



## **South Asian Artefactual Histories from the London Missionary Society Museum, 1814-1826<sup>1</sup>**

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KEYWORDS: ARTEFACTUAL HISTORY, MISSIONARY MUSEUM, COLLECTING, LONDON MISSIONARY SOCIETY, VISUAL CULTURE

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### **Introduction**

The museum of the London Missionary Society was established in 1814, less than a mile from the India Museum at the East India Company's Leadenhall Street headquarters. With material from India as well as from the Society's other mission fields in Africa, the Pacific, China and elsewhere, the Missionary Museum's collections spanned the globe.

Formed in 1795 and overseen by a board of Directors with a constitution similar to that of a joint stock company, the London Missionary Society (LMS) generated no earthly profits for its members, dependent as it was on fundraising and charitable donations. The LMS, as it was widely known until reconstituted as a Council for World Mission after 1966, must rank as one of the world's earliest examples of what we would now call an international NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation).

In order to pursue its ends, the LMS developed a range of forms of propaganda that included illustrated periodicals - circulated widely in Britain and across the globe. Nicholas Mirzoeff (2011: 15) has suggested that the missionary can be regarded as a metonymic figure within what he has called the 'Imperial Complex of Visuality', dominant between 1860 and 1945. The origins of this complex, together with what Tony Bennett (1988)



has called 'the Exhibitionary Complex', can arguably be traced to forms of missionary visual and material practices that developed and were elaborated in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

Having published an overview of the history and collections of the London Missionary Society Museum (Wingfield 2016), I am in the process of writing an experimental digital monograph that I am calling 'an artefactual history', in order to trace the development of these complexes.<sup>2</sup> Each chapter takes its title from an historic caption or catalogue entry, but uses the body of the text to explore what this reveals, but also conceals, about the artefacts in question.

Together, these chapters are not intended to constitute a Foucauldian genealogy, tracing historical relationships of descent and alliance, but rather to provide a gallery of ancestral portraits, which the reader is encouraged to explore in order to recognise and identify family resemblances in the present. As such, the project is a response to David Graeber and David Wengrow's (2021: 5, 24) challenge to write history 'as if it consisted of people one would have been able to talk to, when they were still alive', as part of an attempt to construct a new science of history that 'restores our ancestors to their full humanity'.

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The chapters are sequenced chronologically but structured to reveal trans-regional and trans-historical connections between the multiple global locations where the LMS operated. However, in a time where we frequently encounter texts digitally, directed into their midst by search engine algorithms, the resulting digital artefact is intended to enable readers to arrive at any point, and to pursue the strands that take their interest.

This contribution to the special issue constitutes a South Asian strand, combining the sixth and eleventh chapters, both focused on South Asian historical artefacts and artefactual histories. Together, they unpack the material listed under 'EAST INDIES' in a catalogue of the Missionary Museum printed in 1826.

### **Twenty-two models of 'HINDOO DEITIES'**

*Calcutta, 1819*

In September 1819, shortly after the 'principal idol' sent by Pomare II from Tahiti in the middle of the Pacific was conveyed around a Chapel in Falmouth, Cornwall (Wingfield 2022: Chapter 4), the *Missionary Chronicle* reported the arrival in London of further additions to the Missionary



Museum. Sent by the Rev. Henry Townley as a gift from the Bengal Auxiliary Missionary Society, they were described as:

Twenty-two models of Hindoo deities, [carved in wood, about a foot in height, and painted] such as are ordinarily manufactured in that idolatrous country. Prints taken from these are intended to be given in the Missionary Sketches, accompanied by explanations from the Rev. Mr. Ward's History of the Literature and the Religion of the Hindoos. (LMS 1819b)

A month after their arrival, the cover of *Missionary Sketches* featured nine of Townley's models (Fig. 1), each with the name of the God they depicted printed beneath (LMS 1819a).

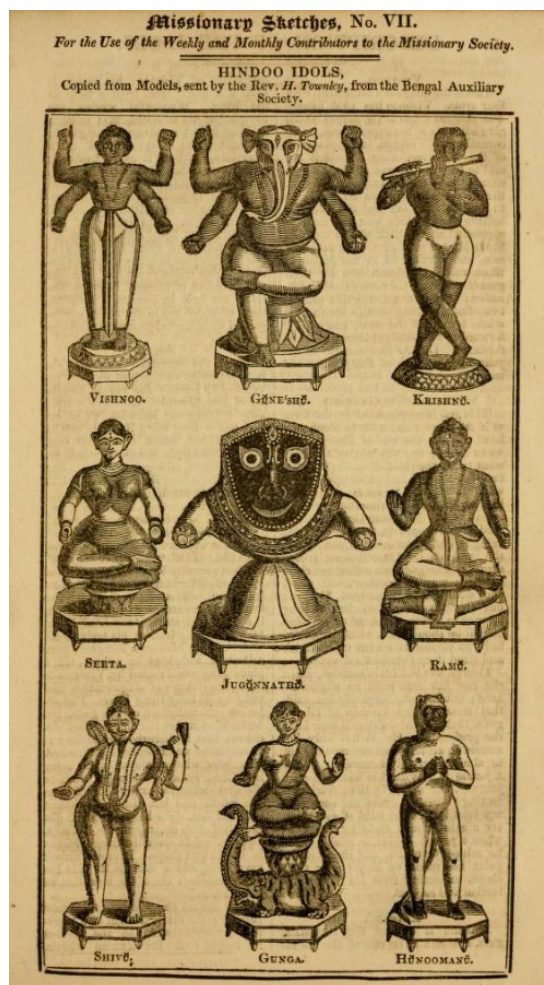


Figure 1, HINDOO IDOLS, Copied from Models, sent by the Rev. H. Townley, from the Bengal Auxiliary society. *Missionary Sketches*, No. VII, October 1819. Internet Archive (Public Domain): <https://archive.org/details/missionarysketch00lond/page/n24/mode/1up>



Abbreviated descriptions of each God, summarising Ward's text, were given on the following pages. In a footer at the end of the descriptions, a paragraph clarified their intended message, positioning the work of missionaries in India as a direct continuation of a long-term battle against religious idols, documented in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible:

These are specimens, Christian Reader, of the gods of the heathen in India, worshipped by more than a hundred millions of deluded people. These are the creatures of a corrupt imagination, and the workmanship of men's hands — "they have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not; they have hands, but they handle not; feet have they, but they walk not; neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusted in them. O Israel, trust thou in the Lord." Psalm cxv. 5—10. (ibid.)

These conjunctions of artefact, image and text illustrate the strong connections between items sent to the Missionary Museum, and the images and texts that appeared in missionary publications. It seems likely that Townley, like John Smith in Demerara (Wingfield 2022: Chapter 5), had seen the early issues of *Missionary Sketches* from 1818, featuring the Trimurti from Elephanta, Mantis the Soothsayer from South Africa, and the Family Idols of Pomare from Tahiti. A fairly recent arrival in India, Townley had been sent to Calcutta by the Missionary Society's Directors in 1816.

The Rev. Mr. Ward, on the other hand, was William Ward, something of a veteran with nearly two decades of experience working for Baptist Missionary Society in India (Fig. 2). In the aftermath of the French revolution, non-conformist churches in Britain had been associated with political radicalism, and the official line of the East India Company prohibited their missionaries from operating in areas it controlled. Sympathetic Company officials, however, had turned a blind eye to the activities of William Carey, the original Baptist missionary, after he arrived in India in 1793, particularly when he was officially employed on an indigo plantation (Carson 2012: 53).

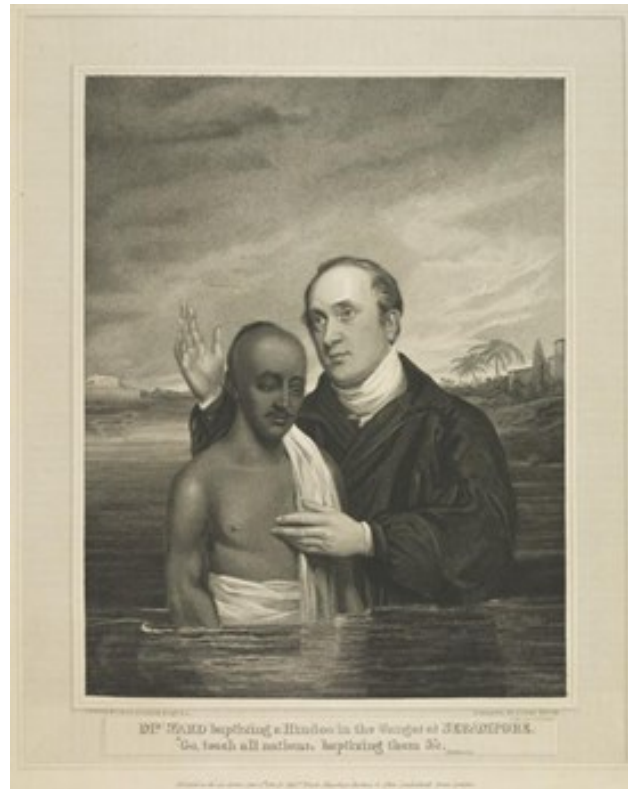


Figure 2, William Ward baptizing a Hindoo in the Ganges at Serampore. 1821 stipple engraving on paper by Henry Meyer, based on painting by John Jackson. *Scottish National Portrait Gallery* (CC BY NC): EPL 98.1.

