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## Schomerus and his field research on Tamil recitation

### Introduction

“Professor Dr. H. W. Schomerus, Halle a. S. 15. III. [19]29”. When Hilko Wiardo Schomerus wrote his name into the Phonogrammarchiv’s visitors’ book he was already on his way to Asia for an elaborate research trip, which – during 1929 and 1930 – would take him to Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), India, Indonesia (then Dutch East Indies) as well as China and Japan. His visit to the Phonogrammarchiv of the Academy of Sciences in Vienna was also documented in the Academy’s *Almanach* for the year 1929, where reference is made to the fact that he was supplied with equipment for recordings (see ÖAW Almanach: 199f.).

From Vienna, Schomerus, clergyman and Tamilist, travelled to Genova, where he embarked for Ceylon and India. In Madras (today’s Chennai), he recorded 30 *Phonogramme* between 27 August and 27 September 1929, each at an average length of one to two minutes. They contain various recitations of specimens of Classical Tamil poetic literature of Hinduism and the Bhakti movement, one text in the Telugu language and also two recitations with Christian contents in Tamil. The recitations were provided by five persons: Civapirakāca Tēcikar, Muttuttāṅṭavarāya Piḷḷai, Kuñcitapāta Tēcikar, Salomon Ācirvātam, and Umāpati Mutaliyār.

We do not know who inspired the German Protestant missionary Schomerus with the idea to make phonographic recordings of recitations of religious literary works in Classical Tamil and Telugu. Nor is there any information about why Schomerus chose to approach the Vienna Phonogrammarchiv rather than the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv for technical equipment and support. Importantly, however, it was the Phonogrammarchiv in Vienna in particular that had early on built up a certain reputation among scholars of Indology, with its singular collection of Brahman recitations established by the meteorologist Felix Exner as early as 1904 and 1905 (see Remmer, Liebl & Lechleitner 2016).

Exner’s altogether 68 recordings mostly contain recitations of Vedic and Sanskrit literature, but also feature isolated specimens in other languages of India, including the Phonogrammarchiv’s oldest recordings of Dravidian languages: a recitation of the Nālāyira Tivviya Pirapantam (Nālāyira Divya Prabandham) 1–4 (CD 2: 20–21, Ph 462 and Ph 463), a recitation of verses from Mahābhāgavatamu by the poet Bammera Pōtana (CD 2: 22, Ph 464) and an invocational text in Malayalam (CD 2: 23, Ph 465). All the recordings mentioned were made on 23 January 1905 in the Adyar Library of Madras.

Another collection of phonographic recordings, which falls chronologically between the field research conducted by Exner and Schomerus, is that compiled by the musicologist Arthur Fox Strangways (1859–1948), author of *The Music of Hindostan* (Fox Strangways 1914). In

the course of a field trip to India undertaken between 1910 and 1911, he made recordings of recitations in Tamil Nadu on wax cylinders, including specimens of literary works in Classical Tamil.

### Biographical sketch

Born in 1879 in the East Frisian parish of Marienhafe in Germany, Hilko Wiardo Schomerus originally qualified as a Lutheran missionary. Following his elder brother Rudolf Schomerus, he served between 1902 and 1912 in the “Leipziger Mission” as a missionary in Tamil Nadu (South India). There he also married his wife Anna Marie Mathilde Odefey and conducted studies in Tamil literature and Dravidian languages, which at that time was a less studied field of Indology commonly neglected by Western scholars, who normally focused on the Indo-European languages extant in India, especially the literary language of Sanskrit. Schomerus became a renowned expert, especially for Tamil with its rich and millennia-old literary tradition, and he distinguished himself by a thorough study of sources, philological accuracy and “critical appraisal of India’s religions in comparison with Christianity” (see Pohlus 2007: 464f.). Back in Germany in 1912, he continued his Indological, religious and Oriental studies at the universities of Kiel (with Paul Deussen, Hans Heinrich Schaeder) and Leipzig (with Ernst Windisch, Nathan Söderblom, Wilhelm Wundt). Prevented from returning to India by World War I, he took on the position of a parish pastor in Rendsburg (Schleswig-Holstein). After the war, Schomerus continued his academic career by working as an academic teacher and finally achieved his *Habilitation*. In 1926 he was appointed Professor of Mission Studies and director of the seminary of mission studies of the University of Halle-Wittenberg (Germany), also functioning, at times, as dean of the Divinity Faculty. He died in 1945, just a few months after the end of World War II (ibid.).

