

European Sources For Tamil Manuscripts

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A visit to even the most obscure library in Europe is not without potential interest to a Tamil scholar. Lying dormant, uncatalogued and unknown in many of the continent's learned institutions and repositories are a goodly number of manuscripts, both on paper and palm leaves, awaiting discovery and identification. Dhamotharan (1980:2) estimates there are in excess of 2000 MS in the libraries of Europe. A series of enquiries which I have conducted around Europe has unearthed several manuscripts previously unrecognised as having been written in Tamil. But these enquiries have not been without other sorts of surprises: one librarian, in response to a letter from me asking whether his library held any Tamil manuscripts, sent a photocopy of the full description of the plant *Gardenia* (*Gardenia jasminoides*). Only when I read that the flower's alternative name is *Malabar* did I realise the confusion that had taken place. Malabar, by which name both Tamil and Malayalam have been known, is frequently the catalogue heading in the older libraries of Europe under which Tamil manuscripts are to be found. Another library sent details of Hebrew manuscripts: only much later did I realise that *Tamil* had been catalogued under *Talmudic*! Tamil and Malayalam are often associated, and may be found catalogued under *Malay* or *Malaya*. It follows that when one visits a library, and receives a negative response to one's initial enquiry as to whether there exist any Tamil materials there, it is certainly worth checking around in the catalogues.

So many are the apologies from librarians that they have "no oriental specialist". Outwith the main centres of learning of Europe, the smaller provincial libraries suffer the handicap of lack of specialised staff to catalogue adequately and accurately the manuscripts in their collections. The major national catalogues, e.g., of France or Germany, or of the great libraries such as the British Library or the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the Leningrad State Public Library or the Bibliotheque nationale in Paris, are, for the most part, well executed and accurate in their descriptions of their Tamil holdings. Smaller provincial catalogues are sometimes grossly inadequate, or contain no descriptions at all. Tamil, along with other "oriental" languages, may be found under such headings as "Orient. var.,"

or "Orient. misc." with no particular identification at all. The time has come, I feel, for a comprehensive and definitive list of the Tamil manuscripts available in Europe to be made, and for a full descriptive catalogue to be produced. As a first step along this road, I append a list of 86 libraries and other institutions in Europe where Tamil manuscripts are to be found, from the major collections to minor holdings of only a few leaves.

In order that this list should be kept up to date, readers are earnestly invited to make known any further information which they may have, in order that this may supplement that already known. It should be noted that this list refers to those places holding Tamil *manuscripts*, which, in general, are those manuscripts written in the Tamil script on palm leaves. Manuscripts in the Grantha script, and written in Sanskrit, are beyond the immediate scope of this brief survey, as are printed materials in Tamil. Many libraries possess examples of very early printed works in Tamil, but no manuscripts: these have not been included in the present list.

The major source of reference for oriental manuscripts in Europe is Pearson, 1971, but this catalogue has to be used with caution. It was compiled as a *catalogus catalogorum*, as a result of a sifting of the information in the main catalogues of European libraries are a series of visits to selected countries by the author. Some countries (e.g., Spain) were, for some reason, omitted altogether; the information for others was taken from nineteenth-century catalogues which no longer represent the reality of holdings in the Libraries concerned, e.g., that of the Biblioteca Trivulziana in Milan. Pearson copied the information on trust from a number of catalogues where he could not visit the libraries personally, and some of the information in previous catalogues is quite inaccurate. For example, an alleged Tamil manuscript in the Universitatshibliothek in Graz, Austria, turned out on examination to be in Malayalam; Pearson, quoting another source, maintained that all the oriental manuscripts in Biblioteka Uniwersytecka, Wroclaw, Poland, had been destroyed during the second world war-but the present librarian assures me that the Tamil manuscript Cr II 2, a 200-leaf manuscript entitled "Bharasvamin" is still in existence there. Though the generosity of the British Academy (Small Grants Fund for Research in the Humanities), the Sir Ernest Cassell Educational Trust and the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland, I have been able to make enquiries of a large number of individual libraries, and to visit many of them personally and examine not only the catalogue entries but the manuscripts described themselves. Postal and personal enquiries have been conducted in a total of 711 libraries and institutions in Europe; replies

are still awaited from 251 libraries. However, an interim list of 86 places where Tamil manuscripts may be found, including several not mentioned at all by Pearson (e.g., Gothenburg, Madrid) is appended here, in the hope that it may stimulate further research into European sources.