The arrival of William Ward, along with three other Baptist missionaries and their families, in 1799, was harder to ignore. The recently arrived Anglo-Irish Governor-General, Richard Wellesley, pursuing a war against the French and their allies in Mysore, refused them permission to join Carey in Bengal. As a consequence, the Baptists established themselves at Serampore, a Danish controlled town less than twenty miles north of Calcutta, the capital of British India, much to Wellesley's initial displeasure (Carson 2012: 56-7).

Originally a printer and journalist from Derby in the British Midlands, Ward was responsible for the printing press at Serampore, established in 1800, where translations of the Bible were printed in Bengali, Marathi, Hindi and other Indian languages (Carlyle 2004). The project of religious translation involved working closely with Indian scholars such as Ram Ram Basu, who was worked for Carey as his *munshi* (language teacher) (Murshid 2021).

When Governor Wellesley established Fort William College in Calcutta in 1801, it was Carey he appointed to teach Bengali, assisted by Basu. The project of translation operated in multiple directions—Sanskrit epics, the



Mahabharata and Ramayana were published in Bengali in 1802-03. From 1805 the Baptists were even paid a stipend by the Asiatic Society at Fort William College to translate and publish Sanskrit texts in English (Carson 2012: 59).

The first volume of Ward's *Account of the Writings, Religion, and Manners of the Hindoos including Translations from their Principal Works* was printed at the Mission Press in Serampore in 1806, with the fourth volume completed in 1811, just before a fire destroyed the print works (Ward 1811). A second edition, "carefully abridged and greatly improved", was printed between 1815 and 1818 under the title *A View of the History, Literature, and Religion of the Hindoos* (Ward 1815-1818), with a third edition printed in Britain by the Baptist Missionary Society between 1817 and 1820 (Ward 1817-1820).

A compendium of Indian religious texts printed in English, alongside descriptions of Hindu practice, Ward provided British evangelicals with an accessible guide to 'the religion of the Hindoos'. Even before the arrival in London of Townley's 'models', Ward's text had been used to compile a description that accompanied an image of Ganesh that was printed in the *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* in March 1818 (Fig. 3).



Figure 3, Representation of the Indian Idol, Ganesa. Published in *Evangelical Magazine*, volume 26, March 1818, p. 125. Hathi Trust (Public Domain, Google-digitized): <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.ah6lsg&view=1up&seq=139>



It was noted that many Hindus kept a small metal image of the god in their houses for daily worship. The *Evangelical Magazine*, however, was not content to adopt a position of straightforward condescension in relation to this 'idolatry', noting that:

The superstitious regard paid by these blind idolaters to a senseless image, may put to shame many who are better informed, and who call themselves Christians, but who live practically "without God in the world;" who never acknowledge the Creator and Preserver; and who daily go out and return home, amidst a thousand dangers, without seeking his guidance or protection. (LMS 1818: 125)

The London Missionary Society sent their first missionary to India in 1798. Arriving five years after William Carey, also without an official licence, Nathaniel Forsyth preached in and around Calcutta with the tacit support of Company officials. With minimal financial assistance from the Society in London, he found Calcutta expensive and lived for a time on a boat, until appointed minister of the Dutch church at Chinsurah (Hugli-Chuchura) in West Bengal (Lovett 1899, vol. 2: 11-15).

Only in 1804 were further missionaries sent to India by the LMS, but they went to the south. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the major Indian campaigns undertaken by the Society seem to have been largely conducted through a war of words in London.

In July 1806 an uprising at Vellore Fort in Tamil Nadu, South India, following the implementation of new uniform regulations involving the trimming of beards and removal of caste marks, was connected to the circulation of rumours about forced conversion to Christianity. Evangelicals sought to blame the family of Tipu Sultan, imprisoned at the fort, as well as the Madras administration, invoking the weight of British evangelical opinion in an attempt to avert a wholesale recall of missionaries from India (Carson 2012: 71).

Making the case for the opposition was the Rev. Sydney Smith, who, in his essay "Indian Missions" published in *The Edinburgh Review* of February 1808, quoted the *Transactions of the Missionary Society* at length to illustrate the strong reactions missionary activity provoked in India. Smith argued that it was perilous to proselytise in a precarious India 'without incurring the utmost risk of losing our empire' (Smith 1808: 173). In the essay, which Smith himself later characterised as 'routing out a nest of consecrated cobblers' (Smith 1809: 40), he famously asked: 'Why are we to send out little detachments of maniacs to spread over the fine regions



of the world the most unjust and contemptible opinion of the gospel?' (Smith 1808: 179)

Evangelicals were ultimately successful in defending the admittedly fairly ambiguous status quo, but many of the same arguments resurfaced in the years leading up to the British government's renewal of the East India Company's charter in 1813.

Evangelical networks across the British Isles were mobilised in a campaign that led to 908 petitions supporting the promulgation of Christianity in India being submitted to the British parliament, at that time the largest number ever presented (Carson 2012: 139). In a parliamentary compromise orchestrated by William Wilberforce, all sides were enabled to believe they had achieved some of their aims. A new clause in the charter of the East India Company made it:

the Duty of this country, to promote the interests and happiness of the native inhabitants of the British dominions in India, and that such measures ought to be adopted as may tend to the introduction among them of useful knowledge, and of religious and moral improvement. That in the furtherance of the above objects, sufficient facilities shall be afforded by law, to persons desirous of going to, and remaining in India, for the purpose of accomplishing those benevolent designs. (Carson 2012: Appendix 4)

One of the major consequences of this clause was the establishment of schools across India, including for girls, supported financially by the East India Company—the Rev. Robert May of the London Missionary Society established thirty schools, educating nearly 3000 children including 700 sons of Brahmins in and around Chinsurah between 1812 and 1816 (Lovett 1899, vol. 2: 16). The exterior, interior and plan view of one of these schools was depicted on the cover of *Missionary Sketches* in October 1820 (Fig. 4), a year after the cover had featured Townley's 'Hindoo Idols' (LMS 1820a).



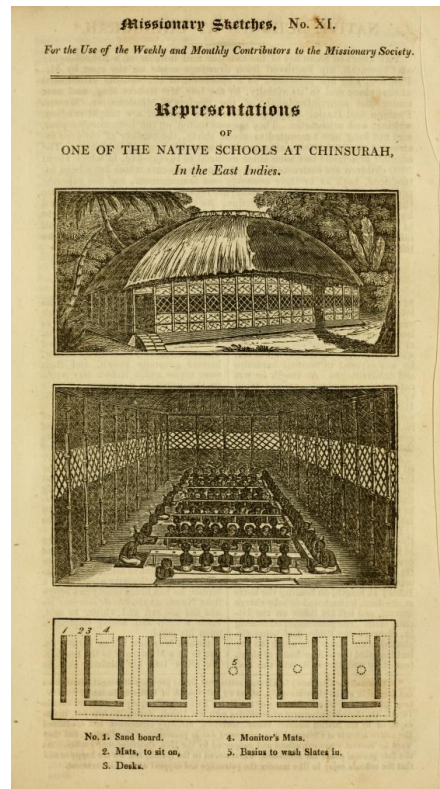


Figure 4, Representations of One of the Native Schools at Chinsurah In the East Indies, *Missionary Sketches*, No. XI, October 1820. Internet Archive (Public Domain): <https://archive.org/details/missionarysketch00lond/page/n40/mode/1up>

It was in the wake of this campaign and the resulting new clause that Henry Townley had been sent to re-establish the Society's mission at Calcutta, following the death of Forsyth. The Bengal Auxiliary Missionary Society was established in December 1817 to raise funds locally to support missionary activity (Lushington 1824: 78). Prompted to contribute to the stock of missionary images, Townley, acting on behalf of the Auxiliary Society either purchased or commissioned a set of twenty-two *murti* (models)—images of Hindu gods.

It is significant these were described as "models". This may have been an attempt to translate the word *murti*, which carries a sense that such figures take the material form of a god, without being gods in themselves, but it more likely suggests that they were acquired from the craftspeople who made them, rather than from temples or homes, where they had already been the focus for *puja* or *bhakti* (religious devotion). Unlike Pomare's Family Idols, these were not given up by converts to Christianity, but they remained useful in illustrating the religious practices of India for missionary supporters across the world.



