the possession of the society, such as the Moghul jade cup dated 1022 A.H. (1613 A.D.), which is now at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and a number of carved wooden clubs and spears from New Zealand, which are now in the British Museum collections.

For the first five years in the new building, from 1989 to 1994, the library staff consisted of two people, myself and my predecessor as librarian, Godfrey Goodwin. This ensured a continuity which was invaluable to someone coming fresh to such a large variety of material. However with Goodwin's retirement at the end of last year, the library staff is down to one person. The librarian of the society is in effect librarian, archivist, and curator and has charge of the following items: approximately 100,000 monographs; approximately 2,250 bound volumes of periodicals; over 1,140 boxes of periodical parts; seven bound volumes of early newspapers; approximately 300 bound volumes of pamphlets; a small collection of maps; approximately 2,000 Oriental manuscripts; ten collections of English-language personal papers; over 2,000 prints, paintings, drawings, busts, etc.; many albums and boxes of photographic prints; approximately 800 photographic glass plates; a wide variety of miscellaneous "museum" items including copper-plate inscriptions, four bronze figures from southeast Asia; two swords; two wooden "folk" figures from southeast Asia; a Qajar ceramic bowl; a cast of a column with a Chola inscription from southern India; a cast of a lion with a Hittite inscription; etc.

The collections of the library are concerned with the history, geography, religions, philosophies, languages, arts, and literature of Asia. There is some material on Hindu and Islamic law and the history of science in Asia, but these subjects have not been actively collected by this library for a long time. There is a small amount of material of ethnographical or anthropological interest, but this is also not an area in which the library actively collects items.

Asia is now defined as that area of the world which is not Europe, Africa, the Americas, or Australasia, although in the earlier years of the society it meant anywhere east of Istanbul, including Australia, New Zealand, and the western Pacific Ocean. For historical reasons, the collections are stronger in those geographical areas, such as India or Malaya, which were former colonial territories. The collections cover material relating to the last two thousand years, although we do not collect items relating to current affairs, this being defined very roughly as the last thirty years or so.

There are catalogues or handlists for almost all of the material in the various collections owned by the society. Some of these are fuller and

more informative than others, and I will try to elaborate on this as I come to relevant parts of the collections.

In most categories of material the library has items relating to southeast Asia. These have been acquired in a variety of ways—by purchase, donations, bequests, and exchange. There is another category of acquisitions for the items which come in for review in our journal.

The society has been fortunate in having for much of its existence two sister societies in southeast Asia from which it has received periodicals and books in exchange for its own journal. The Straits Settlements branch of the Royal Asiatic Society was founded in 1878, became the Malayan Branch in 1923, and, on independence, the Malaysian Branch in 1964. The other society was the oldest of all the Oriental societies, the Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen [the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences], founded in 1778 in Batavia, now Jakarta, Indonesia. After the last war and Indonesian independence, this society became the Lembaga Kebudayaan Indonesia [Indonesian Institute of Culture] from 1950 to 1962 and was then disbanded, the library becoming part of the National Museum.

For well over one hundred years, the Library of the Royal Asiatic Society has benefited from the exchange of monographs and periodicals with both of its sisters in southeast Asia and also from an exchange agreement with the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (K.I.T.L.V.) in Leiden.

The Library: Monograph Collections

The European-language monographs on subjects relating to southeast Asia are mostly in English, with some French and Dutch. For all the monographs acquired before 1991, there have always been author catalogues. The first catalogue of the library was published on 5 May 1830 and listed 878 volumes. Books were listed by a number, within broad groups such as languages, history, philosophy, theology, politics, etc. The numbers beside the entries appear to be location numbers. Items of southeast Asian interest appear quite early as number 29, which is in fact a volume of manuscript material, including an entry for the “true copy of the Pass from the King of Acheen for the grab ship Allum Shah.” I am not sure of the technical meaning of “grab ship” in the 1820s, but I would hesitate to describe this as a license for piracy, although the practice was common enough in southeast Asian waters at that period.