Brief surveys of the possibilities of research into the contents of Tamil manuscripts in European libraries have been made by Thani Nayagam (1954) and Dhamotharan (1980). Thani Nayagam referred to a selected few libraries he was able to visit during a trip to Europe, and expressed the hope that further research would be undertaken. None seems to have been, and Dhamotharan in his 1980 paper does little more than to draw scholar's attention to the possibilities. Most of his information is gleaned from Pearson and the major printed catalogues and research in the U.K. and Germany. I believe that the enquiries I have been making represent the first definitive step towards the establishment of a catalogue of Tamil manuscripts in Europe.

Potential researchers in this field may wish to know that most libraries in Europe are pleased to supply photocopies or microfilms of their manuscripts to scholars. Different countries, and different libraries, have varying copyright rules, and it is essential to enquire of the librarian before ordering any copies as to the precise regulations of the library in question. For example, some libraries will supply copies of manuscripts only on payment of a copyright fee (e.g., in Belgium); others will supply only to individuals and not to institutions (e.g., some of the libraries in Germany); some others will not supply any copies at all (e.g., the libraries of the Soviet Union). And, as one may well imagine, many libraries are very reluctant to photocopy or microfilm palm leaf manuscripts for fear of damaging them. Many leaves have been preserved badly, and cannot be flattened out without risking their complete destruction, as they are very brittle. Further, the actual cost of microfilming and photocopying varies enormously: in my experience, the most expensive countries are Italy and France, where libraries do not have the facilities themselves to microfilm, and sub-contract any work to commercial firms in the towns. Inevitably, the prices charged are considerably higher than those imposed by institutions whose profit margins are somewhat smaller.

I have made a collection of microfilms and photocopies of some of the major manuscript collections which are not yet catalogued, where the libraries have been able to supply them. I hope that these reproductions will be of use to a scholar wishing to make a deeper study of them that I

have been able to do, and, subject to the particular rules governing the supply of the copies, I can make these available to interested persons. The information concerning many of the manuscripts in Europe is very scant, and a casual perusal of the existing catalogues reveals much material that is, from any literary point of view, comparatively uninteresting. This does not, in my opinion, detract from the intrinsic interest and history of the manuscript, and, further, it is my experience that many libraries have been able to catalogue their manuscripts which are copies of e.g., the *Tirukkuraḷ* or the *Rāmayaṇā*, but others await identification. Herein may lie many discoveries of a very interesting nature.

A preliminary list of libraries and institution in Europe, holding Tamil MSS (in alphabetical order of city).

1. *The National Library of Wales/ Ilyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru, Aberystwyth, Wales, United Kingdom*

The Tamil manuscripts in this library have not yet been identified.

2. *Bibliothèque de Mējanès, Aix-en-Provence, France*

The two Tamil manuscripts in this library have been described in the French national catalogue.

3. *Bibliothèque municipale, Amiens, France*

Two small manuscripts are held in this library, both containing examples of the Tamil syllabary.

4. *Koninklijk Institute voor de Tropen, Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

This library contains six manuscripts, all apparently from Sri Lanka. They are unavailable for examination at present, because the manuscript room is under construction.

5. *Statsbiblioteket, Aarhus, Denmark*

The library holds one Tamil manuscript, a paper document giving details of a Christian baptism.

6. *Evangelische Missionsgesellschaft, Basle, Switzerland*

The library contains a small number of Tamil manuscripts, still unidentified, but mostly on Christian themes.

7. *Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, West Berlin*

The F.O. Schrader collection of oriental manuscripts, comprising some 650 items, is housed in this library. Only a minor part of the collec-

tion has been catalogued, and a number of Tamil items remain unidentified still. The library also contains a collection of manuscripts which belonged to a Tamil Brahman family, but which has not been catalogued or studied.

