



The Private Side of Cultural Brokerage: Autobiographical Practices and the Self-Constructed Archives of Imperial Exploration¹

MORITZ VON BRESCIUS
MORITZ.VONBRESCIUS@HIST.UNIBE.CH

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301

All too often, scholarly accounts suppose that the proper mode of analysis for major European expeditions overseas is to focus exclusively on strategies of publicity, propaganda and the distribution of scientific results.² In contrast, I use the case of a group of controversial German travellers to British India in the mid-nineteenth century, the Schlagintweit brothers, and the archives they left behind in order to reflect on the often-ignored interplay between the *public* and the *private* for the careers, self-fashioning and the material and textual legacies of travellers turned cultural brokers. The Schlagintweits were trying to make a career and carve out a legacy out of their experience of imperial exploration. In that pursuit, they followed changing strategies, all of which, however, saw them perform the role of mediator between cultures, countries and the world of science and the world of bourgeois entertainment.

Cultural brokers are both seemingly ubiquitous and yet elusive figures. Across the multiple disciplines that have invoked them since the 1950s (including anthropology, history, cultural and media studies), conceptual clarity is still wanting (Geertz 1960; Wolf 1956). As a recent



survey has found, 'no consolidated usage or systematic differentiation of the terms "mediator" or "broker" – and also intermediary, go-between, *passeur*, *Vermittler*, etc. – has been developed', even if a 'facilitating role in transmission or transaction' is generally assumed to be a characteristic of actors engaged in mediation (Dietze 2018: 494; Winterbottom 2011). While there is increased attention in the field of 'global biographies' to recognising time- and place-bound types of people (who were characteristic for a particular period and cross-cultural constellation, and later vanished again),³ scholars have identified and studied brokers across vast historical time frames and political conjunctures. These range from medieval and early modern encounters and court machinations to the inner workings and cultural contacts of pre-modern and more recent imperial systems, nineteenth- and twentieth-century nation states and post-colonial formations.⁴ Across these epochs, they are taken to include such heterogeneous personae as musicians, explorers, artisans, diplomats, missionaries, merchants, experts, intellectuals, political reformers and artistic modernisers, with the added complexity that such roles and professions were not mutually exclusive, as brokers frequently 'operated not only between polities, societies and communities, but also across fields and domains' (Saunier 2013: 36).

302

In view of such diversity—if not arbitrariness—key works in the field of science and empire have adopted a more narrow and fruitful focus on certain moments and limited spheres of operation. Above all, the ground-breaking volume *The brokered world*, which is concerned with itinerant go-betweens involved in knowledge and high culture production during the Age of Revolutions, could thus demonstrate the remarkable contrast between knowledge brokers' 'strikingly improvised activities and the robust institutions that they helped produce' (Schaffer et al. 2009: xi). The frailty of the brokers' interstitial positions and mobility is here tellingly contrasted with the constancy and firmness of the institutional arrangements they contributed to summoning into existence (Subrahmanyam 2009: 430). The establishment of museum collections is one such institution of historical significance that individual brokers contributed to or indeed launched through their mobile activities.

To come closer to understanding the intricacies of cultural brokerage and the government of its legacy in the second half of the nineteenth century, we will focus on three relevant episodes in the lives of the three Schlagintweit brothers from Munich. These travelling naturalists had become experienced Alpine explorers when, energetically supported by Alexander von Humboldt, they were commissioned by the East India Company to conduct a number of precision surveys in and beyond British



imperial possessions in South and High Asia in the mid-1850s (Finkelstein 2000). The transnationally sponsored Schlagintweit venture is remarkable not least for the number of heterogeneous artefacts and texts it accumulated, which the brothers subsequently used to address diverse expert and lay audiences and which informed European engagement with Eastern cultures and religions in lasting ways (Armitage 1989; Kleidt 2015; Neuhaus 2015).

While I demonstrate that the wide scholarly, commercial and ideological impact of their substantial Asiatic collections depended on their prominent display at various key sites of scientific and imperial instruction and entertainment, it is not conceded that the public dimension of these travellers' enterprise either exhausts or should dominate historical study of the subject. On the contrary, I further illustrate that the travellers responded to the widespread critique of their scientific results from Asia (especially in Britain but also partly in their German homeland) by establishing and managing a number of *self-constructed archives*.⁵

I particularly explore the uses and fate of three 'intimate archives'—each an assemblage of material objects and documents that the Schlagintweits aimed to establish, not always successfully, as mediums of memory and personal glorification for later generations.⁶ First, a visionary and interdisciplinary India Museum in the heart of Berlin in the late 1850s, filled with their Asiatic booty and coordinated by the travellers as founding directors. This fleeting institution later had to be transformed into a private but publicly accessible collection put on display in a specially purchased family chateau in Bavaria. Second, a large personal collage of commemoration and reports on their Eastern feats, carefully assembled in multiple volumes by Hermann Schlagintweit, who vigilantly filtered out critical reportage from the national and international press. Third, a vast professional archive that recorded in breath-taking detail the late career of one of the siblings.

