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Text and Paintings
A Preliminary Study of Indien 745, a Manuscript of the Bibliothèque nationale de France

ABSTRACT: The manuscript now preserved as Indien 745 in the Manuscript Department of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) contains 137 paintings by an Indian artist, each accompanied by an explanation in French. These paintings depict deities and sages in static posture or narrative mode, as well as icons associated with temples. The present contribution forms a preliminary study of this manuscript in our project on South Indian manuscripts with paintings of deities preserved in the BnF.

KEYWORDS: Indien 745, Bibliothèque nationale de France, paintings, deities, 17th–18th century

The manuscript now preserved as Indien 745 in the Manuscript Department of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) contains 137 paintings

by an Indian artist, each accompanied by an explanation in French. These paintings depict deities and sages in static posture or narrative mode, as well as icons associated with temples. The present contribution forms a preliminary study of this manuscript in our project on South Indian manuscripts with paintings of deities preserved in the BnF.[1] Our approach in this project will not be that of cultural history that sometimes sees orientalism or ethnology in European intellectual works on India from the 16th to the 18th century. We will not deal with South Indian painting in general, nor with art, aesthetics, art history or the circulation of artefacts from South India. The aim of this article, in keeping with the theme of the present CIS volume, is to discuss the relation between word and image as observed in Indien 745. This article does not intend to compare Indien 745 with other similar works.[2]

Description of the manuscript

The binding of Indien 745 is *à la française*. Covered with a worn leather that appears to be sheepskin (*basane*), it may have been made in India.[3] An arabesque frame of foliage and flowers is drawn in black on the outside of the upper and lower boards. The back shows six raised bands. The paper is French with undated watermark. The number of quires cannot be known without dismantling the binding. The first quire consists of eight folios. The folios measure 220 mm in width and 355 mm in height. The total number of folios is 283: four unnumbered folios ([A] blank, [B] with the preamble (*Aduertissemens*),[4] [C] blank and

[1] This project will not deal with the manuscripts that contain paintings of deities without accompanying text, nor with the so-called Mughal and Company paintings.

[2] For descriptions of collections of paintings from South India accompanied or not by texts, see, for example, Dallapiccola 2010 and Hurel 2011.

[3] We would like to thank Ms Marie-Pierre Laffitte (General Curator of Libraries) and Mr Laurent Héricher (General Curator of Libraries, Head of the Orient Service in the Manuscript Department of the BnF) for this information.

[4] On the top right side of folio [B] is inscribed in pencil "Indien 100," an old call number (used in Blochet 1900: 180–186).

[D], blank on the recto, with the commentary of painting 1 on the verso; then 230 folios (115 folios numbered 1 to 115 bearing paintings 1 to 115 on the recto, each of which is followed by an interleaved folio with the recto blank and the verso inscribed with the commentary on the following painting); then 45 folios (23 folios numbered from 120 to 142 with paintings 120 to 142 on the recto, each of which—except for folio 142—is followed by an interleaved folio with the recto blank and the verso inscribed with the commentary on the next painting); and finally four blank unnumbered folios [E], [F], [G] and [H].

Origin of the manuscript

That the manuscript was prepared in South India is evident for several reasons: it contains paintings of deities honoured particularly in Tamil and Telugu countries; most of the temples depicted are located in South India, with rare exceptions (for example, Badarikāśrama, painting 112);[5] the names of the deities often appear to be French transcriptions from Tamil or Telugu languages;[6] the explanation of the *liṅga* of Mallikārjuna (e110) as that which is worshipped "on the northern side" (*Du Coste du Nort*) may indicate that the commentator was writing in an area south of Śrīśailam (where this Mallikārjuna temple is located, in the present Telangana state of South India). This geographical origin does not signify that the paintings of Indien 745 belong to a style that could be called "South Indian." Moreover the very notion of "South Indian painting" remains to be defined by art historians given the number of schools, styles and idioms they identify in South Indian art of the 17th to 19th century.[7] Also, factors such as the migration of artists according to the fortunes of their patrons, the influence of local

[5] Hereafter, the mention of the number alone refers to that of the painting and the mention of the number preceded by "e" ("e" for "explanation") refers to the explanation of the painting concerned.

[6] Exceptionally, the transcription of the letter *va* as *ba* and of *a* as *o* is observed, for example in *Bamon* for Vāmana (6), showing the influence of a language from the North-East (Bengali or Oriya), a region bordering the extreme north of Telugu country.

[7] See, for instance, Dallapiccola 2010: 15, 17–19, etc.

traditions, varied time spans of styles, etc., make it difficult to determine the date and place of production of paintings on the basis of comparison with other paintings.

The date of preparation of this work is unknown. Indien 745 is ascribed to 18th century by Blochet and Cabaton (Blochet 1900: 180 and Cabaton 1912: 109) perhaps because it is described in the Catalogue of the Royal Library published in 1739. Mitter assigns it to a period not later than early 18th century due to its similarity to missionary works of late 17th and early 18th century (Mitter 1992: 323). According to Becherini, following Jakimowicz-Shah, Indien 745 seems to have been acquired by a Frenchman in Andhra Pradesh in the early 18th century (Becherini 2017: 329, n. 40.). None of these scholars present a precise argument for the period and the origin they propose.

There are no indications about the person (missionary, traveller, collector, or other) who acquired Indien 745 or the milieu which had it prepared. It is quite possible that the author of the commentary belonged to a Catholic mission, more specifically Capuchin or Jesuit. It may be noted that the French Capuchin mission in Madras (active from 1642 to the end of the 17th century) is said to have prepared a collection of paintings describing the deities honoured around Madras, accompanying a *Mémoire* that is apparently lost (Richard 1995: 67). In fact the commentary on painting 23 of Indien 745 states: "as it is represented in the table of castes" (*comme il est représenté dans la table des castes*). Could this refer to a part of the above *Mémoire* and by consequence be a proof that Indien 745 comes from the Capuchin milieu? The BnF keeps four manuscripts (dated 1666, 1667 and 1677) of Christian texts composed in Tamil by the French Capuchin missionaries of Madras themselves or under their direction (Muthuraj 1986: ix and 44; Richard 1989: 161–162). If Indien 745 is of Capuchin origin, it is likely that it later passed into Jesuit hands. Indeed, the manuscript Od 38 pet. fol. (BnF, Estampes), probably of Jesuit origin, acquired from a Jesuit brother named Perchec[8]

[8] Perchec or Le Perchec, being a Breton surname, this Jesuit brother could have belonged to a group of Jesuits coming from the West of France.

by the Royal Library in 1763,[9] contains copies of paintings of Indien 745 (or its original) with almost identical French commentaries.[10]

The other conjecture is that Indien 745 was prepared exclusively in a Jesuit environment.[11] It should be remembered that the Jesuits of the 17th and 18th centuries were particularly interested in the religious use of images as an instrument for the propagation of Christianity in India and Asia in general.[12]

The date of arrival of the manuscript Indien 745 in France remains unknown.[13] The *terminus ante quem* of the manuscript's presence in the Royal Library is 1739. The entry numbered XI of the *Codices indici* in volume I of the Catalogue of the Royal Library (published in 1739)

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[9] See inventory BnF Estampes Réserve Ye 1 pet. fol., fol. 211r: "Dessins [surmounted by "et gravure chinoises" in the same hand] acquis ~~en 1763~~ [surmounted by "1763" in pencil], du frere Perchec, Jésuite, en 1763 / un an apres ~~lors de~~ la supression de la Societé. savoir" [then follow the titles and inventory numbers of nineteen volumes, and at the bottom of the page: "Puis trois autres volumes contenant des dessins coloriés, savoir 1290—Le Premier contient Les Dieux des Indiens et Deesse de leurs Pagodes. [etc.]." The number 1290 of this inventory is found on a blank folio at the beginning of Od 38 pet. fol.

