REFERENCES to early printing in the distinctive script of Oriya, the Indo-Aryan vernacular of Orissa, the region of India to the south-west of Bengal (fig. 1), are very scarce indeed. The attention of scholars has naturally enough tended to focus upon Bengal in the context of early printing in northern India, especially in view of the remarkable achievements of the Serampore Mission Press under the famous trio of William Carey, Joshua Marshman, and William Ward. In this article I have attempted to redress the balance a little by tracing the development of early printing in Oriya and in particular the setting up of the first printing press in Orissa itself, some of the earliest products of which are to be found in the British Library's Oriya collection, in the Department of Oriental Manuscripts and Printed Books.

British contact with Orissa dates back as far as 1633 when factories were established at Hariharpur and Balasore on the Bay of Bengal, and prior to that the Danes, Dutch, and particularly the Portuguese had all been active in the area. It was not, however, until 1803 that Orissa came under formal British rule as a result of the Marquis of Wellesley's campaigns against the Marathas then still paramount in central India.

In 1805-6, Dr. Claudius Buchanan, a Chaplain to the Presidency of Bengal and Vice-Provost of Fort William College, visited Orissa and its shrines in the course of one of his tours collecting information on Hindu sects and their practices as well as on the various Christian churches established in the subcontinent. In 1816 the General Baptist Missionary Society was formed, largely due to the zeal of the Revd. J. G. Pike of Derby, and on 28 May 1821 its first two missionaries, the Revd. William Bampton and the Revd. James Peggs, embarked for India, accompanied by their wives and by William Ward of the Serampore Mission founded some twenty-two years earlier. They reached Madras on 24 September and Serampore on 15 November 1821. It was largely on the advice of Ward and his Serampore colleagues that the decision was taken to establish a mission in Orissa. The Serampore Mission had previously made several attempts to 'occupy' that region but had been on the whole unsuccessful. Up to 1813, when certain changes were made in its Charter, the Honourable East India Company had the power to forbid anyone settling in the territories which it governed if it so desired. Missionaries were particularly unwelcome because the Company feared that their activities might provoke rebellion. Brother Peter, an 'East Indian' missionary, had, however, managed to establish himself briefly at Balasore in northern Orissa under Serampore patronage about 1813-14.
Fig. 1. Maps of Orissa
Moreover, Orissa presented a special challenge to missionaries since it contained within its borders the notorious temple of Jagannatha at Puri (fig. 2), 'the Mecca of Hindustan, the Sebastopol of Hindu idolatry'.

Having obtained the Governor-General's permission, Bampton and Peggs left Serampore on 23 January 1822 and reached Cuttack in Orissa on 12 February. Here they set up their first mission station and were eventually joined by other missionaries sent out from England, the first two to arrive being Charles Lacey in December 1823 and Amos Sutton in March 1825. After four years' service, Peggs was forced through ill-health to return to England where he became a vigorous campaigner and pamphleteer for social reform in India. His particular objects of attack were the Company's financial involvement with the Jagannatha temple through the pilgrim-tax and the practice of suttee. Bampton remained in Orissa, preaching at Puri itself, where he had started a second mission station in 1824, until his death in 1830.

