



ANQUETIL-DUPERRON

ANQUETIL-DUPERRON, ABRAHAM HYACINTHE (1731-1805), French orientalist, born in Paris on 7 December 1731, the fourth of seven children of Pierre Anquetil, a spice importer. Duperron, the name of one of his father's estates, was added to his own name, as was the custom, to distinguish him from his brothers, among them Anquetil de Briancourt, who became French consul at Surat, India.

After distinguishing himself in classical studies, Anquetil-Duperron went to Holland to study Oriental languages, especially Arabic, with the Jansenists exiled at Amersfoort. Back in Paris, he was appointed to the Bibliothèque du Roi (now the Bibliothèque Nationale). In 1754, he was shown a few lines copied from a fragment of the Avesta brought in 1723 to the Bodleian Library, Oxford, by Richard Colbe . He decided to go to India to retrieve the sacred book, which Colbert, Louis XIV's minister, had ordered Father J. F. Pétis de la Croix, a Capuchin, to bring back from Iran without success. In order to hasten his departure he enrolled as a soldier in the Compagnie des Indes and walked all the way to Lorient on the Atlantic in the company of recruits from Parisian prisons. But before embarking on 7 February 1755 he received an allowance of 500 pounds from the Bibliothèque and thus was able to travel as a free passenger. On 10 August 1755 he reached Pondicherry, where he pursued his study of Oriental languages, notably Persian but also Tamil, Telugu, and others. Serious obstacles, including the outbreak of the Seven Years' War, made it difficult for him to reach the ultimate destination of Surat, where Parsees had declared themselves willing to be his teachers. Forced to travel all



the way around India on horseback or on foot, he arrived at Surat, then one of the chief commercial centers of India, on 1 March 1758 and was welcomed by his brother Anquetil de Briancourt. Owing to the dissension between reformist and conservative Parsees, he obtained a copy of the Vendidad from two reformist dastūrs, Kaus and Darab, who also taught him, via Persian, what they knew of Avestan (which was not much). Then he got a better copy of the Avesta from the conservative dastūr Mancherji. In June, 1759, he was able to send news to Paris that he had completed (in three months) a translation of that Vendidad. His plan of studies was read to the Academy in February, 1760. That June Dastur Darab managed to have him attend, under disguise, a fire ceremony in the Dar-e Mehr without telling him that the sacred fire had been temporarily removed in order to repair the building and whitewash the walls.

In September, 1760, his translation of the Avesta was finished, and he had acquired 180 manuscripts, including samples of nearly all the languages of India. He left Surat on 15 March 1761 aboard an English ship and arrived eight months later at Portsmouth, where he was interned, but allowed to continue working. After his release he visited Oxford and was able to check his copies of the Avesta against those in the Bodleian. On 15 March 1762 he deposited his manuscripts in the Bibliothèque du Roi in Paris. Among the papers that he subsequently read to the Academy was an “Exposition du système théologique des Parses,” (1767) which deals first with Zurwān, then with Ohrmazd and Ahriman. On his authority, his theory that Zoroaster and the Zoroastrian elite were Zurvanite monotheists was from now on adopted by the majority of writers. In 1830 Wilson could cite as supporting it Gibbon, Lord Woodhouselee, Sir John Malcolm’s *History of Persia*, Sir Graves Haughton, Enfield Creuzer, and Stuhr, but only l’Abbé Foucher and Erskine as opposed to it. Not until the 20th century was the Zurvanite problem to be taken up again, by such scholars as Benveniste, Nyberg, Zaehner, and others.

Anquetil’s three-volume translation of the Avesta, including the *Journal du voyage de l’Auteur aux Indes orientales*, *Notice des manuscrits*, *Vie de Zoroastre*, a translation of the *Bundahišn*, and two essays, *Exposition des usages civils et religieux des Parses* and *Système cérémonial et moral des livres zends et pehlvis*, was published in 1771. He was immediately accused of forgery by William Jones. The same opinion prevailed among Germans with the exception of Herder and the translator of Anquetil’s work, Kleuker (Riga, 1776). It was not until 1791-94 that he was finally vindicated by Tychsen and Heeren. In France, Anquetil met with the hostility of the Encyclopedists.



Anquetil's departure for India had raised high hopes in the ranks of the philosophers. Voltaire had already entered the ideological field of battle, since Zoroaster provided him with a weapon against Christianity: if truth could be found in non-Christian tradition, Moses was not unique. Rameau had an opera performed in Paris in 1770 entitled *Zoroastre*. But Anquetil, both in his letters from India and after his return to Paris, shattered the hopes of the enemies of the Church by his firm refusal to see anything in the Avesta that could be used against Christianity. Voltaire, Grimm, and Diderot were conspicuously disappointed.

Anquetil's attempt at a translation was, of course, premature. The right approach to the Avesta was through Sanskrit, as E. Burnouf demonstrated sixty years later. But Anquetil was nonetheless the first to bring a manuscript of an ancient oriental sacred text other than the Bible to the attention of European scholars. For the next thirty years, until his death in Paris on 18 January 1805, Anquetil was occupied with studying the laws, history, and geography of India. In his youth a kind of Don Juan, he now led the life of a poor, ascetic bachelor, combining Christian virtue with the wisdom of a Brahmin. (In 1804 he refused to swear allegiance to Napoleon, while stating his "obeisance to the laws of the government under which he lived and which protected him.") His most valuable achievement was a Latin translation of the *Upaniṣads* completed in 1796 from a Persian translation received from India in 1775. Publication was started at Strasbourg in 1801 under the title of *Oupnek'hat*. A 108-page French paraphrase by Lanjuinais appeared in Millin's *Magasin Encyclopédique* of 1805. This was the first time that a sacred book of Hinduism, albeit in an approximate rendering, was revealed to Europe. Schopenhauer found in it the revelation of his own thinking, and even in India, Anquetil's translation started a revival in the study of the *Upaniṣads*.

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(J. Duchesne-Guillemin)