

The Provenance and Cataloguing of the Younghusband Collection

I first heard the name Younghusband as a young boy in Bhutan and the name lingered in my memory, mainly for its nomenclatural peculiarity to the sensibility of a young Bhutanese boy. Etymologically, Younghusband was one name I could make sense of among the many European names (Hastings, Bogle, Hamilton, Eden, Curzon, Wellesley, etc.) I have come across in the history books on Bhutan and British India. Nonetheless, it remained just a name with no face or person to go with it. The role Ugyen Wangchuk played in the Younghusband mission to Tibet in 1903-4 and the role Younghusband and his government played subsequently in securing external support for Ugyen Wangchuk's emergence as the first King of Bhutan in 1907 did not feature prominently in our school textbooks.

It was only in September, 2003, during the 10th Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies that I learnt more about Younghusband through Hildegard Diemberger, who was at that time preparing a project proposal to survey the Tibetan literary legacy left to the British institutions by the Younghusband mission to Tibet a hundred years ago. I had just defended my thesis on the philosophy of Emptiness at Oxford and was about to embark on post-doctoral research in Paris.

In the following months, an interest in Younghusband, his so-called civil mission to Tibet and its literary bequest now dispersed in the British archives burgeoned in me through the advice and persuasion of late E. Gene Smith and Alak Zengkar Rinpoche, the two most distinguished luminaries in the field of Tibetan Buddhist bibliographical and archival studies. They enticed me on an adventure to rediscover and unravel the 'hidden treasures' which lay in the restricted sanctuaries of the British archival repositories.

Stephen Hughes-Jones, Hildegard Diemberger and Craig Jamieson, the project applicants, had meanwhile secured full funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) under its Resource Enhancement Scheme to run the project in the Mongolian and Inner Asian Studies Unit in the Department of Social Anthropology, Cambridge. The project was to be executed as a collaborative venture among scholars and institutions in the UK, US, Europe and Tibet. It built a network of professional consultants and advisors including experts on Tibetan, Mongolian, Indian and Buddhist Studies and bibliographical technology. I came on board officially in March 2004 as chief researcher for the project.

The project aimed at conserving, consolidating and cataloguing the Tibetan and Mongolian resources available in the University Library, Cambridge, the British Library and the Bodleian Library. However, our primary focus was on what we loosely termed the Younghusband Collection, the Tibetan texts acquired during the 1903-4 British mission to Tibet, which perhaps formed the single largest acquisition of Tibetan literature made during British colonial history and is one of the most significant collections of the Edwardian period. It comprised significant portions of the Tibetan collections in the three libraries concerned. The collection was obtained at the peak of the British Raj and at a time of intense political tension between the greatest military and imperial powers of the day. This short paper presents a brief account of the mission and process of acquiring the books so as to explain the provenance of the collection.

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The infamous Younghusband Mission, which turned out *de facto* to be a full-scale invasion of Tibet, took place during the viceroyalty of Lord Curzon (1899-1905). The British Government was under the suspicion that the Tsarist Russian hegemony was spreading to Tibet at the invitation of the thirteenth Dalai Lama Thubten Gyatsho and through the Buryat monk Dorjjeff. The British were convinced, without any evidence, of growing Russian presence in Lhasa, the Forbidden City. With the Great Game or rivalry for supremacy in Central Asia between the British Empire and Tsarist Russia at its height, control over Tibet was both militarily strategic and commercially beneficial as a gateway to China. The suspicion of Russian presence led to an active British campaign to enter Tibet against a strong isolationist policy adopted by Lhasa since late 18th century toward the outside world in general and the British power in India in particular.

It was in such a political climate that Lord Curzon appointed Colonel Francis Younghusband, an earnest adventurer and ambitious imperial officer, to head a civil mission to Lhasa escorted by a large army of some 3000 soldiers and 7000 support staff under Brigadier James Macdonald. The British desire to enter Tibet at all costs and the fierce Tibetan resistance to it unfolded into a bloody war on the Roof of the World during which its inhabitants suffered tremendous loss of life and were forced eventually to allow the British troops to march into the Forbidden City, to pay the indemnities of the war and to sign a treaty apologising for the resistance. Younghusband, however, returned from Tibet a different man: after experiencing something of an epiphany on the high mountains of Tibet he became an advocate and author of a proto-new age spirituality and the founder of the World Congress of Faiths.