8. *Bernisches Historisches Museum, Berne, Switzerland*

This museum possesses a fragment of a longer (lost) manuscript which has not been identified.

9. *Bibliothèque municipale, Besancon, France*

This Library holds one manuscript, a Tamil syllabery.

10. *Bibliothèque dell' Archiginnasio, Bologna, Italy*

The two Tamil manuscripts housed by this library are translations of catechisms.

11. *Bibliothèque municipale, Bordeaux, France*

This library holds two Tamil manuscripts, both moral treatises described in the French national catalogue.

12. *Universidade do Minho, Arquivo distrital de Braga, Portugal*

The archives contain one Tamil manuscript, as yet unidentified.

13. *Bibliothèque des Bollandistes; Brussels, Belgium*

One manuscript is available in this library, consisting of stories of saint's lives and rites for certain Christian feast days.

14. *Bibliothèque royale Albert Ier/Koninklijke Bibliotheek Albert I, Brussels, Belgium*

This library contains two Tamil manuscripts on paper, a Tamil-French and a Tamil-Portuguese word list.

15. *Musées royaux d' Art et d' Histoire, Brussels, Belgium*

This museum contains a number of Tamil manuscripts, as well as a pillar of Rajendra Chola II, discovered in Ostend harbour at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The legend around the pillar has not yet been fully translated.

16. *Bibliothèque municipale, Caen, France*

The library contains six Tamil manuscripts, all catalogued in the French national catalogue.

17. *Cambridge University Library, Cambridge, England, United Kingdom*

This library contains some thirty Tamil manuscripts, some as yet unidentified, as well as eleven copper plates with Tamil inscriptions.

Some of the manuscripts, especially those on paper, are comparatively modern.

18. *Emmanuel College Library, England. United Kingdom*
This library contains one manuscript in Tamil, as yet unidentified:
19. *Bibliothèque Inguimbertaine, Carpentras, France*
This library contains one manuscript in Tamil, described in the French national catalogue.
20. *Bibliothèque et Archives de Cherbourg, Cherbourg, France*
This library holds one Tamil manuscript, described in the French national catalogue.
21. *Biblioteca Filiala Cluj-Napoca Academiei R.S. România, Cluj-Napoca Romania*
One manuscript, apparently in Tamil, is housed in this library, but is has not yet been identified. Efforts are being made to obtain copies in order to establish its identification.
22. *Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen, Denmark*
This library houses a very large collection of Tamil material, both on palm leaves (of which there are several thousand examples) and paper, much of which was catalogued by A. Krishnamurti in 1959. The collections have been the subject of much scholarly investigation.
23. *Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen, Denmark*
This library contains a good deal of uncatalogued material in Tamil. In addition to the documents relating to the Tranquebar colony, there are hundreds of letters in the archives of the Asiatic Company and in those of the Danish missions. None of these extensive collections has been catalogued or inventoried.
24. *University College, Cork, Republic of Ireland*
One Tamil manuscript, from Sri Lanka, is held by this library.
25. *Hessische Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek, Darmstadt, Federal Republic of Germany*
Of the four Tamil manuscripts held by this library, one is still unidentified. The others consist of catechisms and Biblical quotations.
26. *Bibliothèque municipale, Dole, France*
This library holds one Tamil manuscript, described in the French national catalogue.

27. *The Chester Beatty Library and Gallery of Oriental Art, Dublin, Republic of Ireland*

This library possesses six Tamil manuscripts, mostly Hindu religious poems, a medical text and one Christian missionary manuscript. These are all uncatalogued.

28. *Trinity College Library, Dublin, Republic of Ireland*

Eight Tamil manuscripts, including a copy of the *Rāmāyaṇā*, a syllabary and a number of religious poems are to be found in this library. Catalogue references are as yet incomplete.

29. *The National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom*

This library contains one Tamil manuscript, a Christian text.

30. *Universitätsbibliothek Erlangen-Nürnberg, Erlangen, Federal Republic of Germany*

This library contains eight Tamil manuscripts, briefly catalogued and under current investigation.

31. *Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, Italy*

This library holds two Tamil manuscripts, both catechisms.