After rejecting the perceived boredom of a university professorship in Giessen in 1864, Robert Schlagintweit became a widely travelled, sensationally successful public lecturer across Russia, central Europe and the United States from the mid-1860s to the early 1880s. Crucially, he claimed, through that very self-constructed archive and its selective publication, to have no less than personally pioneered the business of trans-Atlantic science popularisation in the form of such public oratory spectacle. I argue that all of these projects constitute significant cases of 'autobiographical practices', which go beyond the compilation of autobiographical life writing to include other forms of self-testimony (Hellbeck & Heller 2004). The concept of autobiographical practices



usefully draws our attention to the very acts and strategies through which self-representation was produced and collected. While these have hitherto mostly been limited to autobiographical writing, performances and visual representations (Hellbeck & Heller 2004: 12f.), this article extends the notion to include schemes of private and public archive- and institution-building as ingenious modes of self-representation.

Since Robert Schlagintweit later advertised to huge European and American audiences the appeal of future white settlement and colonisation of South and High Asia, I also use the Schlagintweits' case of trans-cultural exploration and mediation to offer further reflections on the ambivalence of cultural brokers, reconsidering recurrent normative assumptions about the figure (see also Raj 2016; Dietze 2018: 499). Against overly facile notions of brokers as 'all-purpose saint[s]' of mutual cultural enrichment and translation (Subrahmanyam 2009: 430), current scholarship embraces and explores their peculiar 'mixtures of idealism and self-interest', acknowledging that they were not infrequently tragic figures, cunning tricksters and poachers, who were not neutral parties in transactions, but took sides and actively manipulated outcomes (Liebersohn 2019: 269; Anderson 2007; Lindquist 2015). This spectrum of brokers' qualities and pursued objectives (and the more complex narratives of agency that these, in turn, enable) are key to explaining the enduring appeal of these chequered agents of cultural transmission to the historical craft, especially at a moment of ongoing interest in cross-border processes and biographies that help to challenge essentialising and homogenising notions of distinct, self-sustaining cultures (Boeckler 2004: 44).

In treating the entirety of the Schlagintweits' myriad activities of brokerage in front of diverse audiences and their legacy-making through autobiographical archiving, I take up Natalie Zemon-Davis's call 'to research all the sides of your subject's life movement', and to 'look both at the personal goals and achievements of your cultural brokers and at the costs and disappointments of their role' (Zemon-Davis 2016). We would indeed lose critical insight into their life-long ingenuity in carving out ever-new spheres of operation and recognition if we analysed them merely within the single frame of Eastern travellers in a Humboldtian mould who struggled and ultimately failed to come on par with their towering mentor.⁷ Before I analyse the complex trajectories of the Schlagintweit collections in learned centres and institutions across North America, Europe, Russia and South Asia, it is useful to establish the historical context of the brothers' itinerant careers and ask how their monumental collections of natural history and ethnography were accumulated.



The siblings Hermann (1826-82), Adolph (1829-57), and Robert Schlagintweit (1833-85) were all Munich-born naturalists who established an early reputation for themselves through a series of excellent studies on the European Alps in the late 1840s and early 1850s (A. & H. Schlagintweit 1850, 1854). Their joint interdisciplinary work soon attracted the attention of the old master of physical geography, the cosmopolitan Prussian polymath Alexander von Humboldt. Soon, the brothers were sucked into his orbit and resettled to Berlin in 1849. Gently pulling strings for his protégés, Humboldt managed to secure the support of the Prussian king Frederick William IV and the East India Company's Court of Directors in London for the Schlagintweits to undertake a survey expedition to India and High Asia in 1854.⁸ Initially designed to merely advance geomagnetic studies across the Indian subcontinent, it was through a series of negotiations by the Schlagintweits with the imperial directorate that their mission would later officially combine climatic and magnetic observations with large-scale contour cartography, the identification of resource deposits and the documentation of ethnic and racial variety in South and High Asia (Brescius 2018b).

While not formally listed in the Schlagintweits' sanctioned list of proposed operations, the brothers and their large indigenous establishments of assistants, porters and guides came to collect over 40,000 objects of natural history and ethnography in just three years of travel.⁹ Since this acquisitive programme was *not* part of the Schlagintweits' initial commission, its pursuit requires an explanation that explores the different interests at stake in the enterprise. Their mentor Humboldt and, through him, the Prussian king both hoped to enrich existing scientific collections in Prussia with the brothers' Asiatic booty. From early on, Humboldt urged them to collect all artefacts in duplicates, as the East India Company, their main financial sponsor, would claim primary ownership over the collections.¹⁰

The brothers had, however, much more extensive plans for their collections. These plans owed a great deal to imperial connections with London. As mentioned, the brothers were Alpine specialists. But once the prospect had opened up for them to explore India and the Himalayas, and thus go where Humboldt had never received permission from the British colonial authorities to travel himself, the brothers significantly expanded their scientific outlook. They did so by consulting not only the Asian publications by Humboldt and Carl Ritter, but also and especially by studying the rich material and textual collections held in the capital of the British Empire.¹¹ Prior to their departure to India in October 1854, the brothers spent months in London institutions. Above



all, they perused in detail the possessions of the East India House Museum at the EIC headquarters—the largest and most important assortment of Oriental manuscripts, curiosities and samples of Eastern natural resources in the Western world (Desmond 1982).

