

SOME TAMIL MANUSCRIPTS IN THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF PARIS

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SUMMARIUM. — In Bibliotheca Nationali Parisiensi asservatur magna collectio manuscriptorum, ut ex aliis Orientalibus regionibus, ita etiam ex India; huius autem sectionis initia posuerunt ab anno 1729 Socii missionis gallicae in Carnatico adlaborantes. Longe maiorem eius partem lingua tamulica sibi vindicat. Auctor describit complura manuscripta quae opera patris Beschi exhibent, reliqua quae christiana, denique aliqua alia quae aliquid singulare praeseferunt; prima, quamvis ignota non contineant, fovere tamen possent editionem criticam operum Beschi, quae a doctis desideratur.

The book on the manuscripts of the Paris National Library informs us that in the beginning of the 18th century, during the reign of Louis XIV, oriental manuscripts (Hebrew, Arabic, Persian) were brought to Paris. In the year 1723 through the efforts of M. l'abbé Bignon seven boxes of manuscripts arrived from China. The same Bignon sent letters to India to the Jesuit superior Fr. Le Gac to collect Indian manuscripts. Fr. Le Gac and his confreres deemed it an honour and duty to help the Royal Library and sent the first collection of manuscripts and books in December 1729 and every year until 1739 a considerable collection would reach Paris.

It is said that 300 books and manuscripts from India arrived early in the 18th century and among those in Tamil, mention is made of the famous second and third volume of De Nobili's Catechism and of the books printed by the Danish Protestants at Tranquebar. Year after year more and more books and manuscripts were sent from Pondicherry and Carnatic. And in the present collection of Indian manuscripts the section on Tamil manuscripts is the largest.

The first section in the catalogue of the Indian manuscripts is for Tamil. It has 578 manuscripts as they are numbered. The next is for Telugu which has 59 manuscripts (579-637). The third section is entitled Indian manuscripts and includes manuscripts in Sanscrit, Bengali, Marathi etc. and these are 252 in number (638-889). The fourth contains 47 Singhalese manuscripts (890-936). After these there is a miscellaneous section which has altogether 67 Tamil manuscripts.

Many of these numerical classifications contain, according to the catalogue, more than one manuscript. For example, No. 5 «Viradam mundu» has three manuscripts, No. 28. contains 60 different manuscripts. Such individual manuscripts not included in the general numbering come to 372. This means we must add this 372

to the 67 of the miscellaneous section and to the 578 given in the specific Tamil section. Then the total number of Tamil manuscripts in all sections comes to 1017.

There may be even more, for some numbers like 530, 537, 539, 549, 550 are said to have fragments of different works. And even in the section of Indian manuscripts some like No. 723 are definitely Tamil.

Against some of these manuscripts we read the name of the person from whose collection they were obtained. Thus Ariel's collection has given 278, Ducler's 20 and Burnouf's 19.

Beschi's manuscripts

Fr. Constantius Josephus Beschi (1680-1747), the Italian Jesuit popularly known in Tamilnadu as Veeramamunivar, has been the author of many Tamil works religious and literary, in prose and poetry, in grammar and lexicography. Though most of these works have been published scholars have felt the need of re-editing them more critically, for different publishers seem to have added their own interpellations to Beschi's texts (as in «Tonnul Vilakkam», «Sadurakarati») or to have changed his language to suit modern terminology. It was a joy to see that the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris contains many of his manuscripts.

1. *Veeramamunivar kural urai* (No. 57). The text of the first two parts of the classical book of moral sayings in Tamil called *Tirukurral*, with the transcription, Beschi's translation and commentary in Latin. This is a precious manuscript as it is, according to Ariel, in the handwriting of Beschi himself. *Tirukurral* contains three parts: on Virtue, on Public life, on Domestic life. In the first page of his translation Beschi says he modestly omits the third part and translates the first two: «Codex manuscriptus quocum hic consentit; at de tribus Moraliū kural dictorum [partibus], supremam translator pudice rejecit, duas solummodo tenet praeceuntes. Egomet scribo titulum sequentem libro impositum».