The first printed item listed is number 51, a grammar of the Thai, or Siamese language, by Captain James Low, 4TO, Calcutta, 1828. Other early dictionaries and grammars appear in this section, including one for

translating Dutch, French, and English into Malay, published in Haarlem in 1826, and a grammar of the Burman language with a list of the simple roots from whence the language is derived, by F. Carey, 8VO, Serampore, 1814.

Interest in strange plants and objects from strange places was in part satisfied by number 237 in the catalogue *D'Amboinische Rareteitkamer* [Cabinet of curiosities from Amboyna] door [by] George Everard Rumphius, Folio, T'Amsterdam, 1705. More conventional activities were presented in number 340, Proceedings of the Agricultural Society, established in Sumatra, 1820, vol. 1, 8vo, Bencoolen, 1821.

There is now a printed catalogue listing books received to about 1932 and a card catalogue listing books received from 1932 to 1991. All acquisitions since July 1991 have been entered in a computerized catalogue. Until the introduction of a computerized catalogue, it was not possible to trace books by either title word or subject. For the southeast Asian books this is now possible, as almost all the non-oriental-language books and some of the oriental-language ones relating to southeast Asia can now be found on the computerized catalogue.

There is quite a large "grey area" of monograph series like the Publications of the École Française d'Extreme-Orient and the Verhandelingen of the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde. Some of these have been kept together and treated as serials under a collective series title, while others are shelved separately as monographs and catalogued individually.

There are approximately 3,000 monograph titles relating to southeast Asia shelved on several floors throughout the building. Dictionaries and grammars are kept in the basement, and in the lecture room on the first floor there is a stack devoted to Burma. Apart from commercially published books about Burma, this section contains over 115 volumes of official gazetteers and approximately 25 publications by the Archaeological Survey of Burma.

The main southeast Asia collection is on the second floor, and it covers the Malay/Indonesian world, Indochina, Thailand, and the Philippines. In addition to the European-language books on Thailand, there is also on this floor a large number of Thai-language publications, including 113 presented in 1926 by the Vajirayan National Library in Bangkok and several more presented by King Prajaahipok in 1931. A small group of books in Vietnamese published in the 1950s and 1960s has recently been given to the society. Most of these non-European-language books do not yet appear in any of the library's catalogues. In the basement are a number of books in Burmese as yet uncatalogued, still in the brown paper parcels in which they arrived. It would appear from the labels on these parcels that these books are mostly translations of texts from

English into Burmese published in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Understandably their cataloguing has taken a very low place on any list of priorities.

The second floor is also used to house the publications of the Pali Text Society, but these have recently been moved to the Reading Room on the ground floor where they are shelved with other books relating to Buddhism. Many of these volumes complement texts found in the Burmese, Thai, and Sinhalese manuscript collections.

There are a number of early printed items which may include rare, if not unique, copies of lithographed books. In 1991 Ian Proudfoot of the faculty of Asian Studies at the Australian National University listed some 55 items in this category which he found in the library of this society. In fact, 41 of these are part of the Maxwell Collection of Malay material which includes a number of manuscripts. The entire Maxwell Collection, a bequest from Sir William E. Maxwell, a former colonial administrator in Malaya, is numbered in one manuscript sequence and kept in the Strong Room.

The Library: Periodical Collections

The library currently receives and keeps over 166 serial publications. Altogether there are over 400 dead and current serial titles in the collections. Periodicals are not purchased but mostly acquired as part of exchange agreements with other institutions or as gifts. This means that the periodicals collection is very uneven in its coverage as many good journals are commercial publications which the society cannot afford to buy.

In the past, many periodicals were bound, especially those of sister societies like the Malayan Branch or the Bataviaasch Genootschap. However, the rising cost of binding meant that in the 1960s the library had to abandon binding for all periodicals except its own journal.

Records of periodical holdings are not always very good, partly because there have been various methods of recording the receipt of new issues, and some of the earlier lists have not survived. However, all titles which have been identified in the collections are now listed and can be called up on the terminal in the library office. Considerable progress has been made in the last five years to record details of the holdings for these titles, and this has been invaluable in checking the large numbers of periodical parts among the recent bequests and donations.

Three groups of donations received in the last year have enabled me to fill many gaps in our periodical holdings. In some cases individual issues have been added to complete a run of one title, and in other cases partial runs of new titles have been acquired.