Inspired by this odd and splendidly heterogeneous collection, the Schlagintweits came to collect everything that caught their interest during their prolonged encounter with South and Central Asia. They amassed samples of soils and water, which were later analysed for schemes of Indian agricultural improvement in London (Armitage 1989). They gathered thousands of fossils, stuffed animals, minerals, wood specimens and examples of indigenous manufacturing in the form of textile and paper samples (Kleidt 2015). These were later bound together and dispatched for industrial display and imitation to London, Manchester and other British industrial centres. The brothers, with no previous knowledge of Eastern religions and social mores, also became avid collectors of Asian manuscripts, especially on Buddhism in Tibet. They bought up the interiors of temples in the Himalayas, thus acquiring prayer stones, flags, religious masks, mantras and other rare *ethnographica*.¹² These precious collections allowed their younger sibling, Emil Schlagintweit (1835-1904), to later become one of the greatest authorities on Tibetan Buddhism in Europe.¹³ A significant example of geographical displacement spurring disciplinary transgressions was the Schlagintweits' sudden interest in racial and ethnic variation. While they had limited their Alpine observations to natural phenomena, the brothers measured hundreds of Indian bodies and produced a celebrated series of 275 plaster casts of indigenous heads across South and High Asia (taken from 'living specimens'), which later shaped racial theories and genealogies in the West (Driver 2018).¹⁴

While such avid collecting was an essential characteristic of the culture of expeditionary fieldwork at the time, these German travellers in British imperial employ pursued early on the idea of erecting their own India Museum in Prussia, which was to be modelled on the East India House in London. Before I explore the fraught fate of this institution, let me briefly demonstrate how Schlagintweit objects could be mobilised for different purposes by various imperial, scientific and cultural agents and institutions across Europe. After the return of two of the Schlagintweit brothers to Europe in 1857 (Adolph Schlagintweit was killed as a British spy in Chinese-controlled Turkestan in August that year), the collections were first presented to the Court of Directors in London. Soon, their entire series of ethnographic heads was put on display in Leadenhall Street, as were chunks of marble and Indian and central Asian samples of paper and textiles (both raw and highly refined). The latter could circulate as a 'mobile museum' in the form of



nine bound volumes entitled *Technical objects from India and High Asia*.¹⁵ These illustrative books featured snippets of original manufactured specimens and explanations of regional and class-specific consumption.¹⁶ The results of the analysis of the Schlagintweits' soil samples were, in turn, displayed in 1862 at the Colonial Exhibition in London and were used to portray British scientific achievements in India, presenting a form of civilising mission driven by the ideology of improvement (Forbes Watson 1862: 23-6 (Class I: India; Subdivisions VI: Soils and Mineral Manures)).

Yet, the Schlagintweit objects were too rare and significant to be left to British appropriation alone. French institutions like the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle in Paris acquired reproductions of the full series of ethnographic heads, prominently displaying them above showcases of human skulls and entire skeletons in its 'Gallery of comparative anatomy and palaeontology', as captured in a photograph from 1908.¹⁷ Finally, the ethnographic heads were also the *pièces de résistance* at the Second International Geographical Congress in Paris, 1875, where a selection of Schlagintweit books and masks were presented on a central table in the German section.¹⁸ Held only a few years after German national unification and the military defeat of France, this congress was a highly charged space where science and politics colluded, as both nations sought to portray their learned achievements to the world.¹⁹

While the Schlagintweits had been keen to secure such publicity for their collections from the start, having prepared internationally circulating sales catalogues for certain categories of artefacts (especially for those that could be reproduced indefinitely, such as the ethnographic heads cast in zinc), their greatest ambition was to permanently establish a museological monument to their Eastern expedition in the Prussian capital (H. Schlagintweit & R. Schlagintweit 1859). They announced the idea for an independent India Museum in August 1857. But rather than acknowledging that this new institution was their own ambition and a vanity project, the brothers claimed in their negotiations with Prussian authorities and patrons that such a distinct museum was a necessary 'condition' for the rightful British owners to gift half of their collections (all duplicates) to the Prussian king.²⁰

Initially, and owing to a monopoly of communication with their British sponsors on the one side and their German benefactors on the other, the brothers' plan seemed to work. They established a temporary India Museum in Schloss Monbijou in the heart of Berlin between 1857 and 1860. This brought together science, spectacle and commerce—and represented an essentially imperial repository in the non-colonial German lands. It is indeed not without irony that the Humboldt Forum in Berlin



will, from 2020, display some of the same Schlagintweit objects that were earlier exhibited as a celebration of the explorations and feats of three German travellers in British imperial employ.²¹

