

Jainism and the Western World

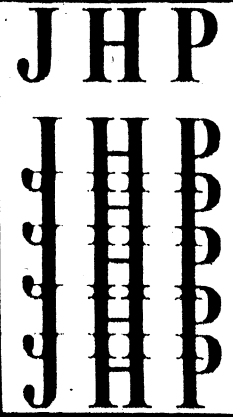
Jinmuktisūri and Georg Bühler and Other Early Encounters


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It is puzzling to the student of religion that even though in 1867 the Calcutta High Court decided that Jainism is not an independent religion, sixty years later it was widely depicted as a 'world-religion' by virtue of its universal principles of non-violence and world-renunciation and the existence of an independent body of sacred scriptures (Glasenapp 1925:316). One of the many paradoxes of Jain history is that books, which initially were considered to be products of acts of violence, became objects of religious veneration itself, and as such, from the 11th century onwards, were hidden away from the public eye in subterranean *bhaṇḍhārs*, or treasure houses, in fear of persecution and plundering, only to be unearthed by Jain lawyers and European Indologists in the 19th century as proof for the independent existence of the Jain religion *vis a vis* the emerging Hindu Law.

The history of the opening of the Jain libraries is still to be written, but for the moment three views prevail. One school of thought attributes this achievement to the protest of reform-minded Jain laity against the illegitimate privileges of the *yatis*, or property-owning monks, who supplied the majority of the few remaining Jain ascetics at the beginning of the 19th century and often controlled access to the *bhaṇḍhārs*. Others have pointed to the efforts of monastic reformers, like Ātmārām (1837-1896), Vijayvallabhsūri (1870-1954) and others, to publish the Jain scriptures, while many western Academics continue to recite the Orientalist narrative of the western 'discovery' of the Jain *bhaṇḍhārs*, which critics rather want to portray as a story of imperialist plunder. It is this version of the events which will be the prime concern of this paper.

The central stage belongs to the Sanskritists Georg Bühler (1837-1898) and Hermann Jacobi (1850-1937), who in the year 1873-1874 travelled together to the famous library of Jaisalmer "in order to make its contents accessible to science (Bühler 1875:82)." The fascinating story of Bühler's journey from Disa via Sirohi and Jodhpur to Jaisalmer and on to Bikaner in company of the young Hermann Jacobi belongs to the stock of Orientalist legends which are re-told over and

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over again. The original report, however, written ten years after the event and published in German in an Austrian weekly, has almost been forgotten. The following translation of the most significant passages of this report should therefore be of interest.

Bühler was the education inspector for a district of northern Gujarat, when he received an order from the Viceroy in 1868 to access and catalogue the indigenous libraries of the region, and to buy manuscripts with the help of a Jain agent as source materials for the compilation of a digest of Hindu Law to be produced for European Universities (Johnson 1992:200). He undertook several journeys through Gujarat in 1868, 1870, 1871 and 1872-3, before he decided to visit the famous Jain libraries in Jaisalmer and Bhatnir, which were first mentioned by James Tod (1830:282), who himself caught a glimpse of the Hemacandra Bhaṇḍār at Patan with the help of his Khartar Gacch Jain Guru (Johnson 1992:197ff). In his report Bühler described the importance and the difficulties of his task as follows:

These libraries are in part extraordinarily extensive and old. They contain many valuable manuscripts and often even works of the brahmanical literature, which are not available elsewhere. But they are under the supervision of a community committee, a so-called Panch, which only in very rare cases is prepared to grant curious Sanskritists access to its treasures. Mostly it requires a hard struggle, out of which the European not always emerges victorious (Bühler 1883:518).

Particularly interesting is his description of two meetings with Jain monks. The first took place in the Paśvaṇāth temple in Randol, where Bühler copied some ancient copper plates and bought some scriptures for the Government. He writes:

My agent received these from the monk naturally under the seal of discretion [Bühler does not mention his name]. The latter seemed to be very happy with our visit and the business that was done later. In the afternoon he offered us a return visit, which such saints rarely do, and brought along a disciple, whom he educated to be a monk. According to his statement, he bought him during a famine in the year 1869 from his parents. Although the boy was only nine years old, he knew already large parts of the sacred scriptures by heart (522).