32. *Bibliothèque publique et universitaire, Generv, Switzerland*

This library holds one Tamil manuscript, a moral treatise.

33. *The Hunterian Library, Glasgow University Library, Glasgow, Scotland, United Kingdom*

This library contains nine Tamil manuscripts, including a copy of the *Tirukkural*, Christian and Hindu prayers and some unidentified items.

34. *Forschungsbibliothek, Gotha, German Democratic Republic*

This library contains four manuscripts, including a copy of the *Tirukkural*.

35. *Göteborgs Universitetsbibliothek, Gothenburg, Sweden*

This library contains fourteen Tamil manuscripts, all unidentified and uncatalogued, under current investigation.

36. *Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Göttingen, Federal Republic of Germany*

A detailed catalogue of the eleven Tamil manuscripts held by this library is available. The manuscripts consist of Hindu and Christian religious texts.

37. *Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt, Halle, German Democratic Republic*

This library is one of the great repositories of mission records in Europe. Its Tamil collections are extensive, and there is a considerable collection of Tamil manuscripts, all well catalogued.

38. *Museovirasto, Helsinki, Finland*

The museum possesses two fragmentary manuscripts, both syllabaries.

39. *Evangelical Lutheran Mission, Hildesheim, Federal Republic of Germany*

This library holds one Tamil manuscript, as yet unidentified.

40. *Friedrich-Schiller-Universitätsbibliothek, Jena, German Democratic Republic*

This library holds four Tamil manuscripts, as yet unidentified.

41. *Bibliothèque municipale, Le Havre, France*

This library holds one Tamil manuscript, described in the French national catalogue.

42. *Nauchnaya Biblioteka imeni M. Gorkovo (Gorky Library), Leningrad U.S.S.R.*

This library possesses two Tamil manuscripts, apparently copies of medieval texts, but very damaged and decipherable only with great difficulty.

43. *Publichnaya Biblioteka imeni M.E. Saltykova-Shchedrina (M.E. Saltykov Shchedrin State Public Library), Leningrad, U.S.S.R.*

The ten Tamil manuscripts, described in the 1852 catalogue of this library (formerly the Imperial Public library of Petersburg) are apparently still held there. No further details are forthcoming.

44. *Biblioteca de Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa Lisbon, Portugal*

Three Tamil manuscripts. all bi-lingual word lists, are held by this library.

45. *Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Lisbon, Portugal*

This library holds seven Tamil manuscripts, including a Portuguese-Tamil lexicon and Christian religious texts.

46. *Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon, Portugal*

This library holds one Tamil manuscript, unidentified.

47. *Biblioteca da Ajuda, Lisbon, Portugal*

This library possesses four Tamil manuscripts, the works of Jacomo Goncalves.

48. *The Sidney Jones Library of the University of Liverpool, Liverpool, England, United Kingdom*

This library contains two Tamil manuscripts, identified, and four or five more unidentified.

49. *The British Library, London, England, United Kingdom*

This library holds a large collection of manuscripts and copper plates, for the most part accurately catalogued. One of the best known collections of Tamil manuscripts and other materials in Europe is held here.

50. *The India Office Library and Records, London, England United Kingdom*

This library houses a considerable collection of Tamil manuscripts, all well catalogued and identified.

51. *The Lambeth Palace Library, London, England, United Kingdom*

This library possesses one small manuscript, a piece of religious ephemera.

52. *The Library of the Royal Asiatic Society, London, England, United Kingdom*

This library holds a considerable number of Tamil manuscripts, some of apparently early date, all catalogued and identified.

53. *The Library of the Royal College of Physicians, London, England, United Kingdom*

One of this library's manuscripts consists of a vocabulary list with Tamil entries.

54. *The School of Oriental and African Studie's Library, University of London, England, United Kingdom.*

This library contains a small number of Tamil manuscripts, all catalogued.

55. *The Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, London, England, United Kingdom.*

This library has a collection of forty Tamil manuscripts, including some rare examples of children's early attempts at writing on palm leaves.

56. *Biblioteca Statale di Lucca, Lucca, Italy*

This library holds one Tamil manuscript, a bi-lingual word list.