The fact that eight of the *murti* were arranged on the cover of *Missionary Sketches* around the black-faced figure of Jugunnathu is significant (Fig. 1), reflecting this figure's centrality to early nineteenth century British imaginations of Indian religion. A note in parentheses in the written account points out that the name of this God is 'usually written Juggernaut', explaining that this name is a title for a deified hero meaning "Lord of the World" (LMS 1819a).

The form of the image, with no legs and only stumps for arms but a very large head and eyes was explained: having been commissioned to house the bones of Krishna, its maker was interrupted at work, leaving the image unfinished. Brahma, himself, however, was said to have given the murti its eyes and a soul.

The focus of the printed description in *Missionary Sketches* then shifts from the image itself to the temple to Jagganath in Orissa and its annual Car Festival. As part of this, the crowd drew a tapering tower containing the image of Jagganath, between 50 to 60 feet high and with sixteen wheels. The description ends by noting:

Unnumbered multitudes of pilgrims, from all parts of India, attend this festival, among whom a great mortality frequently prevails; and hundreds, perhaps thousands of persons, diseased or distressed, have cast themselves under the wheels of this ponderous car, and have been crushed to death. (ibid.)

The subjugation of Orissa during the Second Anglo-Maratha War of 1803, pursued by Wellesley, placed the temple of Jagannath at Puri, a major site of regional pilgrimage, under the control of the East India Company. The appointment by the Company of a tax collector and committee to manage temple affairs upset evangelicals, who argued that this amounted to state-sponsored idolatry.

The person most responsible for advancing this concern was Claudius Buchanan, an evangelical Scottish Anglican minister appointed to an East India Company chaplaincy in Bengal in 1796, who became vice-provost of Fort William College in 1800, where he worked closely with William Carey. In 1811 Buchanan (1812) published *Christian Researches in Asia* and in December of that year, the *Evangelical Magazine* syndicated his description of the festival of Juggernaut in order to 'kindle the zeal of European Christians in the support and extension of Missionary efforts' by becoming 'more intimately acquainted with the horrors of Heathenism':



I have returned home from witnessing a scene which I shall never forget. At twelve o'clock of this day, being the great day of the east, the Moloch of Hindoostan was brought out of his temple, amidst the acclamations of hundreds of thousands of his worshippers [...]

The idol is a block of wood, having a frightful visage, painted black, with a distended mouth of a bloody colour [...] An aged minister of the idol then stood up; and, with a long rod in his hand, which he moved with indecent action, completed the variety of this disgusting exhibition. I felt a consciousness of doing wrong in witnessing it [...] The characteristics of Moloch's worship are obscenity and blood. We have seen the former. Now comes the blood.

After the tower had proceeded some way, a pilgrim announced that he was ready to offer himself a sacrifice to the idol. He laid himself down in the road before the tower, as it was moving along, lying on his face, with arms stretched forwards. The multitude passed round him, leaving the space clear, and he was crushed to death by the wheels of the tower. A shout of joy was raised to the god. He is said to smile when the libation of the blood is made. The people threw cowries, or small money, on the body of the victim, in approbation of the deed. He was left to view a considerable time, and was then carried by the *hurries* to the Golgotha, where I have just been viewing his remains. How much I wished that the Proprietors of India Stock could have attended the wheels of Juggernaut, and seen *this peculiar source of their revenue!* (LMS 1811)

Buchanan's reference to Moloch connected Jagannath to the Old Testament book of Leviticus but also to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, making it clear he regarded the procession at Puri as a form of demonic idolatry, endorsed and managed by a British commercial company. The image of the immense and unstoppable car of Juggernaut, crushing pilgrims beneath its wheels was so potent that it captured early nineteenth century evangelical opinion, finding an enduring place in the English language (Altman 2017; Carens 2005: Chapter 3).

In the years that followed, the front cover of *Missionary Sketches* featured further Indian gods, with commentary supplied by Ward. In July 1820, an image of "Kalee, the black goddess of India" (Fig. 5) included a description of the animal sacrifices Ward witnessed at a festival in Calcutta:

Never did I see men so eagerly enter into the shedding of blood; the place literally swam with blood. The bleating of the animals, the numbers slain and the ferocity of the people employed actually made me unwell; and I returned about midnight, filled with horror and indignation. (LMS 1820b)



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Figure 5, Kallee, the Black Goddess of India, *Missionary Sketches*, No. X, July 1820.  
Internet Archive (Public Domain):  
<https://archive.org/details/missionarysketch00lond/page/n36/mode/1up>

In January 1821, the cover featured a representation of "Doorga, a principal goddess of the Hindoos" (Fig. 6) based on a drawing made and purchased at Chinsurah along with a number of others, distinctive in that:

all the lines by which the figures are delineated are composed of the name of the idol, in the Bengalee character, many thousand times repeated. The ornaments (here omitted) which are very profuse and not inelegant, are formed in the same manner. (LMS 1821)

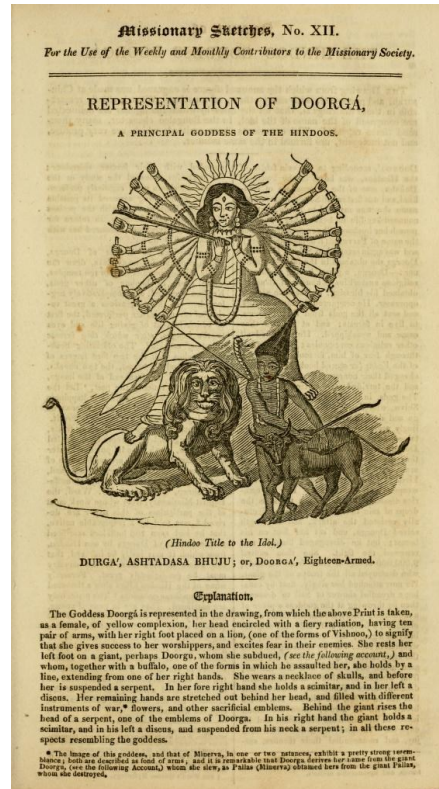


Figure 6, Representation of Doorgá, A principal Goddess of the Hindoos. *Missionary Sketches*, No. XII, January 1821. Internet Archive (Public Domain): <https://archive.org/details/missionarysketch00lond/page/n44/mode/1up>

The text described Durga and the features of ceremonies at which she was worshipped, noting a ceremony Ward witnessed at Calcutta in 1806, when:

The whole scene produced on my mind sensations of greatest horror. The dress of the singers - their indecent gestures - the abominable nature of the songs - the horrid din of their miserable drum - the lateness of the hour - the darkness of the place - with the reflection that I was standing in an idol temple, and that this immense multitude of rational and immortal creatures, capable of such superior enjoyments, were, in the very set of worship, perpetrating a crime of high treason against the God of heaven, while they themselves believed they were performing an act of merit. (ibid.)

Rumours of human sacrifices to Durga were reported, and a footnote enumerated the far larger number of annual deaths in ways that were, according to Ward, sanctioned by the '*shasters* (religious books of the Hindoos)', which he had calculated:

- Widows burnt alive on the funeral pile — 5000
- Pilgrims perishing on the roads and at sacred places — 4000



FOCUS

- Persons drowning themselves in the Ganges, or buried or burnt alive — 500
  - Children immolated, including the rajpoots — 500
  - Sick persons, whose death is hastened on the banks of the Ganges — 500
- 10,500

Although not given a number, the body of the text listed another cause of death: 'by the wheels of the idol Juggernaut'.

In April 1822, the cover of *Missionary Sketches* once again featured an image of Juggernaut, as well as diagrammatic representations of Boloram and Sabattra, his siblings (Fig. 7). The text included a mythical history of the creation of the three *murti*, abridged from an account drawn up by a Brahmin from Orissa. The commentary that followed listed a number of features of the narrative, each provided with biblical references, suggestive of Christian parallels that might make the bible—referred to as the "True Veda"—appealing to Hindus (LMS 1822c).