What is significant about the museum episode is that the Schlagintweits clearly wanted to be seen and appreciated as high-profile cultural brokers between Europe and Asia. With their projected nine-volume scientific account of their travels (*Results of a scientific mission to India and High Asia*, the first four volumes of which were published between 1861 and 1866) to hand, the brothers wanted nothing more than to transform Western knowledge of India and High Asia, much as Humboldt had done earlier for South America and the Andes. Their work of cultural brokerage was not unconscious or unintended. On the contrary, their cultural crossings began voluntarily and the Schlagintweits embraced it and navigated it, cleverly coordinating and orchestrating their work of mediation, even by means of manipulation and intentional deception.

The way the brothers sought to secure a permanent space for their Asiatic collections within Prussia's cultural landscape gives valuable insights into processes of the fraught institutionalisation of cultural brokerage. Future research in this field will perhaps examine more closely how cultural brokers, in general, may have initiated or opposed such institutionalisation of their activities, and how intermediaries were included in, but could also be excluded from, such processes of formal institution-building. In this context, it seems also promising to explore potentially changing dynamics: did an institutional foundation, such as the establishment of a new state museum, lead to a reinvigoration of cultural exchange, or did it entail periods of stasis? Did individual impulses and ambitions of cultural brokerage tire themselves out in official structures, resulting in institutional inertia? Indeed, scholars may want to further study how such cultural institutions may even isolate themselves from broader trends, and develop a life of their own—in short, how they can become cultural gatekeepers, instead of innovators.²² The foundation of and the (at times conservative) activities and ritualised proceedings and displays of formal institutions of cultural brokerage raise the pertinent question whether they indeed make individual brokers redundant.²³

The Schlagintweits' India Museum project in Berlin ended, in any case, once the brothers lost Frederick William IV's vital support with the sudden decline of the king's mental health and when they were subsequently exposed as liars in relation to the supposed British insistence on a distinct museum in Berlin (Brescius 2018b: ch. 7). To their dismay, the museum project was drawn into the machinations of



the Prussian cultural administration. An expert commission formed in 1858 found it advisable to disperse their 40,000 objects across the existing museological landscape.²⁴ The final expert report noted that such '[a]n Indian museum in Berlin would be a mere oddity'. Clearly out of step with the *Zeitgeist* and its mass events such as the first World Fairs, such public display of their Eastern collections, the report added, would merely 'excite the curiosity of the prying masses'.²⁵ The members of the expert commission, all significant authorities in their respective fields of study, instead insisted on and celebrated the museological specialism of German sciences.

In order to secure the future integrity of their Asiatic booty, the brothers abandoned their strategy of founding a permanent public museum with their collections in Prussia, instead deciding to go private. In the year their permission to use rooms at the Berlin Palace ended, 1860, the brothers bought their own castle in Upper Franconia in their native Bavaria, which was subsequently turned into a semi-private museum. Its walls were decorated with Asian textiles, carpets and portraits of the Indian princes they had encountered; its rooms were filled with objects and memorabilia from their Eastern travels, matched by large-scale images the Schlagintweits had produced across the regions they traversed (Figure 1) (E. Schlagintweit 1864). Demonstrating the extent to which their ethnographic heads were both scientific specimens and personal memories of individuals the Schlagintweits had once cherished as close companions in Asia, the castle also displayed the entire series of plastered faces. There thus existed a great ambivalence about these artefacts as single portraits (they sometimes hung in oval frames similar to a family photograph) and their character in a large ethnographic series used for racial cartography across South and High Asia (Figure 2) (Brescius 2018a; Driver 2018).



Hermann Schlagintweit, "Gaurisankar, or Mount Everest, in the Himalaya of Nepal", aquarelle, June 1855, Atlas of panoramas and views, with geographical, physical, and geological maps: dedicated to Her Majesty the Queen of England (1861-66). No. 1.



310

Figure 1, source: © Wellcome Collection.



Cast of living female face, made of brown-coloured plaster, set on oval metal sheet, within oval wooden frame that is painted in brown, with cardboard backing. Inscribed is the sitter's name 'Hagi', a 'Leptsa' from Sikkim, Himalayas.



311

Figure 2, source: ©The Trustees of the British Museum.

