

# The Absent Vedas

WILL SWEETMAN  
UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO

The Vedas were first described by a European author in a text dating from the 1580s, which was subsequently copied by other authors and appeared in translation in most of the major European languages in the course of the seventeenth century. It was not, however, until the 1730s that copies of the Vedas were first obtained by Europeans, even though Jesuit missionaries had been collecting Indian religious texts since the 1540s. I argue that the delay owes as much to the relative absence of the Vedas in India—and hence to the greater practical significance for missionaries of other genres of religious literature—as to reluctance on the part of Brahmin scholars to transmit their texts to Europeans.

By the early eighteenth century, a strange dichotomy was apparent in European views of the Vedas. In Europe, on the one hand, the best-informed scholars believed the Vedas to be the most ancient and authoritative of Indian religious texts and to preserve a monotheistic but secret doctrine, quite at odds with the popular worship of multiple deities. The Brahmins kept the Vedas, and kept them from those outside their caste, especially foreigners. One or more of the Vedas was said to be lost—perhaps precisely the one that contained the most sublime ideas of divinity. By the 1720s scholars in Europe had begun calling for the Vedas to be translated so that this secret doctrine could be revealed, and from the royal library in Paris a search for the texts of the Vedas was launched.

In India, on the other hand, the missionaries, who—overwhelmingly—were responsible for the best information on Indian religious literature that had reached Europe, took a quite different view. Many doubted whether the Vedas still existed; some that they had ever existed. All realized the much greater significance for daily religious life in India of other texts, mostly texts in vernacular languages. The missionaries reported that most Brahmins knew little of the Vedas and often did not well understand even the little that they did know. The only European to have read parts of the Vedas before the 1720s—the Jesuit Roberto Nobili—knew the Vedas described sacrifices to multiple deities. He called these deities idols and thought Vedic ideas superstitious rather than sublime. It was another Jesuit, Étienne Le Gac, who responded to the call from Paris in the 1720s for copies of the Vedas. In his first response he wrote that the whole venture was useless. Five years later, even as he dispatched copies of the Vedas to Paris, he predicted—accurately—that the books would serve only as a spectacle in Europe, and he repeated that he thought acquiring them a waste of money.

What accounts for this dichotomy in European views of the Vedas? Here I argue that it is ultimately the absence of the Vedas, in Europe but also in India, that explains both views. Until well into the eighteenth century the view from Europe was shaped primarily by just one early report of the Vedas. This was contained in an account of “the opinions, rites and ceremonies of the Gentiles of India,” written by a Portuguese friar, Agostinho de Azevedo, most likely in the late 1580s. His brief statement on the Vedas was recycled in every

*Author's note:* In preparing this article, I benefitted greatly from discussions with Christophe Vielle, Joan-Pau Rubiés, David Lorenzen, and Linda Zampol D'Ortia. I am grateful to all of them; responsibility for any errors that remain is mine.

major European language throughout the seventeenth century and even late in the eighteenth century, half a century after the first manuscripts of the Vedas had arrived in Europe. But Azevedo, like almost all missionaries writing on Hinduism prior to the 1720s, in fact relied on vernacular—in his case, Tamil—texts for his own account of Indian religious belief. References to these sources were, however, excised by those who repeatedly plagiarized his account.

The view from India was shaped by the absence of the Vedas in most Indian religious practice. The best seventeenth- and eighteenth-century accounts of Indian religion, penned mostly by missionaries in the south of India, were primarily based on other literature—Vedic only in the broadest sense. Their works were mostly not published until long after missionary Orientalism was superseded by Company Orientalism and the Vedas proper were finally studied by British Orientalists in north India in the last years of the eighteenth century. In the meantime, Europe's obsession with the Vedas had elevated a pseudo-Veda—the *Ezour-Vedam*, a work produced among the same group of Jesuits who first acquired the actual Vedas as a kind of *preparatio evangelica*—to the status of an important source for European discussions of Hinduism.

This article begins by examining European engagement with Hindu texts in the sixteenth century, demonstrating that despite Azevedo's early report on the Vedas and contrary to what is sometimes stated, it was vernacular texts that Europeans—including Azevedo—obtained, read, and translated. It will then be shown how the repeated copying of Azevedo's report in published European works on Indian religion in the seventeenth century established the reputation of the Vedas in Europe. By this time Jesuits had gained access to the Vedas and discovered they were far from monotheistic, but their works remained unpublished in the seventeenth century. The Protestant mission in India began in the early eighteenth century and at first followed the Catholic pattern of using vernacular texts. By the second quarter of the eighteenth century both Catholics and Protestants had to respond to demands from Europe that the Vedas be found and translated. The Vedas were obtained, but missionaries continued to emphasize the importance of other texts, and the texts sent to Europe remained unread. The article concludes by examining the relative ease with which collectors and scholars associated with the English East India Company obtained copies of the Vedas in the 1780s and 1790s and questions the view that it was primarily the prohibition on transmission of the Vedas to non-Brahmins that accounts for the gap of two centuries between the first European report of the Vedas and the first published scholarly studies of them.

#### THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY: THE PORTUGUESE IN INDIA

One of the earliest Portuguese writers on India, Duarte Barbosa, describes the Brahmins in Malabar as “learned in their idolatry,” adding that they possessed many books and were held in great esteem by the rulers of the land.<sup>1</sup> In this respect they were quite different from the other idolatrous “Indians” the Spanish were encountering in the New World. In time, the literacy of Asian civilizations would force recognition of the need for quite different strategies of evangelization there, but in the 1520s the first episcopal visitor to Goa, Duarte Nunes, proposed that the Portuguese should proceed in the same way as the *conquistadores* in the Americas: destroying the temples of the idolaters and expelling from Goa any who

1. Duarte Barbosa, *O livro de Duarte Barbosa: Edição crítica e anotada*. Vol.2: *Prefácio, texto crítico e apêndice*, ed. Maria Augusta da Veiga e Sousa (Lisbon: Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical, 2000), 163. Barbosa, a writer at Cochin and Cannanore in the first decade of the sixteenth century, was renowned for his knowledge of Malayalam but he records no attempt to read any Indian works.

would not convert.<sup>2</sup> It was not, in fact, until the early 1540s that orders were given for the destruction of temples in areas under Portuguese control and the diversion of their revenues to newly built Christian institutions.<sup>3</sup> It was in this context that Francis Xavier arrived in Goa in May 1542. At the end of 1543 Xavier was to add some critical details to Barbosa's image of the literate Brahmin idolater. Xavier encountered a Brahmin who revealed to him their secret monotheism: there was only a single God, creator of heaven and earth, and they worshipped this God and not the idols, which were demons. This doctrine was taught in their schools, but the Brahmins were obliged not to reveal it. Xavier added that they had books [*scripturas*], written in a learned tongue, which contained the commandments.<sup>4</sup> Already by the 1540s, then, Europeans had begun to establish an image of the Brahmins as literate and in possession of texts that taught a secret monotheism. It was these elements that would lead to calls for the Vedas to be obtained and translated. Only the idea of the antiquity of these texts, and their designation as Veda, were lacking at this point.

As soon as missionaries managed to obtain Hindu religious texts, however, a quite different image emerged. These were acquired by confiscation, in the context of competition and conflict between the Portuguese colonial and clerical establishments and their prominent clients and converts in Goa. In 1548 the Bishop of Goa, the Franciscan Juan de Albuquerque, described the seizure of some "gentile books" from the house of a prominent Hindu on the island of Divar, an area where many temples had been destroyed. The books were taken to António Gomes, recently installed as the head of the Jesuit College of Saint Paul, founded in 1541 with the revenues from the destroyed temples of Goa. Before Gomes could find someone to read the texts, the Governor, Garcia de Sá, ordered that they be returned.<sup>5</sup>

Further texts were seized in the same way a decade later, during the period when the so-called "rigor of mercy," or forcible conversion of Goa, reached its height. In 1558 a Jesuit brother, Pedro d'Almeida, described the imprisonment, impoverishment, and even enslavement of those found in possession of images or other Hindu artefacts during raids that took place at the time of festivals such as Ganesh Chaturthi and Divali.<sup>6</sup> It was during Divali that a copy of a text called *Anādipurāna*, in two volumes of more than a hundred folios, was seized in the house of a prominent Gentile.<sup>7</sup> This work is likely lost, but Almeida writes that a translation of the text had already begun, and copies were sent to Europe.<sup>8</sup> This was

2. António da Silva Rego, ed., *Documentação para a história das missões do Padroado Português do Oriente: Índia*, vol. 1 (1499–1522) (Lisbon: Agência Geral do Ultramar, 1947), 452.

3. Joseph Wicki, ed., *Documenta Indica*, vol. I (1540–1549) (Rome: Institutum historicum Societatis Iesu, 1948), 760–71 (henceforth DI).

4. Francis Xavier, *Epistolae S. Francisci Xaverii aliaque eius scripta*, ed. Georg Schurhammer and Joseph Wicki, vol. I. (1535–1548) (Rome: Monumenta Historica Soc. Iesu, 1944). Xavier's letter, written in Spanish, was translated into Latin and published in French (*Copie d'une lettre missive envoyée des Indes par monsieur maître François Xavier* [Paris, 1545]). In a later French translation of 1660, Xavier's brief account of texts containing the commandments is elaborated so that the Brahmins are said to have "une espece de Bible, où ils tiennent que les Loix divines sont contenües" (*Lettres de S. Francois Xavier* [Paris, 1660], 68).

5. Albuquerque to João III, November 28, 1548 in DI, I: 326–29.

6. Almeida, December 26, 1558 in DI, IV: 199–215.

7. The purāna is ascribed to Nāmdev, the name of a well-known thirteenth/fourteenth-century Marathi sant. Although in the following year the Jesuits were to acquire works by Nāmdev's contemporary and friend Jñāndev, references in Almeida's letter to village deities mentioned in the purāna suggest that this work was composed in Goa and had Nāmdev's name attached to it (Panduronga Pissurlencar, "A propósito dos primeiros livros maratas impressos em Goa," *Boletim do Instituto Vasco da Gama* 73 [1956]: 55–79).