2. There are several copies of Beschi's grammar of common Tamil and high Tamil in Latin (NN. 190, 191, 192, 193). These have been translated into English and used by Protestant missionaries. The one on common Tamil was the first of its kind and because of its great value was printed by the not-too-friendly Lutherans during the lifetime of Beschi.

3. *Tonnul Vilakkam* (No. 204). A Tamil grammar in the traditional verse form treating of the essentials of the five parts of classical grammars.

4. Several copies of his Common Tamil dictionary translated from Latin into French (NN. 210, 211-212, 215, 216, 218 etc.). It is known that Beschi wrote this dictionary in Latin towards the end

of his life. But whether he himself translated it into French or someone else did it, is still to be ascertained. This work besides giving the meaning of words served also as a missionaries' guide giving them the necessary informations about the social and literary conditions of the period.

5. *Thesaurus linguae tamulicae ad plenioram planioramque scriptorum tamulensium intelligentiam, collegit ac quatuor in partes digessit Constantius Josephus Beschius*. A. D. MDCCXXXII. (Saduragaradi) (NN. 227, 228, 229). This is the Tamil-Tamil dictionary for classical or literary words. Containing four parts it was the first one to be composed in the full alphabetical order and has since been the basis for other famous dictionaries like the *Madurai Sagam* dictionary.

6. *Vaman Sarittiram* (No. 473). A small manuscript in prose meant to be a sort of text book for the missionary students of high Tamil.

7. *Tembavani* (NN. 474-475, 476). Beschi's opus magnum, an epic on the life of St. Joseph, which contains the whole history of salvation. Combining artistically the traditions of Tamil epics like *Cinthamani* and *Kambaramayanam* with those of western epics like the *Divina Commedia* and *Gerusalemme Liberata*, Beschi's *Tembavani* is a model for the integration of the East and the West, for dialogue between Hinduism and Christianity.

8. *Tirukkavalur kalambagam* (No. 477). A work with various kinds of poetry in honour of Our Lady of Refuge whose church Beschi built and whose statue he installed in a place called by him *Tirukkavalur*.

9. *Veda Vilakkam* (No. 481). An apologetical exposition of the faith intended to clarify the Catholic position against the attacks of the Lutherans. Its tone will not sound too ecumenical today.

10. *Lutherinathiyalbu* (No. 489). This small book in prose explains in the form of a letter the nature of Lutherans to a Hindu Tamil scholar who inquired about it. In it Beschi compares in detail St. John's (*Apoc.* 9, 1-11) star that fell from heaven and the army of locusts that came upon the earth to Luther and his followers.

11. *Kitheriammal ammanai* (No. 953). A poetical work on the martyrdom of Saint Quiteria whose cult was widespread in Portugal at that time, in an epic form of popular verse.

These books of Beschi have been published. His translation and commentary on *Tirukurral* has not been printed separately but given as an appendix to G. U. Pope's book *The Sacred Kurral*. If Beschi's Latin commentary is translated into English or Tamil, it will throw new light on his christian way of understanding the *Tirukurral*. His other books if re-edited more critically and popularised may serve to diffuse christian ideas through good literature.

Manuscripts on Christian topics.

1. *Challabam* (No. 450). This huge manuscript is a precious one as it has been referred to and used by Lutherans at the beginning of the 18th century. It contains the substance of the old and new Testament in the form of question and answer. This particular manuscript has on its front page the phrase « Arrivé de Constantinople en 1738 ». It should be interesting to trace its journey to Constantinople and to Paris. It should be noted that the very first question in this manuscript on the nature of the Bible uses the word ,viviliam' for Bible. And this is just the word used today in Tamil and believed to have been coined by modern writers.

2. There are two manuscripts (NN. 454, 490) which have the Gospel passages read on Sundays and chief feast days of Catholics. No. 454 has the gospel reading for the feast of St. Fr. Xavier, which means it was written after 1622, when St. Ignatius and St. Fr. Xavier were canonised.

3. The Gospel of St. Matthew has been translated into Tamil. This manuscript (No. 456) seems to follow the Vulgate in the translation of the sermon on the mount. Perhaps this is by Catholics.