In the transcription by Hurel 2010 (p. 43, note 72) of the passage "frere Perchec, Jésuite, en 1763," "frère Bouchet [?]" is a conjecture for "frere Perchec" and "envoyés" a mis reading for "en 1763." Thus there is no indication that Od 38 pet. fol. is from the Jesuit father Venant Bouchet (of the Carnate mission, died 1732), contrary to the assumption of Hurel 2010, which became an affirmation in Hurel 2011 (p. 149: "Provenance: 1763, deposit by the Society of Jesus of the gift of Father Venant Bouchet, Jesuit" [trans. from French]).

[10] For a comparison of Indien 745 with Od 38 pet. fol. see our forthcoming article.

[11] This could be the mission that became the Carnate mission (1688–1689 and following years): see Colas and Colas-Chauhan 1995: 8.

[12] See Bailey 1999. The Pietist Lutherans of Tranquebar, too, collected information about Indian religious beliefs, including paintings of temple deities, as indicated by Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg in his *Genealogie der malabarischen Götter* (written in 1713) (see Becherini 2017: 316–317).

[13] Jakimowicz-Shah (1988: 8) states that "The set [that is, Indien 745 and the Warsaw University Library manuscript Inw. zb. d. 21944/1–105] was acquired by the library [that is, the Bibliothèque Royale, Paris] between the years 1682 and 1748 according to the inventories" without giving the references of these inventories.

describes the manuscript now numbered Indien 745:[14] "Manuscript on paper, in which are contained images of the gods and goddesses who are honoured among the Indians, by an anonymous eyewitness of all these things while residing in India, and they are very carefully represented."[15] The identification of Indien 745 with the manuscript described in entry XI cannot be doubted because the number "11" is written in ink and underlined by a brace[16] in the left margin of the first painting of Indien 745.[17] Moreover, Dupuis' description in 1794–1795 of the manuscript referred to as "Bibliothèque nationale, n°11" and of several of its paintings corresponds to the present Indien 745 (Dupuis 1794–1795: 599).

[14] This cannot be Indien 744, an album of paintings of deities (but also castes, etc.) which bears the date 1831.

[15] See *Catalogus Codicum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Regiae*, *Tomus Primus* (Paris, Imprimerie royale, 1739), Codices indici, p. 434: "XI./ Codex chartaceus, quo continentur deorum & dearum quae apud Indos, coluntur imagines, ab anonymo, rerum omnium, dum India versabatur, oculato teste, accuratissimè depictae."

[16] This way of presenting the call number is common for Indian manuscripts in the old manuscript collection of the BnF. See, for example, Colas and Colas-Chauhan 1995, entries for Indien 582, Indien 600, Indien 609, Indien 634, Sanskrit 876.

[17] Jakimowicz-Shah (1988: 8) reads the number "11" of Indien 745 as a "II" in Roman numerals and conjectures that Indien 745 is the second of a set of two volumes, and that manuscript 476 in the Warsaw University Library (the current call number of the manuscript is Inw. zb. d. 21944/1–105) would be the first of this set. This and the conjecture that one volume is Śaiva and the other Vaiṣṇava (see below) is unfortunately accepted without discussion by other scholars (Hurel 2011: 13; Guy 2011: 174, n. 39). It should be noted that Jakimowicz-Shah gives her own numbers to the paintings and they do not correspond to the painting numbers in the manuscript. Although the treatment of the subjects, decorative elements and binding, as well as the handwriting of the French captions are very similar in the two manuscripts, the hand which painted the personages is different. Moreover, the Warsaw manuscript contains the names of the deities in Telugu in the margins while Indien 745 does not. We thank Dr Małgorzata Biłozór-Salwa (Curator of the Old Master Drawings Collection, University of Warsaw Library) and the staff of the Imaging Services for their help in procuring a digital copy of the Warsaw manuscript.

Album or book?

Did the very concept of paintings on paper and bound in a book form exist among Indians before their contact with non-Indians, Persians or Europeans? Did the Indians themselves make or commission such albums?[18] Were the paintings sold separately or in bound collections to pilgrims or local lords?[19] According to some modern authors, artists' families kept collections of drawings of deities and other subjects, (Dallapiccola 2010: 22) but this observation concerns a period after the production of Indien 745. The prescriptions for paintings of deities on cloth in the fine arts treatises (*śilpaśāstra*) do not allow us to infer the existence of such collections either. The transmission of models through observation and oral or written instructions could explain these representations of deities without assuming the existence of collections of paintings in artistic circles. It is also possible that painters of temple or palace murals[20] or craftsmen using colour to decorate various artefacts (Hurel 2011: 29) responded to commissions for paintings on paper from European or Indian clients.

Indien 745 is not a mere collection or album of paintings, but a book of images and their explanations. Thus, the commentator's preamble presents the manuscript as a book (*liuure*). Can we not place Indien 745 in the lineage of Christian books about religious images (identified by a marginal text, explained by a commentary and leading to meditation), a genre that reached its consecration with the Jesuits of the 16th century?[21]

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[18] An inscription on Od 40 pet. fol. states: "it is said that this collection belonged to a famous Brame" [trans. from French] (Hurel 2011: 14). According to Jakimowicz-Shah (1988: 18), the Warsaw manuscript "may have been made for a local ruler or for sale to pilgrims."

[19] See Jakimowicz-Shah 1988: 18 (about the Warsaw manuscript); Hurel 2011: 137 (in relation to Od 40b).

[20] For South Indian temple, palace and manuscript paintings, see Sivaramamurti 1994; Hurel 2011: 14.

[21] According to Chatelain (1992: 331 ff.), one of the origins of this kind of work is the 16th century commentary on emblems, combining text and emblem.

The aim in the case of Indien 745 is neither religious nor meditational, but to help the reader understand the Indian pantheon. The explanations in this manuscript were intended to be as important as the paintings, if not more so. The very physical form of this book testifies to the close relationship of the explanation to the painting: the alternation of the explanation on the verso and the painting on the recto of the next folio, facing each other, is continuous. In short, the back and forth between explanations and paintings is direct, textually and visually.

The order of the paintings

The 137 paintings are numbered in the hand of the commentator, from 1 to 115, then from 120 to 142. The choice of subjects does not indicate any sectarian affiliation, whether Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva or other,[22] of the painter of the volume or a preference of the commissioner. It is impossible today to measure precisely how the exchanges between the artist, the commentator and the patron (if he was not the same as the commentator) played out. How much freedom did the painter have in the order of the paintings, in the choice and treatment of subjects? Did the commentator have specific wishes, such as a certain documentary realism or the choice of certain subjects? One of his interventions is obvious: he supplied the painter with French paper quires of a certain format with instructions regarding the blank folios which were to receive an explanatory text.

