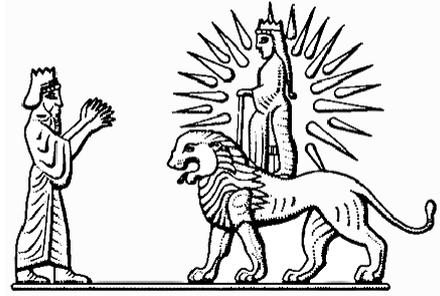


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Expansion of Oriental Studies in the Early 19th Century*

While the first roots of Oriental studies in the West go back to the 18th century and even earlier, it is clear that the first half of the 19th century is a sort of “Achsenzeit,” with important breakthroughs and fundamental methodological developments in almost every field of the wide area of studies dealing with the languages and civilisations of Asia and North Africa. On a general level, this is seen in the growing specialisation: In the 18th century and even at the beginning of the 19th, it was still common that individual scholars tried to encompass the whole vast area in their studies,¹ while by 1850 everyone hoping to be taken seriously as a scholar was only representing one or, at most, two fields.²

The beginnings of Grotefend’s³ deci-

pherment of Old Persian cuneiform writing go back to the 1790s, but in the first decades of the 19th century it was still possible to put forth the serious claim that the cuneiform writing in fact consists of stylised Cuphic script and explain a Behistun relief as a representation of a cross and twelve apostles.⁴ By the middle of the 19th century, after the work of Grotefend, Rawlinson and others,⁵ Old Persian was more or less completely understood and the Akkadian and the Elamite tablets were already beginning to reveal their secrets. At the same time, the fieldwork of Botta and Layard had initiated Mesopotamian archaeology.⁶

The centuries of fantastic and entirely erroneous speculation about the character of hieroglyphic writing⁷ came to an abrupt end in 1822 when Champollion

* An asterisk before a book title denotes that I have not seen it myself. Margot Stout Whiting has kindly corrected my English.

¹ For instance, the names of Joseph de Guignes (1721-1800), Louis-Mathieu Langlès (1763-1824), and Julius von Klapproth (1783-1835) come easily to mind.

² There still were (and even now are) combinations of such related fields as Egyptology and Assyriology, Hebrew and Arabic, Indology and Iranian studies.

³ Georg Friedrich Grotefend (1775-1853). His decipherment was first presented to the Göttingische Gelehrte Gesellschaft by the classical scholar and historian Thomas Christian Tychsen (1758-1834) and published as a summary in *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen* in 1802. The second, more complete version, was appended to the second edition of A. H. L. Heeren’s (1760-1842) famous history, *Ideen über die*

Politik, den Verkehr und den Handel der vornehmsten Völker der alten Welt. 1805.

⁴ A. A. H. Lichtenstein (1753-1816): *Tentamen palaeographiae Assyro-Persicae*. 1803; Paul-Ange-Louis de Gardane (1765-1822): *Journal d’un voyage... Paris* 1809.

⁵ Henry Creswicke Rawlinson (1810-1895). In addition, names such as Rasmus Rask (1787-1832), Eugène Burnouf (1801-1852), Christian Lassen (1800-1876), Edward Hincks (1792-1866), Félicien (Caignart) de Saulcy (1807-1880), and Jules Oppert (1825-1905) deserve to be mentioned here.

⁶ The French Paul-Émile Botta (1802-1870) and the British Henry Austin Layard (1817-1894) both started excavations in Mesopotamia in the 1840s.

⁷ The most famous figure in the history of this speculation is, of course, Father Athanasius Kircher (1601-1680).

published his famous *Lettre à M. Dacier*⁸ presenting his decipherment of the hieroglyphs of the Rosetta Stone.⁹ The stone itself was among the finds of Napoleon's expedition and the publication of the scholarly results of this expedition, *Description de l'Égypte*,¹⁰ made ancient Egypt really popular. Before the middle of the century, Demotic writing had been deciphered by Brugsch¹¹ and the first archaeological expeditions¹² had laid the foundation for Egyptological field research.

