

Sri Lankan Manuscriptology

This brief note is a review article on Anne M. Blackburn's paper, "Notes on Sri Lankan Temple Manuscript Collections", published in the *Journal of the Pali Text Society*, XXVII (2002), pp. 1–59.

Blackburn's paper is interesting for two reasons: (1) It is salutary that more and more Western scholars are showing interest in Sri Lankan palm-leaf manuscripts, (2) It is a contribution to the effort of bringing these manuscripts into the limelight, especially in the context of the importance paid to traditional knowledge in recent times.

THE VALUE OF SRI LANKAN MANUSCRIPTS

Sri Lankan palm-leaf manuscripts are the repository of the intellectual property of that nation up to the twentieth century. After the introduction of printing to the island in the eighteenth century, palm-leaf manuscripts continued to be written even at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although the bulk of the manuscripts were on Buddhism, other subjects of interest (grammar, lexicography, literature, history, astrology, medicine, arts and crafts, yantras and mantras, etc.) were not neglected. All this mass of literature was written in Sinhala, Pāli, Sanskrit, and some in Tamil. The number of manuscripts that have survived destruction (by rival religious sects, foreign invaders, callous neglect leaving documents in unfavourable climatic conditions and prey to the attack of insects, and, in recent times, wanton sale to tourists) shows the prolific literary activity of the past.

The value of these documents and the urgent need to preserve them have been pointed out by me in the following three papers :

1. "The Literary Heritage of Sri Lanka, A Case for the Preservation of Palm-Leaf Manuscripts", *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik*, 15 (1989), pp. 119–27.

2. *La Fabrication des livres dans l'ancienne Lanka* (Paris: Cahiers du Cercle d'études et de recherches sri-lankaises, 2000).¹
3. "Laṅkāvē nāsī yana saṃskṛtika dāyādaya" ("The cultural heritage of Lanka in the process of destruction"), *Samṣkṛti*, 18, 2, 2002, pp. 34–41.

The palm-leaf manuscripts have been the main source material for authors of the history of Sri Lankan literature² and naturally for scholars engaged in textual criticism. The value of these manuscripts for the study of a particular branch of knowledge has been amply illustrated in my studies on the history of medicine and traditional medical literature of Sri Lanka.³

CATALOGUING OF SRI LANKAN MANUSCRIPTS

The cataloguing of fractions of this wealth of literature started in the mid nineteenth century. The first such effort seems to be that of Mudaliyar Dionysius Perera, *Catalogue of Pali and Other Manuscripts in Temples in the Tangalle District*, presented at the General Assembly of the Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland on 5 May 1832. This unpublished work is reported to be now lost.⁴ Heinz Bechert considers that the first catalogue was published by Edward Upham in the third volume of his work, *The Mahāvansi, The Rājaratnācari, and the Rājāvalī, Forming the Sacred and Historical Books of Ceylon; also, A Collection of Tracts Illustrative of the Doctrines and Literature of Buddhism*. London, 1833, 169–93.⁵ About twenty catalogues of Sri Lankan manuscripts have appeared since then. Some of them are the following:

¹This booklet was published by the Sri Lankan Embassy in Paris.

²See, for example, Godakumbura 1955 and Sannasgala 1964.

³These studies of over twenty years have been published as a collection in Liyanaratne 1999.

⁴See Goonetilleke 1970, p. 23.

⁵Bechert 1980, p. 275.

1. James D'Alwis, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Sanskrit, Pali and Sinhalese Literary Works of Ceylon* [a very ambitious task!], Vol. I. Colombo, 1870.
2. Louis De Zoysa, *Catalogue of Pali, Sinhalese and Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Temple Libraries of Ceylon*. Colombo, 1885 (an attempt similar to item 1 above).
3. D.M.De Z. Wickremasinghe, *Catalogue of the Sinhalese Manuscripts in the British Museum*. London, 1900.
4. W.A. De Silva, *Catalogue of Palm Leaf Manuscripts in the Library of the Colombo Museum*. Vol. I. Colombo, 1938.
5. Heinz Bechert, *Singhalesische Handschriften*, Vol. I. Wiesbaden, 1969; Vol. II, Stuttgart, 1997.
6. C.E. Godakumbura, *Catalogue of Ceylonese Manuscripts, The Royal Library*. Copenhagen, 1980.
7. K.D. Somadasa, *Catalogue of the Hugh Nevill Collection of Sinhalese Manuscripts in the British Library*. 7 Vols. London, 1987-95.

Items 4 and 6 above, notably the former, are of special importance as they have long introductions with a survey of Sri Lankan literature and valuable information regarding the various aspects of manuscripts (techniques of production, writing, numbering folios, dating, etc.).