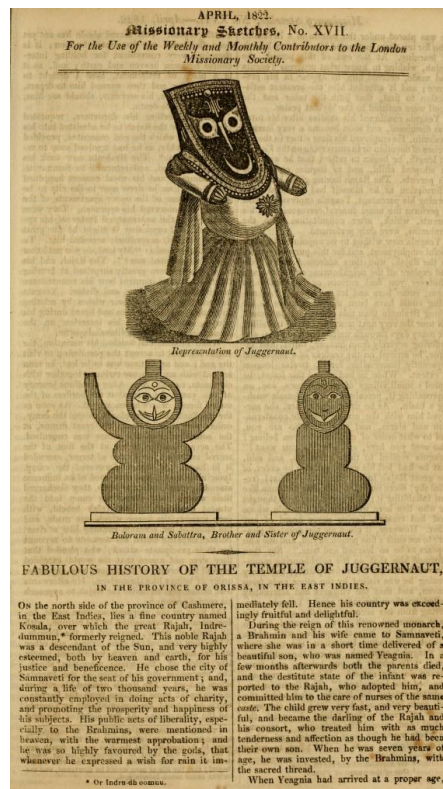
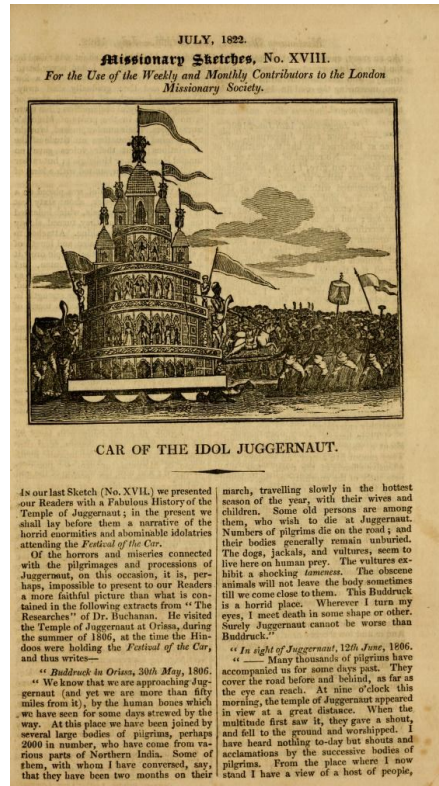


Figure 7, Fabulous History of the Temple of Juggernaut, in the Province of Orissa, in the East Indies. *Missionary Sketches*, No. XVII, April 1822. Internet Archive (Public Domain): <https://archive.org/details/missionarysketch00lond/page/n64/mode/1up>



## FOCUS

The following issue, printed in July 1822, included an image of the procession of Juggernaut (Fig. 8), with the textual description taken from Buchanan's account, eleven years after it had appeared in the *Missionary Chronicle*—to lay before readers 'the horrible enormities and abominable idolatries attending the *Festival of the Car*' (LMS 1822b).



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Figure 8, Car of the Idol Juggernaut. *Missionary Sketches*, No. XVIII, July 1822. Internet Archive (Public Domain): <https://archive.org/details/missionarysketch00lond/page/n68/mode/1up>

This was juxtaposed with another description by Buchanan of baptism and preaching at Serampore, alongside texts quoted from William Carey and William Ward. Readers were told: 'Surely no reader of this sketch would hesitate to exert himself, or to subscribe a portion of his property, to put a stop only to the evils connected with the IDOL JUGGERNAUT.' (ibid.)

Just as Townley's models were followed on the cover of *Missionary Sketches* by an image of a Chapel and school at Madras in January 1820, the succeeding issue, printed in October 1822, depicted Union Chapel in Calcutta (Fig. 9), opened in April 1821. A centre for missionary activity, it was also intended to make evangelical Christianity available to the many dissolute Europeans living what evangelicals regarded as immoral lives in the capital of British India (LMS 1822a).

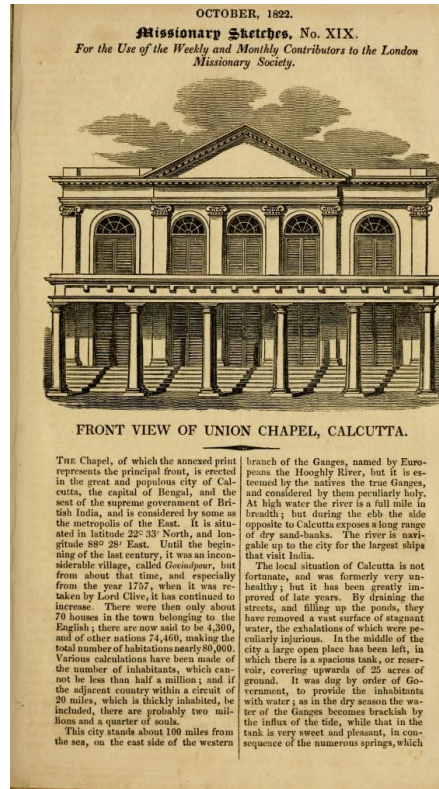


Figure 9, Front View of Union Chapel, Calcutta. *Missionary Sketches*, No. XIX, October 1822. Internet Archive (Public Domain): <https://archive.org/details/missionarysketch00lond/page/n72/mode/1up>

Readers were provided with a history of the city, including an account of English prisoners dying crowded into the Black Hole Prison in 1756. This was followed by an account of the Serampore translations by the Baptist Missionaries, the work of Forsyth, as well as the arrival of Townley and more recent missionaries in the city. The London Missionary Society's grant of 1000 Rupees a year to support the School Society was noted, with the implication that schools and chapels would rapidly replace temples of idol worship across India.

While the missionary critique of India and its religious institutions was frequently harsh and intemperate, it is striking that it seems to have induced a response from Indian intellectuals. Ram Ram Basu, who worked with Carey from the 1790s onwards and never converted to Christianity, nevertheless argued for the reform of Hinduism based on the Vedas. He even wrote a Bengali text about Jesus Christ, *Christabibaranamrta*, in 1803.

In 1817, Mrityunjaya Vidyalkar, an orthodox Brahmin depicted working alongside William Carey on translations at Fort William College (Fig. 10) compiled a legal report suggesting that the practice of *sati* (widow burning) was not sanctioned by any Indian holy texts (Ahmed 1965: 112).



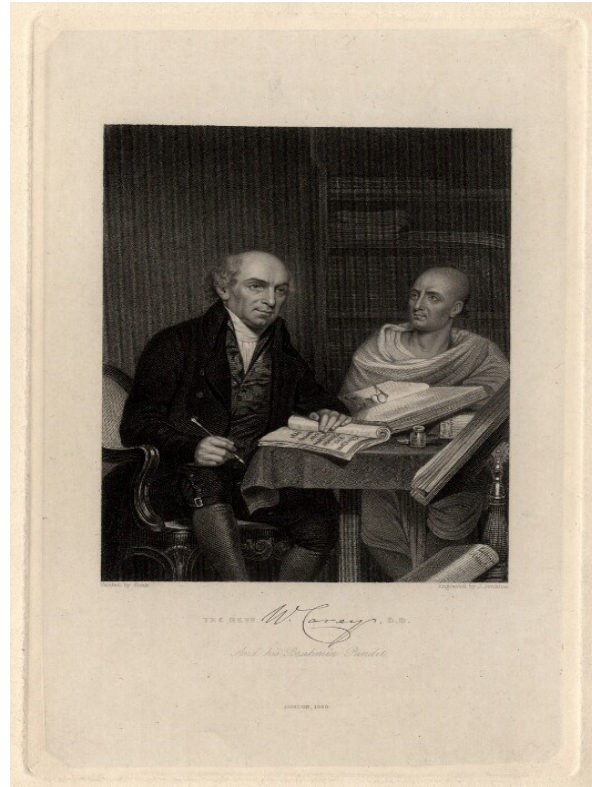


Figure 10, The Rev. W. Carey, D.D. and his Brahmin Pundit (Mrityunjaya Vidyalankar). 1832 line engraving by Joseph John Jenkins after painting by Robert Home (now at Regent's Park College, University of Oxford). National Portrait Gallery (CC BY NC ND): NPG D2180.

Most famously, Rammohum Roy, who worked alongside Basu, Vidyalankar and Carey at Fort William College spearheaded a movement to reform Hinduism, the principal targets of which were shared with evangelical missionaries: idolatry, the caste system and sati. Sometimes remembered as the "father of the Bengal Renaissance", Roy was significantly influenced by his engagement with Christianity, publishing *The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness* in 1820, setting out ethical teachings drawn from the gospels (Richards & Hughes 2005).