4. There is also a translation of St. John's Gospel (No. 457). The name of John is not translated as Arulappar, which is the Catholic usage, but is transliterated as ,Lones', which is the Protestant usage. It has the verse numbers put at the end of the verse as the Bible of Ziegenbalg has it. It gives to the ,logos' in the first verse a neuter verbal ending. These hints make one think that this translation may belong to the Protestants.

5. A catechism on doctrines and virtues is found in a manuscript (No. 564). At the end of each virtue (like humility) there is a reference to Bible examples and passages to be read and explained.

6. In those early days when a village chapel did not have a sacristy, as it is the case even now in remote villages, the priest would vest before Mass in the sanctuary; the congregation that saw him vest was helped to reflect over the symbolism of each of the vestments. These reflections are found in a manuscript (No. 563).

7. Another manuscript (No. 723) also has a preparation of the people before Mass, by a common recitation of the important prayers like the Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Precepts of the Church. The Precepts of the Church as found in this manuscript are five. The one forbidding marriage between close relatives and at particular periods is not found. Could this indicate that the manuscript was written before the introduction of this precept.

This manuscript has a separate sheet of paper, apparently to serve as a model form of conversation of a priest with a christian.

Here is the translation :

Priest — What do you do ?

Christian — I don't do any work. I'm keeping quiet.

Priest — Do not act against religion.

Do not perform the rites of pagans.

Be a good christian, my brother.

Do not swear.

Do not bear false witness.

Do not steal.

Do not tell lies.

Do not beat your parents.

Do not go to the temples of the devil.

Do not scoff at elders.

This piece of advice reflects the attitude prevalent in those days of not allowing christians to have any contact with other religions, which were supposed to be creations of the devil.

8. Some of the miracles and ministries of St. Fr. Xavier in Kerala and Kanniyakumari are narrated in manuscript No. 511. According to the catalogue it is an inquiry for the canonisation of St. Fr. Xavier. The manuscript however calls him , saint ', may be as expressing the *vox populi*.

9. Manuscript No. 479 deserves special notice. The catalogue mentions two manuscripts against this number : *Kadanariyagaval*, by Manuel pillai and *Tevamada pillai tamil*. Actually there is only one manuscript. On the front page it is written « Kadanariyagaval » and there is no name of the author. But the matter inside is of *Tevamada pillai tamil* ; and nowhere in it is the name of the author mentioned. This work is noteworthy as it is a type of poetry prevalent in the middle ages, when gods, kings and heroes were praised in the background of their infancy. They were imagined to be children just trying to walk, to clap hands, to ask for the moon etc. and their great deeds and heroic qualities were entwined in the description of these childhood actions. Such a poem is for the first time sung in honour of Our Lady. It is a pity that the very last stanza is left incomplete.

Manuscripts on other topics

The bulk of the manuscripts of the Bibliothèque Nationale is about various topics like Hindu philosophy, literature, medicine etc. A few of these deserve mention.

1. Manuscript No. 154 is the diary in Tamil of Anandarangam pillai, a Government official during the French rule in Pondicherry. It covers the period from 9th of April 1760 to 12th January 1761. This diary is the first of its kind and offers interesting material for

linguistic analysis on account of its mixture of colloquial words and French words in Tamilform. The last sentence is written in bigger letters and mentions bodily fatigue and ends with an incomplete word.

2. There is another manuscript (No. 993) that was written during the French rule. This is on the training of soldiers. It has been written in Karaikal, another city under the French. It is dated 1830. This also is the first of its kind and uses a number of French words.

3. We have a small Tamil grammar in French (No. 189), written in Pondicherry, in 1728, by a missionary of the Society of Jesus, belonging to the Carnatic mission.

4. There are about 37 manuscripts of Tamil dictionaries, both of the ancient model called Nigandu, and of the western model. The *Vocabulario Tamulicano-Lusitano* (No. 221) may be of the 16th or 17th century. The *Dictionnaire tamoul-français* (NN. 208, 214) are by Fr. Louis Noël de Bourzes, a contemporary of Beschi (cfr. SOMMERVOGEL, II, 44 ; but he refers only to certain statements that he had written the work). Hence they are of the 18th century.