The Library: Oriental Manuscript Collections

The Royal Asiatic Society has a considerable number of manuscripts from both mainland and island southeast Asia. There are between 1,500 and 2,000 oriental manuscripts in the collections. About one-third of these are from southeast Asia. Total numbers are hard to quantify because item numbers in lists and catalogues often cover more than one item, or are listed more than once under different headings. For example, Royal Asiatic Society Malay 142 contains some 36 separately listed items and Royal Asiatic Society Raffles Java 40 is, in effect, a Buginese-Makasarese vocabulary and has additional entries in lists of Buginese and Makasarese manuscripts.

The manuscripts are printed on a variety of materials, most being on paper or palmleaf. There are, however, a few quite exceptional items, including a copy of part of the *Kammavaca* on sixteen partly gilded, decorated ivory plates, and several on badly discolored silver. This discoloration has prevented them from being fully identified, but conservation work is at hand, and I hope that it will be possible to make proper catalogue entries for these items soon.

The southeast Asian manuscripts were, with one exception, acquired in the nineteenth century: 10 Malay manuscripts presented by Sir William Farquhar (1827); 80 Malay manuscripts and 45 Javanese manuscripts from the collection of Sir Stamford Raffles presented by his widow (1830); the Gutzlaff collection of manuscripts from Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia given by Sir Alexander Johnston (1831); Burmese manuscripts presented by Sir Charles Hopkinson (1847); a copy of the *Patimokkha* (rules for Buddhist monks) presented by King Mongkut (Rama IV) (1858); a collection of Pali, Sinhalese, and Burmese manuscripts purchased by the Royal Asiatic Society from the executors of the Rev. Richard Morris (1896); 105 Malay "books" bequeathed to the society by Sir W. E. Maxwell (1899); 9 "Siamese" manuscripts presented by Dr. Quaritch Wales (1940s).

The society's Malay and Indonesian manuscripts were listed in Ricklefs and Voorhoeve's *Indonesian Manuscripts in Great Britain* (London, 1977). In round numbers these amount to: 1 Balinese, 3 Buginese, 50 Javanese, 1 Madurese, 2 Makasarese, 142 Malay, 1 Moken, 3 Old Javanese, and 1 Sudanese.

The handlist of Burmese manuscripts suggests that there were some 80 items in the collection. Against many of the numbers on the list is the word "missing," and this may be for one of several reasons. It is probable that there has been confusion over the exact identity of some of the manuscripts and that parts of one longer work have been listed separately and later reunited.

The handlist of “Siamese” manuscripts lists some 21 items. Again, it is not entirely clear whether these are all still with the society. The names Burmese and “Siamese” do not necessarily define the language of these manuscripts but rather the script in which they are written. Among the Burmese manuscripts are at least two in Shan, and the “Siamese” collection is said to have a few items in Laotian. Both of the collections include a large number of Pali-language texts, as does our collection of Sinhalese manuscripts. The Burmese and “Siamese” manuscripts are the least well-known of the society’s oriental manuscripts, partly, it must be said, because they have until recently been very inadequately catalogued.

A major advance has been made in cataloguing this part of the collection with the draft “Survey of the Pali Manuscript Collection in the Royal Asiatic Society” by Jacqueline Filliozat of the *École Française d’Extrême-Orient*. One pleasing discovery made as a result of Filliozat’s work was a manuscript which may well be the oldest manuscript on palm leaves kept in Europe, although there are older ones on metal in a number of collections. It contains fragments of a mid-seventeenth-century royal manuscript commissioned by King Sirinandadhammaraja and his Queen Mahanandadevi. This manuscript is in three parts, the last being the *Sahassavathuppakarana*, a series of paracanonical texts using popular folk stories, and belonging to the category of late medieval edifying Pali literature.

The Library: Prints and Drawings

There are items of southeast Asian interest in five collections from the library’s many prints, drawings, etc. These were described in detail in the “Catalogue of Paintings, Drawings, Engravings and Busts in the Collection of the Royal Asiatic Society,” by Raymond Head. London, Royal Asiatic Society, 1991.