8. DI, IV: 203. Two summaries of the *Anādipurāna* are extant. The first (ARSI, Goa 46, 348–65) is described by Joseph Wicki ("Old Portuguese Translations of Marathi Literature in Goa: c.1558–1560," *Indica* 12 [1975]: 22–26). Another version of this text, with a few variations in spelling, is extant in the Bibliotheca Pública de Évora

probably prepared for the new rector of the Jesuit college, Francisco Rodrigues, who took possession of this and other texts seized the following year.<sup>9</sup>

These latter texts represent the first targeted acquisition by the Jesuits of Hindu religious works. The texts were stolen by a young Brahmin, who had recently converted and taken the name Manuel d'Oliveira. The Jesuits reported more than three thousand conversions in Goa in 1559, but d'Oliveira's had been eagerly anticipated as he was reputed to be one of the most intelligent and learned of the Brahmins in Goa. With the Governor's permission, d'Oliveira led an expedition to steal books belonging to a Brahmin living outside the area under Portuguese control. This Brahmin had spent eight years assembling and translating from different ancient authors the works of "their principal prophet, who they call Veāço [Vyāsa], who wrote the eighteen books of their law."<sup>10</sup> Having brought the books to the college, d'Oliveira began translating them, and Rodrigues quickly put them to use in preaching to Brahmins who were obliged by order of the Governor to assemble in the college on Sunday afternoons. Copies were also made and sent to Europe, but Fróis notes that these were done by young students in the college who made many errors, and that there had not been time to improve the translations or compare them to the original.<sup>11</sup> The copies extant in Europe include texts in both Marathi and Konkani, mostly episodes from the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyāna*, as well as translations into Portuguese.<sup>12</sup>

These texts became important sources for the Jesuits in Goa. As well as being put to use in sermons against the Brahmins, Jesuits used these texts well into the seventeenth century. They served as models for Christian works in Marathi like Thomas Stephens's *Kristapurāna* (1616) and Étienne de la Croix's *Discursos sobre a vida do Apostolo Sam Pedro* (1629),<sup>13</sup> and as sources for vocabularies like those composed by Diogo Ribeiro (1626) and Miguel d'Almeida.<sup>14</sup> Together with the *Anādīpurāna*, they informed the accounts of Indian religion in Jesuit histories by Alessandro Valignano (1584) and Sebastiam Gonçalves (1614).<sup>15</sup> It is important to note the character of these texts—including a local purāna and vernacular versions of the epics—as

---

(Cod. CXV/2–7, no. 3) and has been transcribed as an appendix to Ricardo Nuno de Jesus Ventura, "Conversão e conversabilidade: Discursos da missão e do gentio na documentação do Padroado Português do Oriente (séculos XVI e XVII)" (Ph.D. diss., Universidade de Lisboa, 2011), vol. II, Anexos, 10–15. It is clearly a summary, rather than a translation, of the purāna, as is suggested by the title of the codex: "Seguesse a lei dos Jentios e substancias do que elles cren e en que tem que esta toda sua saluação."

9. This is stated in the last line of the text (ARSI Goa 46, 352r), where "R." stands for *Reitor*, i.e., rector of the College of Saint Paul.

10. Luís Fróis, November 14, 1559 in DI, IV: 335.

11. *Ibid.*, 339.

12. Wicki ("Old Portuguese Translations") summarizes the Portuguese translations in Rome (ARSI, Goa 46, 354–94). There are also three codices in the Braga Public Library (771, 772, 773), which are described in L. A. Rodrigues, "Glimpses of the Konkani Language at the Turn of the Sixteenth Century XIII: Ramayana and Mahabharata," *Boletim do Instituto Menezes Bragança* 163 (1990): 43–72, and Pissurlencar, "Livros maratas impressos em Goa." The first two codices contain rough and fair copies of stories from the epics, all in Konkani. The third codex contains Marathi works, by Goan authors. One of these may be a version of, or a commentary on, Jñāneśvara's Marathi version of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*.

13. Nelson Falcao, *Kristapurāna: A Christian-Hindu Encounter. A Study of Inculturation in the Kristapurāna of Thomas Stephens, S.J. (1549–1619)* (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2003), 12–13.

14. L. A. Rodrigues, "Glimpses of the Konkani Language at the Turn of the Sixteenth Century VI: Pre-Portuguese Konkani Literature," *Boletim do Instituto Menezes Bragança* 131 (1982): 3–23, at 18, 22.

15. See Alessandro Valignano, *Historia del principio y progreso de la Compañiá de Jesús en las Indias orientales (1542–64)*, ed. Josef Wicki (Roma: Institutum historicum Societatis Iesu, 1944), II: 30–34, and Sebastião Gonçalves, *Primeira parte da História dos Religiosos da Companhia de Jesus*, ed. Josef Wicki (1614; Coimbra: Atlântida, 1957–62), III: 34–45, 62–65. Giovanni Pietro Maffei, who used Valignano's history, mentions the name Parabrammam, identified in the *Anādīpurāna* as the sole god (*Historiarum Indicarum libri xvi*. [Florence, 1588], 27).

a hasty reading of the Jesuit letters has sometimes led to the conclusion that the Jesuits had acquired Sanskrit versions of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, the *Mahābhārata*, or the *Rāmāyāṇa*.

#### THE FIRST EUROPEAN ACCOUNT OF THE VEDAS

It was only toward the end of the sixteenth century that the Vedas are first mentioned, by Agostinho de Azevedo, an Augustinian. Azevedo's biography has been reconstructed by Georg Schurhammer, who thinks it possible he first went to India as a soldier before joining the Augustinian order in Goa in the 1570s. Azevedo was sent back to Portugal to ordain and train, returning to India in 1586. From 1589 to 1600 he was in Hormuz, from where he returned overland to Portugal, where he completed a *Relação do Estado da Índia*.<sup>16</sup> Azevedo's report provides an overview of Portuguese settlements in Asia from the Arabian Gulf to the spice islands, devoting particular attention to Hormuz and Ceylon. It is notable that in his accounts of both, Azevedo draws on local textual sources. For Hormuz, he claims that he read these sources himself,<sup>17</sup> but for Ceylon he relied on an interpreter's simultaneous translation of Sinhalese chronicles recited for him when he met Sinhalese princes in Goa around 1587.<sup>18</sup> There is a similar emphasis on textual sources in his section on India, entitled "Of the opinions, rites, and ceremonies of all the gentiles of India between the river Indus and the Ganges and that which is contained in their original scriptures which their learned men teach in their schools."<sup>19</sup> The Brahmins, the "masters of their religion," teach a unified doctrine of God, creation, and the corruption of creatures. They have, writes Azevedo,

many books in their Latin, which they call *Geredão* [Grantha] which contain everything they are to believe, and all the ceremonies they are to perform. These books are divided into bodies, limbs, and joints, whose origins are some [books] which they call *Veados*, which are divided into four parts, and these further into fifty-two parts in the following manner: six are called *Xastra*, which are the bodies; eighteen are called *Purana*, which are the limbs; twenty-eight called *Agamon* which are the joints.

16. Georg Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier: His Life, His Times*, vol. 2: *India 1541–1545* (Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute, 1980), 614–16. Two versions of Azevedo's "Estado da Índia e aonde tem o seu principio," from manuscripts in the British Library and the Bibliotheca Nacional de Madrid, are printed in António da Silva Rego and Luís de Albuquerque, eds., *Documentação ultramarina portuguesa* (Lisboa: Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1960–63), I: 197–263 and II: 40–147. I cite from the first version, except where noted. Schurhammer (*Xavier*, 2: 616–20) notes that there are close parallels in three sections of these texts with parts of the fifth of Diogo do Couto's *Décadas da Ásia*. In the case of the first two—which relate to the history of Hormuz (210–12) and of Ceylon (235–54)—Azevedo mentions that Couto had asked him to provide information (205, 235). Couto, who elsewhere does mention his sources, nowhere acknowledges Azevedo. There are also close parallels in the section on Indian religion in Azevedo and Couto and also with that which appears in João de Lucena in his life of Xavier. Lucena's work was published in 1600, Schurhammer dates the final version of Azevedo's text to 1603 (*Xavier*, 2: 616), and Couto's work did not appear until 1612. Nevertheless it appears that Lucena used the manuscript of Couto's fifth decade, a version of which was sent to Lisbon as early as 1597 (Marcus de Jong, ed., *Década quinta da "Ásia": Texte inédit, publ. d'après un manuscrit de la Bibliothèque de l'Univ. de Leyde* [Coimbra: Biblioteca da Universidade, 1937], 47). In a letter sent from Goa in November 1603, Couto complained bitterly about Lucena's use of information which he claimed to have acquired at great effort and expense from the schools of the Brahmins in the kingdom of Vijayanagara (Schurhammer, *Xavier*, 2: 620). Despite Couto's claim here that "in all my *Décades* I have given to each his due," it seems likely that he had again used without acknowledgment material provided to him by Azevedo. The account of Indian religion was likely prepared by Azevedo during his second period in India between 1586 and 1589, and later incorporated into his *Relação do Estado da Índia*, completed in Lisbon by 1603.

17. Azevedo, "Estado da Índia," 211.

18. Joan-Pau Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India through European Eyes, 1250–1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 279; Azevedo, "Estado da Índia," 242.

19. Azevedo, "Estado da Índia," 249.



Azevedo's brief account of the content of the four "origins" makes clear that he had no real access to the Vedas themselves. When he comes to elaborate on the content of the fourfold Veda, he in fact names a series of other texts—all in Tamil.<sup>20</sup> The first part of the Vedas, he writes, deals with the first cause

according to the books which they have called *Tirumantiram* and *Tiruvācakam*, which are *summas* of their theology which they read in the schools. They say that this first cause is God, and that he is a pure spirit, incorporeal, infinite, full of all power and knowledge and truth, and present everywhere, which they call *Carvēsparan* [*Xarves Zibarum*] which means the creator of all.<sup>21</sup>

For the second part of the Vedas, "dealing with the regents who have dominion over all things," Azevedo again cites a Tamil text: "They say that this supreme [being] which they call God has infinite names, given in a particular book called *Tivākaram*."<sup>22</sup> His account of the third part of the Vedas, on moral doctrine, singles out the author of *Tirukkuraḷ* as the great teacher of moral precepts. Like many later missionary authors, Azevedo suggests Tiruvaḷḷuvar had derived these from St Thomas.<sup>23</sup> Finally, Azevedo refers to a further book, *Cātikaḷ Tōṭṭam*, on castes. This text is difficult to identify, but its southern provenance is confirmed by the names of the four primary castes: kings, brahmins, chettis, and vellalas.<sup>24</sup>

Despite his claim, then, that the Vedas are the original scriptures that prescribe what the gentiles of India are to believe and what rites they are to perform, Azevedo's actual sources are all much later Tamil sources: *Tirumantiram*, *Tiruvācakam*, *Tivākaram*, *Tirukkuraḷ*, and the text on caste. This combination—identification of the Vedas as the oldest authoritative sources, together with a reliance on quite different texts for the actual details of the religious practices of those who so acknowledged the Vedas—would be repeated in the works of many of those who wrote from India. But the identification of the Vedas as the oldest and most authoritative works meant that it was only the Vedas that gained widespread recognition in Europe as *the* sacred texts of the Indians.

#### AZEVEDO IN OTHER AUTHORS

Although Azevedo's work was not published until the twentieth century, it had an extraordinary impact on European understanding of the Vedas in the seventeenth century. Diogo do Couto, who had met Azevedo in Goa, used Azevedo's work in his continuation of João de Barros's chronicle of the Portuguese Asian empire, the *Décadas da Ásia* (see n. 16 above).

20. Although he says nothing about this, Azevedo's access to these texts is more likely to have been akin to his access to the royal chronicles of Ceylon—that is, simultaneous translation of a recited text—than to his direct reading of the histories of Hormuz.

21. The names of the texts in Rego's transcription are "Ferum Mandramole e Trivaxigao" (Azevedo, "Estado da Índia," 251) or "Tonem, Mandramolé e Trivaxigao" (Silva Rego, *Documentação ultramarina portuguesa*, II: 134). In the 1612 *editio princeps* of Couto these appear as "Terúm, Mandramole, Etrivaxigão." From Couto's work, Willem Caland was confident in identifying the latter as *Tiruvācakam*, less so the first as *Tirumantiram* (*De ontdekkingsgeschiedenis van den Veda* [Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1918], 273). Although neither *Tirumantiram* nor *Tiruvācakam* uses *carvēsparan*, or the more common *carvēccuran* (Sanskrit, *sarveśvara*), to refer to God, there can be no doubt that *Tiruvācakam* is meant here, and good reason to think that *Tirumantiram* could also have been intended.

22. Azevedo, "Estado da Índia," 255. In both Rego's transcriptions, and Couto, the title of the work is given as *Tivarum*. Although Caland (*Veda*, 318) suggests *Tēvāram*, Azevedo's description of the content leaves little doubt that it is rather *Tivākaram*, an important early Tamil lexicon that begins with a list of the divine names, which is meant.