When they left Serampore in January 1822, Bampton and Peggs took with them one thousand Gospels and Epistles in Oriya and five hundred tracts. Other bodies, including the Calcutta Auxiliary Bible Society, had also made generous donations of scriptures and tracts in various languages, since one of the few attractive aspects of Puri to missionaries was that Hindus flocked to the Jagannatha temple from all over the subcontinent: 'There are myriads of pilgrims continually passing and repassing who, furnished with the Scriptures here in Bengalee, Hindoosthanee, Napaulese, etc., may carry them to the very confines of India.' The printing of the first Serampore edition of the New Testament...
Fig. 3. The first Serampore New Testament in Oriya (dated 1807, but printing actually completed in 1809), Or. 71.c.28
in Oriya (fig. 3) had been completed in 1809. In fact the Oriya version was one of the first to be undertaken after the Bengali 'to which language it bears the same relation as rural Scotch to English, though it has a written character of its own'. A fount of Oriya types had to be specially cast for the purpose as none was known to exist: 'The fount consists of about 300 separate combinations, and the whole expense of cutting and casting has amounted to at least a thousand rupees. The character, though distinct, is of a moderate size, and will comprise the whole New Testament in about 700 pages octavo, which is about a fourth less than the Bengalee.' A pundit from Orissa who understood Bengali almost as well as his mother-tongue was employed to translate the Bengali version (i.e. the 1806 second edition) into Oriya, his draft then being revised and compared with the original Greek by Carey himself. There appears to be some confusion about this pundit's identity. M. S. Khan, following G. Smith, states that Mrtyunjay Vidyalaikar, Chief Pundit of Fort William College, prepared the initial draft, whereas S. K. De21 quotes the official proceedings of the College where he is named as simply 'Pooroosh Ram'. Subsequently, the entire Old Testament was also printed in Oriya, the translation presumably being prepared in the same manner. As usual with Serampore editions, it appeared in four separate volumes initially, between 1811 and 1815. A second and much larger edition of the Oriya New Testament was printed in 1822, apparently at least partly in order to meet the requirements of the newly-arrived Bampton and Peggs. Besides these major Biblical translations, the Serampore Press had before their arrival produced a number of tracts in Oriya and at least one important book, namely *A Vocabulary, Oriya and English, for the Use of Students*, compiled by Mohan-Prasad Thakur, Assistant Librarian in the College of Fort William, and published in 1811 (fig. 4). The Baptist Mission Press of Circular Road, Calcutta, had also printed a few Oriya items.24

Once they had mastered the new language, the missionaries Bampton and Peggs quickly set about preparing tracts for publication. These were vital to their evangelical work, being needed for distribution to the people in the streets, at markets, fairs, and above all the great annual Jagannatha festivals, as well as for teaching purposes in the vernacular day-schools which they soon established. As they had no printing press of their own, everything had to be sent to either Serampore or Calcutta for publication, and this situation was to continue for another fifteen years. The first tracts – hymns, extracts of Scriptures, etc., mostly translated from Bengali originals – were prepared in the latter half of 1823, the very first being *A Few Select Passages on the Law and the Gospel* which was sent to Serampore to be printed on 25 October of that year.25 From 1828 onwards, the Orissa Mission was aided in its publication programme by an annual grant of paper from the Religious Tract Society of London. Besides having their works printed, however, the missionaries also experimented with traditional Indian methods of book-production by having texts copied out on leaves of the talipat palm: 'This method has the advantage of being easily understood, for the natives are not used to the printed character.'26

In course of time, the work of translation and preparation for publication became largely the responsibility of Amos Sutton. At the request of the East India Company, he compiled *An Introductory Grammar of the Oriya Language* (fig. 5), the first work of its kind,
VOCABULARY,

OORIYA AND ENGLISH,

FOR THE USE OF

STUDENTS.

By MOHUNPERSAUD TAKOO,
Assistant Librarian in the College of Fort William.

SIRAMPORE,
PRINTED AT THE MISSION PRESS.
1811.

INTRODUCTORY GRAMMAR
OF THE
OORIYA LANGUAGE.

By

AMOS SUTTON.

Calcutta:
PRINTED AT THE BAPTIST MISSION PRESS, CIRCULAR ROAD; SOLD BY MISHRA,
W. TRACHER AND Co., CALCUTTA; AND BY THE AUTHOR, POONAH.
1831.

Fig. 4. The first vocabulary of Oriya, 14121.g.6 (Reduced)

Fig. 5. The first grammar of Oriya, 12097.c.14 (Reduced)
published at Calcutta in 1831. In the preface he estimates the total number of Oriya speakers to be roughly three million and laments the fact that little attempt has been made by the Company’s servants to cultivate the language: ‘With the exception of those immediately concerned with the propagation of Christianity, perhaps not two individuals exist who know the language with any tolerable degree of grammatical accuracy.’  