Criticised by some Baptist missionaries for extracting the teaching of Jesus from their framing within a narrative of salvation by grace, premised on Christ's sacrifice on the cross, Roy continued working on a revised translation of the New Testament with the Baptist Missionary William Adam, only for Adam to leave the Baptists to establish a Unitarian Society in Calcutta with Roy.<sup>3</sup>

The *Catalogue of the Missionary Museum*, printed in 1826, begins its East Indies section with Case H, containing twenty-one named and numbered 'Indian idols'. The nine *murti* depicted in *Missionary Sketches* are all listed,



in many cases alongside descriptions taken directly from the 1819 text. In addition to the nine depicted 'idols', the following were included in the same list, albeit without the same degree of further description:

- 1. CHOITUNYU, THE WISE
- 2. UBHUYA
- 3. LU RUHMUNU
- 4. NUNDEE
- 5. KARTIKEYU
- 6. JUGUDDHATREE
- 7. SHIVU LINGU
- 8. RADHA
- 10. VISWAKARMA
- 16. BULURAMU
- 19. BRUMHA
- 21. LUKSHMEE

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The original note in the *Missionary Chronicle* of September 1819 referred to 'twenty-two models of Hindoo deities' (LMS 1819b). In the seven years between their arrival and the publication of the catalogue, one seems to have been lost or broken. Although they appear in various images produced during the nineteenth century, I haven't been able to locate any of the original twenty-two models, two centuries after they arrived in London.

The closest I have come is a somewhat damaged painted clay figure of Jagganath at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford (1910.62.84). Made from clay rather than wood, it has a different, less waisted shape. It seems more likely therefore that it is one of the other representations of Jagganath that appear in images of two cases of South Asian material from the Missionary Museum, one predominantly Buddhist, that were printed in 1860 (Figs. 11 & 12). It also seems to match a black and white photograph, published in 1899 that includes a model of Jagganath's car (Fig. 13). Juggernaut—'the Moloch of Hindoostan' (LMS 1811)—clearly haunted both missionary imagery and missionary imaginations throughout the nineteenth century.



Figure 11, Case of Indian Idols, published in "The Missionary Museum No. V". 1860. *Juvenile Missionary Magazine*, 17, p.161, Author's Personal Collection.

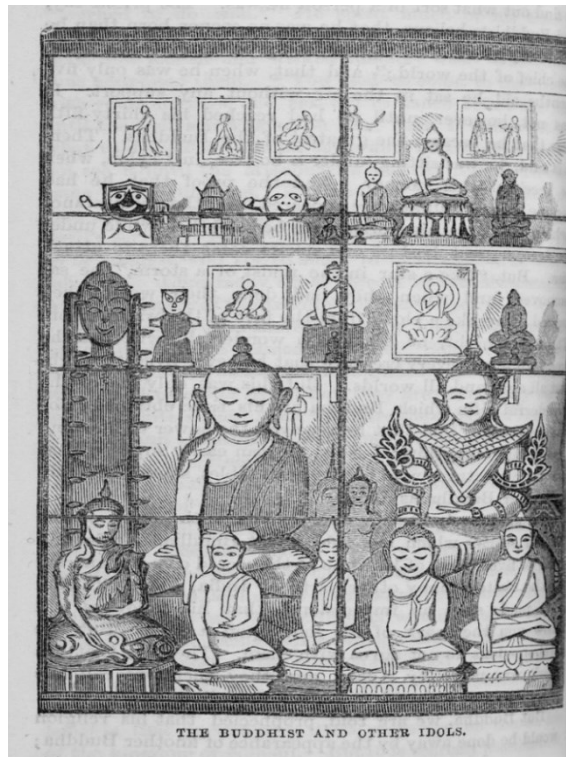


Figure 12, The Buddhist and Other Idols, published in "The Missionary Museum No. XI". 1861. *Juvenile Missionary Magazine*, 18, p.60, Author's Personal Collection.



Paramastee or Spoon 166  
Models are here also of the Juggernaut Car and of the "Lord of the

who, so runs the myth, was indulging in a dance of triumph at her victory over the giants, and Siva called to her to desist, for the earth shook and trembled beneath her weight. Her exultation was such that she neither heard nor saw him, so, to attract her notice, he lay down among the slain, and she suddenly realised that she was standing on the body of her husband. Kālī is the Goddess of Destruction, and is painted blue to suggest the darkness of her skin, with

World" himself, an incarnation of Vishnu, who rose out of the sea at Orissa in the form of a block of wood fifty-two inches long and eighteen inches broad. A rajah who had already built a large temple in anticipation that a god would come to earth to dwell among men, was commanded in a dream to convey this block to his palace and conceal it for three weeks, while it assumed another shape. Had his behest been obeyed literally it is believed that Juggernaut would have been perfect in form; but at the end of fifteen days the king could no longer restrain his curiosity and peeped into the room. To his amazement the block had been divided into three figures—Juggernaut and his brother and sister—carved, however, only from the waist upwards, and the angry god



A Model of the Famous Juggernaut Car, under the skirts of which Hindus voluntarily cast themselves. The Wooden Images represent Juggernaut himself, whose origin is told in a curious tradition.

Figure 13, A Model of the Famous Juggernaut Car. Photograph published in Helen C. Gordon. 1899. 'Lesser Known Museums. The London Missionary Society's Museum. By Helen C. Gordon' in *English Illustrated Magazine*, XXI, pp. 81-84. Hathi Trust (Public Domain, Google-digitized): <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015056060018&view=1up&seq=102>

**THE VIRGIN MARY AND CHILD from Mysore, that belonged to two native Roman Catholics, who embraced the Christian religion, and sent the same to the Missionary Society**

*Bangalore, 23 July 1825*

The caption from which this section takes its title appears on the final page of the 'EAST INDIES' section of the Missionary Museum catalogue, printed in 1826. The section begins with descriptions of twenty-one 'models of HINDOO DEITIES', sent from Calcutta by Henry Townley in 1819. The caption, however, doesn't describe an Indian god, but rather a key figure in Christian, or at least Catholic religious art: the Virgin Mary with the infant Jesus.

The inclusion of this artefact in the Missionary Museum illustrates a confrontation between Protestant and Catholic missionary activity that occurred at multiple locations around the world, but is suggestive of a conflict in relation to the function of religious images that began in Europe itself.



This conflict underpinned the northern European Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, from which Protestantism took shape, and seems to have conditioned LMS responses to religious 'idols', whenever and wherever they were encountered.

Writing about missionary encounters in the Dutch East Indies, now Indonesia, Webb Keane (2007) has described this conflict as a clash of semiotic ideologies, suggesting that Protestantism developed a moral narrative of modernity, by which people were understood to be progressively emancipated through detachment from material forms—a narrative that shaped notions of "fetishism" later in the nineteenth century and continues to underpin contemporary imaginings of secular modernity.

In many ways it is The Virgin Mary and Child, among all the artefacts listed in the 1826 catalogue that allows us to unpack the fundamental problem the LMS had with 'idols'—objects that formed a focus for acts of religious worship—and the reasons these became a dominant focus for missionary collecting during the middle of the nineteenth century.

Following the re-opening of the Missionary Museum in August 1824, at a new location at Austin Friars, the considerable costs of relocation (£417) generated concern within the LMS. Should funds raised to support overseas missionary work be used for the preservation and display of artefacts in London?

Writing from Raiatea in the Pacific in November 1823, the missionaries John Williams and Lancelot Threlkeld declared that:

Did you know the state of the surrounding islands, how ripe they are for the reception of the gospel, you would sell the very gods out of your Museum, if it were necessary to afford the means of carrying the glad tidings of salvation to those now sitting in darkness. (LMS 1824a: 457)

A catalogue of the museum's contents was compiled and printed, sales of which were intended to 'to diminish the expense incurred by the preparation and support of the Museum' (LMS 1824c). The catalogue's price was not fixed, but rather left to the 'liberality' of museum visitors, with a donations box located in the museum (LMS 1824b). By May 1825, the *Missionary Chronicle* reported this had returned 57 pounds 7 shillings and 5 pence (LMS 1825b).

Sadly, there are no known copies of this original 1824 catalogue, although the British Library retains a copy of the slightly later 1826 version (LMS 1826d). This makes it possible to gain a sense of how the collections



had grown in the twelve years since John Campbell returned to Britain from South Africa with his giraffe, among many other things, initiating the establishment of the Missionary Museum (Wingfield 2022: Chapter 3).

The title page of the catalogue (Fig. 14) provides a guide to what could be found in the museum, listing three main categories:

- Specimens in Natural History
- Various Idols of Heathen Nations
- Dresses, Manufactures, Domestic Utensils, Instruments of War, &c. &c. &c.