I referred to some of them for some particular words. To mention one, the phrase ,paravai illai' , not important' seemed to me to be a slightly changed form of ,param illai' , which occurs in the above meaning in Beschi's short story *Paramartha Guruvin Kathai*. Param = weight, Param illai = it is not weighty, not important. Some scholars think that the present form ,paravai illai' is from the Hindi word ,parva nahi' . In this collection, the « *Vocabulario Tamulicano-Lusitano* » has : param = pouco, aliquando dificuldade, importancia — atu param illai = pouco vaidoso ; Bourzes' « *Dictionnaire tamoul-français* » has : param alla = peu importe.

Strangely enough Beschi who uses this phrase in his short story does not include it in his dictionary of common Tamil (NN. 210, 211-212). But as the two earlier dictionaries mention it, we can be sure that the phrase ,param illai' had existed. Now ,param illai' can easily become ,paramai illai' which is its adjectival form. In Tamil , m' and , v' belong to the same class of sounds and therefore are interchangeable, compare ,vilikirathu' and ,milikirathu' , both mean , to open the eye' . Given this change between , m' and , v' , it is easy to see how the former ,paramai illai' has now become ,paravai illai' .

5. There are four manuscripts concerning Muslim religion (NN. 529, 987, 1023, 1024). I saw the last two. They contain a good many Arabic words. A muslim Tamil scholar could easily identify them.

6. On Tamil medicine we have about 40 manuscripts, according to the catalogue. No. 138 seems to be a medical dictionary, for it reads : « *Dictionnaire pharmaceutique tamoul-maure-telugu* ». It was written in the year 1850. I looked into just two of these manuscripts. No. 1044 entitled *Agasthiyar Vaithyam* mentions different

kinds of medicinal oils and the method of preparing them. No. 1045 *Vaithya Sasthiram* speaks of thirteen kinds of typhoid and the medical oils for them. It has 155 palm leaves. The last leaf tells us how to prepare a special decoction to strengthen the teeth. Seven herbs or roots are mentioned. These must be cut and boiled in water till it becomes one-fourth of its original quantity. If one gargles with this daily, even an old man's teeth will become like a child's.

7. NN. 563 and 508 are copper plates. The catalogue says that No. 563 copper plate has Marathi and Tamil characters. It requires a specialist in epigraphy to read this. The other (No. 508) is readable. It speaks of four donations of land for a charitable work in or near Pondicherry. The work is called Thiruvambala Neelankarai Nainar charity. The first two pieces of land are donated in Murunkai pakkam by Thiruvambala Nallatambi Alagappan. The third is given in Aryankuppam by three persons : Koonpapu Reddiar, Parisa Reddiar and Koneri Reddiar. The fourth is donated in Kilinasi kuppam. This one besides giving the land makes arrangement for supply of food grains for the charity. It is said at the end that Thennava rayan, Nallatambi, Sihappu Mudali, Kuppai Pillai, Sivatambi and on the whole thirty persons have signed it.

Every donation states the warning that if anyone hinders this gift from being materialised, he will incur the curse that befalls those who kill a cow on the banks of the Ganges. Along with this copper plate there is a printed notice in French by Maridas, and according to it the first donation was signed in 1695, the second in 1697.

8. The last to be mentioned are not writings but paintings. The section of Indian manuscripts has six manuscripts of paintings. No. 753-4 depicts Hindu deities in colours with explanation in Singhalese. No. 758 portrays the signs of the zodiac in colour with their names in Singhalese.

The other four have explanations in Tamil and French. No. 746 has 18 coloured pictures of Hindu religious ceremonies. No. 743 contains 204 paintings on the different castes and professions in India. Like the ark of Noa it has the male and the female of every caste. No. 744 contains 182 folios of coloured pictures of Hindu deities and some persons. Besides the gods like Vishnu of Srirangam, Tirupati etc., persons like a Marathi servant in Tanjore palace, an Indian soldier in the English and French army and individuals like Appu pillai in Karaikal, Gnanapragasa Mudali and his wife Danammal going to church, Fr. Fernando of the Catholic church in Karaikal are also depicted. Some scenarios too are portrayed : a view of a field in Karaikal, of the Government garden there and the prison built in 1828.