Indien 745 is a compilation whose overall order, if there was one, is difficult to identify. However, the painter probably arranged certain paintings in micro-series. For example, ten incarnations (*avatāra*s) of Viṣṇu (2–11, Kṛṣṇa is missing); deities of the directions and intermediate directions (12–16, Vāyu, Kubera and Īśāna missing), characters from the *Rāmāyaṇa* (93–104); the five Pāṇḍavas (*5 Darme Rages*) as

[22] Contrary to Jakimowicz-Shah's affirmation that Indien 745 is "Saivite in content" and that the Warsaw manuscript is Vaiṣṇavite (1988: 8, 11, 28). Indien 745 contains the paintings of Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava and other deities.

well as their wife (56–61), temple deities (62–65, 136–138), etc. Several series of paintings depict episodes from epics or the legend of temples (Paraśurāma-Jamadagni 49–50, *vālivadha* 100–103). Some other paintings were gathered on the basis of iconographic features: three deities in yoga postures (Yogīśvara, Yoganārāyaṇa, Yoganarasiṃha 17–19); three figures possessing animal characteristics: snake body (Sarpa-ṛṣi), tiger body (Puruṣamṛga) and horned body (Ṛṣyaśṛṅga) (67–69). In contrast, some themes appear scattered throughout the volume, such as Kṛṣṇa's exploits (*vastrāpaharaṇa* 105, *govardhanagiridhara* 109, *kāliyamardana* 111, slaying of different *asura*s 130–133), etc. At times, the succession of the paintings does not correspond to the chronology of events of a story (Tārā mourns in front of her dead husband Vāli in 101, while Rāma is depicted aiming at Vāli to kill him in 102). This could indicate that the originally conceived order was disrupted even before the numbering and explanations of the paintings were written, when the quires were bound into a volume.

The pictorial treatment

The pictorial treatment of the 137 paintings appears to be specific to the artistic culture of the Indian painter and does not show any European influence. The rather thick colours of the paintings can be described as gouaches.[23] All the subjects are painted within a double frame border of red and yellow. The painting sometimes extends beyond this frame, for example, 33 (the *dhoti* of Mahiśāsura), 36 (the tail of the serpent Śeṣa and the lotus below the feet of Viṣṇu), 93–97 (tails of monkey kings), 132 (hand and feet of Bakāsura). The frame sometimes seems to have been painted after the subject (104, 106). Very often, a bracketed arch or one with multiple lobes, from which small garlands of flowers hang, is placed in the upper part of the frame. The figures are sometimes seated

[23] The technical, aesthetic and stylistic analysis of the paintings is beyond the scope of this article.

on a moulded pedestal which evokes a temple statue (for example, 42), and sometimes on a sort of moulded dais (23, 58, 71, etc.).

Despite the diversity of subjects, the paintings show unity of style, notably through the use of a true aesthetic vocabulary. The paintings resort to many models and motifs (recumbent Viṣṇu, dress, textile designs, jewellery) in a recurrent manner. The background colours are often plain, sometimes interspersed with flowers of various colours. Flowery decorations and other motifs are profusely used both for the backgrounds and for the clothing of the figures. The painter also used gold and silver colours, especially for the jewellery of the figures, which have oxidised over time.

What dominates are two-dimensional flat surfaces (*à-plat*), without perspective in the Western sense of the term. However, the painter plays with darker and lighter strokes to render the modelling of anthropomorphic and animal bodies. The faces of the characters are often depicted from the front. Temple icons are represented from the front, which corresponds to the vision of these icons by the devotee in the sanctuary and, one must add, to the gaze that the icon-divinities are supposed to direct on the devotees (Colas 2018a: 163, 163 n. 90). The body of the deity is often painted from frontal view even when the head is represented in profile. This device is often used to indicate or draw attention to the physical particularity of the personage, notably the head of a monkey (28, 93–94, 96, etc.), elephant (44), or horse (11) on human bodies. Faces in profile also appear in narrative paintings where the action of a personage is directed towards another (for example, 92). Depictions of figures in lost profile are rare (39). In procession scenes, the icon being carried is depicted in front while the chariot or palanquin and the actors (bearers, chariot drivers, horses), in motion, are in profile (86–87, 142). Thus, the frontal representation of the deity takes precedence over the orientation of his vehicle (125) and his entourage.

Times, spaces and their symbiosis

The deities depicted in static mode are generally in their normative representation, identifiable by their attributes, mounts, etc. For example,

Śiva with drum and fire in his hands and Gaṅgā in his matted hair (20), Viṣṇu with conch and disc (18), Kumārasvāmin on peacock (66), and others. The paintings of temple icons are in static mode (Veṅkaṭeśvara at Tirupati and Varadarāja at Kāñcipuram, 22 and 34). Hills (e.g., Aruṇācala at Tiruvannamalai, 62), rivers and islands (e.g., Kāverī at Srirangam, 124), tanks (e.g., Mahabalipuram, 126) and trees (tamarind tree at Alvartirunagari, 75) connected with the temples are sometimes depicted along with the deities in static mode. Narrative paintings, on the other hand, recount one episode of a story, for instance, Śiva preventing Kannappa from gouging out his own eyes to offer them to god (26). Different moments of the same episode are sometimes evoked simultaneously in the same painting to narrate the story. For example, *asura*s who come to kill Kṛṣṇa are shown both in their non-offensive disguises and in their real forms once slain by Kṛṣṇa (the ogress [*bhūtaki*] in her disguise of a beautiful woman [Pūtanā] and in her true form of demoness when sucked to death by child Kṛṣṇa, 130 [Fig. 3–4]; 131–133, etc.); Bali is shown in a single painting before he grants three steps of ground to Vāmana and after he is pushed down into the netherworld by the third step on his head by Vāmana, now turned into Trivikrama (113). A story is also narrated in successive paintings, each reporting the ensuing event (Paraśurāma killing his mother Reṇukā and getting blessings from his father Jamadagni [49–50], Rāma slaying Vālin and restoring the kingdom to Sugrīva [100–103]).

The pictorial management of spaces, various times and space-times in the paintings is ingenious. Temple icons are indicated by the presence of cult utensils (e.g., 52), priests (63) or devotees (27), which suggest depth or spatial distance (e.g., 53, icon of reclining Viṣṇu with his right hand on the head of a devotee; 121, two birds flying and a devotee kneeling in front of the *liṅga*). Another mode of presentation of space is created in the paintings by a division into frames or niches, which allows several specific spaces to be shown simultaneously. For example, in the painting of the temple of Kāśīviśvanātha (128), no less than eight panels can be distinguished, some consisting of rectangular

frames, others of niches or chapels (see Fig. 5).[24] A single painting may evoke several spaces and times with the help of a division into several panels simultaneously. For example, the painting of Mahābalipuram (136) depicts, through four separate frames, icons of an existing temple and a mythical temple (?), and a scene from mythological time relating to the site.

The commentator

Without the commentary, the paintings of Indien 745 are for non-Indians pure objects lacking the semantic truth that they have for Indians. The commentarial act aims to fill this void. The commentator gives no indication of the circumstances of the production or acquisition of the paintings. He makes no value judgement either to appreciate the beauty of the paintings or to denigrate them or the figures represented in them. Nor does he discuss the vital importance which representations of deities have for Indian devotees. Apparently, these paintings for him were neither pieces of art nor a source of inspiration of religious feelings, but rather visual documents illustrating Indian pantheon and mythology.