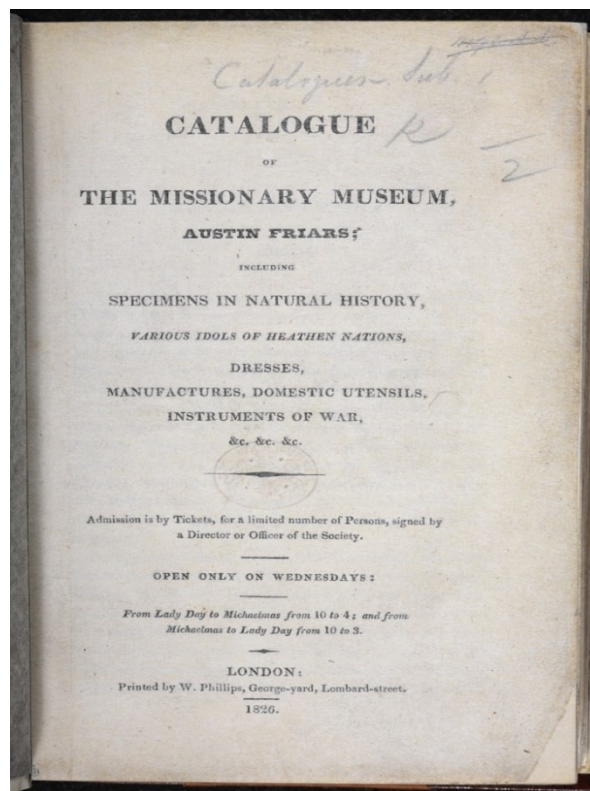


Figure 14, Title page of the Catalogue of the Missionary Museum, Austin Friars, printed in 1826. © British Library Board (General Reference Collection 4766.e.19.(2.))

This is followed by an 'Advertisement' providing more background, explaining that the articles composing the museum were supplied chiefly by Missionaries of the London Missionary Society, with a few others being donations from 'benevolent travellers, or friendly officers of mercantile vessels'. It then explains the three categories of material set out on the previous page, suggesting that:

The Missionaries rightly judged that the natural productions of the distant countries in which they reside would be acceptable at home,



especially to the juvenile friends, and to others who may not have opportunity of viewing larger Collections.

Natural History, although it formed a significant dimension of John Campbells' founding collections, are effectively dismissed as curiosities chiefly of interest to children. It then goes on:

The efforts of natural genius, especially in countries rude and uncivilised, afford another class of interesting curiosities; whilst they prove how capable even the most uncivilised of mankind are of receiving that instruction which it is the study of Missionaries to communicate.

The 'Dresses, Manufactures, Domestic Utensils and Instruments of War, &c. &c. &c.', through examples such as finely worked samples of bark cloth brought by William Ellis from Hawaii demonstrated a capacity for conversion, but also the potential to be schooled in civilisation—this argument was concentrated on 'countries rude and uncivilised'—which seems to have referred largely to Africa and the Pacific at this time.

Presumably penned by a professional preacher, the Advertisement altered the order outlined on catalogue's title page so that the third category delivers its rhetorical hammer blow:

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But the most valuable and impressive objects in this Collection are the numerous, and (in some instances) *horrible* IDOLS, which have been imported from the South Seas Islands, from India, China, and Africa; and among these, those especially which were actually given up by their former worshippers, from *a full conviction of the folly and sin of idolatry* - a conviction derived from the ministry of the Gospel by the Missionaries.

Value here was accorded to 'Idols' over and above Natural History or 'efforts of natural genius', but special emphasis was given to 'idols' given up by their former worshippers, especially when this came from '*a full conviction of the folly and sin of idolatry*'.

For Protestant evangelicals the removal of any idols may have been regarded as a good in and of itself, but real value was linked to objects which demonstrated the sole object of the Missionary Society, set out in its founding constitution of 1795: 'to spread the knowledge of Christ among heathen and other unenlightened nations' (Lovett 1899, vol. 1: 30).

Idols removed and sent to the Missionary Museum by converted 'heathens' on the basis of personal conviction and a change of heart—indicators



of conversion—were by far the most valuable and impressive objects in the collection.

The text of the advertisement explicitly connected the display of these 'singularly interesting objects' to Pomare's despatch of his 'family idols' from Tahiti to London in 1816, quoting his suggestion that missionaries 'send them to Britain, that the English people might see what foolish gods they had been accustomed to adore'. It suggested that the Directors of the Society were doing no more than complying with Pomare's wishes.

The final paragraph of the advertisement expressed a desire that these 'trophies of Christianity' will

inspire the spectators with gratitude to God for his goodness to our native land, in favouring us so abundantly with the means of grace, and the knowledge of his salvation and at the same time, with thankfulness that these blessings have, in some happy degree, been communicated, and by our means, to the distant isles of the Southern Ocean.

The means of grace received in the British Isles by ancestors, generations previously, was connected, as it had been at the foundation of the Society, to the forward extension and communication of these blessings to distant isles. The final sentence of the advertisement, presumably originally written in 1824, suggested:

Many of the curious articles in the Collection are calculated to excite in the pious mind, feelings of deep commiseration for the hundreds of million of the human race, still the vassals of ignorance and superstition; whilst the success with which God has already crowned our labours, should act as a powerful stimulus to efforts, far more zealous than ever, for the conversion of the heathen.

Keane's (2007) moral narrative of modernity is set out here in grand historical terms for an assumed audience of British Christians—our ancestors were vassals of ignorance and superstition but by the grace of god we have reached a state of liberation that places us under an obligation to liberate those still bound by these same chains.

The listing of individual items forms the body of the catalogue following this introductory framing, but on the final page of the catalogue, an appeal for subscriptions and donations 'in aid of the Funds of this Society' included the Form of a Bequest. This included a blank space for an amount to be added, allowing visitors whose missionary zeal had been inspired by their visit to make a legacy benefitting the Society.





In 1826, the Missionary Museum was still in the process of being reimagined as an extension of the fundraising work underpinning all aspects of the London Missionary Society's operations. The title page and the advertisement of the catalogue establish a framework through which visitors are expected to engage with the museum and its collections, categorising and valuing the materials on display, but also providing a narrative structure for a reader—assumed to be not only British, but also Protestant and most likely evangelical, or at least sympathetic.

Prefiguring secular narratives of progress that would shape the museums and displays of the later nineteenth century in relation to what Tony Bennett (1988) has called 'the exhibitionary complex', this script of liberating Grace has parts for missionaries, supporters, converts and idols. But how well do the artefacts listed on the pages of the catalogue play their allotted parts?

Individual scenes, including Campbell's giraffe, Pomare's idols and William Ellis' Hawaiian bark cloth may appear to conform to the categories outlined, but taken as a whole, how far do the listings of the 1826 catalogue reflect this exposition?

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Considered in numerical terms, both 'specimens in Natural History' (117) and 'efforts of natural genius' (323) outnumbered 'Idols' (110) among the 550 artefacts listed in the catalogue. Geographically, the largest number of items came from Africa (163), with twice as many 'efforts of natural genius' (111) as 'specimens in Natural History' (52), and no 'Idols' at all. Next came the Pacific (135), with a good number of 'Idols' (45), but still more 'efforts of natural genius' (89). This is followed by China (87), with a third as many 'Idols' (19) as 'efforts of natural genius' (60), although this figure includes quite a number of publications, including the Chinese dictionary of Robert Morrison (17).

Other geographical areas, such as Australia, Madagascar and the Americas include far smaller numbers (107 combined total), and apart from the PEHI rattle from Demerara, don't include items that could readily be categorised as 'Idols'.

Only among those items listed as coming from the 'East Indies' (58) is there a clear predominance of 'Idols' (45). Indeed, the number of Indian 'Idols' is the same as that from the Pacific (45), with much smaller numbers of 'specimens in Natural History' (6) and 'efforts of natural genius' (7) (see Fig. 15). But how far do these represent what the 'advertisement' called



especially 'valuable and impressive objects... actually given up by their former worshippers, from a full conviction of the folly and sin of idolatry'?

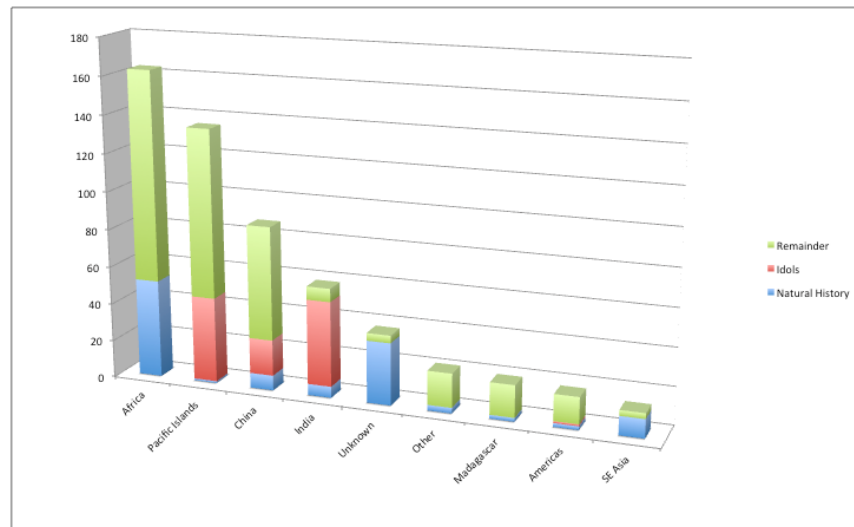


Figure 15, Bar chart showing listings in the 1826 catalogue broken down by geographical region, with categorisation by colour. Red shows 'Idols', suggesting that this category overwhelmingly dominates the Indian collections at this date. Author's own work.