The last one (No. 745) has 142 paintings on the various incarnations of God and the minor deities of Hinduism. This volume has a French introduction which says : In the present book I claim

to state the names of the divinities that the Gentiles worship ... but to give you an explanation of each one in particular will be impossible, for there is no author who can give such a narration without shocking the ear. That is why I shall be content to give a description in a few words according to what the Brahmans informed me ...

Each page of the last three manuscripts (NN. 743, 744, 745) bears the year 1831. And the paintings seem to be from the same artist. As some of the pictures portray persons, buildings and sceneries connected with Karaikal, it is likely that there was an important event in 1831, in the French territory of Karaikal, that became the occasion for these.

This account of some of the noteworthy manuscripts of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, is by no means complete. It is only a handful that I was able to run through. If a thorough study is undertaken by a group of scholars who are specialists in different fields like Hindu philosophy, Tamil literature, Tamil grammar, Tamil medicine, Christian literature etc. this collection that is ancient and rich may unfold new data to Tamil language and literature, and to the political, social, religious history of Tamilnadu.

RÉSUMÉ

Depuis le temps de Louis XIV, des collections de manuscrits orientaux ont afflué à Paris et se conservent à la Bibliothèque Nationale. Ceux qui proviennent de l'Inde constituent un groupe important. A partir de 1729, sollicité par l'abbé Bignon, le Supérieur des missionnaires jésuites français du Carnatic se mit à en recueillir et à les expédier en France. Pendant dix ans, presque chaque année, un chargement considérable prenait la route de Paris. Dans le groupe en question diverses langues indiennes sont représentées : télougou, sanscrit, bengali, etc., mais c'est le tamoul qui domine, et dont la section propre compte 578 manuscrits numérotés. En réalité, si l'on compte aussi ceux de la section 5 (miscellanea), et si l'on considère que certains numéros embrassent plusieurs manuscrits, on arrive à un total de 1017.

L'a. passe en revue ceux d'entre eux qui reproduisent des œuvres du P. Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi, le fameux écrivain classique tamoul († 1747) ; ceux qui proviennent du milieu chrétien ; et quelques autres, de type varié, intéressants sous un aspect particulier.

Parmi les onze œuvres contenues dans les manuscrits de la première section, il ne s'en trouve ni d'inconnues ni même d'inédites, mais la collection n'en est pas moins précieuse, car il semble que les éditeurs aient souvent ajouté leurs commentaires aux écrits originaux de Beschi ou changé l'expression pour suivre la terminologie moderne. Ce qui fait désirer aux spécialistes une édition plus critique. La constatation qu'il existe à Paris plusieurs œuvres conservées dans l'état où elles sortirent de la plume de l'auteur, favorisant ainsi la réédition désirée, est une vraie joie : à travers la bonne littérature, on pourrait encore diffuser dans un cercle plus large les idées chrétiennes. Il serait également souhaitable d'avoir une traduction anglaise ou tamoule du commentaire de Beschi aux deux premières parties du texte moral intitulé *Tirukurral*. Elle ferait mieux connaître sa manière chrétienne d'interpréter la collection classique de maximes morales.

Dans la 2^e section, qui embrasse les Évangiles et des écrits à l'usage des fidèles, on peut mettre en relief surtout le n° 450, énorme manuscrit qui contient la substance de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament sous forme de demandes et de réponses, et qui fut employé par les luthériens au début du 18^e siècle ; et le n° 479, qui contient un poème en l'honneur de la Sainte Vierge, rédigé à la manière des poèmes médiévaux, où l'on se plaît à célébrer l'enfance des dieux, des héros et des rois.

Dans la masse des autres manuscrits, on trouve un peu de tout : littérature, philosophie, médecine (40 mss.), illustrations en couleurs ... ; il y a également une grammaire tamoule en français, écrite à Pondicherry en 1728 par un jésuite, et deux exemplaires du *Dictionnaire tamoul-français* du P. Louis N. de Bourzes (contemporain de Beschi), dont Sommervogel n'en connaît aucun.