

Field Trip Report

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Abstract

This report describes the research activities carried out during my field trip supported by the Field Trip Grant from the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO), hosted by the EFEO Pondicherry Centre. The field trip was conducted as part of my master's thesis project on the manuscript transmission and scribal practices of the *Tantrasārasaṅgraha*, a Sanskrit text preserved in Malayalam-script palm-leaf manuscripts in Kerala.

The main purpose of this field trip was to locate and verify manuscript witnesses of the *Tantrasārasaṅgraha* and to study the manuscript tradition of the text. A central part of the research involved identifying palm-leaf manuscripts preserved at the Oriental Research Institute and Manuscripts Library in Trivandrum. Through the consultation of manuscript catalogues and the direct examination of manuscript bundles, several manuscript copies of the text were identified and verified. After confirming the relevant manuscripts, requests were submitted to obtain digital photographic copies of the palm-leaf manuscripts from the library. These digital copies will be used for further transcription, comparison, and analysis in the later stages of my thesis.

In addition to the manuscript search, the field trip also included consultation of relevant secondary literature at the EFEO Library in Pondicherry and discussions with scholars working on manuscript cultures, Sanskrit texts, and South Indian textual traditions. Further visits were made to the University of Calicut to obtain the printed edition of the text, to the Vadakke Matham Brahmaswam Research Centre in Thrissur to observe their manuscript collection, and to a few private manuscript collections in Thrissur and Kannur.

Overall, the field trip helped locate important manuscript materials and provided a better understanding of the Malayalam manuscript tradition in which the text is preserved. The manuscripts and resources identified during this fieldwork will play an important role in the completion of my thesis.

1. Introduction

This report presents the research activities undertaken during my field trip supported by the Field Trip Grant awarded by the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO). The purpose of this field trip was to carry out research necessary for the completion of my master's thesis.

My thesis focuses on the manuscript transmission and scribal practices of the *Tantrasārasaṅgraha*, a Sanskrit text preserved in Malayalam-script manuscripts in Kerala. The text is traditionally attributed to Nārāyaṇa of Śivapuram and is usually dated to the fifteenth or sixteenth century. It belongs to the āgada-tantra tradition dealing with toxicology and includes discussions of medical, ritual, and therapeutic practices.

Since the text survives in multiple manuscript copies written by different scribes, it provides a valuable opportunity to study how texts were copied, transmitted, and preserved within manuscript traditions. For this reason, direct engagement with manuscript materials is very important for my research.

The field trip began on 2 February, and the first part of the research was conducted at the EFEO Centre in Pondicherry. During my stay there, I consulted secondary literature available at the EFEO Library and interacted with scholars working in related fields. After this, I visited the Oriental Research Institute and Manuscripts Library in Trivandrum, where I searched for palm-leaf manuscripts of the text. I also visited the University of Calicut to obtain a printed edition of the text for comparison with manuscript versions.

In addition, I visited the Vadakke Matham Brahmaswam Research Centre in Thrissur and explored some private manuscript collections in Thrissur and Kannur. These visits helped me understand the wider manuscript traditions of Kerala.

Overall, the field trip played an important role in advancing my research and helped me collect materials necessary for completing my thesis.

2. Research at the EFEO Library, Pondicherry

The first stage of my field trip was carried out at the EFEO Library in Pondicherry, where I spent around three weeks working on my research. The EFEO library is well known for its collection of books, journals, and research materials related to Indology and South Asian studies.

During my stay at the library, I mainly focused on consulting secondary literature related to my research topic. This included studies on manuscript cultures in South India, palaeography of Malayalam script, and codicological studies of palm-leaf manuscripts. I also consulted previous research related to the *Tantrasārasaṅgraha* and other related tantric and medical texts.

Access to these materials was very helpful because many of these books and publications are not easily available elsewhere. Reading these studies helped me better understand the scholarly discussions related to my topic and helped me place my research within a broader academic context.

In addition to reading secondary literature, I also spent time organizing the structure of my thesis. During this period, I worked on outlining the chapters of my thesis and began drafting some sections. This helped me clarify the main research questions and the methods I will use in my study.

The research environment at the EFEO library was very supportive for academic work. The availability of catalogues and digital resources made it easier to locate the materials I needed.

3. Academic Interactions with EFEO Scholars

One of the most valuable aspects of my stay at the EFEO Pondicherry Centre was the opportunity to interact with scholars working there.

Several scholars at EFEO are working on Sanskrit texts, manuscript cultures, and South Indian religious traditions. I had the chance to discuss my research topic with some of them and receive their suggestions and feedback.

These discussions were very helpful because they provided different perspectives on my research topic. The scholars shared their experiences working with manuscripts and suggested additional sources and catalogues that might be useful for locating manuscripts related to my text.

Such interactions are very important in manuscript research, since locating manuscripts often requires knowledge of different manuscript collections and catalogues. The discussions with EFEO scholars helped me gain a better understanding of possible research directions and resources.

4. Consultation of Manuscript Catalogues

After reviewing secondary literature, the next stage of my research involved identifying manuscript copies of the *Tantrasārasaṅgraha*.

To do this, I consulted different manuscript catalogues and digital databases that list the manuscripts preserved in various libraries in South India. These catalogues contain important information about manuscript collections, including the titles of texts, their physical condition, and their location.

While searching through these catalogues, I noticed that the *Tantrasārasaṅgraha* appears under different titles and variations in different catalogues. Because of this, it was necessary to search under several possible names in order to locate the manuscripts.