One of the persons on the mission was Colonel Lawrence Austine Waddell, a medical doctor. Called 'a miserable old woman' by Younghusband in a letter to his father,¹ he was the archaeologist to the mission and was also the main person responsible for the acquisition of the collection. Charles Allen later called him 'the chief looter'² for this role. Beside Captain Frederick O'Connor, the official interpreter for the mission, Waddell was the only officer who had some knowledge of Tibetan and things Tibetan. He appears to have had a strong inclination for cultural exploration and some prior knowledge of Buddhism. Although his knowledge of Tibetan culture and religions was totally inadequate to properly understand its intricacies and underlying concepts, it was for his days a rare and admirable achievement.

Like Younghusband and most other of his colonial colleagues, Waddell approached Tibet with a mixture of curiosity and superciliousness. The mood of the mission was infused with the ethos of Victorian grandeur and the glory of the British Empire. British imperialism was at its apex with the strong fervour of British supremacy. Unlike some of the earlier visitors to the Himalayas such as George Bogle, who, inspired by the age of enlightenment and exploration and motivated by commercial benefits, were open and appreciative of the foreign cultures they encountered, the explorers of the late nineteenth century and beginning of twentieth century were arrogant and oppressive, driven by a sense of their

¹ Cited by P. Fleming (1961), p. 243

² Allen (2004) at <http://newsmine.org/content.php?ol=cabal-elite/globalization/britain/britain-hands-tibet-to-china-on-silver-platter.txt>. Accessed on 3 August, 2011

own superiority and their zeal to promote British imperial interests. This was compounded with the usual explorer's thirst for conquest of unknown places. Entry into the Forbidden City was in itself seen as a trophy by most of the officers in the mission. Only one English man, Manning, had previously managed to barge into Lhasa.

Waddell, like most other colonial masters of that time, believed in the supremacy of the white race and in their duty to subject and rule other people. Given such beliefs, he probably had little love or respect for Tibetan civilization. A glimpse through his *Lhasa and its Mysteries* reveals his imperialistic arrogance and contempt for what he saw as the barbaric and superstitious world of Tibet. In addition, his perceptions of Tibetan culture and religion were often influenced by late Victorian Christian evangelism. Like many other early western scholars, he calls Tibetan Buddhism 'Lamaism'. Padmasambhava he describes as the 'wizard king', the Dalai Lama as 'Pope King / Grand Lama', the private chapel of deities as the 'the Devil's Chamber of Horrors' and much of Tibetan Buddhist rituals as 'diabolic'. In his description, Tibetan Buddhism was 'a disastrous parasitic disease'.³ He calls it, 'a cloak to the worst forms of oppressive devil-worship, by which the poor Tibetan was placed in constant fear of his life from the attacks of thousands of malignant devils both in this life and in the world to come, and necessitating never-ending payments to the priests of large sums to avert these calamities.'⁴ Tibet's socio-political structures are seen as the most repressive and backward.

With reference to the conflict at Guru, a battle on the mission's progress towards Lhasa in which several hundred Tibetans were killed, Waddell regrets the bloodshed but justifies it saying 'enemies as the Tibetans were, not only of ourselves, but in some sense, by reason of their savagery and superstition, of the human race.'⁵ Such hyperbolic observations of Waddell may be insincere travesties to feed a British audience hungry for accounts of patriotism, British superiority and expanding imperialism but it is generally not difficult to see Waddell's disregard for Tibet and its people.

Seen in the light of such condemning prejudice, it is very unlikely that Waddell had any interest to collect Buddhist manuscripts, which represent the depth and spirit of Tibetan civilization, for what they are. Their interest lay more in their material and monetary value as curios for museums and private collections. There was a growing popular interest in Britain to collect Oriental artefacts and curios both for public institutions and private possession. Beside, according to Carrington,⁶ looting after a military action, had become institutionalised in the British imperial system although it was increasingly being brought into question on moral grounds by the time of Younghusband's mission to Tibet. The plundering of artefacts and texts was in fact seen as part of a more general scramble for information and knowledge and it fitted well in the imperial scheme in which knowledge was power.