While the roots of Hebrew (and Aramaic) studies go back to the 16th century and even earlier¹³ – and some valuable work was indeed done during the following centuries¹⁴ – the defective understanding of the true nature of the Semitic languages together with the Biblical idea of Hebrew as the parent of all languages had much hampered serious study. The famous *Hebräische Grammatik* of Gesenius¹⁵ appeared in 1813, three years after the popular dictionary by the same

author. For the sake of brevity, I will just refer in passing to the new developments in textual criticism and source analysis, to the 'Wissenschaft des Judentums,' to the beginnings of topographical and archaeological fieldwork in Palestine,¹⁶ as well as to the development of comparative Semitic linguistics and of Semitic epigraphy.¹⁷

The Arabic studies in the West – with some beginnings in the Middle Ages – had started in the 16th century, but after the solid foundation laid in the 17th century,¹⁸ little progress was made and a critical scholar such as Reiske¹⁹ remained a solitary figure. In the beginning of the 19th century, Silvestre de Sacy²⁰ and his numerous pupils initiated a new era characterised by rapid evolution in grammatical and lexicographical²¹ as well as in textual and historical studies.²²

In Iranian studies, too, beside the Old Persian cuneiform mentioned above, there were important new developments. The *Avesta* was already known at the end

⁸ Jean François Champollion le jeune (1790-1832): *Lettre à M. Dacier, relative à l'alphabet des hiéroglyphes phonétiques, employés par les Égyptiens pour inscrire sur leur monuments les noms des souverains grecs et romains*. Paris 1822.

⁹ Some preliminary observations were earlier published by Johan Georg Zoëga (1755-1809), Johan David Åkerblad (1763-1819), and Thomas Young (1773-1829).

¹⁰ *Description de l'Égypte: ou recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'Expédition de l'Armée française*. Eight volumes of text and 12 of plates, Paris 1809-22. General editor was François Jomard (1777-1862).

¹¹ Heinrich Karl Brugsch (1827-1894). His earlier work on the subject was completed in his **Grammaire démotique*. 1855.

¹² Champollion 1828-29, Lepsius 1842-45, Mariette 1850-54.

¹³ The most famous names being, perhaps, Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522) and Sebastian Münster (1489-1552).

¹⁴ I have personally found Samuel Bochart's (1599-1667) learned study *Hierozoicon* (1661) very useful.

¹⁵ Heinrich Friedrich Wilhelm Gesenius (1786-1842).

¹⁶ Especially by Edward Robinson (1794-1863) be-

ginning in 1838.

¹⁷ This development did in fact begin in the 18th century. Abbé Jean-Jacques Barthélemy (1716-1795) presented the decipherment of the Palmyran inscriptions in 1754 (publ. *Mémoires de littérature* of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres 26, 1759; independently also by John Swinton [1703-1777] in **Philosophical Transactions* 1754 & 1766) and of the Phoenician in 1758 (publ. *Ibid.* 30, 1764).

¹⁸ Especially the grammar of Thomas Erpenius (1584-1624) in 1613 and the Arabic-Latin dictionary of Jacobus Golius (1596-1667) in 1653.

¹⁹ Johann Jakob Reiske (1716-1774) was a brilliant specialist in Greek and Arabic historical literature whom his contemporaries were unable to appreciate.

²⁰ Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy (1758-1838). Note that Silvestre is part of the surname.

²¹ Silvestre de Sacy: *Grammaire arabe*. Paris 1810, Georg Wilhelm Freytag (1788-1861): *Lexicon Arabico-Latinum*. Halle 1830-37.

²² At least Étienne Quatremère (1782-1857), Joseph Toussaint Reinaud (1795-1867), Heinrich Leberecht Fleischer (1801-1888), and Edward William Lane (1801-1876; not a pupil of Silvestre de Sacy) deserve mention here.

of the 18th century through the translation by Anquetil-Duperron,²³ who had learnt the language and obtained manuscripts in Surat in the 1760s. However, the majority of scholars received the text translated by Anquetil-Duperron with great suspicion; some even accused the translator of deliberate deception while others explained the Avestan language as a sort of corrupt late Sanskrit.²⁴ Only the new development of Sanskrit philology, leading to the birth of comparative Indo-European linguistics, together with the decipherment of the Old Persian inscriptions, made it possible for Rask (1826) and Burnouf (1833ff.) to establish the role of Avestan as an ancient Iranian language and of the *Avesta* as a genuine corpus of early Zoroastrian literature. It is suitable for our present theme that the first complete text edition of the *Avesta* was published in the middle of the century by Westergaard,²⁵ who had himself acquired a number of Avestan and Middle Persian manuscripts in Iran and India.