57. *Bibliothèque de la Ville de Lyon, Lyons, France*

This library holds one Tamil manuscript, described in the French national catalogue.

58. *Biblioteca nacional, Madrid, Spain*

This library holds two Tamil manuscripts, neither of which has been identified. These are under current investigation.

59. *The John Rylands University Library of Manchester, Manchester, England, United Kingdom*

This library contains fifteen Tamil manuscripts, all catalogued.

60. *Musée de Mariemont, Morlanwelz, Belgium*

This museum holds one Tamil manuscript, from Sri Lanka, unidentified.

61. *Biblioteka S S.S R. imeni V.I. Lenin (The Lenin State Library of the U.S.S.R.), Moscow, U.S.S.R.*

This library holds one Tamil manuscript, consisting of several different texts.

62. *Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, Munich, Federal Republic of Germany*

Of the eleven Tamil manuscripts held by this library, some still remain unidentified. Those identified are Hindu and Christian religious texts, apparently.

63. *Universitetsbiblioteket, Oslo, Norway*

Nine Tamil manuscripts are housed in this library, two of which have not yet been identified.

64. *The Indian Institute Library, Oxford, England, United Kingdom*

The Indian Institute Library is a branch of the great Bodelian Library, and possesses a large collection of Tamil manuscripts, well preserved and catalogued personally by the Rev. G.U. Pope, whose original catalogue in his own handwriting is still the main source for reference for this manuscript collection.

65. *Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale, Paris, France*

This library contains one Tamil manuscript, the life of St. James the Apostle.

66. *Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, France*

This library holds one of the largest collections of Tamil manuscript, in Europe, most of which has been efficiently catalogued.

67. *Société asiatique, Paris, France*

The Society's library contains a good number of Tamil manuscripts, including some very rare items; a catalogue is available.

68. *Biblioteca Palatina, Parma, Italy*

This library houses one Tamil manuscript, the text of a religious debate.

69. *Ceskoslovenská Akademie Věd, Orientální ústav, Prague, Czechoslovakia*

This library holds one manuscript in Tamil, which has been identified.

70. *Pamětní Národního Písmnictví na Strahova, Muzeum České Literatury, Prague, Czechoslovakia*

This library possesses two manuscript fragments, both syllabaries in Tamil.

71. *Biblioteca dell'Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, Rome, Italy*

This library possesses three Tamil manuscripts, all unidentified.

72. *Biblioteca nazionale centrale Vittorio Emanuele II, Rome, Italy*

This library possesses sixteen Tamil manuscripts, some of which are unidentified.

73. *Wilhelm-Pieck-Universitätsbibliothek, Rostock, German Democratic Republic*

Of the six Tamil manuscripts catalogued for this library, some have, apparently, been lost. Definitive information is unavailable at present.

74. *Bibliothèque municipale, Rouen, France*

This library holds one Tamil manuscript, described in the French national catalogue.

75. *The University Library, St Andrews, Scotland, United Kingdom*

This library contains one Tamil manuscript, a moral treatise.

76. *Stiftsbibliothek, St Florian, Austria*

This library possesses two unidentified Tamil manuscripts.

77. *Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm, Sweden*

The two Tamil manuscripts held by this library are a word list and a Bible translation.

78. *Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire, Strasbourg, France*¹

This library contains sixteen Tamil manuscripts, including several volumes presented by A. Burnell in 1871. For the most part, these are copies of classical works. They are well catalogued, but not mentioned in Pearson, 1971.

79. *Biblioteca nazionale universitaria di Torino, Turin, Italy*

This library holds one Tamil manuscript, a religious text.

80. *Universitetsbiblioteket, Uppsala, Sweden*

This library contains thirteen Tamil manuscripts, on a variety of subjects, all catalogued.

81. *Archives of the Jesuit Generalate, Vatican City*

These archives contain two Tamil manuscripts, one a catechism, one unidentified.

82. *la Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican City*

The library contains a small number of Tamil manuscripts, mostly of a religious nature and generally well catalogued.