Whatever his motive, Waddell seems to have been earnest in his interest to collect books and other artefacts. He even claims to have risked his life to collect the books. He writes: "On

³ Waddell (1988), pp. 22-30, 25, 32, 115-6, 226-9

⁴ Ibid., p. 25

⁵ Ibid., p. 160

⁶ Carrington, (2003), p. 82.

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being told that there were several Tibetan books in the house of the headman, I hurried in through a labyrinth of dark passages, crowded with boxes of gunpowder, and found some books, which I had brought out hastily as the adjoining house was afire, and I had to run the gauntlet of explosions, which were occurring all around, and the house in which I had been blew up a short time afterwards.”⁷ The books, he remarks, had also given him protection from explosives thrown at them when the British were under siege in the Changlo manor in Gyantse.⁸



Much of the collection, Waddell claims, was collected by May 1903, thus in and on the way to Gyantse where negotiations began. The books, he says, were collected ‘under exceptionally favourable circumstances of acquiring rare manuscripts and volumes otherwise unobtainable’.⁹ These ‘favourable circumstances’ were the numerous military clashes during which the invading army besieged and ransacked several monastic and family establishments. Almost all of the texts and artefacts acquired by the mission, both officially and individually, were the booty of lawless looting. Very little was collected after Gyantse according to Waddell, due to ‘unfavourable circumstances’. After the last battle at Kharo La pass, the Tibetans surrendered and gave in to British demands to enter Lhasa. There was no confrontation and this left the mission with very little opportunities to loot. Besides, Younghusband had by then lost the unflagging support of the Government of India for the Tibet campaign, which came from his chief ally and patron Lord Curzon, and was instead sternly reprimanded for exercising excessive authority and senseless looting.

⁷ Waddell (1988), p. 162

⁸ Waddell (1912), pp. 6

⁹ Ibid., p. 1

When the British mission returned from Tibet, after signing a nominal treaty and finding no Russian presence, Waddell brought back with him '300 mule loads'¹⁰ of about 2000 volumes of religious books. In his account, he laments the lack of an organized system to exploit the wonderful opportunity for collecting rare books presented by the Younghusband expedition and that it was left up to 'mere chance initiative of one or more enthusiastic private individuals' to acquire rare manuscripts that were otherwise unobtainable. F.W. Thomas of the India Office Library and C. Bendall of Cambridge University wrote to the Government of India stressing the importance of the acquisition of books but Waddell sorely regretted that their letters both 'arrived too late to materially assist in increasing the collection'. He also bemoans the cumbersome 'process of handling these ponderous packages, and untying them to examine their titles and contents and retying the bundles', cataloguing, labelling, sorting the books for distribution to the different libraries and arranging them for transport, all these in the intervals of professional duties in the midst of battles in a hostile country. He claims that 'every single volume of this huge Tibetan collection was selected with my own hands'.¹¹

Waddell collected for both the Government of India and for himself - but it is difficult to verify what proportions were intended for each party. The list he wrote for *Asiatic Quarterly Review* in 1912 was based on the provisional list he made in Tibet and the lists the librarians at India Office Library, the British Museum and Cambridge University Library provided of the books they had received. However, we know that most of the books were sorted, packed and then later shipped to the UK where the collection got distributed between the libraries of Oxford, Cambridge, the British Museum and the India Office. The latter two collections have now been put together in the British Library. For over 100 years these books and manuscripts remained obscure and unopened, an under-exploited treasure house of Edwardian scholarship that was never properly catalogued. Hence the appropriateness of a cataloguing project under the AHRC's Resource Enhancement scheme.

The collection of books obtained by Waddell during the Younghusband Expedition contains five canonical corpuses including three *kanjur*, one *tanjur* and one *rnying ma rgyud 'bum*, and several hundreds of miscellaneous titles. Of these canons, the 106 volumes of the Shel dkar manuscript *kanjur* and 218 volumes of the sNar thang *tanjur* were presented to the British Museum and 96 volumes of the sNar thang *kanjur* to the India Office library. Four volumes of this copy of the sNar thang *kanjur* are said to have been lost in transit and four other volumes of the sNar thang *tanjur* to have been lent to the Professor of Pali in Calcutta, thus rendering the sets incomplete.¹² The 91 volumes of the sNar thang *kanjur* given to the Bodleian are also incomplete and said to be in poor condition having been damaged by dampness and rodents. The manuscript *kanjur* from Shel dkar, which is an exceptional item belonging to the *Them spang ma* recension and now known as the London *kanjur*, was also incomplete. Long after the collection was presented to the India Office, two volumes were sold at an auction and acquired by the Bodleian Library.¹³