### The research trip

The research trip between March 1929 and May 1930 was obviously a long-planned endeavour. Besides his scientific aims, Schomerus presumably also had a great affection for Tamil Nadu and a desire to visit again that part of the world where he had lived and worked and which he had left not anticipating that the way back would be blocked for such a long time. No such sentiments, however, can be found in the few and dry documents extant today, like the so-called protocols of the Phonogrammarchiv, the written documentation accompanying each recording; these protocols provide but a minimum of information, such as the date and place of the recording session, technical data, the biographical data of the informants, etc.

Furthermore, on the Agreement made between Schomerus and the Phonogrammarchiv concerning the terms of lending the *Archivphonograph* and affiliated material (see AÖAW), Schomerus noted the Indian address under which he could be reached until 29 September as

“50. Pursavalkum Righ [High?] Road. Madras – Kilpauk. India” (probably standing for today’s Purasawalkam High Road).

Further evidence can be procured from the documents in Schomerus’ personal file, kept in the archives of the Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg (see UAHW). According to these, the application for the trip to British India and Dutch India was motivated by research in the fields of religious and linguistic studies. Besides, Schomerus also intended to visit Southern China, as his application for a service passport and the necessary visa shows (letter by Schomerus to the curator of the University of Halle, 24 September 1928). Finally, Schomerus was allocated 6,000 Reichsmark (RM) by the “Notgemeinschaft der deutschen Wissenschaft” (Emergency Association of German Science), which was the predecessor institution of today’s “Deutsche Forschungsgesellschaft” (DFG; German Research Foundation). A further amount of RM 2,200 was given by the Prussian ministry of culture. Schomerus was granted leave of absence for the summer term of 1929 and the winter term of 1929/30 (letters from the minister of culture, 1 October 1928 and 30 November 1928).

Soon after his return to Germany in May 1930, Schomerus handed in the final report of his travels to the minister (UAHW: letter dated 12 May 1930):<sup>1</sup>

I left Halle on 14<sup>th</sup> March 1929 and travelled at first to Vienna, where I was introduced to the handling of a phonographic apparatus which was lent to me by the University of Vienna [recte: by the Phonogrammarchiv of the Vienna Academy of Sciences]. In Genova I boarded the steamer of the North German Lloyd, on which I sailed to Colombo. After visiting Kandy’s spots of religious interest, with its Buddhist temples and monasteries, and Anuradhapuram, with its countless and enormous dagobas [stupa temples] and other ruins of the ancient Buddhist culture, I headed for the South Indian mainland. Here at first I devoted myself almost entirely to Dravidian studies, i.e. I researched the oldest Tamil literature and information on the old pre-Aryan Dravidian culture and religion of South India. From mid-June until mid-August I undertook an elaborate trip through the whole of India, from Cape Comorin to the Himalaya Mountains, and from Calcutta to Poona. On this trip I visited the most important places of Indian religious art, conferred with a number of Indian scholars, and in the talks with missionaries of all denominations and all nationalities I strove to familiarise myself with the status and the current problems of the missionary service. From mid-August to the end of September, I returned to my Dravidian studies.

In order to gain a better insight into the various problems posed by British India and into the character of India’s religious art, the stay in India has been of inestimable value. The study of ancient South India was particularly important to me. I have found precious material, more than I would have dared to expect. My most important duties for the following years will be to examine the data thoroughly and to process them in a scholarly manner. Furthermore, it

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<sup>1</sup> This, as well as most of the other quotations, were originally in German and have been translated into English. Scans of this typewritten document can be found on the Data CD (reproduced by kind permission of the University Archive of the Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg; personal file of Hilko Wiardo Schomerus, Rep 11. PA 14210 [Schomerus]).

was important that I was able to organise a systematic processing of the various Dravidian literatures. I hope that, with the help of various collaborators, I will be able to edit a series of Dravidian studies in the course of time. [...]