23. Azevedo, "Estado da Índia," 257.

24. *Ibid.*, 260–61.

The third and fourth chapters of the sixth book of Couto's fifth decade, published at Lisbon in 1612, are taken almost verbatim from Azevedo.<sup>25</sup> Couto's work, in turn, was used by João de Lucena in his life of Xavier.<sup>26</sup> The Dutch chaplain, Abraham Rogerius, followed one or the other of these works very closely in the account of the Vedas in his *De Open-Deure tot het Verborgene Heydendom* (1651), adding only the names of the Vedas, which he is the first to report in print in Europe. Through his primary informant, a Tamil Brahmin named Padmanābha, Rogerius was even able to give a paraphrase of part of a Sanskrit text (the *Nīti- and Vairāgya-śatakas* of Bhartṛhari), although he again relies on other sources including some in Tamil. While Rogerius emphasizes that the Brahmins "must submit themselves to the Veda, and cannot contradict it in the least or object when a text from it is cited," he adds that there are often strong disputes over the sense of the text: "one interprets a word thus, the other so," so that to resolve such disputes reference is made to the "śāstra, which betokens so much as an explanation or exposition."<sup>27</sup> This was perhaps suggested to him to explain why texts other than the Vedas were those to which he was referred, despite the Veda's acknowledged ultimate authority. Burnell suggests that, rather than the Vedas, Rogerius's work in fact reflects the Tamil Vaiṣṇava canonical collection, the *Nālāyira Tiviyappirapan-tam*.<sup>28</sup> Rogerius's work gives a great deal of detailed information on brahminical Hinduism, but it was his repetition of Azevedo's summary content of the Vedas that was most important for their reputation in Europe.

Rogerius's work was quickly translated into German (1663) and French (1670), plagiarized in Dutch by Philip Baldaeus (1672)<sup>29</sup> and Olfert Dapper (1672),<sup>30</sup> and extracted in English and French in the works of John Ogilby (1673)<sup>31</sup> and of Jean-Frédéric Bernard and Bernard Picart (1723, 1731).<sup>32</sup> Each of these included Azevedo's summary of the Vedas, and in this way it was very widely disseminated in Europe.<sup>33</sup> Even late in the eighteenth century, Azevedo's account of the Vedas was repeated almost verbatim in the work of the

25. Da Asia de Diogo de Couto, *Decada Quinta, Parte Segunda* (Lisbon, 1788), 24.

26. Ioam de Lucena, *Historia da vida do padre Francisco de Xavier* (Lisbon, 1600), 95.

27. Abraham Rogerius, *De Open-Deure tot het Verborgene Heydendom*, ed. Willem Caland (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1915), 21.

28. A. C. Burnell, "On Some Early References to the Vedas by European Writers," *Indian Antiquary* 8 (1879): 98–100, at 99.

29. As well as Azevedo's account of the Vedas, Baldaeus included also the brief account of Jacome Fenicio (Albert Johannes de Jong, ed., *Afgoderye der Oost-Indische Heydenen door Philippus Baldaeus* [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1917], 176). Baldaeus was also translated into German in 1672.

30. Olfert Dapper, *Asia, of naukeurige Beschryving van het Rijk des Grooten Mogols, en een groot gedeelte van Indiën* (Amsterdam, 1672), 137.

31. John Ogilby, *Asia. The first part being an accurate description of Persia . . . the vast empire of the Great Mogol, and other parts of India* (London, 1673), 143. Ogilby used Dapper.

32. An adaptation of Rogerius's work by Antoine Augustin Bruzen de La Martinière appeared first as "Dissertation sur les Mœurs et sur la Religion des Bramines" in Jean-Frédéric Bernard and Bernard Picart, *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses des peuples idolâtres . . . Second partie du tome premier . . . les pratiques religieuses des Indiens Orientaux* (Amsterdam, 1723). Each text was separately paginated. Azevedo's account of the Vedas is on p. 27. A translation from this version appeared also in John Lockman's translation, *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Several Nations of the Known World*, vol. III: *Idolatrous Nations* (London, 1731), 318.

33. The essence of Azevedo's account appeared also in Vincenzo Maria di Santa Caterina da Siena, *Il viaggio al l'Indie Orientali* (Venice, 1678), 282. Caland (*Veda*, 271) noted the similarity between the accounts of Couto, Lucena, Rogerius, Baldaeus, and Vincenzo Maria. Theodor Zachariae, in his review of Caland, considered the possibility that Couto and Lucena might depend on a common, older source, but dismissed it as improbable (*Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen* 183 [1921]: 148–65, at 151). Zachariae's review was translated and published with a few additional comments, mostly relating to the Jesuit *Ezour-Vedam*, by Henry Hosten ("The Discovery of the Veda," *Journal of Indian History* 2, 2 [1923]: 127–57).

Italian Capuchin, Marco della Tomba.<sup>34</sup> Although Couto, who repeats almost the whole of Azevedo's account, retained all the references to Tamil texts, none of these subsequent works (with the partial exception of Lucena, who retains only the reference to Tiruvaḷḷuvar) mention any of the Tamil sources, despite Azevedo's claim that these are the "summas of their theology." In this way the idea was firmly established in Europe that it was the Vedas, above all and almost to the exclusion of other texts, that were the sacred books of India.

#### OTHER PUBLISHED SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ACCOUNTS

The only other significant independent account of the Vedas published in the seventeenth century was that of François Bernier.<sup>35</sup> Bernier had met the Jesuit Heinrich Roth in Agra and noted his study of "the books of the gentiles."<sup>36</sup> He also acknowledges having read Rogerius, but the major details in his account are independent of the Azevedo/Rogerius text,<sup>37</sup> and it was an Indian pandit, Kavindrācārya Sarasvatī, who was his primary informant.<sup>38</sup> Although Bernier repeatedly makes the "Beths" the source of "the doctrine of the Indous or Gentiles of Hindoustan," he notes that having learned Sanskrit,

they ordinarily put themselves to reading the purāṇas, which are an interpretation and abridgement of the Vedas, which are very large, at least if they are those which were shown to me in Benares. They are also very rare, so much so that my agha could never find them for sale, whatever diligence he used; for they keep them well hidden, fearing that the Mahometans should get hold of and burn them, as they have done several times.<sup>39</sup>

34. See Marco della Tomba, *Gli scritti del Padre Marco della Tomba, missionario nelle Indie Orientali*, ed. Angelo De Gubernatis (Florence, 1878), 100–101.

35. Two other early seventeenth-century sources—both likely independent of Azevedo—mention the idea that the Brahmins have four sacred texts. The first is Edward Terry, whose account first appeared in Samvel Pvrchas, *Haklyvtvs posthumus, or, Pvrchas his Pilgrimes* (London, 1625), 2: 1478. When Terry published his own, much revised version, of his *Voyage to East-India* (London, 1655), he mentioned not four books, but two, one of which he names as śāstra (349). Four unnamed sacred books are mentioned in a report on Gujarat prepared in the 1620s by a factor of the Dutch East India Company (Willem Caland, ed., *De Remonstrantie van W. Geleynssen de Jongh* [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1929], 85). Although not published until Caland's edition, the work was used by Johan van Twist, in his *Generale Beschrijvinghe van Indien* (Batavia, 1638), 35.

36. Frédéric Tinguely, ed., *Un libertin dans l'Inde moghole: Les voyages de François Bernier* (1656–1669) (Paris: Chandeigne, 2008), 332. Roth had studied Sanskrit and brought the *Vedāntasāra* of Sadānanda (c. 1490) and the *Pañca-tattva-prakāśa* of Veṅḍatta (1644) to Europe in 1662 (Richard Hauschild, "Notes on the Content of the Three Manuscripts of Heinrich Roth," in *The Sanskrit Grammar and Manuscripts of Father Heinrich Roth S.J. 1610–1668: Facsimile Edition of Biblioteca Nazionale Rome Mss. or. 171 and 172*, ed. Jean-Claude Muller and Arnulf Camps [Leiden: Brill, 1988], 17–18). Roth's letters from India are lost, but in what has survived the descriptions he gives of Indian religion are based on purāṇic sources. See his account of the avātaras of Viṣṇu, *Decem fabulosae Incarnationes Dei, quas credunt Gentiles Indiani extra et intra Gangem*, published by Kircher in his *China illustrata* (Amsterdam, 1667), 156–62, and a shorter account of the nine principal Indian gods in Heinrich Roth, *Relatio rerum notabilium Regni Mogor in Asia* (Aschaffenburg, 1665), 4–5.

37. Following his return from India in 1669, Bernier published the four volumes that have come to be called his *Voyages* in 1670 and 1671. His "Lettre à Monsieur Chapelain," dated 1667, which includes the acknowledgment of Rogerius, Kircher, and also Henry Lord's 1630 account of Vaiṣṇavas in Surat, appeared in the first volume of his *Suite des Mémoires du Sieur Bernier sur l'empire du Grand Mogol* in 1671. Although Chapelain dispatched books to Bernier in India, it seems more likely that he first read Lord and Rogerius in the French translations that had recently appeared (in 1667 and 1670, respectively), especially as Kircher's *China illustrata* was only published in 1667.

38. Kavindrācārya Sarasvatī was retained by Bernier's own patron, Danishmand Khān (P. K. Gode, "Kavindrācārya Sarasvatī in the Mughal Court," in *Studies in Indian Literary History*, vol. 2 [Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1954], 364–79).

39. Bernier, *Voyages*, 332.



Bernier was not the first to mention that the Vedas were kept hidden; Rogerius had given details on which of the *varṇas* were entitled to learn, teach, read, or hear the Vedas.<sup>40</sup> Bernier and Rogerius thus confirmed Xavier's account that the Brahmins' texts—and the teachings they contained—were kept secret.

It is certainly true that there were restrictions on who could hear the Vedas. One of the most notorious expressions of this is the verse stating that the ears of a Śūdra who hears the Veda are to be filled with lead. The verse is widely, but falsely, attributed to the *Manusmṛti*.<sup>41</sup> More relevant, perhaps, for Europeans in the early modern period and those who revealed the Vedas to them, was the fact that, while Manu's code does forbid the recitation of the Vedas in the presence of Śūdras (4.99, 108), the penance for "misusing" the Veda, i.e., disclosing it to someone unauthorized to hear it, is fairly mild. It is found not among the grievous sins listed at the beginning of the chapter on sin and penance but rather in the "motley list of sins and infractions" at the end of the chapter, an excursus "which is clearly an interpolation."<sup>42</sup> Moreover, given that Europeans first obtained Hindu texts by seizure or theft, Brahmin reluctance to transmit the Vedas would be irrelevant, if we can assume that the texts were indeed available in manuscript. However, when Jesuits first gained access to Vedic texts, in the early seventeenth century, this was through the personal mediation of converted Brahmins who may have known the texts—thus from memory rather than manuscripts.