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 4

¹¹ Ibid., p. 5

¹² Ibid., p. 19

¹³ Pagel and Gaffney (1996)

One of the rare and exquisite items in the Younghusband Collection is the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* manuscript, which was probably produced in honour of Rig 'dzin Tshe dbang Nor bu (1698-1755). This collection has hence been called the Rig 'dzin Tshe dbang Nor bu edition of *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* or the Waddell *rGyud 'bum*. The books have been produced with much care and with beautiful illustrations. On this, Waddell remarks that 'one of the finest sets of these illuminated manuscripts in twenty-nine large volumes was presented by me out of my own private collection to the India Office Library, where the volumes have safely arrived.'¹⁴ Waddell sent only twenty-nine volumes to the India Office Library out of what is now assumed to have originally been thirty-three volumes labelled with thirty Tibetan letters Ka to A and O∞ A | and Hu∞.¹⁵ The volumes Ka, Ga, Ta and O∞ were not included in the collection but the first volume, Ka, went on auction many years later and was procured by the Bodleian Library. Two of the title leaves belonging to Ga and A were also auctioned separately and acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum but the title leaves of Ca and Sha are still missing. The O∞ volume has been recently found among books in the British Library acquired from a private collector, who perhaps bought it from Waddell. Thus, thirty-one volumes belonging to this edition are now available.

We can see from the above account that the manner in which Waddell variously distributed the books among the libraries, kept copies for himself, and sold some privately, is far from a simple and straightforward story. It seems there was no clear distinction between what he acquired for himself and what was acquired by him for the Government of India. The lists Waddell gave of the books he acquired and presented to the libraries were also not consistent. His private collection was also not listed and, apart from the volumes in the Bodleian and British Library and the folios in the Victoria and Albert Museum, the rest of Waddell's own books were sold to a museum in Berlin.

The Cambridge University Library did not receive any of the canonical corpuses in the Younghusband collection but was sent some 39 sets of books of miscellaneous titles. It is very difficult to determine exactly how many titles or texts were sent and how many received. Firstly there is the usual problem of the amorphous nature of listing Tibetan literature, in which sometimes a multi-volume work is listed as one book while at other times even sub-sections of a small text are considered independent books. In addition to this the [List of Tibetan Collection Sent to Cambridge](#), which was despatched with the books to the librarian in Cambridge does not agree with Waddell's own list provided at the end of his article.¹⁶ Following my own scheme for defining an individual book or title which I discuss in my Introduction to the catalogue, I have listed a total of 239 titles including 67 manuscripts and 172 blockprints in the Younghusband Collection at the University Library, Cambridge. In comparison, the Bodleian Library in Oxford holds 50 manuscripts and 87 blockprints in addition to the incomplete sNar thang *kanjur*. The main bulk of the Younghusband Collection is in the British Library, including two main corpuses of *kanjur*, one *tanjur*, one *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* and some 348 miscellaneous titles.

¹⁴ Waddell (1912),p. 5

¹⁵ Mayer, Cantwell and Fischer (2002) at http://ngb.csac.anthropology.ac.uk/Title_page_main.html.

¹⁶ Waddell (1912), pp. 19-35

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The Younghusband Collection in its entirety has now been re-assembled in virtual form and reproduced in microfilm and digital format through the AHRC-funded Tibetan-Mongolian Rare Books and Manuscripts project at Cambridge University, for which I was employed as chief researcher. The main aim of this project was to conserve the Younghusband Collection and the other Tibetan materials in the Cambridge University Library through duplication in the most viable format and to enhance their visibility and accessibility. We achieved these objectives fully by the end of the project through creating copies of the books and by compiling a detailed catalogue. Today, the entire Younghusband Collection, in all three repositories of the British Library, Cambridge and Oxford, and all other Tibetan books in the University Library Cambridge have been copied and consolidated as both microfilm copies and digital surrogates. Microfilms have proven to be quite durable while digital images, notwithstanding their flexibility and reproducibility, are recent inventions whose overall lifespan is yet to be known. With this in mind, we decided to consolidate the collection in both formats.