In Middle Persian studies, Silvestre de Sacy's early epigraphical breakthrough in 1793²⁶ was followed by a similar achievement with literary Pahlavi in 1835, when Quatremère showed, with the

help of Arabic sources, the idea behind the *Uzväreš*, which until then had been ununderstandable for scholars. The first Western edition of a Pahlavi text (*Bundahišn*) was published, again by Westergaard, in 1851.

After some preliminary attempts by missionaries and travellers, the first flourishing of Indology took place far from Europe, in the 1790s in British Calcutta.²⁷ Early Calcutta publications were often republished or translated in Europe where they soon found an eager readership. The very first academic chair of Sanskrit was founded in 1814 in the Collège de France and the next January A. L. de Chézy²⁸ started his teaching. Franz Bopp's famous books *Conjugationssystem* 1816 and *Nala* 1819²⁹ strongly promoted the study of Sanskrit and gave rise to the completely new field of comparative Indo-European linguistics. Around 1850 there were nearly 20 Professors of Sanskrit (or nominally Professors of Oriental Studies, mainly teaching and studying Sanskrit) in European universities,³⁰ and some monumental works still in use, such as the *Ṛgveda* edition by Max Müller and the multi-volume Sanskrit-German dictionary by Böhtlingk and

²³ Abraham-Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron (1731-1805): *Le Zend-Avesta, ouvrage de Zoroastre*. 1-3. P. 1762-69. French translation with a "Discours préliminaire" of 500 pages including a description of his travels, and various appendices. There was also a *German translation by Kleuker, Riga 1775, and of Vol. 1 by J. G. Purmann 1776.

²⁴ The last to hold to this opinion was the German Indologist Peter von Bohlen (1796-1840) in 1831.

²⁵ Niels Ludvig Westergaard (1815-1878): **Zend-avesta or the religious books of the Zoroastrians*. Copenhagen 1852-54.

²⁶ His "Mémoires sur diverses Antiquités de la Perse," *Journal des Savans* 1793, contains, *inter alia*, the decipherment of Sasanian inscriptions.

²⁷ Sanskrit was first studied, among Europeans in Bengal, by men such as Charles Wilkins (1749/50-1836), Sir William Jones (1746-1794), Henry Thomas Colebrooke (1765-1837), and Horace Hayman Wilson (1784/86-1860).

²⁸ Antoine Léonard de Chézy (1773-1832).

²⁹ Franz Bopp (1791-1867): *Ueber das Conjugationssystem der Sanskritsprache in Vergleichung mit jenem der griechischen, lateinischen, persischen und germanischen. Nebst Episoden des Ramajan und Mahabharat*. Frankfurt a.M. 1816; *Nalus, carmen samscritum e Mahabharato*. London 1819 (text edition with Latin translation).

³⁰ The teaching advanced as follows: Paris 1815, Bonn 1818, Berlin 1821, Königsberg 1825, Munich 1826, London 1827, Breslau, Halle and Oxford 1833, Göttingen 1834, St. Petersburg 1835 (with intervals), Greifswald 1840 (1824), Kazan, Leipzig and Leuven 1841, Tübingen 1845, Copenhagen 1845 (1831), Vienna 1846, and Prague 1850. In addition, Sanskrit was taught by Professors of other subjects, e.g., at the universities of Jena in the 1820s, Leiden in the early 1830s, Helsinki 1835, Uppsala 1838. During the next twenty or thirty years many Italian and other German universities founded a chair for Sanskrit.

Roth, were well on the way to publication.³¹

East Asian studies do not properly belong to the sphere of MELAMMU, but in the present discussion they cannot be left completely out. There was, in fact, a flourishing tradition of Sinology since the 17th century, but this was mainly achieved by the Jesuits and some other Catholic missionaries working in China, and their few followers in Europe did not count as much more than interested dilettantes. Thus Fourmont's *Grammatica Sinica*³² was full of learned speculation, often far from correct, but it did not really teach the language. This was done in the manuscript grammar written by the Jesuit Prémare³³ and from this book young Abel-Rémusat started his Sinological studies.