The following account of Bühler's subsequent encounter with the Kharatara Gaccha Śrīpūj Jinmuktisūri in Jaisalmer - during 15.1.1874 to 4.2.1874 - is of great historical significance. According to his pupil Winternitz (1898), he owed much of his success in searching Jaina libraries "to his intimate friendship with the Śrīpūj Jinamuktisūri (344)":

Śrīpūj Jinmuktisūri was the head of a great portion of the Kharatara Gaccha, the sect of the strict ascetics, which was founded in the 11th century. His stay in Jaisalmer was caused by the fact that Sheth Himatmal, one of the richest bankers, had built a new temple near Jaisalmer, which he had consecrated by the Shripuj. Although this happened a year ago, and Jaina ascetics are really only permitted to stay in one place for the three months of the rainy season, Jinamukti had lived in the monastery of the Kharatar-community already for nearly one and a half years. Probably he found it too difficult to break loose, because the community was extraordinarily rich and generous.

In the year 1873 he was a man of approximately 35 years, with most intelligent, pleasing features and of great kindness. He received us with great amiability and replied to my "*Maharaja Vande*", "*my veneration, great king*", with a heartily spoken '*Dharmalabha*', "may the faith increase". He spoke Sanskrit very skillfully and in our conversation showed himself to be well-versed in the Jaina scriptures, Sanskrit poetry and the sciences. Even the strictest Brahman would have declared him to be, if not a great pandit, then a real *Byutpanna* or a well-educated man.

I told him that he should become my Guru or teacher in Jainism, and he declared himself ready to answer all kinds of questions concerning his faith. Even my intention, to enter into the library of the Osvals, interested him. He told me that he, though being the Shripuj, [and] despite many promises [to admit him to the library], had not seen it. They were probably afraid to show him the books, lest he requested some of them as a gift for himself.

He showed us his very significant personal library, which he carried with himself, and made an offer to copy what I wanted. It made a peculiar impression to even find in this library a Hindustani Bible, which was presented to him by a missionary. Jinamukti said, that he had read the Bible. That he held it in honour was apparent, because he preserved it as carefully as his sacred books.

This first visit was followed by many others, and throughout the whole period of my stay our relationship remained equally cordial. In the morning one of his subordinate monks usually came to ask about my well-being, and at approximately four o'clock I went to him. He always

gave answers to my many questions, supported me with good advice in my negotiations with the Osval library committee and took a lively interest in the discoveries which I soon began to make.

Once, when he preached to the congregation, he made a special invitation for us to listen, and allowed us to witness how the community richly presented him with gifts after the sermon. He received some 700 Florins in cash, four small golden and four large silver waterjugs and 860 pieces of cloth, stitched by pious hands, for wrapping his books. Of the latter he gave me one specimen as a remembrance. Even in later years wandering monks did bring me greetings from him, and once, when I sent him a copy of a book which I found in Jaisalmer and had printed later, I received a friendly letter of acknowledgement in Sanskrit.

The beginning of my scientific activities looked promising. Already two days after our arrival on the 18th we were guided to the temple of Parishnath [sic] in the fort, in whose vaults the great library was kept. A number of manuscripts were brought to us, amongst which were many extraordinarily old ones dating from the 12th century of our era. Until the year 1873 one did not at all know that manuscripts existed in India, which went back to the year 1258. But the most important European colleagues, like Müller, Weber and Aufrecht, still doubted the authenticity of the dates. My joy therefore was not small, when I suddenly got to see manuscripts which were even 150 years older, and I was not less pleased, when I found amongst these works, apart from the religious works of the Jainas, important books of the brahmanical literature, and amongst the latter a very old historical work, the life of the famous Chaulukya-prince Vikramaditya V of Kalyana, which was written around 1158 before Christ by his court-poet, the Kashmiri Bilhana.

There was no question of its being a fake and I felt that I had found something which made my journey a successful one. Unfortunately my joy was soon tainted. Already after three days, during which we saw, catalogued, and checked about 50 books, it was suddenly said, that his was to be all for now. Instead of books only some heaps of loose leaves were brought to us, the inspection of which was very toilsome. Then the librarian led one of the people of the Maharawal once more down into the vault and convinced him that nothing else was left in the opened room. I was very angry about this report, which did not convince me, and mocked the committee that the world-famous library of Jaisalmer should only contain 50 manuscripts. This was to stir their ambitions to show us more, but the answer remained: "We have nothing else."

So I had to retract provisionally, putting a good face on it, and borrowed the most important manuscripts, partly to copy myself, and partly to have them copied. But I promised myself to pay the Jaina committee the anger back with interest. During the next days I worked calmly with Dr. Jacobi on the copy of the historical work, which I, because the characters were very archaic, wished to do myself. In doing so I made inquiries about the library in secret through my agent. But no one apart from the committee of the Jainas and the librarian had ever seen it. The reports were thus not very certain or clear.