BLACKBURN'S INVENTORY

General observation

Blackburn (B) has been handicapped by not being able to examine many of the manuscripts herself. She is reproducing the already available handlists of five collections. In the case of the sixth and final collection, that of the Haṅguranketa rajamahavihāraya, the result of the research has been limited to a broad general survey of two days. This is unfortunate because the particular temple, known as the Hanguranketa potgul vihāraya ("the monastic library of Hanguranketa") has one of the richest collections of valuable manuscripts with regard to both contents and ornamentation of book covers.

The scrutiny of manuscripts is important to ensure their contents, for there are instances where the body of a manuscript does not correspond to the title indicated in the cover or the opening folio or the colophon.

Problems of classification of texts

The category “Miscellaneous Didactic Texts” in B’s classification needs reconsideration. The use of the term didactic itself is unsatisfactory because, on the one hand, the entire corpus of classical Sinhala literature, which centred round Buddhism and purported to inculcate Buddhist ideals, may be called didactic.⁶ On the other hand, some of the titles grouped under that heading are not specifically didactic. The following are some examples:

1. Anāgatavaṃsaya (p. 11), story of the future Buddha Metteyya,
2. Kavmutuhara (p. 11), a Sinhala poem based on the Dasaratha Jātaka,
3. Dharmapradīpikāva (p. 12), a Sinhala exposition (*parikathā*) on the Pāli Mahābodhivaṃsa,
4. Pūjāvaliya (p. 20), a Sinhala prose work illustrating the Buddha’s epithet “*arahaṃ*” with Buddhist tales,
5. Butsaraṇa (p. 12), a Sinhala prose work on the life of the Buddha,
6. Amarasīṃhaya (p. 13), an alternative title of the Sanskrit dictionary Amarakośa, after the author’s name, Amarasīṃha.
7. Rājaratnākaraya and Narendracaritāvaloka[na]-pradīpikāva (p. 17), classified under “Textual Compilations”, are both historical works.
8. Lōvāḍa Saṅgarāva (so read) (p. 14), classified under “Grammars and Lexicons,” is a didactic poem.⁷

⁶On the Sinhala didactic literature proper, see Godakumbura, 1955, pp. 209–20.

⁷An excellent English translation of this poem, entitled *Towards a Better World* (Colombo, 2000), has been made by Bhikkhu K. Ñāṇananda, giving the verses in Sinhala characters followed by the English translation. The book, like all

9. Mādhavanidāna, classified under “Grammars and Lexicons” (p. 14), is the famous medical text with the alternative titles Rugviniścaya and Rogaviniścaya. In fact, this is clear in B’s reference to Bechert’s *Singhalesische Handschriften* (1969).

10. Vessantara Jātakaya is rightly classified under “Jātaka Texts” on p. 11, but under “Textual Compilations” on p. 17.

11. Saṅgharājasādhucariyāva, classified under “Other Texts” (p. 29), is the biography of Vāliṅga Saraṅgaṅkara Saṅgharāja.

12. The classification of the manuscripts of the Haṅguranketa rajamahavihāraya according to the bookcases in which they are stored, is, to say the least, hardly a scholarly approach.

Erroneous transcriptions

Nava Vāranāgilla (p. 14) is undoubtedly Nāma varanāgilla (“declension”).⁸

The correct reading of Nalpavila (p. 22, n. 100) is Talpāvila (a place name).⁹

The transcription of some titles indicates problems confronted in reading. For example, “Sṛtu [= sṛta ?] Sangara-kavaniya” (p. 23) is most probably Kalidasa’s Ṛtusamhāra-kāvya (with the Sinhala suffix *-ya*).¹⁰

Several words have been deformed due to the misuse of diacritical marks. Some of the glaring mistakes are cited here with the correct form following each example: Aṭṭhasālīnī- (p. 9), Atthasālīnī- (correct form is given on p. 36); Umāndāva (p. 10), Umandāva or Umaṃdāva; Padasadhaniya (p. 14), Padasāadhanaya, exposition of Moggallāna’s Pāli grammar; Sarasvatiya (p. 15), Sārasvataya, Sanskrit grammar;

publications of Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda, is strictly for free distribution and can be obtained from the Public Trustee’s Department, Sri Lanka.

⁸Cf. *va* and *ma*. See Dharmarama 1949.

⁹Sinhala *ta* and *na* also differ only slightly.

¹⁰Sinhala *r* is written with a letter similar to *sr* and the two letters *g* and *h* (*ga*, *ha*) can be distinguished only by the small head added to the latter. Kavaniya is an obvious error. The same transcription recurs in Jinavaṃsadīpa Mahākavanaya (for Mahākāvya) on p. 21.