The influential Baron Silvestre de Sacy, himself a famous scholar already mentioned several times, was a sort of godfather of Asian studies in early 19th century Paris. As early as in 1795, he had, together with Langlès and others, founded the famous school of languages, *École spéciale des langues orientales vivantes*, still operating under the revised name of INALCO. It was he who took young Champollion under his wing, and it was through his influence that two new chairs were founded at the Collège de France for two other protégés of his, Sanskrit for Chézy and Chinese for Abel-Rémusat. Through the work of Abel-

Rémusat and his pupil and successor Stanislas Julien,³⁴ Sinology became a fully academic discipline.

It remains to round off the first part of my discussion with a few words on Japan. After a period of early Jesuit activity, Japan had been since 1650, and still was, a closed country, and two or three travel books were the only ones to offer some new information.³⁵ But now the new interest in Asian studies was reflected even in Japanese studies. The old books of Jesuits were dusted off, republished and studied. Nevertheless, the real expansion of Western Japanology belongs to the second half of the 19th century.

It was necessary to give this survey in order to show that there really was an exceptional expansion of Asian studies in the first half of the 19th century. There are, however, other surveys, often more detailed, written by others and even by myself. At present, I think it is more important to make an attempt to find out the reasons for and common elements of this development.

On a general level, the rise of a new concept of the university certainly had an important rôle. In the 18th century, even an institution like the Collège de France (then called the Collège royal), though originally founded for the promotion of liberal arts, had petrified into a sort of scholasticism, and most universities were little more than theological colleges. As far as there existed any real desire for

³¹ Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900): *Rigveda. Saṃhitā and Pada texts and Sāyaṇa's commentary and index*. 1-6. 1849-74; Otto Nikolaus von Böhtlingk (1815-1904) and Rudolf Roth (1821-1895): *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch nebst allen Nachträgen*. 1-7. St. Petersburg 1853-1875 (the so-called "Petersburger Wörterbuch" or "PW").

³² Étienne Fourmont (1683-1745): *Linguae Sinarum Mandarinicae hieroglyphicae grammatica duplex*. Paris 1742.

³³ Joseph-Henri Prémare (c. 1670-1735); other im-

portant Jesuit Sinologists include, e.g., Martino Martini (1614-1661), Prospero Intorcetta (1625-1696), Philippe Couplet (1628-1692), François Noël (1651-1729), Antoine Gaubil (1689-1759), and Joseph Amiot (1718-1794).

³⁴ Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1788-1832); Aignan-Stanislas Julien (1797/99-1873).

³⁵ Especially those by Engelbert Kämpfer (1651-1716), Carl Peter Thunberg (1743-1828), Isaac Titsingh (1745-1812), and Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796-1866).

knowledge and passion for research, it was mainly found outside the universities, in the learned societies and academies.³⁶

It is customary to connect the new concept of the university as the seat of learning and humanist values with Germany and particularly with Wilhelm von Humboldt, and this certainly contributed to the rapid growth of Oriental studies in German universities, a development often headed by Bonn and Berlin. However, the paramount position in Oriental studies unquestionably belonged to Paris. After the French Revolution, there was not much left of the dusty scholasticism of the ancien régime and even during the repressing days of the Restoration, the atmosphere of intellectual exchange and search – and often even heated controversy – seems to have been extremely stimulating. At least as far as Asian studies are concerned, the Sorbonne was not very important, the activities concentrated around the old Collège de France and the new *École des langues orientales vivantes*.³⁷

In Indology, a pattern was soon established in Germany and in Northern and Eastern European countries: after one had learned the basics at one's own university, it was time to go to Paris, where the advanced learning was,³⁸ and then to England, where the rich manuscript collections brought from India allowed independent research work. In the same way, Paris was the Mecca for Arabic

studies, attracting students from all parts of Europe. There was a time when there was hardly any Professor of Arabic in Europe, worthy of being taken seriously, who had not been among the students of Silvestre de Sacy.

In addition to the universities, we must also note the societies. The 18th century was still a time of large general societies, but now many fields felt the need of their own organ. Although general according to their statutes,³⁹ the colonial societies of Batavia and Calcutta are usually counted as the first among Oriental societies. The Royal Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen was founded in 1778, and The Asiatick Society, later known as the (Royal) Asiatic Society of Bengal, in 1784. In Europe, this activity again concentrates in the first half of the 19th century. The French *Société Asiatique* is the oldest, founded in 1823, and was soon followed by the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland in 1828, the American Oriental Society in 1842, and *Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft* in 1845.⁴⁰ Their respective journals soon became an important channel of publication of new information and research.