The commentator apparently belongs to a period in which the so-called classical standardisation of French language was not yet widespread.[25] His spelling is noteworthy and, moreover, irregular.[26] Articles are often not separated from nouns, apostrophes are often dropped, etc. If the commentator was a Jesuit, he was perhaps a lay brother not as educated

[24] Depicting the river Ganges, a set of five small *liṅga*s, a large *liṅga* in a cella, a bull kneeling in profile on a green background, the temple pole, Viṣṇu's two feet in profile, a deity seated in lotus posture, again the river Ganges.

[25] It should be remembered that the 'classical' grammatical and linguistic standardisation that gave rise to written French in the 18th century was not generalised, it seems, until around 1690–1695 and was not practised by everyone. On this period, see Brunot 1939: 143–149, 153.

[26] He uses, for example, *j* instead of *g* (*davantaje*); *z* instead of *s* (*choze*); *y* instead of *i* (*velocyté*). See also *fraicherre* for *fraîcheur*; *çauoire* for *savoir*; *hieux* for *yeux*; *bienfezante* for *bienfaisante*; frequent absence of apostrophes; etc. See also *gentils / jentils*; *changé / il set chanjé*; *muzeau* / *muzau*; etc.

as the fathers.[27] He transliterates the Indian terms phonetically, particularly with the help of three diacritical marks, the tilde, the acute accent and a dot above *o*, though he does not apply them methodically (Fig. 1).

The commentator's text and his preamble

The commentator's text consists of three elements: the preamble (folio [B]), the names of the deities above and below each painting, and the explanations (*explication*) (preceded by the number of the painting concerned) on the verso of the intervening folios, facing the paintings. The explanation sometimes refers directly to the painting[28] which proves that the commentator wrote his explanations after the paintings had been executed.

The preamble (Fig. 2) to the reader announces that the author's main project in this book is to "declare the names of the deities which the Gentiles worship, with some small thing [that is, the explanation] at the end."[29] A (full) explanation, he says, would be impossible because it would shock (morally perhaps) the reader's "hearing" (*l ouie*, that is, understanding). So, he makes a simple description from what his informants, Brahmins and Gentiles, tell him. He counters possible criticism of the incompleteness of his descriptions by referring to the multiplicity of views of his informants: according to him some of them are Pythagoreans (alluding to the belief in transmigration), others priapists (alluding to the worship of Śiva in the form of *liṅga*). They live without believing in One Being (*un Estre*), that is, a supreme god. The author then attributes certain characteristics to the Gentiles: they are cunning, malicious, calculating (*fourbes*, *fins*, *aritmaticiens*); they are voracious, greedy, etc. This (harsh) judgement signifies that he lived in contact

[27] For *Jesuit lay brothers*, see Bailey 1999: 46.

[28] For example: *ce que* / *vous voyez sur Les deux Mains deLa figure* (e22); *comme vous* / *voyé dans La figure* (e25); *Elles firent ceque vous voyé* (e105); *jusquá La figure que vous* / *voy couchee* (e136); *Comme vous le voyé En la figure* (e142), etc.

[29] *Declarer Les noms des Diuinites que Les gentils* / *adorent*, *Et quelque petite choze au bout*.

with Indians.[30] He reports that temple icons are made of gold, stone and wood and decorated with precious stones and pearls. He then returns, without going into details, to the Gentiles' belief in the transmigration of the soul to the bodies of various animals, to their priapism—which explains their lust and why they take several wives—and to their love of gold and silver. Finally, he states that he is "leaving some space" (at the end of the preamble and, perhaps, after the explanation of each painting) for others to write further comments.[31]

The preamble refers to Brahmins and Gentiles without attributing any religion to them. In the explanations of the paintings, those who revere the deities are invariably referred to as *jentils* or *gentils*. The author refers to Muslims in a curious context: the aim of Kalki, one of Kṛṣṇa's *avatāra*s, is said to be the destruction of Mohammedans (e11). The author does not compare the beliefs of Gentiles with those of Christians.

The names in the margins

The names of the painted figures are written in the upper and lower margins, often the French name at the top and the Indian name at the bottom (112 has no names). Sometimes Indian names are written in the margins near the figures when there are two or more (for example, 26, 100–104, 113). Exceptionally, numbers are placed on the figures within the painting and the corresponding names written in the margins (31, Fig. 6). It is not certain that the painter was aware that inscriptions would be added in the margins. Thus, some names could not be inscribed in the lower margin for lack of space (51); some are written within the painting (5); and some are written around an element protruding into the margin (37).

[30] See the description of Indien 745 in the *Catalogus* of 1739: "by an anonymous, eye-witness of all these things while residing in India."

[31] *JeDemeure En cet androit court, s il y á / quelqun quy En puisse dire d'auantaje, jeLuy lay* [cancelled] / *Laise Du Blan pour pouuoir sexpliquer* -.

The naming of deities is based on the elements the commentator gathers from his informants as well as his own understanding. The effort to find a French name for the figures in the paintings seems to have diminished as the project progressed. Thus, French designations become less common and less elaborate from painting 50 onwards. Names are then only transcribed, from time to time, with the mention of the character's family connection (72: Brahmā, son of Viṣṇu; 73: Sarasvatī, wife of Brahmā).

The transcription of Indian names seems to have passed through two cultural and linguistic filters: that of the Indian informants and that of the commentator. The designation by the Indian informants is conditioned by the languages they spoke and their pronunciation. The commentator probably resided in a region where Tamil and Telugu were spoken, perhaps by bilinguals. Several transcriptions of names end in *-en*, which corresponds to the nominative *-an* in Tamil (e.g., *Ramen*, *Lachemen* for Rāman [Tam.], Laṭcumaṇan [Tam.]). However, the name *Ranganaiquellou* (36) has the ending *-lu* which is a Telugu honorific form of masculine names of Sanskrit origin (see also the transcription of the name of Nammāḻvār ending in *-ou*, 75). The other filter is that of the commentator.[32] His transcription is conditioned by his hearing, his phonetic understanding of the names and his own transcriptional codes. They include three diacritical marks: the acute accent (e.g., *Parserámá* for Skt. Paraśurāma), the tilde on *y* (e.g., *Quallequỹ* for Skt. Kalki) and on *u* (e.g., *Varounoũ*. *deũ*. for Skt. Varuṇadeva; *Codendoũ* for Skt. Kodaṇḍa) and the dot on *o* (*Gȯȯ.Verdená* for Skt. Govardhana) (Fig. 1). The transcription, however, is not always homogeneous. Thus, the name Rāma (Skt.) is transcribed as *-rámá* (7), *Ramon* (8), *Ramen* (e 91), and that of Kṛṣṇa (Skt.), as *Quichená* (10), or *Quichenen* (111).

[32] A study of the transcription of Indian terms into French in the 17th–18th centuries (notably in South Indian illustrated manuscripts like Indien 745), a fascinating project, is beyond the scope of the present contribution.

