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44. Fysee, A.: *A descriptive List of the Arabic, Persian and Urdu Manuscripts in the Bombay Branch, Royal Asiatic Society*. SA aus Journal of the Bombay Branch of the RAS, III. 1931. S. 1-43. — Unter den 5 arabischen, 19 persischen, 3 Urdu-Mss., meist zum indischen Islam, findet sich eine arabische legendäre Geschichte der Bohra-Sekte vom Jahre 1265 h mit persischer Übersetzung. R. St.

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REVIEWS OF BOOKS

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THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY: ITS HISTORY AND TREASURES. PUBLISHED IN COMMEMORATION OF THE SESQUICENTENARY YEAR OF THE FOUNDATION OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND. Edited by STUART SIMMONDS and SIMON DIGBY. pp. [vii], 174, front., 27 pl. Leiden and London, E. J. Brill for the Royal Asiatic Society, 1979. £16.

The author of this review writes in metaphorical sackcloth and ashes, because of his unpardonable delay in submitting a report on a book which is of special importance to the august Society which it commemorates. The delay is due mainly to oversight, which, especially in a loyal fellow of the Society, is quite unpardonable.

The book is indeed an important one, since it contains a definitive history of the Society from its first foundation to 1973, gracefully and lucidly written by Professor C. F. Beckingham. The only earlier history of the Society appeared from the pen of the Indologist F. E. Pargiter in the Society's centenary volume, in 1923. This is less detailed than Professor Beckingham's history, which, of course, has the added advantage of bringing the story down to somewhere near the present day. This history covers nearly half the book, the rest of which consists of articles on some of the art treasures in the possession of the Society, including the building itself, and is the work of several hands.

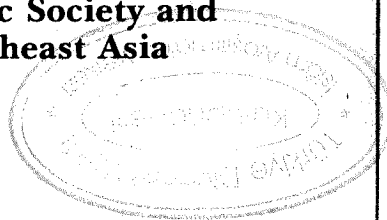
Professor Beckingham's history of the Society is probably as good a study of the subject as possible, giving a clear account of the Society from its foundation in 1823. The prime mover of the Society's formation was the pioneer Indologist Henry Thomas Colebrooke, who had formerly been President of the Asiatic Society of Calcutta, the model on which the Royal Asiatic Society was founded. Modestly, he refused to become the first president of the Society, recommending "a person having some higher position in society than his own". In fact Charles Wynn, President of the Board of Control of the East India Company, became the Society's first president. The Society's charter, wherein it was granted the title "Royal", was issued in the following year, 1824.

The Society's history has been comparatively uneventful, the most outstanding occurrences being probably the changes in its headquarters. It has had five homes, of which the present one was occupied only in 1947. The acquisition of the fine Georgian house in Queen Anne Street was perhaps the greatest of the many services rendered to the Society by Sir Richard Winstedt, who, either as President or as Director, served the Society with single-hearted loyalty for over 20 years, after long and distinguished service to the Crown in Malaya. He was, in Professor Beckingham's words, "the last of the Proconsular Presidents of the Society", which is eternally in his debt for his devoted guidance in the difficult years during and immediately after the second World War. All older fellows of the Society will remember Sir Richard with affection.

The general conclusion drawn from Professor Beckingham's history of the Society is that, though it has always remained solvent, it might have rendered even greater services to scholarship if it had had more funds at its disposal. Not only has it consistently enjoyed royal patronage from its foundation, but also it has numbered among its members statesmen (from the Duke of Wellington onwards) and princes, not to speak of almost every significant Orientalist in the British Isles, together with many from other parts of the world. Yet the over-all picture of the history of the Society seems one of a hand-to-mouth existence, annually just managing to balance a budget too low for its real needs. It has been of great service to scholarship, both nationally and internationally, but this has not been thanks to the generosity of the rulers of Britain, but the result of the devotion of many scholars, who since its foundation have made up by voluntary service for the comparatively ungenerous grants from the government and its agencies. The largest regular annual grant received from any single source came from the India Office, following the precedent of the East India Company, and was never more than 300 guineas. After 1947 this source of income ceased, but was in part replaced by grants from independent India and Pakistan, together with small grants from Malaysia and Singapore, which have since been discontinued.

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

M. J. Pollock



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

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The Fire-Ordeal of Siyāwush. RAS Shāhnāma, f. 76a.

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