At last my friend, the Shripuj, helped me. He too could not come to know anything directly, but he said: "If the books, which you have seen, did not contain all the sacred scriptures of our religion, then you have not been shown everything. For all our community libraries must contain the 45 Angas."

That was enough for me. I went to Thakur Juvansingh and told him seriously, that the Jaina committee wanted to make a fool of me. It would be all the same to me, whether the books would be shown or not, but I would report [this] to the Government. Likewise I asked the ministers to come to me and told them the same, only adding that, if the government authorities would come, they could lose their posts.

This, at last, had an effect. One of the ministers, who was himself a Jaina and a member of the committee, began to work on his colleagues, and after various turbulent meetings it was decided to show us the real library, since it couldn't be helped. However, one more trick was tried. The entrance to the real library, a large door made of stone, was painted over, and it was decided to guide me into the next vault where the books were kept which I had seen already, in order to convince me that nothing else was there.

All these pleasant things were reported to me by She Shripuj. He advised me to be very careful and not to step into the vault. But in case I had to do it, he provided me with a detailed plan of all the vaults under the Parishnath [sic] temple.

Finally the day arrived when we were called again to the temple. It was January the 28th. The committee received me solemnly, led by the Jaina minister. The latter spoke exactly as predicted by the Shripuj. I decidedly refused to enter the vaults, to check whether there was still something there. Likewise I forbid my agents to go down and always repeated that the masters of the house would know best where the things were. When the minister saw that I could not be tempted, he stood up with a deep sigh, remarked that he wanted to look around down there himself. He stayed away for about half an hour. Then he returned with

three servants, which carried large sacks full of manuscripts. He said, he had opened a door, which usually would not be opened, and found yet more manuscripts. Then he took [our] leave [with a] smile.

Now the inspecting and cataloguing set about afresh, and the manuscripts that were now brought to light contained even more precious treasures than the earlier ones. Until February 3rd, we still had to work in the temple daily for about six hours, and could hand to the scribes more than 50 works for copying. All contained something new or very rare from the Brahmanic, Jaina- and Buddhist literature. One old catalogue of the library from the year 1780 proved to us that we had now seen everything. It contained several hundred manuscripts on palm leaves and some more on paper. The opening of this carefully concealed library was however not the only success which I had. I received many other lists from private libraries and acquired about fifty original manuscripts (Bühler 1883:503-32).

This account shows how Bühler used whatever means he had to gain access to the Jain *bandhārs*.¹ Before receiving the second load of manuscripts an obviously very frustrated Dr Bühler wrote a letter dated January 29 to the *Indian Antiquary* reporting his earlier discoveries:

The *Yatis* here do not possess much more than we have got in Surat. They are very friendly and communicative. The Panch of the Osval, to which the great *bhandhār a* belongs, is very tough, and requires frequent admonitions from the Rawal, but, I believe, finally we shall see everything (1874:90).

Until Alsdorf's visit in 1951, no other modern scholar had visited the Jaisalmer collection, though Shridhar R. Bhandarkar tried to gain access in 1905, while searching for manuscripts for the Government. Alsdorf arrived on invitation by Muni Punyavijaya (1896-1971), who at the time worked in Jaisalmer on his catalogue of the Jaisalmer collection, and later wrote:

He who stepped down the steep staircase into the two narrow subterranean chambers lacking any openings for light and air -- the rear one only accessible through a loop-hole barely meter-high -- he understands without further ceremony how easy it was to thoroughly dupe Bühler... until now every attempt of cataloguing could only lead to partial successes (Alsdorf 162).

Obviously Bühler had been misled about the real contents of the Jaisalmer library, which - according to Muni Punyavijaya's *New Catalogue of Sanskrit and Prakrit Manuscripts: Jaisalmer Collection* (Ahmedabad: L.D. Institute, 1972, Foreword) - contains 2697 manuscripts, not 460 as Bühler was lead to believe. And of the 28 he asked to copy, only 4 were done (Johnson 1992:205).

Evidently the *Pañcācayat* and the *Śrīpūj* did not represent competing interests, as Bühler presumed, but decided together to sacrifice a significant part of the manuscripts to science in order to protect the bulk of the collection from outside interference. Dundas (1992) noted that, although the contents of the library are now known, "Even today, direct access to this material is difficult to gain, usually requiring the simultaneous presence of all trustees, a rare event. .. The conflict of interest here is obvious: for the European, the value of the manuscripts lay in their content by means of which Indian history could be reconstructed, while for the Jain their true worth lay in their role as sacred objects (p.72f.)."

