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Eugène Burnouf: Leading French Oriental Scholar during the first half of the 19th century

Eugène Burnouf(1801-1852), took office as Permanent Secretary of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres and as Sanskrit professor, after the death of his teacher, A. Léonard de Chésy in 1832. Having thoroughly gone through Anquetil-Duperron's(1731-1805) translation of the *Zend-Avesta*(1771) and the *Oupnek'hat*(1802-1803), Persian version of the Upanishad, he set to work on Indian and Indo-European philology.

In 1826, in collaboration with C. Lassen(1800-1876), best known author of *Indian Antiquities*(Bonn, 1843), he published Europe's first essay on Pali (*Essai sur le Pâli*), Paris, 1826,. Let us note, en passant, that prior to Eugène Burnouf, La Loubère'(1642-1724), first French Ambassador to Siam, though rightfully considered the first European to have mentioned Theravada Buddhism in his *Description du Royaume de Siam* in 1692, had unsuccessfully attempted to bring to light the origin of Pali. Be that as it may, in 1829, Eugène Burnouf in his *Commentaire du Vendidad-Sadé* and in his *Commentaire sur le Yaçna*, Paris, 1833, meticulously demonstrated the Indo-Persian link between the Veda and the Avesta, thanks to Neriosengh's manuscripts brought back from India by Anquetil-Duperron in 1762. In 1840, not desiring the least to interfere in other scholar's research, such as, G. Gorresio's W. Schlegel's, von Humboldt's, F. Bopp's and C. Lassen's translation study on the Veda and related subjects, he translated from Sanskrit to French the Bhâgavata-Purâna, Paris, 1840-1895, in 5 volumes. In his work, Burnouf, gave us precise accounts of Vedic cosmogony and philosophy, and a history of ancient Indian dynasties referred to in the Mahâbhârata and the Râmâyana as well. In 1844, as a result of his *Introduction à l'histoire du Bouddhisme Indien*, and posthumously, *Le Lotus de la Bonne Loi*, Paris, 1876(*Saddharmapundarika*), E. Burnouf could be considered as one of Europe's first Indologists to have introduced Indian and Tibetan Buddhism into France, thanks to B.H. Hodgson, British Ambassador to Nepal, who had sent 88 Sanskrit Buddhist manuscripts to the Société Asiatique de Paris in 1837.

Eugène Burnouf's numerous articles in the *Journal Asiatique de Paris* from 1832 to 1850, such as *Affinité du zend avec les dialectes germaniques*, 1832; *De la langue et de la littérature sanscrite*, 1833; *Sur les inscriptions pehviées de Kirmanchâch traduites par M. le baron de Sacy*. 1841; *Etudes sur la langue et les textes zends*, 1840-1850; *Notice des manuscrits zends de Londres et d'Oxford*; and others, all show beyond the slightest doubt, that Eugène Burnouf's contribution to Indo-European studies during the 19th century was most crucial in the decipherment of the lost ancient languages of Asia. After his death in 1852, his successors in France were: P.H. Foucaux(1811-1894, Sylvain Lévi(1863-1935, Jules Bloch(1880-1953), Louis Renou(1896-1966), and the late Professor Jean Filliozat(1906-1982).