Twenty-one of the forty-five 'Idols' listed were, as we have seen, 'models' most likely commissioned in Calcutta by Henry Townley. Following these, somewhat intriguingly is a listing of:

- A Case of REJECTED IDOLS from Cuddapah, in the East Indies.

John Hands began preaching and establishing schools at Cuddapah (Kadapa) in 1822, with a mission established there by William Howell in 1824 (LMS 1825a). It seems likely that these items were sent to London when a number of people were rapidly baptised, according to an account published later in the century 'from doubtful motives' (Porter 1858, 116).

After this abbreviated listing, the catalogue includes a fairly large number of items from Rangoon (Yangon) (19), including thirteen Buddhas, two figures of Krishna, a figure of Kali standing on the stomach of Shiva, a stone lingam, and a set of bells from one of the temples. Beginning a listing for the 'Fourth Shelf' was a gilt Buddha from Rangoon, described as 'a Sea Port in the Burmese Empire' (Fig. 16). This was followed by a long text describing the Buddha as an avatar of Vishnu, taken from a Sanskrit inscription at Bodh Gaya, translated by Charles Wilkins, which had appeared in the first volume of *Asiatick Researches* in 1788.

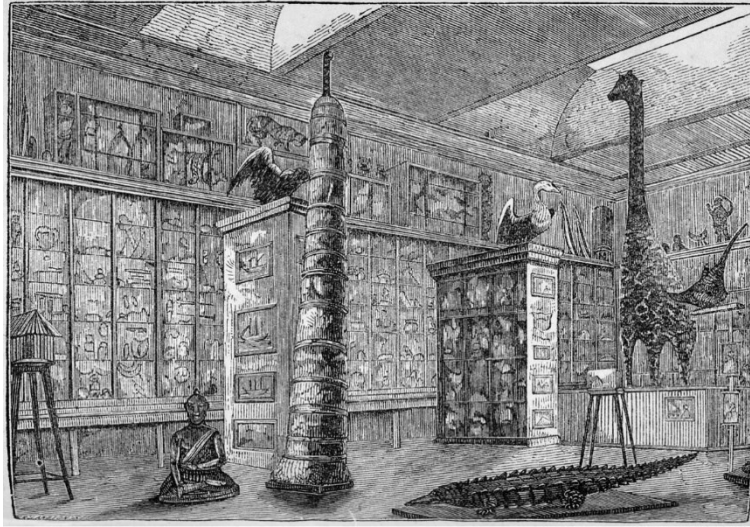


Figure 16, source: *Juvenile Missionary Magazine*, vol. IV, no. 41 (October 1847)

A very brief LMS mission to Rangoon was established in 1810, but within months one of the missionaries, J.C. Brain, had died and the other, Edward Pritchett, returned to Madras. Given how short lived this unsuccessful attempt had been, it seems extremely unlikely that these items could have been collected at that time, especially as it predated the establishment of the Missionary Museum.

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Rather, a hint at the likely source of these items comes from a list of thanks, published in the *Missionary Chronicle* of August 1826, stating:

Also, to Mr. Heritage and others of the Society's Friends, connected with the Congregation at Union Chapel, Calcutta; for several Burmese Idols (some of which were formerly in the large Pagoda at Rangoon), and other valuable curiosities for the Society's Museum. (LMS 1826a: 368)

Mr. Heritage appears to have been a fairly long-term resident of Calcutta, described in 1832 as Commander of the East India Company's pilot schooner 'Henry Meriton' ("Biography" 1832). This normally guided vessels along the Hooghly River, between the sea and Calcutta, making Mr. Heritage what the advertisement described as a friendly officer of a mercantile vessel. In May 1824, however, the pilot schooner, equipped with a pair of 12 pounder guns, joined a hastily assembled fleet to transport troops and their howitzers, to Rangoon as part of the first Anglo-Burmese war (Edwardes & Merivale 1872, vol. 1: 53).

The famous golden Shwegadon Pagoda was the military headquarters for the invading troops who comprehensively pillaged it (Fig. 17). It seems likely, therefore that 'Mr. Heritage and others of the Society's Friends'



acquired these 'Burmese Idols' either as a direct result of their participation in the invasion, or from soldiers returning from the conflict with loot (LMS 1826a: 368).



Figure 17, Scene upon the Terrace of the Great Dagon Pagoda. Watercolour by Lieutenant Joseph Moore, made during the British occupation of Rangoon, and published in 1826. Library of Congress (Public Domain): 2021670151: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2021670151/>

The forced removal of these items as part of military action is not made explicit in the catalogue of the Missionary Museum, although the degree to which their implicit provenance was understood by those reading the catalogue in the years immediately after the war is unclear.

From our perspective, the discrepancy between the display of these items and the ninth commandment—*thou shalt not steal*—is striking, but perhaps was felt to be balanced by the second and third commandments—*thou shalt have no other gods before me* and *thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image*.

After the list of items taken from Rangoon, a short note in the catalogue suggests that: 'In the front of the larger idols are several smaller ones, of silver, brass, copper, and stone: also a curious censer, or spoon for incense.' (LMS 1826d: 31)

These likely relate to an early arrival at the museum—back in April 1816 the *Missionary Chronicle* announced John Hands had sent the Directors 'a number of idols of silver, copper, &c. for their Museum. Also a copy of St. Luke's gospel, written in leaves: Christ's Sermon on the Mount, in the Canara language, &c.' from Bellary (Ballari) (LMS 1816).



Hands began work there in 1810, where he set about translating the bible into Canarese, so it seems likely the gospel was one on which he had worked. The first convert was only recorded in 1819, however, and the letter he sent with the items in September 1815 explained he could not 'gratify them with an account of the poor Hindus around him having openly embraced the gospel' (ibid.: 155).

With the possible exception of the 'REJECTED IDOLS from Cuddapa', neither the idols from Ballary, the looted material from Rangoon, nor the models from Calcutta were given up voluntarily by converts to Christianity. Nevertheless, the catalogue rounded off its listing of Indian 'Idols' by re-printing the text from *Missionary Sketches* in 1819 that cited Psalm cxv. 5-10—'These are specimens, Christian Reader, of the gods of the heathen in India worshipped by more than a hundred millions of deluded people. These are the creatures of a corrupt imagination, and the workmanship of men's hands...!'.  
 Following this, a paragraph from Ward's *Account* was included in the catalogue:

Nine-tenths of the whole Hindu population pay no conscientious regard whatever to the forms of their religion, and yet the various cruelties accompanying their superstitions occasion the death of more than ten thousand persons every year. And notwithstanding the veneration in which some pretend to hold their gods, yet many, especially the poor, take the liberty of abusing them. When it thunders awfully, respectable Hindoos say, "Oh! the gods are giving us a bad day;" the lower orders say, "The rascally gods are dying." During a heavy rain, a woman of respectable class frequently says, "Let the gods perish! my clothes are all wet." A man of low castes says, "These rascally gods are sending more rain." Ward. vol.1 p.xc

Two thick lines mark an ending of sorts to the 'EAST INDIES' section, but in the remaining space of the page is the description with which this section began: '*THE VIRGIN MARY AND CHILD from Mysore, that belonged to two Native Roman Catholics, who embraced the Christian religion, and sent the same to the Missionary Society*'

Beneath this, a further paragraph appears in quotation marks:

The people were in great consternation at the removal of the image, and offered large sums of money for it; one offered twenty pagodas, another his daughter, and another even declared he would sell his own child and procure money enough to purchase it, if it might be retained; but a deaf ear was turned to the proposals, being aware of the danger of making it an object of worship, and felt as the disciples of Christ,-



constrained to take it away. *Vide Missionary Chronicle for January 1826*

Given the reference to the *Missionary Chronicle* in same year as the catalogue itself was printed, I initially wondered whether the caption's inclusion after the thick black line suggested a late addition to an already prepared printing block. However, given that the items from Rangoon were reported in the *Missionary Chronicle* even later in the year (August), but were incorporated into the main listing, I now think the lines serve to demarcate this Christian 'idol' from the 'heathen' idols that preceded it.