Schomerus continues with his report by describing his sojourn in Sumatra and Java, where he likewise visited places of religious importance and mission stations. He proceeded to Bali and the Malaysian peninsula before taking the boat from Singapore to Shanghai and finally entered Northern China, where he also visited Qingdao (which until 1919 had been under German colonial rule) as well as “Tsimo, Tsinanfu [Jinan], Yenchoufu, Kūfu (the city of Kung Fu Tse) [Qufu] and especially Peking [Beijing]”. A “side trip” finally brought Schomerus to Japan with the destinations Tokyo, Nikko, Kyoto and Nara. Back in China, Schomerus visited Canton [Guangzhou] and Hong Kong, where on 23 March 1930 he boarded the ship back to Genova, arriving on 26 April.

In his report Schomerus also writes about the contemporary peculiarities and problems for scholarship in British-governed India (more or less implicitly meaning German-speaking scholarship), which, since the outbreak of World War I, had suffered severely from the consequences of geopolitics. Moreover, he emphasises his contact with Professor S.N. Dasgupta in Calcutta (Surendranath Dasgupta, 1887–1952, the famous Sanskritist and philosopher) and his willingness to promote young German Indologists to undertake on-site research with manuscripts, pointing to the new and extensive findings of manuscripts on Bali. Finally, he stresses the desiderata and possibilities of research activities in Siam, China and Japan.

#### The recordings, their translations and transcriptions

Unfortunately, only little is known about the actual recording processes. Schomerus perhaps made the recordings in the Dravidian Research Institute of the University of Madras, since two of the speakers were students in this institution. Possibly, though, he also recorded in the “higher vocational school”, not further identified by name, in which two other informants were employed as teachers.

Even worse, the data on the five speakers in the recordings are extremely scarce (see “Performers”). The protocols reveal their age, ranging from 19 to 61 years, and their various occupations. It is obvious that they were intellectuals: two of them, Civapirakāca Tēcikar and Kuñcitapāta Tēcikar, are described as students at the Dravidian Research Institute of the University of Madras; two others, Muttuttāṅṭavarāya Piḷḷai and Salomon Ācirvātam, were teachers in a certain higher vocational school [“höhere Bürgerschule”]. The youngest, Umāpati Mutaliyār, is characterised as a scribe. In the present edition, the names of the speakers have been rendered in the original spelling used by Schomerus, with the current way of transcription being added in brackets, e.g. Sivapragāsa Thēsigar (Civapirakāca Tēcikar) or Kuñcithapātha Thēsigar (Kuñcitapāta Tēcikar). In addition, the protocols mention not only *their* place of origin, but also their parents’ place of residence.

Except for the instructions given in the Phonogrammarchiv, Schomerus was not entirely familiar with the process of recording and the handling of the recording devices. He did not specify the recording horn or membrane chosen, as required by the protocol, and his indications of the speed used (i.e. the revolutions per minute), which he gave as 70, were obviously not correct in many cases. Schomerus was equipped with the last model of the *Archiv-Phonograph*, Type V; created in 1927, it was characterised by further weight reduction in order to meet the demands of the field researchers for lighter equipment. This, however, negatively affected the stability of the machine, which produced an inferior sound quality in comparison to earlier sound recordings (cf. Lechleitner 2016). The most problematic recording made by Schomerus is Ph 3289: it is practically incomprehensible and has thus been transcribed with great reservation, solely according to the indications of the protocol. Nevertheless, with the aid of the transcriptions, the majority of the recordings can be followed quite well.