The French names of the deities are not established according to a homogeneous system either. Often, the French name of the deity corresponds to a moral trait. Thus, Paraśurāma (7) is named "The god judge of the will" (*Le Dieu Juge dela volonté*); Devendra (12), "The god of vigilance" (*Le Dieu de la Vigilance*); Dharmarāja (14), "The charitable god" (*Le Dieu Charitable*); Hanumat (28), "The god of cunning" (*Le Dieu dela finesse*); Īśvara (32), "The beneficent god Iprum" (*LeDieu Iprum Bienfezant*); dancing Kṛṣṇa (35), "The carefree bantering god" (*LeDieu Badin sans soucy*); Piṭāri-Kāli (48), "indecent goddess" (*Deesse impudique*). An iconographic feature may also be the origin of the name: thus Yogīśvara-Śiva (17) is called "The crescent" (*Le Croisan*) because in the painting, his hair is adorned with a crescent moon. Sometimes the deity is said to be that of a section of Indian society. Baladeva (9) is named "the god of the ploughmen" (*Le Dieu des Laboureurs*), probably because he carries a plough; Rājagopāla (37) is the "god of beggars" (*Dieu Des Mandians*) because of the arrangement of his hair similar to matted hair. The designation of the deity also sometimes relates to his role in the natural world: Nairṛti (15) is "the god of rain" (*Le Dieu Dela Pluie*); Varuṇa (16) is "the god who presides over the waters" (*LeDieu quy Prezide sur Les Eaux*). The French interpretation sometimes seems to be wrong: the designation of Rāma (8) as "The god present in the future" (*Le Dieu present a la venir*) could refer to Kalki (the future incarnation of Viṣṇu).

The deity depicted is sometimes given the name of a deity from the Greco-Latin pantheon: thus Indra (12), portrayed with a body covered with eyes, is named Argus whom Greek mythology describes as possessing a hundred eyes; Garuḍa (29 and e139) is said to be Mercury because both are winged.

The explanations

In his explanations, the commentator makes known the pantheon and mythology not only concerning famous deities, but also relating to temples depicted in the book. He never uses terms such as idols, idolatry

and idolaters. Although the preamble mentions priapism as a principle of the Gentiles, the commentator does not mention it in his explanations, despite the presence of *liṅga*s in quite a few paintings. The explanations are occasionally erroneous or of unknown origin. Perhaps the commentator sometimes relied on informants who were not very knowledgeable. He also drew his explanations from his own culture (for example, reference to Greco-Latin pantheon) and imagination to explain the paintings. Sometimes he gives an allegorical explanation of a particular deity or of an aspect of its representation. The explanations often replicate the French names written in the margins of the paintings.

The explanations identify the characters in the paintings and often refer to the role they played in epics and mythology, but do not mention any text or literary source. The commentator appears to follow a tradition that it was Kṛṣṇa, not Viṣṇu, who incarnated in ten *avatāra*s,[33] as Kṛṣṇa himself does not appear in this series of *avatāra*s. Kalki is said to be Kṛṣṇa with a horse's head (e11). On the other hand, some of Kṛṣṇa's feats are attributed to Viṣṇu: the slayer of Kāliya is Viṣṇu (e80), the flute-playing god is said to be Veṇugopāla-Viṣṇu (e51).

Sometimes the legend reported by the commentator corresponds to a particular temple represented in the painting, for example, those of Virincipuram (e30), Srirangam (e36), Tiruvallur (e53), or Pudupet (e24). The commentator also mentions local traditions associated with famous temples. For instance, he recounts that at the Tirupati temple (e22), pilgrims have their beards shaved and receive the Vaiṣṇava branding.[34] He also explains traditions relating to local deities like Pōlēramma (and the ceremonies around her) (e23), Piṭāri-Kāli (who is said to be worshipped by the *Parias*) ([= e48]).

The explanations of some paintings are anomalous. Thus, while Govardhanagiri is the name of the mountain raised by Kṛṣṇa to protect cows and cowherds, the commentator explains that Viṣṇu "is named

[33] Although Viṣṇu is said to have taken the *avatāra* of Buddha in e77.

[34] This refers to the practice of *taptacakra*, common among the followers of the Vaiṣṇava Pāñcarātra school.

Govardhanagiri, the saviour of oxen and cows, etc." (*Lon / Lapelle Gȯȯ. Verdená Guiry sauueur des / Beufs. Et vaches &a*) (e109). The explanations of two paintings (10 and 77) (as well as their subjects) are specially interesting. Painting 10 is found between those of Balarāma and Kalki in the series of ten *avatāra*s and identified in the lower margin as Buddha-Kṛṣṇa-Kalki *avatāra* (*Baoudá-Quichená-Quallequỹ-outarom-*). The commentary on this painting is intriguing: "The figure of Buddha, which means to say or to signify the divinity which destroys human beings [reference to Kalki?]. Gentiles give him several kinds of names. He is rather feared and they offer him more sacrifices [than to other deities]."[35] The figure in this painting, wearing many ornaments and the Vaiṣṇava sectarian mark (*ūrdhvapuṇḍra*) on his forehead, is richly dressed. It cannot be Buddha, unless it is Kṛṣṇa prior to his incarnation as Buddha. Nor can it be Kalki who is depicted horse-faced in the following painting (11) and rightly identified as Kalki by the commentator.

The figure in painting 77 is clad only in a loincloth, without ornaments but wearing a sectarial mark[36] different from the two well-known Vaiṣṇava (*ūrdhvapuṇḍra*) and Śaiva (*tripuṇḍra*) marks. The explanation (e77) states: "Viṣṇu-Buddha-*avatāra* means fully naked. One has put on him a cloth which should not be there."[37] The meaning "fully naked"[38] could refer to the word *digambara* (lit. space-clothed) which is the designation of Jaina masters (*tīrthaṅkara*s) who are unclad. It may be recalled that both Buddha and Jina Ṛṣabha (the first of the 24 *tīrthaṅkara*s)

[35] *La figure De Baoudá, quy veut dire ou signifier / La Divinite quy Detruit Les humains, Les jentils Le / noment deplusieurs sortes denoms jl Est bien aprehendé / Et jls Luy sacriffie plus quaux autres diuinites*.

[36] This is perhaps a Smārta mark. It is also seen on the bodies of certain devotees of Śiva as well as Viṣṇu (in paintings 17–18, 136), of gods [Vāmana (6), Brahmā (72)] and of sages [Jamadagni (50), Sarpa-ṛṣi (67)].

[37] *Vichenou Baouda Outarom veut / dire Tout nu Lon Luy amis vnne draperie / quy ne deuvoit pas y Estre*.

[38] Buddha is translated as 'naked' also in another illustrated BnF manuscript (Estampes, Od 39 pet. fol.) which narrates (in Tamil and French) the story entitled "*Metamorphose ou Incarnation deVichenou Endieu Baouta / autrement dit, nud*."

are included in the list of twenty-two *avatāra*s of Viṣṇu.[39] Perhaps here the commentator has failed to distinguish between Buddha and Jina. But Buddha is not usually associated with nudity, although he is exceptionally depicted in iconography dressed in a loincloth.[40] Or perhaps the commentator was recording here a tradition that conflates Buddha and Jina.

