

**Text of a press release by the University of Leuven  
(still Belgium, not yet Flanders) – 14.06.2010**

**Lost manuscript of Sanskrit language found in Italian monastery**

In the last week of May 2010, the **manuscript Grammatica Grandonica** by the German Jesuit Johann Ernest Hanxleden was retraced in the area around Rome. Elaborating on former enquiries by the Luxemburg scholar Jean-Claude Muller, the **Belgian scholar Toon Van Hal , Center for the History of Linguistics, K.U.Leuven** and former Fellow of the Humboldt Foundation, University of Potsdam, succeeded in tracking the lost manuscript to the Convento di San Silvestro, a Carmelite monastery in Montecompatri (Italy, Lazio).

The manuscript was lost for several decades. Grammatica Grandonica is **one of the earliest missionary grammars of the Sanskrit language** and it was a considerable influence on the emergence of the first Sanskrit grammar ever printed in Europe (1790). The rediscovery is relevant to intellectual history in general, and to the history of linguistics in particular.

**A popular missionary in Kerala**

Johann Ernst Hanxleden was born in 1681 near Osnabrück (Germany). From 1701 onwards until his death in 1732, he worked as a Jesuit missionary in Kerala (south-west India). Hanxleden gained a high-level command of the local Malayalam language as well as of the liturgical Sanskrit language, which the Brahmans did not usually reveal to strangers. Hanxleden, however, managed to convince two Brahmans to teach him the language. This enabled him to write a Sanskrit grammar (Grammatica Grandonica), though unfortunately it was lost in the course of history.

**The importance of Sanskrit for intellectual history**

It was a highly deplorable loss, given that Sanskrit occupies an important position in the history of linguistics. Its study in Europe (which only began at the end of the eighteenth century) played a pivotal role in the process of institutionalising the new discipline of linguistics at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The very first Sanskrit grammar ever printed was written by a later Kerala missionary, the Carmelite Paulinus a Sancto Bartholomaeo (1748-1806), who has been accused of simply copying the grammar of Hanxleden, which was 60 years older. This accusation, however, has not been substantiated as of yet.

**Hunting for a lost grammar**

The evidence gathered has been presented at a workshop (June 4, 2010) organised by Prof. Christophe Vielle, holder of the chair for Indology at the University of Louvain-la-Neuve. The discovery will enable an international team of scholars to investigate Paulinus's alleged dependency on Hanxleden. In addition, it will cast **new light on the indigenous South-Indian tradition of Sanskrit grammaticography**, in which both Paulinus and Hanxleden were rooted.

**Original text by the young ‘inventor’:**

**LOST SANSKRIT GRAMMAR RETRIEVED**

LEUVEN ( BELGIUM) – In the last week of May 2010, the manuscript *Grammatica Grandonica* by the German Jesuit Johann Ernest Hanxleden has been retraced in the surroundings of Rome. For several decades, the manuscript was deemed to be lost. It concerns one of the earliest missionary grammars of the Sanskrit language, which influenced considerably the

emergence of the first Sanskrit grammar ever printed in Europe (1790). The rediscovery will prove to be relevant to intellectual history in general, and to the history of linguistics in particular.

### **A popular missionary in Kerala**

Johann Ernst Hanxleden was born in 1681 near Osnabrück (Germany). From 1701 onwards until his death in 1732, he worked as a Jesuit missionary in Kerala (the South-West of India). Hanxleden gained a high-level command of the local Malayalam language as well as of the liturgical Sanskrit language, which the Brahmans tended to keep secret for strangers. Hanxleden, however, managed to convince two Brahmans to teach him the language. This enabled him to write a Sanskrit grammar, in addition to his numerous lexicographic and poetical Malayalam achievements. Although none of his works have been published during his lifetime, Hanxleden is still famous in Kerala under his nickname of 'Arnos Padiri'. Unfortunately enough, his Sanskrit grammar (*Grammatica Grandonica*) was deemed to have been lost.

### **The importance of Sanskrit for intellectual history**

This loss was highly deplorable, given that Sanskrit occupies an important position within the history of linguistics. Its study in Europe (starting only from the end of the eighteenth century onwards) played a pivotal role in the process of institutionalizing the new linguistic discipline at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The very first Sanskrit grammar ever printed has been written by a later Kerala missionary, the Carmelite Paulinus a Sancto Bartholomaeo's (1748-1806), who has been accused of simply having copied the 60 at least year older grammar of Hanxleden. This accusation, however, could as yet not be substantiated.

### **Hunting for a lost grammar**

Elaborating on former enquiries by the Luxemburg scholar Jean-Claude Muller, the Belgian scholar Toon Van Hal (Center for the History of Linguistics, Catholic University of Leuven and former Fellow of the Humboldt Foundation, University of Potsdam) succeeded in tracking the lost manuscript in the Convento di San Silvestro, a Carmelite monastery in Montecomprati (Italy, Lazio). The evidence gathered has been presented at a workshop (June 4, 2010) organized by prof. Christophe Vielle, holder of the chair for Indology at the University of Louvain-la-Neuve. The discovery will enable scholars to investigate Paulinus's alleged dependency on Hanxleden. In addition, it will cast new light on the indigenous South-Indian tradition of Sanskrit grammaticography, in which both Paulinus and Hanxleden were rooted.

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