The first group, of 137 items, is the Baker Collection, numbered 08.00-08.137. Lt. Col. Godfrey Phipps Baker (1796–1850), 19th Bengal Native Infantry, spent the years 1811 through 1826 in Java during the British occupation of that island. He was responsible for undertaking surveys and superintending buildings. In 1812 his orders from the then British Resident at Jogjakarta were to “make plans of the neighbouring country, such as would answer military purposes, tho’ without the employment of instruments. This could be effected without giving unnecessary alarm to the Sultan.” Many of the watercolors and drawings in this collection are of buildings, including the ruins at Chandi Arjuna on the Dieng Plateau and at Borobodur.

Other drawings by Baker are in the Oriental and India Office Collections of the British Library and in the British Museum. The items in the Royal Asiatic Society collection were presented to the society on 2 February 1850 by a Captain Richard Hunt, who later gave a copy of Baker's journal to the India Office Library. A letter from Baker to Hunt is bound to this volume, so it is clear that Baker and Hunt knew each other, but it is not at all clear how Baker's papers and drawings came to be distributed through three different institutions.

The second group, the Low Collection, consists of some twenty items. Lt. Col. James Low, 46th Madras Native Infantry, is the same man who wrote the T'hai dictionary listed in the 1830 catalogue mentioned above. Low was in civil charge of Province Wellesley, inland of Penang on the Malay peninsula. These drawings of Thailand and Burma were by Low and a Thai or Chinese artist "Boon Khorn" and were intended for a book by Low to be called *History of Tennasserim*.

The third group, the Unwin Collection, includes sixteen watercolors and drawings of Burma. Arthur Hamilton Unwin was an assistant commissioner and inspector of schools in Burma from 1873 through 1880. These paintings by Unwin and his wife are perhaps valuable more because of the relative rarity of such items than because of their artistic merit.

The fourth group consists of four paintings by Burmese artists in gouache, with some gilding. The largest is of the Palace of the King at Ava, and the others are of Prince Thibaw and his wives.

The Library: Pamphlets and Newspapers

The library has many bound volumes of pamphlets and tracts, and it is certain that some of these relate to southeast Asia, but locating relevant items is difficult. Some of the earlier pamphlets appear in the printed catalogue of 1893, although all is not always what it seems to be. In this catalogue, volume 34 of the pamphlet sequence has the following entry: "MILLER, J. Administration of justice in the British colonies in the East Indies. 150 p. London. 1828." This is indeed the title on the title page, but the running title for each page of this work is Administration of Justice in India. It is clear that the description "East Indies" is used in the loose eighteenth- and nineteenth-century meaning rather than the more exact twentieth-century one. However, the entry in Volume 77, "INDIAN ARCHIPELAGO. A system of classification and orthography of the languages [n.p., n.d.]," does produce an interesting pamphlet of 32 pages. As the paper cover is missing, it is difficult to identify the origins of these works. A third item, listed in volume 68 as "LEEMANS, C. Over metalen Beeldjes uit Java" is 29 pages long and

dated Leiden, November 1857 at the end. Further work on these pamphlets is needed, but under current priorities the monographs take precedence.

Copies of two southeast Asian newspapers have survived in the library, although most of what was once a much larger collection was disposed of a long time ago. These have been bound into two volumes (each taking a few issues): "SINGAPORE CHRONICLE No. 99 January 1828—No. 150 December 1829" and "COMMERCIAL REGISTER AND ADVERTISER. Singapore. No. 84 January 1828—No. 185 December 1829."

Donations and Bequests

The Library of the Royal Asiatic Society has been very fortunate in the last year in that it has received two bequests and a donation of material, much of which relates to Southeast Asia. The first bequest came from Dorothy C. Wales, widow of Horace G. Quaritch Wales, a scholar of early Southeast Asian history who died in 1981. Apart from some fine antique library furniture, some of which now gives a greatly improved appearance to the librarian's office and comfort to the librarian, there is a wide variety of other items. In addition to manuscript material which includes notebooks and tour diaries relating to researches in Southeast Asia in the 1930s, there were periodicals, books, photographs, scrapbooks containing newspaper cuttings relating to events in Thailand in the 1930s, some small sculptures, and a small Thai manuscript chest decorated in black and gold. The books which were added to stock have all been processed, and gaps in our periodical holdings have been reduced and in one case eliminated. It will be some time, however, before a proper assessment can be made of the photographs and manuscript material.