The brothers knew of the indisputable advantage of creating *faits accomplis*, never seeking official permission to privatise the Prussian half of their collections by moving them elsewhere. The Bavarian castle Jägersburg became, for a time, an international meeting point for Oriental scholars and scientists, where the Schlagintweits used their artefacts as a powerful resource for self-fashioning as great explorers and cultural mediators. Much of their scientific authority was drawn from the artefacts, which, in the words of Humboldt, constituted 'the greatest natural historical and ethnographical collection which ever reached



Europe from Inner Asia'.²⁶ Their display of rare South Asian manuscripts, several hundred watercolours, charcoal sketches, photographs and Indian curiosities attracted widespread attention, luring peers and international royals to their countryside home.²⁷

Yet, financial difficulties forced the brothers to again relocate their treasures from the Jägersburg. Once an official request to the Bavarian king for a distinct India Museum in Munich had failed, the brothers were given free rooms in Nuremberg Castle to display sections of their collectables in a more publicly accessible space.²⁸ Since the costly analysis, preparation and the multiple relocations of the collections had put the brothers in financial difficulties, more and more parts had to be sold off to German and international museums and private collectors.²⁹ The brothers were ultimately also forced to auction off the displayed objects at Nuremberg, demonstrating how difficult it was to permanently realise their visionary plans for an *Indisches Museum* from an exploratory mission in a foreign empire.³⁰

I want to conclude by showing how the Schlagintweits pursued two more related projects of self-constructed archives, which followed a similar goal to that of their India Museum in that they, too, were intended to secure a lasting legacy of their work as cultural brokers and outstanding travellers. The brothers' first private archive was a carefully arranged and bound collection of international newspaper and journal articles on their expedition that Hermann Schlagintweit maintained over the years. Complemented by personal letters from some leading Indian scholars and scientists from Europe, Russia and India, these clips of texts and images were called 'Collectanea critica', a private treasure trove of memorabilia, which when viewed together suggested that their enterprise was one of the greatest achievements of European exploration in recent decades (Figure 3).

However, what is so striking about the surviving volumes is that the many critical pieces, especially from the British press, which at times had called their mission 'one of the most gigantic jobs that ever disgraced the annals of science', were mostly left out and thus silenced for posterity (Review of *Results* 1861). The Schlagintweits had indeed faced a mixed, and sometimes openly hostile, reception of their scientific results and comportment as men of science in Britain. It was generally claimed that the brothers had spent lavish amounts of British money on getting results that British officers and naturalists had already established earlier, and that the achievements of the latter had been plagiarised by the German trio ('Latest Indian mission' 1857). In white-washing what was in reality a mixed reception of their travels and published accounts, these lionising collages 'produced the type of self-



understanding that they likewise represented' for posterity (Hellbeck & Heller 2004: 12f.).

The Schlagintweits' 'Collectanea critica'.



313

Figure 3, source: this private collection of press reviews, journal articles and personal statements from correspondents (British, French, German, etc.) resides today in Innsbruck at the Alpenverein-Museum, Österreichischer Alpenverein, R. und H. Schlagintweit, 'Collectanea critica, 1848-65' / PERS 26.1/5.

The fierce opposition to their conduct and oeuvre in British society and scientific circles, as opposed to their far more positive reception in the German states, points to another crucial factor that significantly shaped the careers of such cultural brokers, especially when engaged in a transnational arena. The Schlagintweits entered a crowded field of rich previous scientific exploration and a competitive market in the European metropolises for cultural representations.³¹ Especially in Britain, diverse groups of people and practitioners of European and Indian origin claimed specific expertise in South Asian history, cultures and geographies. Most notable were oriental savants, public lecturers, former Indian travellers, cartographers and returned Anglo-Indian migrants, as well as other agents who all claimed, in different ways, particular familiarity with the east. This intense competition never allowed the Schlagintweits to establish the lasting reputation as leading Indian authorities in Britain that they accomplished in Germany and elsewhere in continental Europe.



In the Schlagintweit case, never merely a utilitarian objective, cultural brokerage could also constitute a profitable career. The brothers, as cultural brokers, actively created demands for their services, skills and knowledge in a transnational marketplace: one way for them to achieve high status as specialists on Indian history, geography, ethnography and politics in countries as diverse as Germany, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Russia and the United States was the opportunity afforded by modern means of popularising science. In particular, the spectacle of commercially organised public lectures, which effortlessly combined 'science and circus', allowed one brother, Robert Schlagintweit, to mobilise further lay and expert audiences to consume the results of the Schlagintweits' Asian travels (Shreider 1993; Daum 1998). Over 20 years, Robert delivered over 1,300 lectures across Europe and the tsarist empire; he also travelled twice to North America in the late 1860s and again in 1880 to inform captivated audiences about his personal adventures and the commercial and settlement opportunities he believed awaited European and American intervention in India and the enigmatic Himalayas. This was entertaining showmanship, as he made the effort to learn his gripping accounts by heart (Figure 4).³²



Robert Schlagintweit, a sample page of his manuscript for the English lectures in the United States (1867–68 and 1880), here on Turkestan, modified in content for the American audiences.