But the conflict of interest was not merely confined to European scholars and the collectors of Jaina material culture. It manifested itself in various forms within the Jain community itself, as a conflict between conservatives, who wanted to keep the *bhaṇḍārs* locked and under their own exclusive control, and reformers, like Vijayvallabhsūri and the members of the *Śvetāmbara Jain Conference*, who were keen to publicise the content of the collections and to preserve the precious but sometimes already decomposing manuscripts. Sometimes the reformers were monks, sometimes laity.

Although in Jaisalmer the *Pañc* and not the *Śrīpūj* seemed to own the manuscripts, it was not unusual for the period of the 19th century that the *yatis* themselves were the actual owners of *bhaṇḍārs*, and there were frequent "lawsuits between lay *saṅghs* and *yatis* concerning the possession of manuscripts (Cort 1995:81)," which mostly the *yatis* won. John Cort (p.81ff.) has shown how ownership patterns varied, and that there is still an ongoing trade in Jain manuscripts. The fact that Bühler bought manuscripts from a *yati* in Randol was therefore not coincidental, nor were the payments which Jinmuktisūri received for his sermon.

Bühler's queries, however, were met with different responses in each locality. In Surat, Cambay, Limbdi, and Ahmedabad, Bikaner and during his first visit to Patan, Bühler could overcome the resistance of the *Pañcs*, and was able to obtain copies of almost all the 45 canonical Śvetāmbara scriptures already in 1872-1873 (cf. Johnson 1992:203,

205). But during his second visit to Patan in the year 1874 he found that "The Paṇḍit [of the Hemacandra Baṇḍhār] had to sue for many months in vain, as the leading Jains feared that some sinister attempt against the books might be intended when the new catalogue had been prepared (Bühler 1881:44)." Their reasoning was compelling:

The 1868 act does not specify what would be the ultimate disposition of the manuscripts and most Indians feared they would go to Europe and thus not be available in India. The response was not to sell or give their precious titles to Bühler or the other collectors. After much debate the Government of India decided that the manuscripts collected under the auspices of the program would remain in India. The research program now had the possibility of evolving into a meaningful vehicle to support Sanskrit research in India (Johnson 1992:201f.).

The study of the materials collected by Bühler ultimately led to Jacobi's (1884) textual proof that Jainism originated independently from Buddhism, for which he was honoured with the title *Jaina Darśana Divākara* during his visit to the All India Jaina Literary Conference in Jodhpur 27.12.1913 (Glasenapp 1925:77. His work was particularly well-received by the leading members of the *Bhārat Jain Mahāmaṇḍal*, which was founded in Bombay 1882 (The Times 3.7.1882:5), because it could be used as evidence for overturning the judgement of the Calcutta High Court "to force the British Indian courts to recognise the faith of the Jains as a separate religion, and not as a mere sect of the Hindus, and to raise the status of the relevant Jain scriptures" (Derrett 1976:4).

Three Digambara Jain lawyers in particular, Padmaraja Pandit, Jugrhandir Lal Jaini (1881-1927), and Champat Rai Jain (1867-1942), were instrumental in getting this judgement reversed by publishing Jain sacred scriptures and selected translations from Jain legal-texts as a proof of the independent existence of 'Jaina Law'. In so doing they had to rally against the continuing policy of secrecy of the Jain *Mahāsabhā*, which, according to C.R. Jain, "repeatedly passed resolutions against printing. The effect of this has been that the world has not yet known what Jainism is like (1926:8)."

Nowadays printing and translating Jain scriptures is more or less taken for granted, and there are no inhibitions to the world-wide dissemination of Jain religious knowledge anymore. However, the advent of printed editions, which at first were met with the same resistance as the technique of writing a thousand years before, makes

protective storage obsolete, and provokes the question "how marginal the manuscripts are to the ongoing Jain identity (Cort 1995:86)." John Cort (1989:20-37) held against Edward Said's one-sided attack on western Orientalism that in fact "Jain dogma and Orientalist scholarship coincide in their valuation of the past over the present (p.27)," and that Western scholar pioneers merely accepted and repeated Jain normative statements as historical descriptions (p.39-40). However, this conclusion could only be reached by abstracting from the colonial context and the crucial role of the Jain scriptures in the late 19th century communal politics.