#### JESUITS IN THE SOUTH: FENICIO AND NOBILI

The first Jesuit to name the Vedas is Jacome Fenicio, who had been in India since 1584, for the most part in Cochin and Calicut. In 1603 Fenicio reports writing a manual of Hindu mythology, in which he mentions that he has copied three hundred verses critical of idolatry from a text in Malayalam ascribed to Pākkanār.<sup>43</sup> Texts of this sort held an obvious appeal for missionaries—a century after Fenicio, the Protestant Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg was to seize on texts like *Tirumantiram* and *Civavākkīyam* because of their opposition to image worship.<sup>44</sup> Some of Pākkanār's verses are included in Fenicio's *Livro da Seita dos Indios Orientais*, probably completed in 1609. Here Fenicio also mentions and names the four Vedas in connection with the mythology of Brahmā, but he does not otherwise show any knowledge of Vedic sources. Fenicio writes that the four laws, "*iréa, ueressa, samam, edaruna*," came from the four heads of Brahmā, but as Īśvara cut off one head, the Brahmins lack the fourth law, which is the one "pertaining to God."<sup>45</sup> It may have thus been from Fenicio that his more famous colleague, Roberto Nobili, first heard the idea that one of the Vedas was lost. Nobili, who spent three months recuperating in Cochin in early 1606, wrote

40. Rogerius, *Open-Deure*, 21–22.

41. It is from the *Gautama Dharmasūtra* (12.4), but more often cited from Śaṅkara's *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* (I.3.38).

42. Patrick Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 60, 17.

43. Jarl Charpentier, "Preliminary Report on the 'Livro da Seita dos Indios Orientais' (Brit. Mus. Ms. Sloane 1820)," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 2, 4 (1923): 731–54, at 745.

44. Eugene F. Irschick, "Conversations in Tarangambadi: Caring for the Self in Early Eighteenth Century South India," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 23, 1–2 (2003): 254–70, at 263–64.

45. Jarl Charpentier, ed., *The Livro da seita dos Indios orientais (Brit. mus. MS. Sloane 1820) of Father Jacobo Fenicio, S.J.* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1933), 150. Fenicio also mentions the recovery by Viṣṇu as Matsyavatāra of "the Law" stolen from the gods by Hiranyākṣa (p. 57).

in 1608 that, of the four Vedas, only three were extant, and the fourth—which was required for salvation—was lost.<sup>46</sup>

Nobili is the first European known to have read parts of the Vedas. In a number of his works defending his strategy of tolerating aspects of Brahminical lifestyle among his converts, he cites directly from the texts associated with the Black Yajur Veda. Thus, for example, in his *Informatio de quibusdam moribus nationis indicæ* (1613) he quotes from the account of the *aśvamedha* in *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* 3.8.5.<sup>47</sup> Nobili's access to these texts was mediated by the Telugu Brahmin convert who taught him Sanskrit, Śivadharma or Bonifacio.<sup>48</sup> While it was Śivadharma who made the texts available to him, on the basis of Nobili's orthography in his *Responsio*, Caland thought it probable that "Nobili himself had copied the passages [in Sanskrit] quoted by him, and that these passages had not been dictated to him by some Brahman . . . [and therefore] that Nobili has himself drawn his argumentative passages from the Sanskrit texts."<sup>49</sup> Margherita Trento contrasts this with the method of Nobili's opponent in the debate over accommodation, Gonçalo Fernandes. Śivadharma, who had fallen out with Nobili, assisted Fernandes with scriptural quotations in his 1616 treatise attacking Nobili.<sup>50</sup> The first part (*O sumário das serimonias*) describes the lifecycle rites of Brahmins from birth, through initiation and marriage, to entry into the state of a sannyāsīn, with a description of some of the daily and other rites performed by and for brahmin sannyāsīns. It includes a translation of the first six verses of the third chapter of the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*.<sup>51</sup> The second, much shorter, section (*O compendio de ditos de graves autores*) describes penances (*prāyaścitta*) according to the *dharmaśāstra* of Parāśara. Śivadharma is again the source, but, as Fernandes did not know Sanskrit, the texts were translated into Tamil by Śivadharma and only thence into Portuguese by Fernandes with his assistant Andrea Buccerio.<sup>52</sup> This kind of mediated access to Sanskrit texts, likely the same method used by Azevedo and Rogerius, would be repeated in the following century by other missionaries.

Having at last obtained access to the texts hinted at by Xavier half a century earlier, Nobili discovered that while some parts of them did indeed refer to "God in the true and absolute sense" (*Brahmā*)—and even contained "an adumbration of the recondite mystery of the most Holy Trinity"—other parts described superstitious rites directed to false deities (*Brahmā*) so that "the sayings they record are in striking contradiction one with another."<sup>53</sup> He was nonetheless able to name the four Vedas, including the Śukla, or White, recension

46. Nobili to Laerzio Dec 24, 1608, in Joseph Bertrand, *La mission du Madure d'après les documents inédits* (Paris: Poussièlegue-Rusand, 1847–1854), 2: 20. Rogerius also reported this idea (*Open-Deure*, 21).

47. S. Rajamanickam, ed., *Roberto de Nobili on Indian Customs* (Palayamkottai: De Nobili Research Institute, 1972), 55.

48. On Nobili's relation to Śivadharma see Iñes G. Županov, *Disputed Mission: Jesuit Experiments and Brahmanical Knowledge in Seventeenth-Century India* (New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), and Margherita Trento, "Śivadharma or Bonifacio? Behind the Scenes of the Madurai Mission Controversy (1608–1619)," in *The Rites Controversies in the Early Modern World*, ed. Iñes G. Županov and Pierre-Antoine Fabre (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 91–120.

49. Willem Caland, "Roberto de' Nobili and the Sanskrit Language and Literature," *Acta Orientalia* 3 (1924): 38–51, at 50–51.

50. Fernandes's treatise was edited by Josef Wicki under the somewhat misleading title *Tratado do Pe. Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso sobre o Hinduísmo (Madure 1616)* (Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1973). The title of Wicki's earlier German summary of the text gives a more accurate indication of the content: *Die Schrift des P. Gonçalo Fernandes S.J. über die Brahmanen und Dharma-Sastra (Madura 1616)* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1957).

51. George Gispert-Sauch, "The Bhṛgu-Valli of the Taittirīya Upaniṣad: An Early XVII Century European Translation," *Indica* 5, 2 (1968): 139–44.

52. Wicki, ed., *Tratado*, 7, 218–19. On Śivadharma and Buccerio, see further Trento, "Śivadharma," 106–7.

53. Rajamanickam, *Indian Customs*, 43–44.

of the Yajur Veda.<sup>54</sup> Significantly, Nobili also notes that the term Veda refers not only to the “law” of the Brahmin but also to knowledge (*scientia*) more broadly.<sup>55</sup> It was for this reason that he used it in coining many terms to refer to aspects of Christian life and practice, and even to Christianity itself (*dēva vēdam*, or *nāna vētam*) and to the Bible (often simply *vētam* in Nobili’s works). This usage was followed by Protestants in the following century and beyond. Further evidence of the extent of Nobili’s knowledge of the Veda is to be found in Jesuit correspondence of the eighteenth century, discussed below.

Nobili was, however, also keenly aware of the importance of other texts. He associated the Vedas especially with Advaita Vedāntins, but he reported that the religious texts for the Śaivas were the Āgamas, for Vaiṣṇavas the *Tiruvāymoli*, and for the Dvaitins Madhva’s commentary on the *Brahmasūtra*.<sup>56</sup> He concludes that although by metonymy all these works are identified with the Vedas—more specifically with the Upaniṣads—there is a wide variety of sacred texts. Thus, even though he is almost certainly the first European to have had direct access to the Vedas themselves, like other missionaries in India Nobili acknowledged the practical significance of other texts for contemporary Hindus, and thus also for his missionary task.

Nobili’s works were not published until long after his death, but Fenicio’s brief account of Brahmā’s revelation of the Vedas, and the loss of his head and with it one Veda, did reach print in Dutch, Spanish, and English in the second half of the seventeenth century in the works of Baldaeus (1672) and Manuel de Faria e Sousa (1675, 1695).<sup>57</sup>

#### THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: PROTESTANT MISSION

Through Baldaeus, Azevedo’s and Fenicio’s accounts of the Vedas were briefly important for the first Protestant missionary in India, Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg. Ziegenbalg arrived in the Danish enclave of Tranquebar, in Tanjore, in July 1706. The only European work on India that we know for sure Ziegenbalg had read by 1706 is the German translation of Baldaeus, but this was enough to ensure that he very early set out to acquire the Vedas.<sup>58</sup> Already in September 1706 Ziegenbalg reported that books were being copied out for him by the elderly schoolmaster he had engaged to teach him Tamil. Ziegenbalg’s letter includes parts of both Fenicio’s account of Brahmā’s revelation of four books (one of which was lost) and Azevedo’s brief summary of the contents of the Vedas.<sup>59</sup> Ziegenbalg later admitted he had taken these details from Baldaeus, but then only to emphasize the contrast between Baldaeus’s “very false relations of these heathen” and what he had learned from his own extensive reading of Tamil sources in the intervening five years.<sup>60</sup> While one published version

54. Ibid, 42.

55. S. Rajamanickam, ed., *Roberto de Nobili on Adaptation* (Palayamkottai: De Nobili Research Institute, 1971), 138/139.

56. Rajamanickam, *Indian Customs*, 47.

57. Baldaeus, *Afgoderye*, 176. Manuel de Faria e Sousa, *Asia Portuguesa*, vol. 2 (Lisbon, 1675), 2: 682; John Stevens, *The Portugues Asia*, 3 vols. (London, 1695), 2: 390. Faria e Sousa used an abridged text prepared by another Jesuit, Manoel Barradas; Baldaeus had access to a different and fuller version. See Charpentier, *Livro da seita*, lxxvii–lxxxv.

58. Will Sweetman and R. Ilakkuvan, *Bibliotheca Malabarica: Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg’s Tamil Library* (Paris: IFP/EFEO, 2012), 43–44.

59. There are several printed versions of this letter, the original of which is not extant. The most detailed is in Herrm Bartholomäi Ziegenbalgs und Herrn Heinrich Plütscho, *Kön. Dänischer Missionariorum, Brieffe . . . von neuem heraus gegeben von Christian Gustav Bergen* (Pirna, 1708), 18–26.

60. Willem Caland, ed., *Ziegenbalg’s Malabarisches Heidenthum* (Amsterdam: Uitgave van Koninklijke Akademie, 1926), 14.

of this letter states that when Ziegenbalg asked the schoolmaster to transcribe the remaining three of these for him “he could not bring himself to do it, for it would be against their law to allow a Christian to have access to them,”<sup>61</sup> in the longer version edited by Christian Bergen, we read that the three books are being written out for him—but in Tamil—and Ziegenbalg states only that this had never *before* been done for any Christian.<sup>62</sup>

It is clear, both from the fact that the works were being copied in Tamil and from Ziegenbalg’s later catalogue of his library, that these were not the Vedas. As he began reading Tamil texts, Ziegenbalg’s interest in the Vedas receded, and he even came to doubt their very existence. These doubts are first expressed in records of conversations that took place in 1708, which Ziegenbalg had published in 1715. In a discussion with a Brahmin, Ziegenbalg says that he doubts the “lawbooks” exist because none of the many thousands of Tamils to whom he has spoken had seen them. They have only been told by the Brahmins that they exist, but none of the Brahmins Ziegenbalg had spoken to had access to them either.<sup>63</sup> Some years later, in an annotation to a letter received from a Tamil correspondent in 1712 that mentions the names of the four Vedas, Ziegenbalg comments that, because they are in Sanskrit, even the names of the Vedas are known only to the learned. He adds that while the Brahmins make much of the four Vedas, they do not allow others even to see, much less to read, them. Instead, the worship of the Tamils is established on the purāṇas, together with the āgamas and śāstras, which are found “in all sorts of languages” among the common, non-Brahmin, people.<sup>64</sup>

#### THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY JESUITS

In the eighteenth century French Jesuits established the new Carnatic mission in the Tamil- and Telugu-speaking hinterland of the French possession of Pondicherry. In 1711 one of the Jesuits in this mission, Jean-Venant Bouchet, argued that Hindu religious texts were a diabolic imitation of the Christian scriptures. Although he had not been able to obtain copies of the Vedas, he had been able to learn enough of their contents from “certain teachers” to be able to pronounce it an imitation of the books of Moses. He says the Vedas were divided into four parts but that many Indian scholars think there was formerly a fifth part, now lost, and thus he was confident that the Vedas were nothing other than an imitation of the Pentateuch.<sup>65</sup>

The Abbé Étienne Souciet, librarian and professor of mathematics at the Jesuit college Louis-le-Grand, was in regular correspondence with Jesuits in the missions on all manner of subjects. In 1719 the superior of the Madurai mission, Louis de Bourzes, responded to some of Souciet’s questions about the Vedas. His detailed account of “le Vedam” was

61. Joachim Lange, ed., *Merckwürdige Nachricht aus Ost-Indien . . . Die andere Auflage* (Leipzig, 1708), 11.

62. Bergen, *Brieffe*, 19. In another letter written later in the same month to August Hermann Francke, Ziegenbalg confirms both that the texts are being copied and that this was possible only because of the “great love” the Tamils had for him (Arno Lehmann, *Alte Briefe aus Indien: Unveröffentlichte Briefe von Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg 1706–1719* [Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1957], 40).