The quoted paragraph comes from the printed version of a letter, originally sent to the Society's secretary on 23 July 1825 and signed by the London Missionary Society's three European missionaries at Bangalore, Hiram Chambers, William Campbell and Stephen Laidler. This began:

We are permitted at this time to lay before you, two trophies of the victorious power of divine truth over the delusions of the Antichrist; trophies which we hope and trust may prove powerful auxiliaries in making known Christ and Him crucified, to their perishing fellow-men. (LMS 1826c: 32)

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The Antichrist was not a gruesome Heathen deity, but rather the Catholic Church, and the two 'trophies' were not 'idols', but rather two young men who had converted to Protestant Christianity and who, it was hoped would play a part in converting others. Christianity's roots in south India are believed to go back to the arrival of St Thomas the apostle in the first century, but the roots of Catholicism in Mysore are generally traced to the establishment of a Mysore mission by Father Leonardo Cinnami in 1649.

Following an 1817 visit to Bangalore (Bengaluru) by John Hands, from his mission station at Bellary, 300km away, Stephen Laidler established a mission there for the LMS in 1820. With access to the Indian town prohibited to European missionaries, preaching was initially directed at the Europeans and sepoys of the military cantonment. This seems to have changed following the arrival at the mission of Samuel Flavel, who actively preached in surrounding villages, distributing tracts and copies of the gospels in local languages (Lovett 1899, vol. 2: 104-5).

Born at Quilon (Kollam) on the Malabar Coast of Kerala in 1787, Shunkurulingam, as he was known before his baptism, was employed by a British officer at a fairly young age, He travelled widely in India, visiting Mauritius before being employed in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) as a butler. He came across a translation of the Gospels into Tamil which initiated a personal



quest to discover more about Protestant Christianity that led to his baptism at Tellicherry (Thalassery) by an East India Company chaplain, when he adopted the name Samuel.

Invited by Laidler to join the new mission at Bangalore, Samuel became central to its work. He was ordained the pastor of the native church at Bangalore in 1822, when he adopted the surname Flavel at Laidler's suggestion. John Flavel, like his Indian namesake, was a learned Puritan minister, famous for preaching in the face of official prohibitions.

The letter written in Bangalore in July 1825 concerns an event which had recently taken place in the city of Mysore, with none of the three European missionaries present. Samuel Flavel had made the journey of nearly 150km at the invitation of two brothers who were catechists at the city's Roman Catholic Church.

Five years previously they had talked with Joshua, an Indian convert connected to the London Missionary Society which led them to question Catholic practice. The elder of the two was, according to the account, flogged by the priest for his impertinence—an example of what the letter refers to as 'the carnal weapons of Antichrist'.

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Visited in April 1824 by another Indian convert, John, who had recently been baptised at Bangalore, the elder brother wrote to Flavel, requesting a meeting. Flavel told the European missionaries that when he arrived in Mysore, the Catholic congregation had been commanded by the priest not to speak to him, who described him as 'the greater devil... among the Protestants'.

The congregation reportedly tried to persuade the two brothers, whose father had been a Catholic, not to leave the church, offering to double their allowance as catechists. Unpersuaded, the letter suggests they were 'treated with great contempt and abuse', and given a kicking, which was 'received as became the disciples of the meek and lowly Jesus', praying for their attackers. The younger brother was accused by the crowd of saying they were the "Antichrist", to which he replied that the beating the pair received 'fully proved that *they* deserved that name.'

The brothers then went to the Catholic Church 'with a view to removing some images which were their private property, and which had formerly belonged to their father', destroying all except that of the Virgin Mary. This had been embellished with jewels by 'infatuated devotees', in particular by a woman who believed Mary 'had been propitious to her'. The congregation claimed the jewels as the property of the church, attempting to persuade



the brothers to accept payment for the statue, arguing that 'if it were taken away, some curse would descend upon the congregation'—some of the details of their offers were summarised in the paragraph quoted by the Missionary Museum catalogue.

Turning a deaf ear, they:

endeavoured to demonstrate with the poor infatuated people, showing the folly and sin of these offers, assuring them that they did not refuse their offers because they expected more money for it; but being aware of the danger of making it an object of worship, they felt, as the disciples of Christ, constrained to take it away.

When they did so, they were charged with further debts that were subsequently dismissed by a magistrate. Baptised by Samuel Flavel, the brothers took the names Nathaniel and James and travelled with him back to Bangalore, presumably taking the statue of the Virgin Mary with them. I have not been able to locate the figure itself, but it is possible that it may have looked something like Figure 18, also a Catholic Madonna and Child from South India.



Figure 18, Indian Madonna and Child, 17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> century Indo-Portuguese Ivory of the kind likely to have been located in the Roman Catholic Church at Mysore in 1825. Minneapolis Institute of Art (CC BY 4.0): 2019.10.10: <https://collections.artsmia.org/art/131406/madonna-and-child-india>





According to the letter from the three European missionaries, this was: 'The plain unvarnished tale of the conversion of these two men from the errors and superstitions of the Church of Rome, to the profession of the truth as it is in Jesus.'

Here, at last, in the East Indies section of the Missionary Museum catalogue was an 'idol' unambiguously 'given up by their former worshippers, from a full conviction of the folly and sin of idolatry'. Rather than being a Hindu *murti* or a figure of the Buddha, it was an image of the Virgin Mary. It may have been removed through 'a conviction derived from the ministry of the Gospel by the Missionaries' but these Missionaries were not Europeans, but rather Indian converts.

The following month, in February 1826, the editors of the *Missionary Chronicle* returned their attention to the Bangalore mission, printing another letter from the same three missionaries sent slightly earlier, on 15 May 1825 (LMS 1826b). This described an encounter between Samuel Flavel and an Indian Catholic from Madras. Evidently 'all that Samuel said was well received, till he spoke against praying to the Virgin Mary and departed saints'. The two men agreed to have a public disputation at the bazar, for which Samuel proposed four questions:

- Is the faith of the Roman Catholic church the faith of the church of Christ?
- Is the church of Rome the church of Christ?
- Are its ceremonies, - such as bowing to the priests with their faces to the ground, counting their beads, and wearing crosses round their necks, the ceremonies of the church of Christ?
- Are its acts of worship,- such as bowing to images, ringing of bells, &c. - lawful in the church of Christ?

Their subsequent conversations were attended by sixty or seventy people, many of whom were referred to as "heathens", and their meetings continued over more than a fortnight. According to the letter, the seriousness with which these events were approached made the European missionaries think

of the contests which, in the days of Luther and of Calvin, produced such effects in the western world; and we rejoiced in the hope that this might prove a commencement of the more certain and speedy overthrow of Antichrist in this distant land.



In the translation and summary of the dialogue that was printed, one aspect of the disputation focused on the accuracy of the translation of the second commandment, relating to graven images, with Flavel exclaiming that:

I believe, then, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; that he is the only Mediator between God and Man; that he is the way, the truth, and the life; that he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him; and that he is the only Advocate who intercedes for us at the right hand of his Father.

When challenged on the difference between worshipping and looking at images, Flavel's Catholic interlocutor pointed out that Protestant bibles also included images of Jesus Christ. Flavel's counter was to volunteer to burn these images and say he rejected them if his interlocutor was prepared to do the same for Catholic images.

The letter ends its account of the dialogue by stating that it was an imperfect translation 'as Samuel speaks his own language not only very correctly, but often with elegance and eloquence'—revealing in this admission the severe linguistic limitations that held back the preaching efforts of European missionaries.

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It is significant that both letters sent from Bangalore in 1825 end by outlining plans for Mysore College, a seminary that would bring 'forward pious native youth for the ministry of the gospel' (LMS 1826c: 33). Ultimately, these appeals for support were not sanctioned by the Directors of the Society in London.

In 1827 Stephen Laidler resigned as a missionary. James Ashton, as the younger of the two converted brothers was known after his baptism, became a school teacher at the LMS mission at Belgaum (Belagavi) (LMS 1837: 144). Samuel Flavel moved to the mission at Bellary, where he continued to preach for the next twenty years.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to Tobias Delfs for the invitation to contribute to the section of Christian mission in South Asia. As someone who is not primarily a specialist on South Asia, I have been cautious venturing into this field, but in writing these artefactual histories I realised I had probably learnt more from tutorials with Nicholas Allen and lectures by Richard Gombrich's in Oxford two decades ago than I had remembered. I am grateful to them both for my education in South Asian religion and would like to mark Nick's passing in 2020.

<sup>2</sup> The digital monograph can be accessed at <https://argonauts2022.net>. All internet sources have been finally checked on 08 December 2022.



<sup>3</sup> Together with Roy and Dwarkanath Tagore, Adam founded the Calcutta Unitarian Committee in 1821. In 1828, Roy left the Unitarians to establish *Brahmo Samaj*, a Hindu version of Unitarianism, based on the Vedas. In 1829 he journeyed to England to lobby for a law to be passed by the British parliament against Sati or widow burning. Roy became a supporter of the 1832 Reform Bill, hoping that Britain might succeed in 'banishing corruption and selfish interests from public proceedings' but sadly became ill and died in Bristol where he was buried in 1833.

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