Most of the microfilming was undertaken by the project; where works had already been filmed, we have compiled copies of the films. The project has also managed to cover the Tibetan collections in the Ancient India and Iran Trust, Cambridge and the World Museum, Liverpool and also many Mongolian books in the British Library and Cambridge. The microfilms have then been scanned to create bitonal, greyscale digital images. Books with coloured scripts and illuminations have been photographed to produce full coloured images. Beside the documentation and digitisation of the books, a comprehensive catalogue has also been written in order to facilitate the use of these resources.

A digital catalogue for the Younghusband Collection at University Library, Cambridge and the Bodleian Library, Oxford has also been produced and is available online.¹⁷ However, as the catalogue for the Younghusband Collection in the British Library forms part of their larger catalogue, this has not been included at the same address. The online catalogue of the Younghusband materials at Cambridge and Oxford also covers the Tibetan books in the Ancient India and Iran Trust and in the Liverpool World Museum in their entirety and all Tibetan books acquired by Cambridge University Library prior to 1960, i.e. before the tragic destruction of the Tibetan literary heritage during the Chinese invasion and the Cultural Revolution which followed it. Some books produced before this period but acquired later were also included in the catalogue but no modern Tibetan books printed in India or China towards the end of the twentieth century have been included. These collections at Cambridge University Library, Ancient India and Iran Trust and Liverpool World Museum have so far remained largely unknown and inaccessible to the general readers.

The reproduction of the texts in microfilm and digital scans and the task of writing a catalogue for most of them have, as expected, helped us gain a thorough knowledge of the content, extent and composition of Younghusband Collection. The project provided the opportunity to unravel assumptions about the Younghusband collection, which had been neglected and hidden for over a century, and to assess its significance as a whole. The collection may have seemed quite poor in its content at a first glance, but it gradually proved

¹⁷ The catalogue can be accessed <http://catalogue.socanth.cam.ac.uk/exist/servlet/db/mssbp.xq>

to be a substantial one, especially for an acquisition made in an era when knowledge of Tibetan literature was almost non-existent, in the process of a ravaging war, and with only lukewarm state or institutional support to collect books. The collection, Waddell claimed, was 'by far the richest and the largest collection of Tibetan literature to reach Europe'.¹⁸ This was certainly true for Britain. The collection also contains a great number of early woodblock prints such as the *Mani bka' 'bum* from mNga' ris Khyung rdzong dkar po which has a detailed colophon providing much information and insight into the historical and literary activities taking place at the time of its production. It also contains multiple copies and recensions of some texts which can prove useful for codicological and philological studies. A substantial portion of the block prints were from bKra shis lhun po, which was the predominant religious establishment in the gTsang region through which the mission passed and in which Waddell collected most of his books. For us, it confirms the preponderance of bKra shis lhun po's influence and books in the region and its thriving book production before and at the time of the mission.

The Younghusband Collection is by no means a collection of books with exceptional artistic, textual or religious values handpicked by an expert collector. This might have been predicted given Waddell's character and attitudes, his limited knowledge of Tibetan language, culture and religion and the circumstances of his collecting activities all mentioned above. The collection is neither from a single source nor preserves any of the sources in its entirety. It thus has no thematic integrity or internal cohesion with regard to its source, topics of content or collector's interest. It is a collection of largely open and random acquisition made in the midst of the ravages of war and represents a wide range of books which were generally available in the temples and family homes in Tibet at the beginning of the twentieth century. The new and only integral distinction and shared feature we can now impose on this assortment of diverse books is their history of acquisition through the Younghusband mission and their recent reassembly as a catalogue, microfilms and as virtual surrogates through the Tibetan and Mongolian Rare Books and Manuscripts project. It is quite fortuitous, as Zengkar Rinpoche noted, that this body of texts, which could have been easily reduced to ashes during the Chinese invasion of Tibet and the Cultural Revolution, survives intact to this day in the British libraries as the Younghusband Collection. A major credit for this textual legacy, no doubt, must go to the Younghusband mission and Lawrence Austine Waddell, however unethical and dishonourable their mode of acquisition may have been.

¹⁸ Waddell (1912), p. 1

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