58

Russia's influence was then first in course of formation. Moreover they ^{you do keep carefully in mind the full import} ~~But not only had~~ ^{during this journey had not only} ~~had~~ ^{to fix our eyes upon the peculiar} ~~circumstances~~ ^{we are the first} state of political matters then prevailing in Turkestan, but likewise upon the geographical nature of the country to be traversed. For high passes, covered for thousands of feet with ice, glaciers, and vast seas of snow, extensive plateaus, that are in some sort a desert, being uninhabited and forever uninhabitable; besides in addition ^{(rushing, broad, bridgeless rivers, offering} to the European traveller in these regions as many great and scarcely credible hindrances, as ^{are} ~~were~~ presented by ~~the simultaneous appearance and conduct~~ of the Chinese. The real masters of this country are the Chinese, who, to the greatest disadvantage of science have known how to preserve complete independence as regards every European nation, and who have always successfully prevented Europeans, even single travellers, from penetrating into the country. The vast frontiers are guarded with an assiduity and care that are worthy of a better cause; and the Chinese ~~foreign~~ police is not less well organized than is that of any ^{American State or any} ~~(European)~~ country. This peculiar condition of the political circumstances of Turkestan was quite

315

Figure 4, source: BSB, Schlagintweitiana, V.2.2.2, 58.



The fact that in his public lectures Robert sought to actively advance the 'colonisation and settlement of Europeans' in parts of South Asia and the Himalayas suggests a need to rethink the positive, normative associations and assumptions a range of scholars from different disciplines continue to (implicitly or explicitly) hold about cultural brokerage.³³ Too often, this is perceived as a beneficial act of translation, leading—at best—to a better mutual understanding of cultures and their enrichment through intermediation and the adoption and appropriation of new cultural, political or religious idioms, signs and practices.³⁴ In contrast, the Schlagintweits' case makes clear that there is no reason to assume a priori that cultural brokers are more genuine, honest or less self-interested agents than other actor groups of historical analysis.³⁵ It has indeed always been my impression that brokers are particularly well placed to play deceitful double games, for instance with multiple audiences and patrons, capitalising on their unique knowledge and connections to maximise their personal influence and financial gain.

On the lecture circuit, Robert Schlagintweit not only used the power of rhetoric to advertise his and his brothers' expeditionary feats; he also regularly complemented his presentations with itinerant exhibitions in Europe and the United States. Speaking at the American Geographical and Statistical Society in New York in December 1868, for instance, Robert noted: 'To my agreeable surprise and great gratification a number of [...] views [from the Schlagintweit *Atlas*] [have been] deemed worthy enough to be put up in the rooms of this society for general inspection and study.'³⁶ He further increased the popular appeal of his accounts by always circulating among members of the audience samples of the brothers' 'pretty large collections of objects of natural history as well as of ethnography in its widest sense', not least as a way to attract further buyers of their reproducible artefacts.³⁷

Robert's incredibly successful and remunerative³⁸ appearances in front of audiences of hundreds and sometimes even thousands point again to the importance of diffusion, publicity and propaganda as essential components in the culture of exploration, and in his work of cultural mediation in particular. Through his spectacular talks, vigilantly managed through systems of subscription and professional advertisement by means of flyers, posters and coordinated newspaper announcements, he strove to turn himself into an institution. Yet, there was again an important private dimension to Robert's lecturing empire. Faced with the ambivalent reception of his and his brothers' scientific publications, Robert decided his greatest legacy lay less in technical and scientific treatments of Asia (as captured in the *Results*), but rather in his pioneering role and entrepreneurial innovations in the field of 'imaginary travel' through the business of international lecture tours. Among his



private papers in Munich, there survive no less than 41 bound volumes containing thousands of pages. These include hundreds of Robert's letters alongside critiques and summaries of his performances, newspaper articles, (auto-)biographical résumés, advertisement material (such as posters and invitations) and business cards from eminent guests at his shows.

This eclectic collection is all the more notable because the German explorer was eager to carefully frame its use by later generations. Indeed, its first volume opened with the remarks that the 'extensive materials' gathered on Robert's intercontinental trips were preserved 'as completely as possible' so that they could later provide an excellent 'contribution to the history of public lecturing'.³⁹ To achieve that aim, the ingenious entrepreneur also included 'a short historical sketch' in his private papers of how he had secured such remarkable international audiences to consume the accounts of his Asiatic and North American travels. Drawing on this private archive, Robert Schlagintweit published and circulated an account of his popularising achievements (R. Schlagintweit 1878). In his case, it was the failure to become his perceived ideal, a new Humboldt for the Himalayas, that defined him and made him and his professional trajectory unique, as his perceived failure became a catalyst for profound reinvention and contribution to the public and private spectacles of science in the later nineteenth century.

In pointing to the brothers' interventions in shaping their legacies and the commemoration of their missions in public and private formats, Robert's astonishing archive presents another attempted self-inscription into the history of science, with him as forerunner of such travelling spectacles. Over time, the Schlagintweits' struggle for appreciation and public adoration turned them from Alpine explorers into overseas travellers, self-assumed cultural brokers between Asia and Europe, public showmen and would-be museum directors of public and private institutions. These roles—like their diverse personal sets of documentation—were intended to preserve their histories for generations to come. The brothers faced strong headwinds in the public arenas of science and scholarship on Asia in mid-nineteenth-century Britain, where their self-interested projects attracted at times scornful responses and charges of jobbery. In reaction to these public libels, the brothers partly withdrew to private realms of peripheral castles as intimate quarters of display and personal memory—even if Robert's public appearances continued to crave the widest possible attention and recognition in front of amateur audiences that he lacked from scientific peers. The Schlagintweits also meticulously documented selected praise and career successes in intimate collages and extensive, highly organised private archives. These intimate practices of self-fashioning



and memory construction demonstrate that we ignore the private side of publicly maligned cultural brokers at our own peril.