63. The conversation was first published in the so-called *Hallesche Berichte* (8: 567), a series of letters and reports published at irregular intervals from Halle and edited initially by August Hermann Francke. References to the *Hallesche Berichte* (henceforth HB) are given to the installment and page number. An earlier similar conversation is recorded in HB 8: 546. In 1724 Benjamin Schultze, one of Ziegenbalg’s successors, expressed similar doubts (HB 20: 504–5).

64. HB 7: 374.

65. Charles le Gobien, ed., *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrit des missions étrangères par quelques missionnaires de la Compagnie de Jésus* (Paris, 1702–1776), 9: 38–39.

mostly derived, he admits, from Nobili.<sup>66</sup> Bourzes begins by reiterating the trope of Brahmin secrecy, stating that to communicate the Veda to others was a crime punishable by many millions of years in hell. He refers also to the oral transmission of the text, although he adds that one Brahmin has told him the contrary. He corrects Bouchet (without mentioning his name) on the question of whether there were at first five Vedas, saying that he has been assured constantly that there are only four, and mentions also Bernier's report of the "four Beths." He notes, however, that a fifth Veda is spoken of in the same way as we might refer to a poet as "a second Virgil." Following Nobili again, he writes that the name Veda is applied by extension to a whole range of other texts that are not, strictly, Veda. He gives examples, from Nobili, which include purāṇic literature. The Vedas proper are never read and expounded to the people—they would not be capable of understanding them—instead they read other texts to which the name Veda is lent, above all the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which is called the Veda of the Śūdras, the people. He further downplays the Veda when giving reasons why it is not advisable for the missionaries to learn Sanskrit—Tamil is essential, Sanskrit difficult and not likely to aid in the conversion of the Indians. Few Brahmins know more than a fourth of the Veda; one who knows three is regarded as a prodigious scholar.

Bourzes repeats that he knows little of the Veda, but then proceeds to give what is probably the most detailed account yet to reach Europe of a Vedic rite, the sacrifice of a goat.<sup>67</sup> Insofar as this is based on texts, the proximate source is almost certainly again Nobili, or rather Śivadharmā, but Bourzes also includes details—such as the cost of the ritual—that are likely based on observation (whether by Bourzes or his Indian informants) of contemporary rituals. Bourzes's letter also includes an account of Indian chronology—which was one of the reasons for the intense interest in ancient, non-Christian scriptures in the early eighteenth century—suggesting that it owed something to Chinese chronology.<sup>68</sup>

#### THE VEDAS BETWEEN EUROPE AND INDIA

The reputation of the Vedas in Europe around the turn of the eighteenth century demonstrates what Dorothy Figueria has aptly called "the authority of an absent text."<sup>69</sup> An intriguing demonstration of this is a mention of the Vedas in a text that was as much sought after—and as much discussed in ignorance of its actual contents—as were the Vedas themselves: *De tribus impostoribus*. The idea of a blasphemous treatise that grouped Jesus Christ, Moses, and Muhammad as the three impostors who had fooled the world begins with an encyclical from Pope Gregory IX against the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II in 1239.<sup>70</sup> For the next four centuries, accusations of having authored such a treatise—or even just having possessed a copy of it—swirled around Europe, applied to anyone whose orthodoxy was in doubt—from Thomas Scoto (a Franciscan friar accused, arrested, and probably burned to death in Lisbon in 1335) to Michael Servetus and Giordano Bruno, burned alive in Geneva in

66. Bourzes to Souciet, 23 March 1719, Archives de la Province de France de la Compagnie de Jésus, Paris, Fonds Brotier, 86, ff. 42r–43v.

67. Bourzes calls this "Ekiam" (Tamil *ekkiyam*, Sanskrit *yajña*).

68. Joan-Pau Rubiés, "From Antiquarianism to Philosophical History: India, China and the World History of Religion in European Thought (1600–1770)," in *Antiquarianism and Intellectual Life in Early Modern Europe and China, 1500–1800*, ed. Peter N. Miller and François Louis (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2012), 313–67.

69. Dorothy M. Figueira, "The Authority of an Absent Text: The Veda, Upavedas, Upangas, and Upnekhatā in European Thought," in *Authority, Anxiety, and Canon: Essays in Vedic Interpretation*, ed. Laurie L. Patton (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1994), 201–33.

70. Georges Minois, *The Atheist's Bible: The Most Dangerous Book that Never Existed*, tr. Lys Ann Weiss (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2012), 1.



1553 and in Rome in 1600, respectively.<sup>71</sup> The text itself, however, proved elusive. When a version of this notorious text was finally printed, in 1753, it bore a false date of 1598. Caland dated *De tribus impostoribus* sixty years earlier still, to 1538,<sup>72</sup> and therefore suggested that that *De tribus impostoribus* was likely the first European text to mention the Vedas.<sup>73</sup> In fact, the reference to the Vedas in *De tribus impostoribus* is one reason for dating it much later, most likely to a manuscript of 1688 by Johann Müller.<sup>74</sup>

The history of *De tribus impostoribus* itself demonstrates the authority that an absent text can exert. The mention of the Vedas in Müller's text also shows that the Vedas too had begun to exert an authority in Europe while still very much absent there. Further evidence of the Vedas' reputation in Europe can be found in the 1720s. In 1724 Mathurin Veyssière de Lacroze included a chapter on "the idolatry of the Indies" in his *Histoire du christianisme des Indes*. Lacroze, a former Benedictine who had converted to Protestantism in 1696, was Librarian Royal at the Prussian court. His account of Indian idolatry drew on the published works of the Jesuits, Rogerius, and Baldaeus as well as Ziegenbalg's then-still-unpublished manuscripts. From Ziegenbalg, Lacroze learned that the Indians, despite their outward idolatry, preserved also a knowledge of the real nature of the supreme being. Rogerius, Baldaeus, and the Jesuits persuaded him that this could be proven, if only the Vedas could be found and translated.<sup>75</sup> Lacroze's opinion was echoed in 1726 by Johann Lorenz von Mosheim, professor of theology at Helmstedt, in the first published volume of his ecclesiastical history. By the time his *Institutionum historiae ecclesiasticae antiqui et recentioris* was completed, in 1755, Mosheim was chancellor of the university at Göttingen and one of the most renowned theologians and church historians in Europe. In giving an account of the state of philosophy at the time of Christ, Mosheim acknowledged the reputation of Oriental philosophers for wisdom, but regretted that little more could be said until the "very ancient book of the Brachmans called Vedam" was translated into another language.<sup>76</sup> Thus despite the doubts expressed by Ziegenbalg and Bourzes about the practical importance—even the very existence—of the Vedas,<sup>77</sup> the reputation of the Vedas was firmly established in Europe by the beginning of the eighteenth century and would be affirmed repeatedly throughout the century,

71. *Ibid.*, 39, 61, 55.

72. Caland does not explain why he thinks *De tribus impostoribus* was already published in 1538. The date is associated with Thomas Campanella, who, in the manuscript preface to his *Atheismus Triumphatus* (1636), denied that he was the author of *De tribus impostoribus*—which he claimed to have read—on the grounds that it had been published thirty years before his birth in 1568.

73. He suggested that this might owe something to Arabic sources, given that Averroës was one of the putative authors of *De tribus impostoribus* (Caland, *Veda*, 263–64).

74. *De imposturis religionum (De tribus impostoribus)*. *Von den Betrügereyen der Religionen: Dokumente*, ed. Winfried Schröder (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1999). Müller's source was most likely Baldaeus. Müller mentions the theft of three Vedas by "a son of the gods" (p. 115). This is perhaps a combination of the two accounts in Fenicio of the loss of one Veda and the theft of "the Law" by Hiranyākṣa (see n. 45). Rogerius had identified the stolen law as the four Vedas (*Open-Deure*, 94), but in his version of Fenicio's account of the first avatāra of Viṣṇu, Baldaeus combines this with Rogerius's account of the loss of one of the Vedas, which perhaps accounts for Müller's idea that the three remaining Vedas were stolen. *De tribus impostoribus* is to be distinguished from a French text, the *Traité des trois imposteurs*, which emerged in the same milieu, but does not mention the Vedas.

75. Mathurin Veyssière de Lacroze, *Histoire du christianisme des Indes* (La Haye, 1724), 427, 454, 473.

76. *Institutiones historiae ecclesiasticae Novi Testamenti* (Frankfurt, 1726), 56.

77. Doubts about the existence of the Vedas persisted into the late eighteenth century. Around 1774, the Capuchin missionary Marco della Tomba thought it probably they had "never existed, at least as real books" (David N. Lorenzen, "Marco Della Tomba and the Brahmin from Banaras: Missionaries, Orientalists, and Indian Scholars," *Journal of Asian Studies* 65, 1 [2006]: 115–43, at 116). Pierre Sonnerat, reporting the Brahmins' belief that the fourth Veda was lost, wondered if the other three also no longer existed (*Voyage aux Indes orientales et à la Chine* [Paris, 1782], 2: 32).

despite no one in Europe being able to read them—or rather, I would suggest, precisely because no one there could read them.<sup>78</sup>

It was the Vedas' reputation in Europe that prompted the efforts of another royal librarian to obtain them. Jean-Paul Bignon, titular abbot of Saint-Quentin-en-l'Isle, was appointed royal librarian in Paris—a post held by his father and grandfather—in November 1718. The library had fallen into disorder under his predecessor, and Bignon was instructed to restore order and to make the library “more worthy of the magnificence of a great prince.”<sup>79</sup> One of his first acts as librarian was to have Étienne Fourmont, professor of Arabic at the Collège royal, draw up a list of Oriental works to be acquired for the library.<sup>80</sup> Since 1691 Bignon had been President of the Académie des Sciences, established by Jean-Baptiste Colbert early in the reign of Louis XIV. Bignon followed Colbert's model for royal collections. From the 1660s Colbert had set out on a grand scale to establish collections that would reflect the king's magnificence. He employed a network of agents to collect systematically “rocks and plants for the gardens of Versailles . . . exotic animals for the royal menageries, and manuscripts for the royal libraries.”<sup>81</sup> Colbert's efforts in collecting manuscripts were focused primarily on texts relevant for biblical scholarship, although his wider efforts to promote Oriental scholarship were also driven in part by practical considerations arising from trade.<sup>82</sup> Both Bignon and Fourmont, by contrast, were personally most intensely interested in Chinese texts. It was the need to demonstrate the full scope of the king's “curiosity” that meant that other texts, including the Vedas and other Indian works, were sought.