The second bequest, of some twenty-two boxes of material, came from Mr. Anthony Christie, an anthropologist and ethnographer, whose interests covered China, Japan, and Southeast Asia. This collection consists largely of books, periodicals, and typescript notes. The periodicals again supplied items to fill gaps in our own holdings, and a start has been made on checking the books against our catalogues. It is clear that the library has been fortunate in acquiring a number of books on Asian art, iconography, and esthetics. This is an area in which we were previously rather weak. Although the library already has a large number of books on pure religion and philosophy, this gift added a number of items on the ways in which various Asian societies were and are molded by their beliefs.

The third group of material comes from D. J. Duncanson, a former director and currently vice-president of this society. Duncanson worked

in Malaya and Vietnam through the 1950s and 1960s, and later, on his return to Britain, he was a member of the academic staff at Kent University. His books, periodicals, and pamphlets reflect his interest in the history and government of Malaya and Vietnam as well as his other great interest, China. This third group was the most recent, and it will be some time before an accurate assessment of the total additions to the library can be made.

The offer of such a large quantity of material from these three sources in a relatively short space of time has brought with it inevitable problems of indigestion in a library system whose normal budgetary limits ensure that accessions are relatively few over a longer period of time. However, these financial limitations also mean that the library cannot afford to let such offers slip by.

Conclusions

Although I have spent most of my professional career working in libraries with large oriental collections, I am not an orientalist. This has certain disadvantages, and what I like to think are certain advantages.

My background knowledge of Asia comes from a variety of sources, starting with a childhood in which the neighbors were retired Indian empire administrators and soldiers. University-level courses in Chinese and Malay history were followed by holiday travel in China, including Sinkiang, Indonesia, India, Pakistan, and three visits to Istanbul. Working with oriental collections, I have had access to books on almost every Asian subject, and I have read widely, if not necessarily deeply.

My knowledge of spoken Asian languages is limited to a few phrases of Bahasa Indonesian and Mandarin and rather more Hindustani. I can transliterate from Devanagari, the script used for north Indian languages, and recognize Arabic and Persian numerals. I can recognize the wide variety of scripts used for items in the library of the Royal Asiatic Society but not always the language. When I am confronted with a book whose script is clearly Arabic, but whose language might be Arabic, Persian, Punjabi, Sindhi, Ottoman Turkish, Uighur, or even Malay, I have to rely on suitable members of the society to help.

I would argue, however, that my generalist knowledge, acquired through a variety of means, has enabled me to cope more easily with the enormous scope of the collections at the Royal Asiatic Society. For example, I recently came across a book which had been placed in the wrong subject group on the wrong floor, solely because a previous library worker had mistaken Chamba, a small hill state on the borders of the Punjab and Kashmir, for Champa, the early medieval state on the southern coast of what is now Vietnam.

Not being a subject specialist forces me to take a broad view of the collections as a whole. I can not hide in the satisfaction of making one small area of the collections an example of all that area should be. Rather I am faced with the enormity of turning what is in many respects a nineteenth-century library into a late-twentieth-century or even twenty-first-century one. I am the first professionally qualified librarian that the library has had, many of the previous occupants of that post having been scholars or secretaries who administered the library.

When the society was founded, serious oriental studies were in their infancy, and the society performed a useful function as a forum for the dissemination of new knowledge about Asia. Now, however, centers for the study of aspects of Asia are everywhere. Many of these centers are relatively recent, and their libraries are often lacking older books and periodicals. Larger numbers of students also make considerable demands on the libraries of these institutions. In addition, there are a great many individuals with a private interest in some aspect of Asia, people who have no access to the libraries of educational institutions. I see an important future for libraries like that of the Royal Asiatic Society in acting as backup collections of older and rarer material for formal courses and educational institutions, and as a means by which individuals can have access to information which is not easily available elsewhere.