Hilko Wiardo Schomerus is known for his integral translations of important source texts of Hinduism from Tamil. No doubt the choice of texts recorded in the present collection mirrors his interests and his focus of research, though an analysis in greater detail has so far been lacking; it is to be hoped that this will be encouraged by the present edition. To give an example: on Ph 3281 (CD1: 4), Muttuttāṅṭavarāya Piḷḷai, a 61-year-old teacher, is reciting from two hymns of the Tiruvācakam, composed by the poet-saint Māṅikkavācakar Tiruvācakam, probably in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Not only had Schomerus already published a German edition of this work (see Schomerus 1923), but in the following years he would also venture to write the intercultural study *Meister Eckhart und Māṅikka-Vāṣagar: Mystik auf deutschem und indischem Boden* (“Meister Eckhart and Māṅikka-Vāṣagar: mysticism on German and Indian soil”; see Schomerus 1936). The comparison of Indian cultures, religions and history of ideas, on the one hand, and Christian-occidental culture on the other, permeates the oeuvre of Hilko Wiardo Schomerus and brought him into conflict with the growing nationalist trends in Germany in the inter-war-period, since he opposed their pseudo-scientific attitudes, arguments and methods (see Pohlus 2007).

The Christian missionary’s interest in the contact and mutual influence of religions is clearly apparent in the recording of Ph 3303 (CD 1: 25), which features a hymn by Eṅṛi Ālpiraiṭ Kuruṣṇapiḷḷai (or Henry Alfred Krishnapillai, 1827–1900), a Hindu by birth who later became a Christian convert. Another of the performed songs (*Ākamaṅkaḷ pukaḷ vētā namō namō*), recited on Ph 3306 (CD 1: 27) by the teacher Salomon Āsirvātham (Ācirvātam), is still prevalent in Modern Tamil Christian life.<sup>2</sup> Its author, the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Christian poet Vētanāyakam Cāstiriyaṛ (Vētanāyaka Cāstiri or Vedanāyagar Śāstri), is known for his Tamil translation of the German Protestant hymnal, “Garland of Prayer Songs” (*Jepamāla*); see Monius (2001: 195, n. 142).

Although new transcriptions were established for this edition (on which, see below), it goes without saying that Schomerus’ original handwritten transcriptions and translations noted

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<sup>2</sup> See e.g. the modern version performed on <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9xiylnsSm-s>> (11/12/2017).

down in the protocols are of great interest. The original texts were penned by him both in Tamil script and in a Latin transcription. For the latter he used a system differing from today's manner of transcription, exemplified in the protocol of Ph 3277 (CD 1: 29). On this page he also described the language of recitation of this and other recordings as "so-called High-Tamil, exclusively used in poetry", adding: "Among the Dravidian languages of South India, Tamil is the most important." These original transcriptions can be studied at full length by consulting the digital images on the Data CD.

As for the translations, it is worth noting that in addition to a plain translation of the poetic texts into German, Schomerus occasionally also provided a closer word-for-word translation, either interlinearly or in extra paragraphs, in order to render the word order and syntax of the original (Classical) Tamil texts. In contrast to the transcriptions, Schomerus wrote his German translations in the so-called "Deutsche Kurrentschrift" (German *Kurrent* script), which would have been appropriate at the time for German-language texts, but is no longer used today. For the sake of easy access, all German translations in this edition have thus also been given in Latin script in a separate text file ("Schomerus' German translations"). However, since Schomerus' handwriting *per se* is not always easy to decipher and not all readings are certain, unclear words or passages have been indicated by question marks. Furthermore, note that both the transcriptions and the translations, however faithfully and thoroughly they might have been executed at the time, may differ from the present state of knowledge. The protocol of Ph 3277 (CD 1: 29) will serve to illustrate the ambiguities of the handwritten protocols: Schomerus edits and translates *maṛumuka* "du Fremdgesicht" ("strange-faced one") instead of *aṛumuka* "o six-faced one"; presumably, he split the sequence *paramāmaṛumuka* into *paramā-maṛumuka* instead of the expected *param-ām-aṛumuka*.

For the new transcriptions made for this edition, the texts, wherever possible, have been counterchecked with contemporary editions (see the various comments on the transcriptions and the references of the consulted editions below). Occasionally, spellings have been normalised or adapted in other ways, e.g. by restoring the sandhi according to the recitations. For much of this painstaking work – which has proved rather time-consuming, considering the quality of the historical sound material – this edition is once more indebted to Jean-Luc Chevillard. The texts were in many cases based on the digitised versions from the Project Madurai (<http://www.projectmadurai.org/>; e.g. Ph 3288, CD 1: 11) and/or GRETIL, with occasional corrections and modifications.

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