Strictly speaking a coincidence of interests was only emerging in the period after the forced 'opening' of the Jain libraries. In the 20th century many close contacts developed between western Jainologists and reformist Jain monks like Vijaydharmaśūri (1868-1922) and Vijayindrasūri, who shared their scholarly interests. Moritz Winternitz (1926:351f.) for instance writes that he exchanged many letters with the 'free spirited' Vijaydharmaśūri, who also sent him manuscripts, and helped him with the chapter on Jaina literature in his famous book *History of Indian Literature*. A personal meeting between the two men was already scheduled for October 1922, when Winternitz received the news of Vijaydharmaśūri's death on the 5th of September 1922, and postponed his journey. He accepted, however, immediately Upadhyay Indravijaya's invitation to attend the memorial ceremony starting on the 22nd of January 1923 in Shivpuri, where a temple (*samādhimandir*) in Vijaydharmaśūri's honour was erected on the site of his cremation. The similarities and differences shared between the European Indologist and the Jain *sādhu* are well caught in Winternitz' description of his farewell from Indravijaya, who, Winternitz writes, emerged from his abode in the evening "cheerful and happy as ever":

It is remarkable how happy, calm and serene these monks are, despite the hard life which they lead. He asked me: "How many meals did you have today already?" I had to concede shamefully, that there had been four, whereupon he told me - not without an innocent joy, I cannot call it pride - that he had eaten nothing for 36 hours already, for he fasted in honour of the acarya. Curious as ever, he asked, how much salary I got per month, and how much of that I needed, and things like that. Then he asked, whether I believed in reincarnation and a soul. I had to answer in the negative. He could not imagine that one did not believe in reincarnation. Then indeed the whole doctrine of karman would be futile, and the people would not receive their due reward or

the just punishment for their deeds. That one can love the people and do good, without thinking about one's own ego and believing in one's soul as a thing that is eternally alive, as I maintained, he seemed not to understand (Winternitz 374f.).

I had, throughout these days, when I participated in the many ceremonies, often the feeling, that in all this ceremonial there is endless ritualism involved, outward show, joy of pomp and not very much true religious sentiment. In which religion is it any different ? But nevertheless in this wonderful moonlit night it was to me an endlessly touching sight to see all these good and pious people, offering their reverence to their great teacher, the monk who entered into nirvāṇa. All these people, who lived in the world, most of them as merchants, traders etc., united nevertheless here in the veneration of a man, who did not want to have anything to do with worldly goods, but who took upon himself the hard life of a wandering monk, in order to teach and preach what he held to be the highest truth and wisdom (Winternitz 375).

Today the direction of travel has reversed. Even Jain religious functionaries are now moving out of India both to be educated in scientific research and to proselytise, since due to the efforts of Vallabhviśāyāsūri and other reform-minded monks the Jain community has incorporated the ideals of scientific research as far as Indological studies are concerned. Apparently before he became a monk Muni Jina Vijay, for example, went to see Hermann Jacobi in Bonn:

When I went to Germany in 1928 with a view to acquiring first-hand knowledge of the methods of research and with a view to establishing close contact with the German scholars working on indological subjects and especially on Jain literature, the great scholar, Dr. Hermann Jacobi immediately came from Bonn specially to meet me in Hamburg and invited me with great affection to come there and stay with him for some months (Preface by Jina Vijaya Muni, in Jacobi 1946:ii).

The 'opening' of Jain libraries and the revival of interest in the study of Jainism by European Orientalists is today merely a footnote in the history of the Jain renaissance in the late 19th and 20th century, if only by virtue of the fact that much of the task of critically editing and commenting the literary tradition of the Jain heritage has been taken over by secular Jain research institutions like the L.D. Institute and others,

who are also increasingly interested in the study of comparative religion. Yet the quest for the transformation of Jainism into a world-religion has only begun. To date it is practised merely by a small proportion of the Indian population, with a distinctive caste and class background. In the eyes of P.S.Jaini (1990) the claim of universality is yet to be realised: "Having not confined to the original homeland, India; having made new homes in all parts of the world, now there is the opportunity, indeed a duty, to make this benevolent religion accessible to the whole world (9)." But in order to make it universally acceptable as well, doctrinal and organisational innovations might be inevitable. □

ENDNOTES

1. It might be added that access to the only remaining copies of the Digambara *Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama*, which were already in a state of decomposition, was gained by Hiralal Jain and A.N. Upadhye only by using the equally devious means of smuggling some manuscripts out of the monastery at Mudbidri (Dundas 1992:56).

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