In 1719 Fourmont, evidently drawing on Rogerius, drew up a list of works to be obtained which included the Vedas, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, a *pañcāṅkam*, and the works of Bhartṛhari.<sup>83</sup> China, however, took priority, and the list of works was first sent there. It was not until November 1727 that Fourmont made efforts to obtain texts from India, at first through the Compagnie des Indes.<sup>84</sup> The Compagnie's “commandant général” in Pondicherry, Pierre Christoph Le Noir, initially tried to obtain them through the Compagnie's own networks, but in September 1728 he turned to the Jesuits.<sup>85</sup>

The superior of the Jesuit Carnatic mission, Étienne Le Gac, had already been approached for copies of the Vedas by Souciet a little less than two years earlier, in December 1726.<sup>86</sup> In his response to Souciet, Le Gac expressed his doubts about the utility of copying the Vedas. If copies were sent in an Indian script, no one in Paris would be able to read them, and to have them translated would be too difficult because so few learned Brahmins understood them. Although the Brahmin children are taught to read, the sense of the Veda is not explained to them, because the teacher often does not understand it.

78. See, e.g., Tomba, *Gli scritti*, 99.

79. Jack A. Clarke, “Abbé Jean-Paul Bignon ‘Moderator of the Academies’ and Royal Librarian,” *French Historical Studies* 8, 2 (1973): 213–35, at 227.

80. Henri Auguste Omont, *Missions archéologiques françaises en Orient aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1902), 809.

81. Nicholas Dew, *Orientalism in Louis XIV's France* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 20–21.

82. See, for example, Dew's account of his efforts to establish a reliable supply of native French speakers of Arabic, Turkish, and Persian (*ibid.*, 24–25).

83. Jean Filliozat, *Bibliothèque nationale, Département des manuscrits: Catalogue du fonds sanscrit. Fascicule I, nos 1 à 165* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1941), i.

84. *Ibid.*, ii.

85. Gérard Colas and Usha Colas-Chauhan, *Manuscrits telugu: Catalogue raisonné* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1995), 7.

86. Le Gac to Souciet, 10 Oct 1727, Fonds Brotier 88, f. 115.

It is enough that they make them able to pronounce it well and to learn by heart certain things which they will need later, such as certain stanzas of verse which they will have to recite while performing certain ceremonies during marriages, burials, sacrifices.

Souciet had been in regular contact with other French Jesuits in the Carnatic mission. Bourzes had recommended Memmius René Gargam, to whom Souciet had directed a series of questions on subjects such as astronomy, fossils, Indian languages, and whether the Brahmins were descended from the Jews.<sup>87</sup> In 1726 Gargam told Souciet he had been offered a translation of the Vedas. Even though he had not yet read it, he thought it would be of “very great use to all the missionaries . . . in refuting the errors of the Gentiles.”<sup>88</sup> The cost exceeded Gargam’s means, however, and his superior Le Gac refused to invest in the project both because the mission had had high expenses that year and also because a translation of the Vedas appeared to him “useless for the conversion of souls.”<sup>89</sup> Although the missions were perpetually short of funds, the resistance to imparting the Vedas seems here to have been Jesuit, rather than Brahmin.

By the end of 1728 Le Gac’s resistance had given way in the face of the resources and authority of Bignon and Le Noir. In his response to Bignon in January 1729, Le Gac expressed his confidence that he would be able to acquire the Vedas and, to a greater or lesser extent, the other works which had been requested.<sup>90</sup> In August of the following year, Calmette reported that he had obtained copies of the first two Vedas, which he calls “Rougvédam” and “Ejourvédam,” and two years later, in August 1732, he was able to add the “Samavédam” and the “Adarvanavédam.”<sup>91</sup> In both letters, Calmette refers to the Brahmins’ secrecy about the Vedas:

Ever since India has been known, it does not appear that the Europeans have been able to unearth this book which the Brames scruple to communicate and which they transcribe superstitiously in the woods or in remote places where they cannot be seen by any who are not of their caste. (1730: 25v)

I have at last recovered the four Vedas, of which the first is called Rougvédam, the second Ejourvédam, the third Samavédam, the fourth Adarvanavédam. The fourth is that which, so long as there have been missionaries in India, has been said to have been thrown into the sea by the Brahmins. Thus, that which the Brahmins have until now kept hidden more than the Jews have the books of Moses, that which they have communicated to no other nation of the world, not even to Indians if they are not of their caste, finally falls into our hands and the sea itself has given up its prey. (1732: 35r)

Calmette described how he had confirmed the authenticity of the texts he had purchased by having young Brahmins who were learning the Vedas recite them to him (1732: 35v). In his letter he describes how both Gargam, his close colleague in the northern reaches of the Carnatic mission, and Jean-François Pons, a Jesuit collecting Sanskrit texts in Bengal, had been deceived into buying texts purporting to be Vedas (1732: 35r). Nevertheless,

87. Fonds Brotier 82.

88. Gargam to Souciet, 15 Sept 1726, Fonds Brotier 82, f. 72r.

89. Le Gac to Souciet, 10 Oct 1727, Fonds Brotier 88, f. 115v.

90. Bibliothèque nationale de France, naf 6556, f.152r, printed in Omont, *Missions archéologiques françaises*, 838.

91. Calmette to Souciet, 26 Aug 1730, Fonds Brotier 89, f. 25v; Calmette to Souciet, 25 Aug 1732, Fonds Brotier 89, f. 35r. Further references to these two letters will be given in the text by year and folio. The works were sent to Europe in the early 1730s and remain in the BNF: Rgveda (Sanskrit 214); Sāmaveda (Sanskrit 310–12); Yajurveda (Sanskrit 313, 424); Artharvaveda (Sanskrit 177–79, but see below). For details of the contents of the manuscripts see Filliozat, *Catalogue du fonds sanscrit, I & II*.

while Calmette did obtain the R̥g, Yajur, and Sāma Veda saṃhitās, his “Adarvana Vedam” is in fact an assortment of tantric and magical texts connected with goddess worship called *Ātharvaṇatantrarāja* and *Ātharvaṇamantraśāstra*.<sup>92</sup>

Calmette twice states that money alone would not have sufficed to obtain the Veda (1732: 35r, 37r). It was only thanks to “hidden Christians” (1732: 37r) among the Brahmins that he had been able to obtain copies of the Vedas.<sup>93</sup> Nevertheless, he also remarks that the further the Jesuits advanced into the hinterland the easier it was to deal with the Brahmins and to make overtures regarding what they knew and their books (1730: 25r).<sup>94</sup> He notes that not since the time of Nobili had the missionaries had dealings with learned Brahmins (śāstris), for which both a knowledge of Sanskrit and following Brahmin customs (including keeping Brahmin servants, which he and Gargam could not do in such a small mission) were prerequisites (1732: 37v). In 1733, in a published letter, Calmette noted that once Brahmin scholars recognized his and Gargam’s knowledge of Sanskrit, and of Sanskrit learning, they began to engage them in debate. He adds that it was remarkable how few Brahmins understood Vedic Sanskrit and notes the status of those who had studied Patañjali’s *Mahābhāṣya* and thus were able to understand it.<sup>95</sup> Despite the difficulties, Calmette predicted that having “found the vein,” with time he would succeed in finding whatever Souciet and Bignon requested, and he did send several other works—mostly philosophical—to the Bibliothèque Royale. Some of these works, like others sent by the Jesuits, were not so much copies of actual Indian texts as verbal abstracts of the texts recited by scholars and recorded, on paper not palm-leaves, by converts who adorned them with Christian symbols.<sup>96</sup> The method would have been familiar to Azevedo, Fernandes, and Ziegenbalg.<sup>97</sup>

Although the Jesuits had thus finally succeeded in obtaining for European libraries at least parts of the Vedas, Le Gac remained unconvinced of the value of having done so. When in 1732 he wrote to the Souciet to report on the cost of the additional copies he had had made for the library of the college Louis-le-Grand, he reiterated his comments from five years earlier:

between ourselves, this is a useless expense. These books can serve as nothing more than a spectacle in a library. For I cannot believe that anyone in Europe could come to understand them properly, whatever aptitude one may have for languages.<sup>98</sup>

92. Filliozat, *Catalogue du fonds sanscrit*, I, 25.

93. One of these may have been Calmette’s convert Maṅgalagiri Ānanda, who later composed a summary of the Gospels in Telugu verse entitled *Vedānta Rasayanam* (Léon Besse, “Liste Alphabétique des Missionnaires du Carnatic de la Compagnie de Jésus au XVIIIe siècle,” *Revue Historique de l’Inde Française* 2 [1917/18]: s.v. Calmette; see also C. P. Brown, “Notices of some Roman Catholic Books, existing in the Telugu Language,” *The Madras Journal of Literature and Science* [July 1840], 54–58).

94. Calmette’s successive stations saw him push further and further to the northwest of Pondicherry. In 1727 and 1728 he wrote from stations in Arcot; by 1730 he was in Ballabaram (now Chikkaballapura, some 60 kilometres north of Bangalore); and his final letter is from Darmavaram, still further north.

95. *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, 21: 457–58.

96. Colas and Colas-Chauhan, *Manuscripts telugu*.

97. It seems likely that the same method was used by John Marshall in 1674–77 to produce an English version of the *Bhāgavata Purāna* and of another text that he identified as the Sāma Veda. Marshall, an English East India Company factor in Bengal from 1668 until his death in 1688, had been educated at Cambridge and was close to Henry More, one of the Cambridge Platonists. A Bengali Brahmin, Madhusudana, translated orally into Bengali from a Sanskrit original, on the basis of which Marshall produced a written English text (Anna Winterbottom, *Hybrid Knowledge in the Early East India Company World* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016], 95–96). Marshall described the latter text as “the Epitomie or the Sum of the four Beads,” an indication that this is likely not the Sāma Veda.

98. Le Gac to Souciet, 28 September 1732, Fonds Brotier, 89, f. 35r.

Le Gac was quite correct, not least because the texts which had been obtained, although in Sanskrit, were mostly written in Telugu-Kannada script, and even someone who could read Vedic Sanskrit, and Devanāgarī script, would find them unintelligible without knowing Telugu-Kannada script. Pons, who had long experience of India and had sought copies of the Vedas in Bengal, described those collected by Calmette as “en arabe,” in a justly famous account of Hindu thought in a 1740 letter to Jean-Baptiste Du Halde.<sup>99</sup> This was sufficient to mislead even Caland into thinking this was a reference to an Arabic translation of the Vedas when what Pons presumably intended was the use of Telugu script.<sup>100</sup>

Souciet and Le Gac thus encapsulate the difference between scholars in Europe and writers in India with respect to the Vedas. Souciet—like Bignon, Fourmont, Lacroze, and Mosheim—was attracted by the Vedas’ already established reputation as the most authoritative texts of Indian religion. Le Gac—like other writers in India including Rogerius, Bernier, Nobili, Bourzes, and Ziegenbalg—emphasized the greater practical significance of other texts. This can also be seen in the missionaries’ own writings in Indian languages. It is notable that when, in 1726, Beschi completed his *Tēmpāvāṇi*, a Christian epic on the life of Joseph, it was in Tamil not in Sanskrit.<sup>101</sup> In this respect he was following the example of Stephens, who had composed his *Kristapurāṇa* in Marathi a century earlier.<sup>102</sup> Ziegenbalg may have borrowed the term *Veda* for his translations of the Bible and of theological works, but it was Tamil into which he translated them.<sup>103</sup>

The growing reputation of the Vedas in Europe was not without effect in India, however. Among the Jesuits, Gargam and Calmette were convinced of the value of obtaining the Vedas, or at least of responding to the demand for them from Europe. This is perhaps reflected also in that the works of *preparatio evangelica* composed, probably in French, by the Carnatic Jesuits were labelled “Vedam” and, when translated, it was into Sanskrit, rather than Telugu or Tamil.<sup>104</sup> Although Francis Whyte Ellis saw these texts in Pondicherry in 1816, only the *Ezour-Vedam* survives. While their author cannot be determined with certainty, Ludo Rocher has demonstrated that they were probably produced among the Jesuits of the Carnatic mission.<sup>105</sup>

A similar shift is apparent among the Protestants of this period, and the influence on them of scholarly opinion in Europe is perhaps more directly observable. Ziegenbalg was aware of the Vedas and their significance for Brahmins, but he found Tamil texts more important for most of those he sought to convert, and he seems never to have regarded it as important even to learn Sanskrit.<sup>106</sup> In general his successors in the Tranquebar mission evinced much

99. *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, 26: 233.