Some explanations are intriguing and their origin is difficult to locate. They may be minor traditions, purely oral or local, or imagined by the informant or the commentator himself. The story that Viṣṇu imposed on Hanumat (who is a monkey in the *Rāmāyaṇa*) the face of a monkey and a tail because he had not faithfully kept Viṣṇu's secret (e28) could be an invention of the commentator or his informant. The explanation that Garuḍa (e29) was given a hooked beak and snakes to remind him that he had spoken too much, seems to be another invention. In fact, Garuḍa, Viṣṇu's mount, is a rapacious bird, a natural enemy of snakes with whom he is often depicted. The commentary explains that Tumburu was given a horse's head because he was a mocker (e40), whereas, according to Indian mythology, this celestial musician asked Śiva for a horse's head, immortality and mastery of the musical art. Bhṛṅgi (e25) is, according to the Purāṇas, a devotee of Śiva who received a third leg from him to support his weakened body. But the commentator reports that "they say" (*jls dise*) that Bhṛṅgi, having stolen the extra leg from a sleeping companion, danced before Viṣṇu. The expression (of the commentary on Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇa, e47) that it depicts a male and a female deity in a single body, could be a scribal error because it also rightly points out that it is contrary to the previous painting in which male and female are in a single body (e46, Ardhanārīśvara).

[39] See Jaini 1977; Saindon 2003, 2004.

[40] See Jaini 2016. We thank Professor Mudagamuwe Maithrimurthi for drawing our attention to this article. A sculpture in the Vidyāśaṅkara temple at Śṛṅgeri (14th century?) depicts an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu in a naked human form. We thank Professor Catherine Clémentin-Ojha for this information.

The interpretation (by the informants or the commentator) of Indian mythology and the role of certain deities in it sometimes seems strange. Thus, the purpose of Kṛṣṇa's *avatāra* as Kalki is to destroy Mohammedans (*Pour Detruire Les Mahometans*, e11). Kṛṣṇa shouts to the *gopī*s "to make him salām" (*quichena allors Leur Crya deLuy faire salam*, e105). The Gentiles say that Yoganarasiṃha enters their bodies and torments them to death and takes away their children (e19). Kṛṣṇa spared the life of the snake Kāliya after being entreated by his wives "because he loved women" (*Car jl aymoit Les femmes*, e111). Pārvatī sent her son Gaṇeśa to stand on all roads to see if he could find a girl as beautiful as her (e44).[41]

The painting of certain deities is explained from an allegorical point of view. Thus, in the painting of the four-armed Matsyāvatāra, the conch and the disc, the attributes carried respectively by two hands, are said to be the symbols of coolness and warmth; the other two hands making the gestures of granting boon (*varada*) and assuring protection (*abhaya*) are said to "show that he is looking at everything" (*jl montre quil Regarde tout*, e2). The dancing Naṭarāja of Chidambaram temple represents "lightness" (*La Legerreté*, e20). The fire that Kālabhairava has on his head "indicates his anger" (*Marque Sá colerre*, e45) while the peacock that Kumārasvāmin rides "denotes vain glory" (*Denote La vaine Gloire*, e66) and Puruṣamṛga is half tiger "to be in any place he wants to go" (*pour Estre Entout Endroit ou jl veut aller*, e68).

The commentary reiterates some Greco-Latin identifications made in the margins of the paintings. Indra is identified with Argus Panoptes (e12). The commentator says that he believes that the snake Kāliya whom Kṛṣṇa defeats is the giant snake Typhon (e80). Explaining the painting of dancing Kṛṣṇa, the commentator says that the gods, jealous of the splendour of Kṛṣṇa's city (Dvārakā), asked Neptune the Roman god of the seas to destroy it (e35). The temple icon of

[41] This may be an interpretation of the frequent presence of Gaṇeśa's icons on roadsides in ancient times, a practice still prevalent in contemporary India.

Subrahmaṇya, represented as a five-headed snake, is said to be Aesculapius (the Roman god who carries a staff on which a snake is entwined) of the Gentiles (e79).

Other explanations involve the notions of Devil and devils. Thus, Viṣṇu takes the *avatāra* of the tortoise to "drive out the Devil's malignancy against men" (*chasser Les malignyté / Du Diable contre les hommes*, e3). *Asura*s and *rakṣasa*s, painted with fangs, are identified as devils who enter the bodies of animals (elephant in the case of Gajāsura, e106) or change into animals (bull, e133) or take human bodies (Pūtanā, e130). The monster Bakāsura, slain by Kṛṣṇa, is said to be a form of the Devil (e132). But not all monsters are identified as devils (see, for example, e2, e32, e33, e89, e91, e92, e115, e120). Occasionally, French Christian terminology is applied to a divine aspect: Yoganārāyaṇa, seated in a lotus position on the mountain and resplendent with jewels, is described as Viṣṇu "in glory" (*Engloire*, e18). In imitation of the Christian patron saints, some deities are described as protectors of certain human groups. Thus Varuṇa "holds in his hand the destiny of the navigators" (*tient En Main La destinee des Nauigateurs*, e16).

The commentary at times presents moralising allegorical explanations of the deities depicted in the paintings. Gods and goddesses are neither denigrated nor mocked. Some, who represent virtues, are good, others, who represent vices, are evil. The goddess Kāmākṣī "represents Charity" (e21). Agni is "the god of fire, who signifies lubricity" (*quy signifie La Lubricité*, e13). Piṭāri-Kāli (e [48]) is referred to as "goddess of indecency" (*deEsse de Limpudicite*), which explains why she is always naked "because of her heat."[42] Kumārasvāmin is "the god of pride" (*Dieu De la suberbé*, e66). Pōlēramma is "worshipped by the Gentiles because of her malignancy" (e23); this last term (*malignyté*), which is to be taken in a strongly negative sense, may be compared to the Christian designation of the Devil as "The Evil One." Śanīśvara, the retributive god, is identified as "the deity who presides

[42] *Elle Est Toujours a Decouuer a cause desa* / *Chaleur*.

over avarice and takes from everyone what he can" (e114). Narasiṃha is a "carnivorous god without mercy" (e120).

Conclusion

Thus, Indien 745 is not a mere collection of paintings, but a book of information made by anonymous people: an Indian painter, Indian informants, a French commentator. It contains 137 static and narrative paintings representing deities, mythological figures or scenes, and temples. These paintings, executed according to iconographic norms (attributes, physical characteristics, mounts, colours, etc.), are easily recognisable by Indians. They are without obvious European influence, although the constraints of the medium forced the painter to adapt his pictorial act. The format of the sheets, determined by the folding into quires, the texture and thickness of the French paper surely influenced the execution in a way and to a degree that cannot be precisely measured today. The painter plays with the constraints of the book format, through the intrusion of the figure into the margins, or the depiction of successive scenes within a single painting, for example. He also divides the painted surface into multiple frames that describe different moments, places and viewpoints at the same time.

The commentator intends to present as much information as possible about the contents of the paintings. He seems to depend on local informants for classical, local and oral traditions. The origin of certain explanations is sometimes difficult to locate. The commentary, as well as the paintings, records variants or beliefs parallel to better-known traditions. That the commentator was a direct eye-witness of the Indian scene, proved by his preamble, adds to the value of his testimony in the opinion of his contemporaries. No wonder this aspect was highlighted in the description of the manuscript in the *Catalogus* of 1739.[43]

[43] For the importance of eyewitness accounts in the 17th–18th century Europe and the reaction to it, see Forberg 2014: 110 ff, 139.