83. *Bibliothek der Benediktinerabtei U.L. Fr. z.d. Schotten, Vienna, Austria*

This library holds one Tamil manuscript, a translation of St Matthew's Gospel.

84. *Oesterreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, Austria*

This library possesses a number of Tamil manuscripts, of which six have been catalogued and the rest remain unidentified.

85. *Biblioteka Uniwersytecka, Wroclaw, Poland*

The Tamil manuscript believed to have been destroyed during the second world war is apparently still in existence in this library. Further details are being sought.

86. *Zentralbibliothek, Zurich, Switzerland*

This library possesses three Tamil manuscripts, as yet inadequately identified.

87. *Universiteits—Bibliotheek Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

In the Schriftmuseum J. A. Dortmond, there are some fragments of manuscripts exhibited to illustrate the Tamil writing system, numerals etc.

88. *Biblioteca municipal do Porto, Porto, Portugal*

This library holds one Tamil manuscript, on paper, which has been catalogued.

Inevitably, this list is only a preliminary one, and there are a number of libraries and institutions still to be investigated, notably the religious foundations in Europe. I am still awaiting definitive replies from a few of the libraries mentioned by Pearson as holding Tamil or Malabar manuscripts; in other cases, I have verified Pearson's information, and discovered that the manuscripts described were not written in Tamil. These circumstances explain the discrepancy between Pearson's list of libraries and my own. Further, there exist a number of libraries, not listed by Pearson, whose catalogues are not designed in such a way that one may immediately ascertain whether materials in a particular language are housed there. Notably some of the libraries of Switzerland and Germany have such catalogues. The Audencia de Filipinas subsection of the Archivo General de Indias in Seville, Spain, in particular, may possess documents and manuscripts in Tamil, but from the existing catalogues there is no way of knowing without spending a considerable time in diligent research in the spot. There are still one or two outstanding problems: some collections which have been noted to have Tamil manuscripts in the past have been broken up and sold, or have been moved and not rehoused in the original catalogue order. Some Tamil manuscripts are surely lurking in European libraries incorrectly catalogued or misplaced with manuscripts in other languages. It is heartening, then, to engage in correspondence with librarians who appreciate the opportunity to search for their manuscripts. From one such, I received the news that a particular manuscript was lost; "...unfortunately this item is no more to be found, and I fear it has been lost since long." A month later, I received the full details of the manuscript, together with a photocopy, and a letter from the librarian which read: "...I succeeded in finding the manuscript...but for your demand it would still have been missing."

There is still much work to be done in this area of search, not only in bringing manuscripts to light, but identifying and dating them. Many libraries have good records of the histories of their acquisitions, and the histories of manuscripts can often be traced through their donors. Other places have very scant records, and a considerable amount of research will be necessary to establish the provenance of their holdings.

Readers interested in collaborating in this work are invited to contact the author so that a concerted effort may be made to draw up a comprehensive catalogue of Tamil manuscripts in Europe. The list given above includes

only the briefest indications of libraries' holdings. In many cases, I have much more ample information available, including copies of catalogue entries, photographs of manuscripts, descriptions of manuscripts etc. Much of this material can be made available to those interested in pursuing this research.

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Federal Republic of Germany

Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland, Vol. II, (Indische Handschriften), part I ed, by K.L. Janert, 1962;

par II ed. by K.L. Janert and Ch. Tripathi, 1971;

part III ed. by E.R. Sreekrishna Sarma, 1967;

part IV ed. by K.L. Janert, 1975.

France

In addition to the individual collection catalogues, the main manuscript catalogue of the Bibliothèque nationale is

Cabaton, A. *Catalogue sommaire des manuscrits indiens, indo-chinois et malayopolynesiens*, Paris: Bibliothèque nationale: Leroux, 1912.

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Italy

Mazzatinti, G. *Inventari dei Manoscritti delle Biblioteche d'Italia*, Forlì: 1890 et seq. (Continued by A. Sorbelli and L. Ferrari)

NOTES

1. During the period 1870-1914, Strasbourg formed part of Germany, and the city's manuscript collections do not,

therefore, appear in the French national provincial catalogue which was compiled in the 1880s.