Parābhāva Sūtraya (p. 30), Parābhava sūtraya; Pācciti (p. 36), Pācitti; Kotasak (p. 8 and *passim*), koṭasak (“part, extract”); Kadaim (p. 16, *passim*), kaḍaim or kaḍayim.

“Pañcanivāraṇadākvāna Sūtrayek” (p. 35) should read Pañca-nīvaraṇa dākvēna sūtrayak, “A discourse (*sūtrayak*) showing (*dākvēna*) the five (*pañca*) hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*)”.

“Saṃkhyānāya (*sic*)” with a note indicating the uncertainty of its identification (p. 38) may probably be the abbreviated title (Saṃkhyānāya) of the Saṃkhyādhammadīpikā.¹¹

The nasal *ṇ* used in place of the Sinhala half-nasal *ṅ* (before *g, ḍ, d*) gives a defective pronunciation: Saṅgiya (p. 30 and *passim*), saṅgiya; Saṅghasaraṇaya (p. 31), Saṅgasaraṇa. This half-nasal has been correctly used, however, in the word Maṅgul (p. 40).

It would have been desirable to make a distinction between Pāli and Sanskrit forms of words: Pātimokṣa (p. 9), Prātimokṣa (Skt) or Pātimokkha (Pāli); Dhammapradīpikā (p. 27, *passim*), Dharmapradīpikā (Skt) or Dhammappadīpikā (Pāli).

Linguistic problems

In “Anāgatavaṃsaye Desanāva” (p. 31), the inflection of Anāgatavaṃsaye (gen./loc. sing.) is superfluous. It should read Anāgatavaṃsa desanāva where the stem form Anāgatavaṃsa is used as an adjective of *desanāva* (“discourse”). On the other hand, in “Saddharmaratnākārāya Kotasak” (*sic*, p. 38), Saddharma-ratnākārāya should be in the genitive, Saddharma-ratnākārāyē (“part of the Saddharmākārāya”). Hōḍiya Pota (p. 55) should be Hōḍi pota (use of the stem form as adjective).

Although the Sinhala alphabet has no capital letters, it has become the practice, especially in some PTS publications, to use capital letters at the beginning of sentences and in proper nouns. As such, the use of capitals in each separate word should have been avoided in conformity with common practice. Thus, titles such as Viśākhavata (*sic*) and Vena Kathā (p. 17) should read “Viśākāvata saha venat kathā”; Matalē

¹¹See Sannasgala 1964, p. 627.

Disāvagē Kadaim Pota (p. 17), should read “Mātalē Disāvagē kaḍayim pota”, etc.

Kathāvastu (p. 11, n. 26) simply means “stories” (*kathāvastuva*, singular).

Baṇa pot or *baṇa daham pot* (p. 12, n. 30) means “Buddhist books” (religious texts), lit. “books (*pot*) on Buddhist discourses (*baṇa*) or Buddhist doctrine (*daham*)”.

“Moroduvē” (p. 13, n. 33) is probably Morontuḍuvē (a place name).

“Siripaṇṇānanda Abhidhāna Sthavirayan Vahansēn visin siṃhala parivartanaya” (p. 19, nn. 60, 67) should read “Siri Paṇṇānandābhidhāna Sthavirayan vahansē visin [karana lada] siṃhala parivartanaya”: “The Sinhala translation (*siṃhala parivartanaya*) by (*visin*) the Elder (*Sthavirayan vahansē*) named (*abhidhāna*) Siri Paṇṇānanda”.

“Rerukanē Vanavimala Himi” (p. 18, n. 57, p. 20, n. 74) is most probably Rerukanē Candavimala himi.

“Yakuduvē [illegible] Sthavirayan Vahansē” (p. 21, n. 82) is surely Yakkaḍuvē Prajñārāma Sthavirayan vahansē.

“Kaviśvara Sthavirayan Himi Pano” (p. 21, n. 85) is not the name of a text. It is the name of a monk, Kaviśvara. *Sthavira himipāṇō* is an epithet meaning “Venerable Elder”. (*Sthavira* is the title of a monk who has obtained the higher ordination (*upasampadā*); *himipāṇō*: Skt *svāmiṇpāda* > Sinh. *Himipā*, *-āṇa* is an honorific suffix, *-āṇō* is nom. pl. honorific).

Nāva-[illegible]-buduguṇa Sannaya (p. 25, n. 117) should be Nava-arahādi Buduguṇa sannaya, “The exegetical Sinhala version (*sannaya*) of the nine (*nava*) qualities of the Buddha (*Buduguṇa*), starting with *arahaṃ* (“worthy”) (*arahādi*)”.