Unlike some publications of the 17th or early 18th century that ridiculed Indian deities or referred to them as monstrous,[44] the commentator does not seek to present a caricatured idea of them. He explains them without an *a priori* aimed at a sensationalist effect, or even disinformation. No aesthetic assessment is used to discredit Indian customs and pantheon. The commentator focuses on the function and nature of the deities, although he sometimes expresses his moral opinion. His explanations reflect, if not empathy, at least an attempt to define the Indian pantheon as objectively as possible on the basis of paintings. It is probably a working document open to further addition of information.

In the absence of any information about the commentator, the intended audience, or how the book first came to France and then to the Royal Library in Paris, it is difficult to conjecture what the purpose of the book was. Was it initially intended for Indians themselves (local lords, pilgrims), for clerics and/or missionaries, for learned scholars or for an educated and curious public, as gifts for European patrons, or was it an artefact prized by collectors?

The interesting hypotheses that paintings like those found in Indien 745 may have served as iconographic models for craftsmen, or that they were intended for the pleasure of local kinglets or for sale to pilgrims at popular temples,[45] require further evidence. It is hard to imagine that such paintings, bound and accompanied by French (or English) explanations, were not commissioned by Europeans.

The fact that a manuscript from the Jesuit milieu (Od 38 pet. fol.) contains direct or indirect copies of paintings of Indien 745 shows that Jesuit missionaries used this manuscript (or its model) for documentary and educational purposes. The space left by the commentator for possible additions by other persons suggests that this volume was an instrument of collective reflection. Such persons could not have been scholars living in France but were probably fellow missionaries. It is known that Jesuits worked anonymously and collectively on their intellectual

[44] On this subject, see Mitter 1992: 1–72.

[45] See Jakimowicz-Shah 1988: 18; Hurel 2011: 137.

works, to produce dictionaries and grammars for example, in India as in New France.[46]

Once Indien 745 entered the Royal Library (and was described in the catalogue published in 1739), it was no longer used exclusively by missionaries. It is not known how many scholars, such as Dupuis at the end of the 18th century, consulted this particular manuscript or this kind of manuscript. Indien 745's explanations, despite their pedagogical intent, probably did not receive the attention they deserved, perhaps because of the absence of an intellectual point of view, the succinctness of its information and the poor quality of its writing. They did not attract the due attention of the 20th-century scholars either.[47]

Did not the freshness and absolute novelty of the images for the European eye, on the other hand, make this book fall into the realm of the exotic? The purchase of collections of South Indian paintings by the Bibliothèque royale / nationale, from the second half of the 18th century onwards testifies to the growing interest of collectors[48] in texts they could not read[49] and images they could not understand.

For the Indian artist, the paintings of Indien 745 were complete in themselves without the addition of captions or further explanation. For French readers, the paintings combine ideally with the names and explanations to construct a representation of the beliefs and pantheon of the Gentiles. But the text, dependent on informants, on the fragmented

[46] Colas 2011: 42–43; Colas 2018b: 46–48.

[47] Blochet (1900: 180–186) mentions the content of the paintings and the preamble, but not the existence of explanations.

[48] The BnF (Département des Estampes) acquired collections of South Indian paintings in the 18th century from collectors such as Charles-Adrien Picard, the Count of Lally-Tollendal, the Count of Modave, or booksellers, see Hurel 2011. Modern catalogues seem to consider manuscripts consisting of paintings and texts mainly as paintings and not as textual documents per se because they do not discuss the text-image relation, linguistic implications, often crop titles and commentaries from reproductions, etc. (e.g. Jakimowicz-Shah 1988, Dallapiccola 2010, Hurel 2011).

[49] See the disillusioned reflections in 1727 of Étienne Le Gac of the Carnate mission on the quest by the Royal Library for Indian manuscripts which, according to him, nobody could read in Paris, Colas 1997: 350 n. 7.

comprehension of the commentator and on the exegetical link that he tries to establish with the paintings, is partial. Its connection with the images is therefore fragile.

Finally, for French readers, what were the modalities of the back-and-forth between the paintings and the explanations in Indien 745? The page containing the painting already forms in itself a unique visual and intellectual whole consisting of three elements: the painting, the Indian name and an element of identity in French. This tripartition gives the viewer an immediate first understanding of the image: visual, nominative and semantic. To this first semiotic access the commentator adds a second for greater depth: the explanation, that is, a complementary analysis that concerns specific iconographic, cultural and social aspects relating to the figures. The author tries to create a coherent documentation in which the painting serves as an anchor for the interpretation. But the explanation, filling the painting with further information, shifts the painted page into a new perspective, that of exegetical distance, less immediate, more reflective: the semiological and even ontological destiny of the painting, its relationship with the explanations, is henceforth determined by a milieu other than that of its creation, making Indien 745 an exceptional document.

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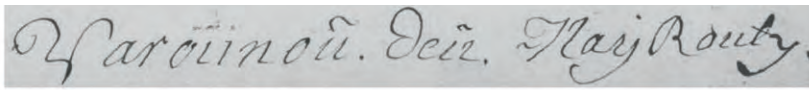
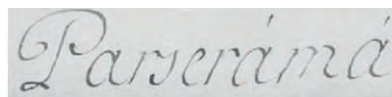
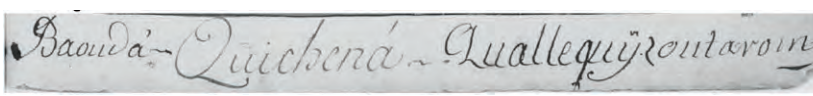


painting 15



painting 07



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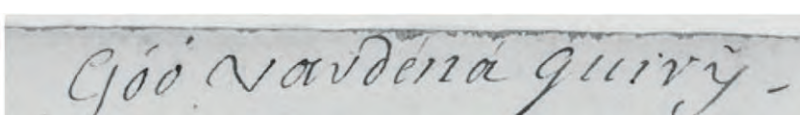
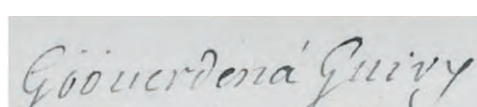