Through this process, I was able to identify several manuscripts preserved at the Oriental Research Institute and Manuscripts Library in Trivandrum. This helped me prepare a list of manuscripts that I needed to examine during my visit to the library.

5. Visit to the Trivandrum Oriental Manuscripts Library

After identifying relevant manuscripts through catalogue research, I visited the Oriental Research Institute and Manuscripts Library in Trivandrum.

I spent about three days at the library consulting catalogue volumes and locating the palm-leaf manuscripts related to my research topic.

At first, locating the manuscripts was somewhat difficult because the text appeared under different titles in the catalogues. On the first day, I examined several catalogue entries but was not able to immediately identify the manuscript I was searching for.

On the second day, I expanded the search by looking under alternative titles and variations. This approach helped me locate several manuscript bundles related to the *Tantrasārasaṅgraha*.

Some of the manuscripts were incomplete or damaged, which is common in palm-leaf manuscripts due to their fragile material. However, by the end of my visit I was able to identify three manuscript bundles, including one complete manuscript and two incomplete ones.

6. Interaction with Library Staff and Manuscript Requests

During my work at the manuscript library, I also interacted with the library staff who assisted me in locating and accessing the manuscripts.

After verifying the manuscripts, I discussed with the staff the procedure for obtaining digital copies of the palm-leaf manuscripts for research purposes. Following these discussions, I submitted requests for digital photographic copies of the manuscript bundles.

These digital copies will allow me to carry out detailed transcription, palaeographical analysis, and textual comparison later during the writing stage of my thesis.

The staff members were very helpful in guiding me through the process and answering my questions regarding the manuscripts.

7. Visit to the University of Calicut

In addition to the research conducted in Pondicherry and Trivandrum, I also visited the University of Calicut.

The purpose of this visit was to obtain the printed edition of the *Tantrasārasaṅgraha* published in the Calicut University Sanskrit Series. During my previous visit I had not been able to obtain a copy of the book, but during this visit I was able to collect it.

This printed edition will be useful for comparing the manuscript readings with the edited text.

During my visit to the university, I also had the opportunity to meet several scholars who are working on tantric texts and related fields. Since my text is connected with tantric traditions, these discussions were very useful for understanding the broader context of the text.

8. Visit to Vadakke Matham Brahmaswam Research Centre, Thrissur

After my visit to the University of Calicut, I also visited the Vadakke Madham Brahmaswam Vedic Research Centre

The purpose of this visit was to meet scholars working there and learn from their experience in working with palm-leaf manuscripts. The scholars associated with this institution have long experience studying Sanskrit texts and manuscript materials.

During my visit, I had the opportunity to discuss my research topic with them and learn from their insights about manuscript traditions in Kerala.

I was also able to see parts of the manuscript collection preserved at the research centre. The manuscripts are well preserved and catalogued. Many of them are written in Malayalam script, which is particularly relevant to my research.

Since my thesis focuses on the Malayalam manuscript tradition, seeing these manuscripts helped me better understand the script styles and manuscript practices used in Kerala.

9. Visits to Private Manuscript Collections

During the final week of my field trip, I visited a few private manuscript collections in Thrissur and Kannur.

In Kerala, many important manuscripts are still preserved in private households that belong to families connected with traditional Sanskrit learning.

The purpose of these visits was to see whether additional manuscripts of the *Tantrasārasaṅgraha* might exist in these collections. Although I was not able to find the text I was looking for, the visits were still very valuable.

Meeting the people who preserve these manuscripts was an important experience. Many of these families continue to maintain traditional manuscript collections that have been passed down through generations.

In most cases, the families did not permit photographs or documentation of the manuscripts because they were part of private collections. Even though I could not document the manuscripts, the visits helped me better understand the living traditions connected with manuscript preservation in Kerala.

10. Final Phase of the Field Trip

During the last days of the field trip, I focused mainly on organizing the materials I had collected and continuing to work on writing my thesis.

The field trip provided access to many important resources, including secondary literature, manuscript catalogues, and palm-leaf manuscripts. The discussions with scholars and visits to manuscript collections also gave me many useful ideas for my research.

During this time, I reviewed my notes and organized the materials collected during the two months of fieldwork. These materials will now be used for the detailed analysis required for my thesis.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO), Pondicherry Centre, for awarding the Field Trip Grant that made this research possible. I am also grateful to the scholars and staff at the EFEO Pondicherry Centre for their support and for the valuable discussions during my stay. I would also like to thank the staff of the Oriental Research Institute and Manuscripts Library in Trivandrum, the University of Calicut, and the Vadakke Matham Brahmaswam Research Centre in Thrissur for their assistance during my research visits. Finally, I thank the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures at the University of Hamburg for their academic support throughout my research.

Conclusion

The field trip supported by the EFEO Field Trip Grant was very important for the progress of my research. The time spent at the EFEO Library allowed me to consult important secondary literature and interact with scholars working in related fields. These discussions helped me gain new perspectives on my research topic. The visit to the Oriental Research Institute and Manuscripts Library in Trivandrum allowed me to identify several palm-leaf manuscripts related to my research and request digital copies of them. Additional visits to the University of Calicut, the Vadakke Matham Brahmaswam Research Centre, and private manuscript collections helped me better understand the wider manuscript traditions of Kerala. Overall, the field trip helped me collect valuable materials and experiences that will support the completion of my thesis.