100. Caland, *Veda*, 281.

101. *Tēmpāvāṇi* uses the conventions of classical Tamil poetry, but Beschi also wrote other works in Tamil in popular genres, such as *ammāṇai*.

102. On Stephens’s close adherence to the purāṇic model see Ananya Chakravarti, “Between *Bhakti* and *Pietà*: Untangling Emotion in Marāṭhi Christian Poetry,” *History of Religions* 56, 4 (2017): 365–87, at 372–73. Although Étienne de la Croix mentions the four Vedas, like Stephens he composed his *Discursos sobre a vida do Apostolo Sam Pedro* (1629) in the vernacular and divided it into three “purāṇas.” The Vedas are mentioned in his second purāṇa, and particularly in the canto 31 of book 5.

103. Ziegenbalg’s translation of the Gospels and Acts into Tamil was published in 1714 as *Añcu vēta poṣṭakkam* and his 1717 translation of Johann Freylinghausen’s *Grundlegung der Theologie* (1703) as *Vētacāstiram*.

104. Although Sanskrit translations of some of these texts were prepared, it appears that the *Ezour-Vedam* itself was to have been translated into Telugu (Ludo Rocher, *Ezourvedam: A French Veda of the Eighteenth Century* [Philadelphia: J. Benjamins, 1984], 71).

105. Rocher, *Ezourvedam*, 57–60.

106. Ziegenbalg does at one place express a desire to be able to translate Sanskrit mantras into German, but notes that no one was able to explain them to him, as only a few learned Brahmins were able to understand them (*Malabarisches Heidenthum*, 108).



less interest in Indian literature than did Ziegenbalg. Although Christoph Walther inventoried the remains of Ziegenbalg's library in 1731, five years earlier he had reported that the Tamil section had been allowed to fall into disrepair, and that many manuscripts had been stolen, or even burnt.<sup>107</sup> In their writings on Hinduism, the Tranquebar missionaries of this generation cite more often "the learned Mr. la Croze" than their predecessor Ziegenbalg.<sup>108</sup> It is, then, not surprising that they remained interested in the Vedas.

In an appendix to their diary for 1734, published under all their names in the *Hallesche Berichte*, the Tranquebar missionaries gave a brief account of the Vedas. They report that despite their efforts to see the Vedas, they have been told that they are not written, but that boys (who can only be Brahmins) learn sections of them from a priest by repeating it constantly. The language in which they are recorded, which they call Grantha, is so old that no one can understand it without referring to the śāstra. Few learn the fourth part, because it consists of sorcery.<sup>109</sup> They gloss the word *Wedam* (i.e., Veda), as "Höllandisch *Wet*"—a clear indication that they are here following the mid-seventeenth-century account of Rogerius,<sup>110</sup> which had stoked the idea in Europe—sparked by Couto's publication of Azevedo—that it was the Vedas which were the key texts, despite their predecessor Ziegenbalg's rather better-informed view of Hindu, especially Tamil, literature.

Three years later, in 1737, four of these missionaries announced that they had obtained a translation of the Yajur Veda.<sup>111</sup> They were very likely conscious of the Jesuits' success in obtaining copies of the Vedas, announced in Calmette's letter in the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* in 1734.<sup>112</sup> The text had been translated for them by a Brahmin named Kṛṣṇa, after much persuasion. His reluctance alone provided assurance, they argued, this was indeed the "veritable Veda." In fact, although Kṛṣṇa appears—like Nobili's informant Śivadharma—to have been a Brahmin of the Taittiriya branch of the Yajur Veda, the text that was published in the *Hallesche Berichte* had, according to Albrecht Weber, "not the slightest thing to do with the Yajurveda," instead representing "an encyclopedic and systematically ordered representation of the modern Brahmanical world and life-view."<sup>113</sup> It is striking that these missionaries are responding to the desire for the Vedas expressed from Europe at the very time that, in their hands, Ziegenbalg's Tamil library was falling into ruin. None of them produced works on Hinduism that bear comparison with those by Ziegenbalg.

#### CONCLUSION: VEDAS REAL AND IMAGINED

Le Gac's doubts about the usefulness of the Vedas he dispatched to Europe were well-founded. Although catalogued, on the basis of the Jesuits' descriptions of the texts, as soon as 1739,<sup>114</sup> they remained unread throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>115</sup> One of the few who

107. Sweetman and Ilakkuvan, *Bibliotheca Malabarica*, 21.

108. They cite also other European scholars, including Mosheim and Thomas Hyde.

109. HB 39: 418.

110. They cite also Bernier and the Jesuit *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*.

111. Their letter is printed in HB 45: 1182–85. The translation of the text appeared in the next installment (HB 46: 1251–94).

112. Although they do not here mention the *Lettres édifiantes*, they had cited an earlier reference in them to the Vedas in their 1734 diary.

113. Albrecht Weber, "Ein angebliche Bearbeitung des Yajurveda," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 7 (1853): 235–48, at 236.

114. *Catalogus codicum manuscriptorum Bibliothecae regiae*. Paris 1739. Étienne Fourmont was likely responsible for the entries in the section "Codices Indici."

115. A fragment of the Vedas—a single hymn from the first *maṇḍala* of the Ṛg Veda (I, 89)—was collected in Surat by James Fraser in Khambayat in the 1730s (Bodleian Library, MSS. Fraser Sansk. 30). Fraser aspired to translate the Vedas but was aware he had only a fragment of them. He notes that the "*Pourans* and *Shasters* are

might have been able to read them was the Carmelite Paulinus a Sancto Bartholomaeo. He knew both Sanskrit and the Tamil and Malayalam scripts, and may have recognized Telugu, even if he had not learned it. Paulinus saw them in late 1789, but in the chaos of the revolution was not permitted enough time to examine them closely.<sup>116</sup> In 1847 the Jesuit Julien Bach commented wryly: “aucun indianiste n’est tenté d’en faire usage, et c’est de ces livres qu’on peut dire: Sacrés ils sont, car personne n’y touche.”<sup>117</sup>

But the importance among scholars in Europe in the eighteenth century of the idea of the Vedas as the most authoritative texts of Indian religion is amply demonstrated by the career of another set of Vedas linked to the Jesuits. Voltaire received a manuscript in French entitled *Ezour-Vedam* in late 1760. Believing, or choosing to believe, it to be a translation from Sanskrit, it became one of his primary sources on India.<sup>118</sup> Although shortly after its publication in 1778, Pierre Sonnerat correctly identified the *Ezour-Vedam* as “definitely not one of the four Vedams” but rather “a book of controversy, written by a missionary,”<sup>119</sup> it became an important source for some eighteenth-century writers. Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil Duperron, the leading French Orientalist of his time, had another copy. He defended the authenticity of the *Ezour-Vedam* as late as 1808, even after he had translated the Upaniṣads into Latin from the Persian adaptation prepared in the early seventeenth century at the order of the Mughal prince Dārā Shikōh. In Surat, Anquetil Duperron was offered, through a Parsi intermediary, manuscripts containing extracts of the four Vedas. He declined, both because the Brahmin—and Jain—scholars whom he asked to certify the authenticity of the texts assured him they were incomplete and because he thought the price unreasonable. He did examine the texts and provided a description of the structure of the four saṃhitās, which indicates that the manuscript of the Ṛgveda saṃhitā at least may have been complete.<sup>120</sup>

While the *Ezour Vedam* was being discussed by Voltaire and others, the Vedas sent by Calmette languished unread in the Bibliothèque Impériale. They were even excluded from the catalogue of Sanskrit manuscripts prepared by Alexander Hamilton and Louis-Mathieu Langlès in 1807, again because they were mostly not in Devanagari script.<sup>121</sup> By this time, other manuscripts of the Vedas had been obtained in India. In 1781–82 Antoine-Louis-Henri Polier, a Swiss Protestant who served in the English East India Company’s army until 1775, had had copies of the Vedas made for him at the court of Pratap Singh at Jaipur.<sup>122</sup> Polier’s intermediary was a Portuguese physician, Don Pedro da Silva Leitão. A doctor named Pedro da Silva Leitão had been present at the court of Jai Singh in 1728 and played a part in the negotiations with the Portuguese regarding the exchange of scientific knowledge, person-

---

glosses and comments on the *Vedh*” and of the *Gītā* he says “This book the *Brahmins* call *The Marrow of the Vedh*. It gives a Light into the most mysterious part of their religion, and explains the substance of the *Vedh*” (*A Catalogue of Manuscripts in the Persic, Arabic, and Sanskerrit Languages* [London, 1742], 37–39). On Fraser and his collections see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Europe’s India: Words, Peoples, Empires, 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2017), 144–210.

116. Paulinus a Sancto Bartholomaeo, *Examen Historico-criticum Codicum Indicorum Bibliothecae Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide* (Rome, 1792), 5.

117. Julien Bach, “Notice sur la première découverte des Vedas,” *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 18<sup>e</sup> année, 3<sup>e</sup> série, vol. 16 (1847): 434–43, at 434.

118. Daniel S. Hawley, “L’Inde de Voltaire,” *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 120 (1974): 139–78.

119. Sonnerat, *Voyage aux Indes orientales*, cited in Rocher, *Ezourvedam*, 13.

120. Anquetil Duperron, *Voyage en Inde: 1754–1762: Relation de voyage en préliminaire à la traduction du “Zend-Avesta,”* ed. Jean Deloche, Manonmani Filliozat, and Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat (Paris: École Française d’Extrême-Orient, 1997), 378–81.

121. Ângela Barreto Xavier and Iñes G. Županov, *Catholic Orientalism: Portuguese Empire, Indian Knowledge (16th–18th Centuries)* (New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 2015), 302–3.

122. On Polier, see Subrahmanyam, *Europe’s India*, 239–68.

nel, and equipment. He was long-lived, but Polier's friend may rather have been one of his descendents. Jai Singh had assembled a substantial collection of manuscripts from religious sites across India, and in the time of his successor Pratap Singh the library had contained the *saṃhitās* of all four Vedas in manuscripts dating from the last quarter of the seventeenth century.<sup>123</sup>

Although Polier records that he had sought copies of the Veda without success in Bengal, Awadh, and on the Coromandel coast, as well as in Agra, Delhi, and Lucknow and had found that even at Banaras “nothing could be obtained but various *Shasters*, w.<sup>ch</sup> are only Commentaries of the *Baids*,” he connects this not with the reluctance of the Brahmins but rather, like Bernier, with “the persecution the Hindous suffered throughout India” under Aurangzeb, noting that Jaipur had been spared because of the services rendered to the Mughal Emperor by Jai Singh.