painting 109



painting 109e

Fig. 1. Diacritical marks and accents on transliterated names of deities

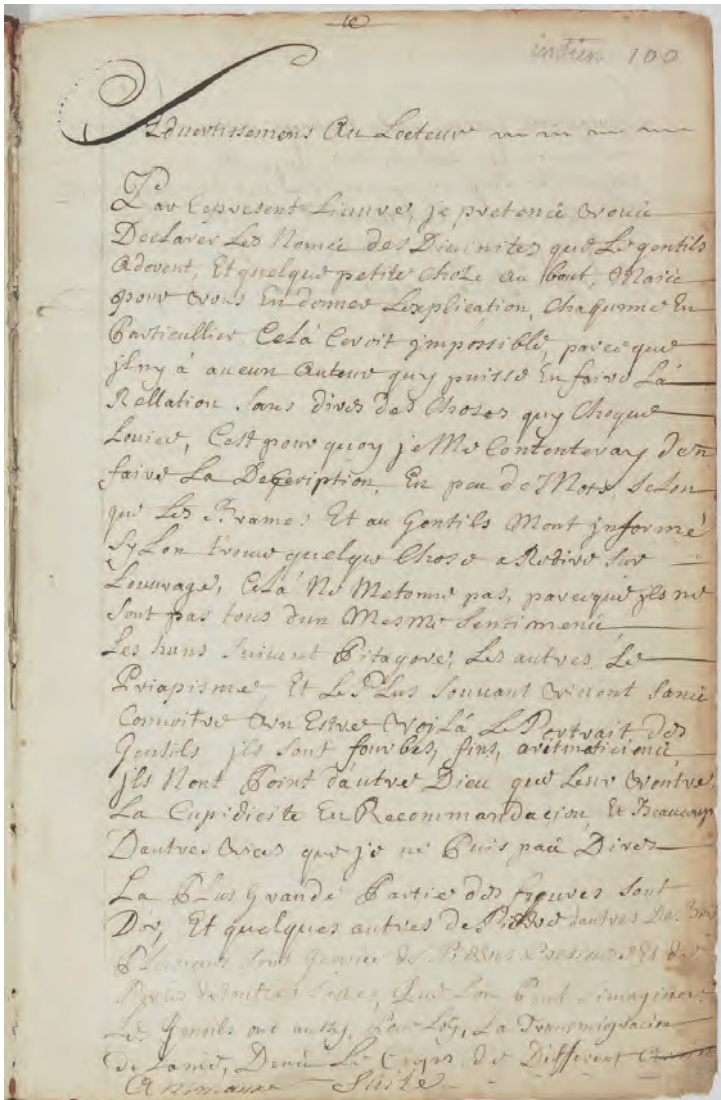


Fig. 2. Preamble, fol. 1r

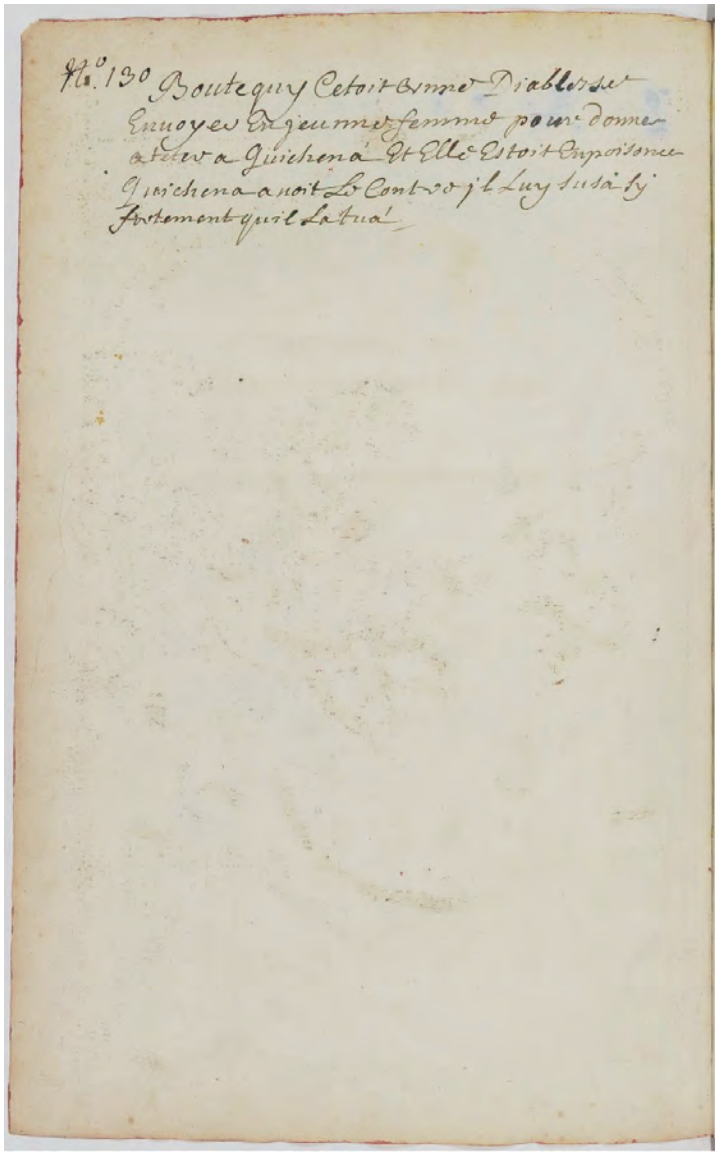


Fig. 3. e 130, The bhūtaki Pūtanā

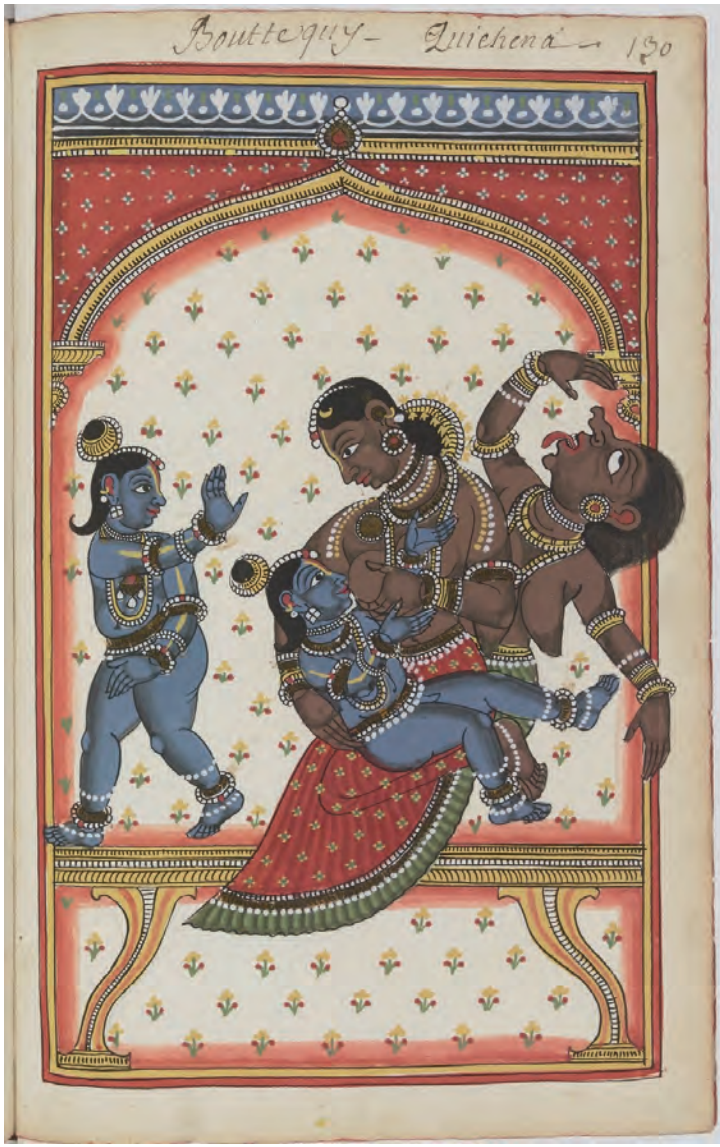


Fig. 4. 130, The bhūtaki Pūtanā

Fig. 5. 128, temple of Kāśīviśvanātha

Fig. 6. 31, Verdachelom (?) temple