Endnotes

¹ This article summarises my reflections developed in a series of papers as part of a three-year research project between Konstanz and Cambridge on 'Cultural brokers and their networks: 1700 to the present', generously funded by DAAD-University of Cambridge Research Hub for German Studies (2016-18) that I had the pleasure to co-organise. I thank Harry Liebersohn, Ulinka Rublack, Bianca Gaudenzi, Nikolai Wehrs, Celia Applegate, David Blackbourn, Cornelia Escher and Martin Rempe for inspiring conversations on cultural brokers and Meike von Brescius for her valuable comments on previous drafts.

² Important works in this regard are Riffenburgh 1993; Sèbe 2013; Keighren et al. 2015; Berenson 2010, and a long list of more popular, often problematically hagiographic, works including Jeal 2007. For an insightful reflection on the different political appropriations of a single explorer's life, see Livingstone 2015.

³ For example, during the time of the Canton trade system in Qing China (1757-1842), 'the only merchants allowed to do business with foreigners were the Hong merchants'. Licensed by the Chinese Government, *hong* merchants enjoyed the exclusive privilege and the burden of responsibility to act as trade and cultural brokers with European and North American traders in the port city of Canton (Guangzhou). Quotation from John Heard, 'Diary' (1891), Baker Library Historical Collections, Harvard Business School, FP-4, 32. On biographical 'Häufigkeitsverdichtungen'—the recurrence of certain life experiences in particular places and times—see Conrad and Osterhammel 2018: 3.

⁴ For anthropology, interest in brokers emerged within the context of decolonisation and modernisation theory, Wolf 1956; Geertz 1960; Lindquist 2015; for court mediation, Jaspert et al. 2013.

⁵ See on adverse responses to their ambitious if not utopian scientific programme launched in South and Central Asia in the mid-1850s, Brescius 2018a. On Prussian satirical responses to the brothers' quest for publicity and charges of plagiarism, *Kladderadatsch* 1857.

⁶ On the notion of intimate family archives, see Randolph 2004.

⁷ Such a simplifying narrative of continual 'decline and fall' is proffered, e.g., in Finkelstein 2000.

⁸ For their recruitment, see Körner 1982; Brescius 2018b: ch. 1.

⁹ Adolph Schlagintweit, 'Operations Proposed to the India House', annotated by the Royal Society man and military engineer Edward Sabine, The National Archives, Kew [TNA], BJ 3/53. On expeditions as deeply collective enterprises, see Thomas & Harris 2018: 7.

¹⁰ Humboldt to Bunsen, Berlin, 20 February 1854, in Schwarz 2006: 170-8. Kirchberger 1999: 390.

¹¹ Carl Ritter's monumental work, *Erdkunde*, almost exclusively treats the continent of Asia; see also Humboldt 1831, 1843.

¹² Describing his visit to the Mangnang Monastery in Western Tibet, Robert Schlagintweit later claimed that the brothers brought 'the Lamas to give us for money whatever we wanted; in fact, we emptied the temple almost completely'. Robert Schlagintweit, notes for 'English Lectures on High Asia Delivered during the Years 1868 and 1869 in Various Towns of the United States of America', Bayerische Staatsbibliothek [BSB], Schlagintweitiana, V.2.2.1, 146. It is salient to note that the brothers also plundered tombs to collect human remains in Asia, Hermann Schlagintweit, *Reisen I*: 235f.

¹³ Emil published, for instance, *Buddhism in Tibet* (1863); *Die Gottesurtheile der Inder* (1866); *Indien in Wort und Bild* (1880-81) (Neuhaus 2015, 2012). On Emil's considerable reputation within colonial circles in India, see Ashley Eden to Colonel H. M. Durand, Secretary to the Government of



India, Foreign Department, Darjeeling, 14 August 1864, 'General report on Bootan', in National Archives of India, New Delhi, External Affairs, File No. 198, 1864, Part III, 94f.

¹⁴ A set of 50 masks survives and continues to be displayed in the Lahore Museum, India (Ahmed 2017).

¹⁵ *Technical objects from India and High Asia, collected by Hermann, Adolph and Robert Schlagintweit, 1854 to 1858*, 9 vols, British Library, X 366. Driver & Ashmore 2010.

¹⁶ Each volume was dedicated to a particular region—e.g. 'Cashmere' or 'Tibet'—and was complemented with a description of what kind of garment was produced out of the different textile samples. The types presented ranged from 'shawls' to 'festival-coats' of 'Lamas' dresses', and valuable Alpaca silks 'used by Europeans and rich Natives'. The Schlagintweits' original fabric rolls from which the samples were cut are held in the Museum Fünf Kontinente, Munich.