By this it may be seen how little a dependence is to be placed in the assertions of those who have represented the *Brehmans* as very averse to the communication of the principles of their Religion—their Mysteries, and holy books.—In truth, I have always found those who were really men of science and knowledge, very ready to impart and communicate, what they knew to whoever would receive it and listen to them with a view of information, and not merely for the purpose of turning into ridicule, whatever was not perfectly consonant to our European Ideas, tenets and even prejudices—some of w.<sup>ch</sup> I much fear are thought by the Indians to be full as deserving of ridicule as any they have.—At the same time it must be owned, that all the Hindous,—the *Brehmans* only excepted, are forbidden by their Religion from studying and learning the *Baids*—the *K'hatrys* alone being permitted to hear them read and expounded: This being the case, it will naturally be asked—how came an European who is not even of the same faith, to be favoured with what is denied even to a Hindou?—To this the *Brehmans* readily reply—That being now in the *Cal Jog* or fourth age, in w.<sup>ch</sup> Religion is reduced to nought, it matters not who sees or studies them in these days of wickedness.<sup>124</sup>

It is perhaps significant that it was in a royal library, rather than in a Brahmin *pāṭhaśālā*, that Polier found manuscripts of the Vedas.<sup>125</sup> But the same is not true of the manuscripts acquired in Banaras only fifteen years later by Henry Thomas Colebrooke, during the period (1795–97) when he was appointed as judge and magistrate at nearby Mirzapur: “A working scholar, he sought manuscripts that ‘had been much used & studied in preference to ornamented & splendid copies imperfectly corrected.’”<sup>126</sup> Moreover, in a letter to his father in February 1797 Colebrooke echoed Polier's sentiments:

I cannot conceive how it came to be ever asserted that the Brahmins were ever averse to instruct strangers; several gentlemen who have studied the language find, as I do, the greatest readiness

123. G. N. Bahura, “Glimpses of Historical Information from Manuscripts in the Pothikhana of Jaipur,” in *Cultural Heritage of Jaipur*, ed. J. N. Asopa (Jodhpur: United Book Traders, 1982), 107. See also G. N. Bahura, ed., *Catalogue of Manuscripts in the Maharaja of Jaipur Museum* (Jaipur: Maharaja of Jaipur Museum, 1971).

124. Constantin Regamey, “Un pionnier vaudois des études indiennes: Antoine-Louis de Polier,” in *Mélanges offerts à Monsieur Georges Bonnard, professeur honoraire de l'Université de Lausanne, à l'occasion de son quatre-vingtième anniversaire* (Geneva: Droz, 1966), 202.

125. The Vedas that Bernier had seen in Banaras were likely also connected with Jai Singh. Although Bernier does not say this, it is likely that he saw them when he and Jean-Baptiste Tavernier visited the college in Banaras established by Jai Singh (William Crooke, ed., *Travels in India by Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, Baron of Aubonne*. 2nd ed. 2 vols. [London: Humphrey Milford, 1925], 2: 183).

126. Ludo Rocher and Rosane Rocher, *The Making of Western Indology: Henry Thomas Colebrooke and the East India Company* (London: Routledge, 2012), 41. It was from the texts obtained by Polier and Colebrooke that Friedrich August Rosen produced his pioneering edition of the Ṛg Veda *saṃhitās* (*Rigveda-sanhita, Liber primus, Sanskritè et Latinè* [London, 1838]).

in them to give us access to all their sciences. They do not even conceal from us the most sacred texts of their *Vedas*.<sup>127</sup>

The several gentlemen would likely have included General Claude Martin, Sir William Jones, and Sir Robert Chambers. These were all East India Company employees who obtained Vedic manuscripts (Jones from Polier) in the last decades of the eighteenth century.

Why was it so much easier for Polier, Colebrooke, and others to obtain what it had been so difficult for the Jesuits and impossible for the Pietists? There are several differences in the context that might have played a part. Some are geographical: Were Brahmins in the south much more reluctant to transmit the Vedas than those in the north? Or was oral transmission more dominant—and therefore physical copies harder to come by—in the south? Others are historical, political, and economic: Is the lack of resistance encountered by Polier and Colebrooke to be explained by the significant shift in power dynamics as the English East India Company was transformed from a trading company to a territorial power? Anquetil Duperron was offered Vedas he could not afford; Le Gac was restrained by the mission's parlous finances; but the same did not apply to the wealthy men like Martin and Polier. Finally, there are religious considerations: Did it matter—as Polier suggests—that the East India Company men were not in India to convert Hindus to Christianity?

The difficulty the Jesuits experienced in obtaining copies of the Vedas is often exaggerated. Although Bouchet had reported in 1711 that he had been unable to obtain copies of the Vedas, the reluctance of Le Gac to respond to a request for the Vedas in 1726 from his fellow Jesuit Souciet indicates that in the period after Nobili the Jesuits in India did not regard this as a priority. Le Gac did not mention Brahmin secrecy in his responses to Souciet in 1726 and 1727, but rather the likely cost and doubtful utility of obtaining manuscripts or translations of the Vedas. His attitude changed only in 1728, with the intervention of Bignon and Le Noir. From that point, it took only two years for Calmette to obtain the Ṛg and Yajur Veda saṃhitās. Despite Calmette's statement about no European having been able to unearth this text "since India has been known," the evidence suggests rather that no European other than Nobili had seriously sought to obtain the Vedas. The "false" Vedas obtained by the Pietists two years after Calmette—and by Gargam and Pons six years before—are explicable by the flexibility of the term Veda; we do not need to postulate either duplicity or secrecy on the part of those who transmitted these texts.

The question of the availability of the texts in manuscript form touches on the hotly debated issue of the oral transmission of the Vedas. That there was a powerful presumption against writing down Hindu texts, and the Vedas in particular, is not controversial. "One who reads from a written text" (*likhita-pāṭhaka*) is included among a list of the six worst types of those who recite the Vedas.<sup>128</sup> Nevertheless, in a survey of Vedic manuscripts, mostly of southern provenance, from c. 1650–1850, Cezary Galewicz notes the paradox of a copyist who cites this very verse in the colophon of a manuscript of 1787 containing the fourth aṣṭaka of the Ṛgveda saṃhitā.<sup>129</sup> Of course, the fact that manuscripts of the Vedas existed by this period does not mean that all Brahmins who knew the Vedas would have had them also

127. Thomas Edward Colebrooke, "Notices of the Life of Henry Thomas Colebrooke, Esq., by His Son," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 5, 1 (1839): 1–60, at 29.

128. *Sarvasammata-Śikṣā*, 36, cited in Madhav M. Deshpande, "From Orality to Writing: Transmission and Interpretation of Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī," in *Proceedings of the International Symposium "The Book. Romania. Europa" 20–24 September 2010*, ed. Jan E. M. Houben and Julieta Rotaru (Bucharest: Metropolitan Library of Bucharest, 2011), 64.

129. Cezary Galewicz, "Let Śiva's Favour Be Alike with Scribes and with Reciters: Motifs for Copying and Not Copying the Veda," in Houben and Rotaru, *Proceedings*, 116.

in manuscript form, still less that they would have been willing to sell or to transcribe them for Europeans. We do not have to fall into what Johannes Bronkhorst calls “the brahmanical trap”<sup>130</sup>—imagining that the Vedas were *never* written down—in order to accept that the brahminical prejudice against writing down the Vedas would have meant that it was far less likely that European scholars would come across manuscripts of the Vedas than manuscripts of other texts.<sup>131</sup> But the Vedas did exist in manuscript, and Calmette’s “hidden Christians” found there were also Brahmins prepared to part with, or to produce, manuscripts—even if they thought they were doing so only for other Brahmins.

Europeans were first able to acquire Hindu texts, in the 1540s and 1550s, because of Portuguese control in Goa. The extension of the English East India Company’s territorial and military might in the later part of the eighteenth century would have changed the nature of interactions between Europeans and Indians elsewhere.<sup>132</sup> Colebrooke’s experience in Mirzapur is perhaps the clearest instance of the effect of a shift in power dynamics, but Polier’s success at the court of Pratap Singh in 1781—not yet within the direct ambit of British power—seems to owe more to the character of the court. Since the time of Jai Singh in the 1720s, the court at Jaipur had been involved in the exchange—partly mediated by Jesuits—of materials of scientific and scholarly interest with the Portuguese court. In 1734 Jai Singh invited Jean-François Pons and Claude Boudier, French Jesuits stationed in Bengal, to Jaipur.<sup>133</sup> Pons was also engaged in collecting manuscripts for Bignon, and had their trip not been cut short by illness it seems likely he would have preceded Polier in gaining access Jai Singh’s collection of Sanskrit manuscripts.

Many Europeans—both Jesuits from Xavier to Bouchet and Calmette, and Protestants from Rogerius to Ziegenbalg and his Pietist successors, as well non-clerical authors like Bernier and Alexander Dow—mentioned restrictions on who could hear the Vedas. This alone would have made the Vedas harder to find; most Hindus would not have had access to them either. But we should not overlook that many of the same writers also stated that even among Brahmins the Vedas were not widely known.<sup>134</sup> Thus, in addition to the reasons suggested above, it seems that one reason, other than religious scruple, for the difficulty Europeans experienced in attempting to obtain copies of the Vedas was a simple lack of knowledge of the Vedas, despite their acknowledged authority, on the part of many Indians.<sup>135</sup> In this sense, the Veda was an “absent text” not only for Europeans, but for many Indians too.

130. Johannes Bronkhorst, “Illiteracy as a Socio-Cultural Marker,” in Houben and Rotaru, *Proceedings*, 47.

131. For a survey of scholarly views on the question of writing in pre-modern India, see Harry Falk, *Schrift im alten Indien* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1993), esp. chs. 9–10. On Indian manuscript culture and the transmission of texts, see also Gérard Colas and Gerdi Gerschheimer, ed., *Écrire et transmettre en Inde classique* (Paris: EFEO, 2009), and Saraju Rath, ed., *Aspects of Manuscript Culture in South India* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

132. It is nevertheless worth recalling Calmette’s comments that his interactions with Brahmins were easier the further he was from coastal areas where European influence was greatest.

133. A brief account of their trip was first published in the new edition of the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* published in 1781–83 (vol. 15, 336–7).

134. This was one reason why the missionaries among them thought other texts more important to obtain.

135. Caland concluded his 1918 essay by noting the limits of most Brahmins’ knowledge of the Vedas, adding that while it was not that there were no Brahmins who could have given Europeans a better and fuller account of the Vedas “do Couto, Rogerius and all the others knocked on the wrong door” (*Veda*, 303). Ludo Rocher expressed similar “reservations concerning the weight that has been given to the secrecy argument” (“Orality and Textuality in the Indian Context,” *Sino-Platonic Papers*, 49 [1994]: 5). Rocher was “convinced that there was, far more often, a second reason why Westerners were denied a knowledge of the Vedas; their Indian contacts, who were supposed to provide them with information on the Vedas, did not possess it themselves, and, therefore, were unable to communicate it” (“Max Müller and the Veda,” in *Mélanges d’islamologie: Volume dédié à la mémoire de Armand Abel par ses collègues, ses élèves et ses amis*, ed. Armand Abel and Pierre Salmon, vol. 2 [Leiden: Brill, 1974], 223).