The entry “Sela Sūtrayādikoṭa-ātisaṅgraha Baṇa Daham Pota” (p. 31) means “The compendium of Buddhist texts starting with the Sela sūtra”, *Sela sūtraya ādikōṭa āti saṅgraha baṇa pota*.

“Sāravaṅga Veda Potak” (p. 39) should read Sarvāṅga vedapotak, “A medical book (*vedapotak*) on general diseases (*sarvāṅga*, lit. ‘the whole body’).”

“Kalunomadinna” (p. 40, n. 161) is not a name; it is a sentence (*kaḷu no madinna*) meaning “Do not apply black”. When manuscripts are inscribed, the palm leaves are smeared with lamp black mixed with resin oil to make the letters clear. This process is called *kaḷu mādīma*, noun; *kaḷu mādīnavā*, verb.

Annotations

For annotations, B has referred the reader especially to catalogues of Godakumbura and Somadasa in the case of several texts. Many texts are devoid of annotations, however. In the case of the Bhesajjamañjūsā, for example, reference should have been given to the PTS edition of the first eighteen chapters (1996) which, for the first time, makes this unique Pāli medical treatise available to the Western readers.

The title “Pāli Nighaṇḍuva” (pp. 32, 39, 46), commonly used to denote the Abhidhānappadīpikā, should have been annotated to make that meaning clear.

Talpata (wrongly spelt “Talpota”, p. 40), lit. “palm-leaf”, deserves to be annotated because of the historical value of this genre of documents. The note given to this document is also interesting as it refers to a rare type of document written in Tamil: *dāmala basaven racita ipāraṇi talpata* (= *demala bhāṣāven* (or *bāsāven*) *racita ipāraṇi talpata*, “the ancient *talpata* (‘royal message’) written in the Tamil language”). The full texts of two Talpatas, one preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, and the other in the Musée de l’Homme, Paris, have been reproduced by me in order to give the reader an idea of this type of document.¹²

¹²Liyanaratne 1983, pp. 112–14; Liyanaratne 1984, pp. 273–83. The historical importance of the Talpata of the Bibliothèque nationale has been explained in Gunawardana 1984–85, pp. 317–19.

Girimānanda Sūtraya (p. 34) has been analysed by me to highlight its historical importance.¹³ A reference to that study, I suppose, would have been of use to readers.

Conclusion

Cataloguing is a rigorous discipline which requires a thorough knowledge of the language(s) and literature(s) of the documents handled.¹⁴ In the case of Sri Lankan manuscripts, a knowledge of Sinhala, Pāli, Sanskrit, and at least a working knowledge of Tamil is necessary. A good knowledge of Sinhala is, however, indispensable.

Cataloguing these manuscripts needs a special training in view of certain peculiarities, notably :

1. Lack of punctuation. The usual punctuation mark is the *kuṇḍalī*, a spiral shape in the form of a cowry shell, generally used as a full stop. Several *kuṇḍalī* are used to indicate the separation of sections of a text.

2. Lack of separation of words. Writing is a continuous flow, probably in consideration of the economy of space. Here, knowledge of the language becomes indispensable for the correct understanding of the text.

3. Peculiarities of writing. Conjunct consonants especially *cca*, *vva*, *bba*, may be confused with *ḍa*, *kha* and *ṇa* respectively. Attention has also to be paid to the similarity between some letters : *kha* (𑀓) and *ba* (𑀔); *ga* (𑀕), *bha* (𑀖), and *ha* (𑀗); *ca* (𑀘), *va* (𑀙), and *ma* (𑀚); *ta* (𑀛) and *na* (𑀜). In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century manuscripts, *r* is written as *pl*.

¹³“Nosology in Āyurveda: Data from a Pāli Canonical Text” in Liyanaratne 1999, pp. 72–83.

¹⁴Some practical problems of cataloguing have been pointed out by me in my review article Liyanaratne 1998.

The preparation of a census of Sri Lankan manuscripts on an island-wide scale still remains a desideratum.¹⁵ It has to be a vast national project engaging trained teams of scholars allotted to the different provinces of the country. In the absence of any such move, individual attempts like that of B to focus attention on the value of this cultural heritage are indeed commendable. It is hoped that the above observations will be of use to B in the pursuit of her work.

Jinadasa Liyanaratne

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¹⁵Somadasa 1959, 1964, although a worthy effort, is not a comprehensive work. Moreover, several manuscripts inventoried therein are now not available in the monasteries indicated.