The world was changing, not only in Europe, but also in Asia and North Africa. Travelling was slowly becoming less dangerous and less time-consuming. While the majority of Oriental scholars still never left Europe, journeys for study and exploration were rapidly increasing. The

³⁶ Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in France, Accademia dei Lincei in Italy, the Prussian Academy and the Göttingen Society in Germany, the Royal Society in the U.K., and the Imperial Academy in Russia are good examples.

³⁷ The word "vivantes" was not taken too literally. Silvestre de Sacy taught classical Arabic and the Professor of Persian concentrated on classical literature. However, there also was a chair for "arabe vulgaire" as early as 1803 and one for Urdu (called

"hindoustanie") was founded in 1830 for Joseph-Héliodore Garcin de Tassy (1794-1878).

³⁸ This was mainly due to Chézy's brilliant successor Eugène Burnouf.

³⁹ In early years, their meetings and publications actually often dealt with the study of nature and other such fields.

⁴⁰ *Società Asiatica Italiana* apparently only in the 1880s.

expanding military and colonial interests of European powers (mainly Britain and France) also brought a great number of Westerners to the East, and, as a more or less unintended by-product, turned some of them into scholars. In addition, some local governments like those of Muhammad Ali's Egypt and the Sikh kingdom in the Pañjāb employed many European soldiers and specialists. By 1850, there was already a vast literature describing both the antiquities and the present situations of Egypt, Palaestina, Turkey, Mesopotamia and India, and, in a few cases, also of Arabia, Iran, Tibet and China.

It would be easy to explain the whole development of Oriental studies in the Saidian sense as a side issue of colonialism. But although Said's ideas can by no means be ignored, this would be just the kind of oversimplification that often troubles Said's arguments. In most cases, the scholars were interested in Asia before the soldiers were. With the exception of British India,⁴¹ the colonial involvement in Asia was still at the initial stage. Moreover, all this happened before Western racism was developed as a formal doctrine by Count de Gobineau and others. Unlike their colleagues at the end of the century, the early 19th century Orientalists were not yet fully convinced of the supposedly complete intellectual, spiritual and, of course, scientific and technological superiority of the West. To some extent, they were still capable of meeting Asians on the same level; they could still believe that the West could learn something from the literatures of

India, Arabia and China.

This leads us to Orientalism, not in the Saidian, but in the Schwabian sense. Side by side with Oriental scholarship was the "Orient-as-fashion," in literature, art and thought,⁴² and while it certainly was a source of interest and motivation, it also led, with its highly romantic interpretation, to a seriously distorted idea. But while the general idea of the Orient was often seen through this Romantic mist, it seems that, in many cases, scholarship preceded and criticised it rather than blindly followed its ideas, which a little expertise could easily put in their place. Here we can also note that early 19th century scholarship was, with the obvious exception of Hebrew, mainly secular in character. The church was not much interested and the time of missionary scholars, working in the field or after returning home, really came after the middle of the century.

We must also keep in mind that the great flourishing of scholarship in this period was by no means restricted to Asian studies, which in fact are only a sideline to the intellectual activity of the time. Technology and science, but also philology, linguistics and history were all rapidly advancing. Perhaps the most important part of this was the development of strict and more or less reliable methodologies. The rise of new methods and disciplines such as archaeology, textual criticism,⁴³ critical evaluation of sources, comparative linguistics, and the history of religions strongly contributed to the development of Asian studies. What had been before was frag-

⁴¹ And here the relative open-mindedness of many late 18th - early 19th century officers is in striking contrast to the situation in the middle and at the end of the 19th century.

⁴² Names such as J. W. von Goethe, Lord Byron, Friedrich Rückert, Heinrich Heine, and A. Schopen-

hauer can be mentioned here.

⁴³ The roots of textual criticism as a part of classical philology lie far back in the Renaissance and even Hellenism (Alexandrian school), but even here the first half of the 19th century meant a new age in the way of methodology.

mentary, often one-sided and represented the confused interests of some individual scholars, most of them long ago forgotten; what resulted was a series of well-

defined and methodologically more or less sound disciplines eagerly pursued by a great number of scholars in many countries.

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