¹⁷ Photograph by Auguste Dollot, 'Galerie de Paléontologie, Eléphant de Durfort', taken 23 September 1908. Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris, IC 4514.

¹⁸ Photographer: Alexandre Quinet. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Société de Géographie W2/ 37. Reprinted in Brescius 2018b: 287.

¹⁹ As captured in a letter from the president of the Société de Géographie de Paris, Camille Clément de La Roncière-Le Noury, to the French minister of agriculture and trade, 8 April 1875; Archives Nationales [AN], Paris, F/ 12/ 4980, Expositions universelles, internationales et nationales (1844–1921); Répertoire méthodique provisoire, folder 'Exposition des sciences géographiques au palais des Tuileries, en 1875'.

²⁰ Hermann Schlagintweit to the Prussian privy councillor Illaire, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin [GStAPK], I. HA Rep. 89 Geh. Zivilkabinett, jüngere Periode Nr. 19767, 'Acta des Kgl. Geh. Cabinets betr. Die von den Gebrüdern Dr. Hermann Alfred Robert Schlagintweit und Dr. Adolph Hugo Schlagintweit aus München, jetzt in Berlin eingereichten Schriften etc. 1852–1885', fols. 61f.

²¹ A critical examination of the acquisition history of the Schlagintweit collections and the role of indigenous intermediaries in their programme of accumulation was attempted in the exhibition *Über den Himalaya: Die Expedition der Brüder Schlagintweit nach Indien und Zentralasien 1854–1858*. Alpine Museum, Munich, 2015-16.

²² Important reflections on these issues can be found in Osterhammel 2017.

²³ Cf. Dietze 2018: 498.

²⁴ See the commission written by Councillor Lehnert, 29 March 1858, GStAPK, I. HA Rep. 76 Kultusministerium Ve Sekt. 1 Abt. XV zu Nr.189, Beiheft 'Acta Commissionis des Geh. Oberregierungsrahs Lehnert betreffend den Erwerb der Sammlungen der Gebrüder Schlagintweit', Prod. 10.

²⁵ Ibid. Originally: 'die Schaulust der neugierigen Menge [...] reizen'.

²⁶ Humboldt to the Prussian minister of culture and education, von Raumer, 8 February 1858, GStAPK, Zivilkabinett, 119. Humboldt was a fervent supporter of a distinct Schlagintweit museum in Prussia.

²⁷ Among others, the Bavarian-born King Otto of Greece (1815-67), accompanied by Queen Amalie, had a guided tour of their Asiatic collections in Franconia. 'Vaterländisches' 1864.

²⁸ Hermann and Robert Schlagintweit to the Bavarian king, 4 February 1861, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich, 'Findbuch über Akten der zoologischen Staatssammlung', VN 67, Abschrift 1182. See also Anon. 1877; Anon. 1878.

²⁹ Only a part of the costs accrued for preparing their artefacts for conspicuous display in elaborate cabinets or, as in the case of their 557 wood specimens, their expensive mounting on brass tripod stands, had been paid for by either their British or Prussian sponsors. By the end of 1858, the brothers' expenditure amounted to 6,500 thalers, roughly equivalent to £123,000 today.



³⁰ See the printed list of auctionable objects, first from the zoological collections, BSB, Schlagintweitiana VI.5.4.7, 7.

³¹ Among many, Dharampal-Frick 1994; Fisher 2004; most recently Subrahmanyam 2017, which explores with great erudition the different visions and representations of India across the early modern period.

³² Robert Schlagintweit, 'English Lectures on High Asia', BSB, Schlagintweitiana, V.2.2.1, 106.

³³ I addressed this normative bias in my opening remarks to the first 'cultural brokers' event in Cambridge, and in my ensuing paper "Cultural brokers and their enemies", December 2016. The Schlagintweits also suggested British economic and social expansion into High Asia during a hearing in the British Parliament, see Select Committee on Colonization and Settlement 1858: 1-10.

³⁴ Cf. Birkle 2009: 59.

³⁵ The critical consideration of 'bad brokers' as part of the 'cultural brokerage' project has led to useful spin-off projects and workshops on this ambivalent figure, including one on 'Fascist brokers', at the University of Konstanz in 2017, whose results have been partly published. See, e.g., Reichard 2019.

³⁶ Robert Schlagintweit, 'English lectures on High Asia', BSB, Schlagintweitiana, V.2.2.1, 5.

³⁷ Ibid., 6.

³⁸ Robert claimed to have earned 'a little more than 2000 Marks' for a single public lecture in California on 7 June 1869 (R. Schlagintweit 1879: 28).

³⁹ Robert Schlagintweit, BSB, Schlagintweitiana, V.1.1, 'Correspondenz über öffentliche, wissenschaftliche Vorträge', Band I: Einleitung – Statistische Tabellen, 3.

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325

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