He sees a knowledge of Oriya essential for the good government of the people of Orissa and also invaluable for the would-be Indologist: ‘The religious celebrity of the province must render the acquisition of the language a desideratum to all who delight in inquiries respecting the history and mythology of the Hindoos.’  

He also explains with regret that, because of his isolated position, he has had no-one to assist him in the compilation of the grammar: ‘He has not been able to meet with a Native capable of declining a noun or conjugating a verb . . . nor is a vestige of Native Grammar to be found.’  

Sutton’s principal task, however, was to revise the original Serampore Oriya versions of first the New and then the Old Testaments, as the methods employed in their preparation were not considered to have been ideal.

As the production of books and tracts increased, it became more and more inconvenient and irksome to send all materials for publication the three hundred miles or more to Serampore or Calcutta. An urgent need began to be felt for an independent press to be established in Orissa itself. The idea was mooted by Lacey, home on leave, at a meeting of the Committee of the General Baptist Missionary Society held at Loughborough on 17 May 1837. The minutes read: ‘Agreed that it is desirable to establish a printing press at Cuttack, to be placed under his [i.e. Sutton’s] direction, if it can be managed by native workmen, that Bros. Lacey and Sutton be empowered to take the necessary steps, the press being sent from this country.’  

A printing press was duly procured and Lacey took it with him when he embarked for India in September 1837. He arrived back at Cuttack on 1 March 1838: ‘Mr. Lacey states that on the arrival of the Press, several persons called to look at it, and appeared to view it as half a miracle.’  

The press was set up in the old school-house of the Cuttack Mission and immediately made Sutton’s work much easier: ‘Our press exceeds our expectations, and we are enabled to print our tracts with a degree of correctness we have never attained before.’  

There is no record of where an Oriya fount was obtained but it seems very probable that it would have come from either Serampore or Calcutta.

The first tract to be printed at Cuttack was hastily composed in the spring of 1838 and rushed through the press as it was specifically intended for distribution to Hindus attending the Ratha-yatra or car-festival of Jagannatha in June (fig. 6). It bore the clearly ironic title The Wonderful Advantages of a Pilgrimage to Jagarnath (Oriya: Sri Sri Gundicâ Yâtrâr Mahâsâcarya Phal). A copy is preserved in the Oriya collection of the British Library (fig. 7). It is a small tract of just twelve pages, defiantly listing the evils of the Jagannatha pilgrimage and of course stressing in comparison the rich rewards to be gained from the worship of Jesus Christ. A Bengali version had already been produced at Serampore (No. 14 in the Bengali Tract Series) and just one year earlier a similar tract, entitled An Account of the True and False Jagannath, in Oriya (Sadasat Jagannâthar Vrttânt),
Fig. 6. The car (ratha) of Jagannātha in procession (from J. Peggs, *Pilgrim Tax in India*) (Reduced)

Fig. 7. The first Oriya tract printed at Cuttack, 14121.a.3.(9.) (Reduced)
had been published by the Baptist Mission Press of Calcutta. Doubtless these two versions were used in the composition of the first Cuttack tract. It was printed in an edition of 5,000 copies which were distributed by no less than seven missionaries from the veranda of a house on the main pilgrim road to Puri. Its appearance was warmly greeted by the Serampore Journal *The Friend of India*: ‘For neatness of execution [it] is not exceeded by any similar brochure which has issued from the Metropolitan presses in Calcutta.'

The British Library also possesses copies of four other tracts (figs. 8–11) printed at the Cuttack Press during its very first year of operations:

1. **The History of Little Henry and his Bearer (Sān Henri o tāhār Beherār Vṛtānt).** This is an Oriya version of the best known of the stories for children by Mary Martha Butt, afterwards Sherwood. It was presumably intended for teaching purposes in the vernacular day-schools established at the various mission stations throughout the province. [14121.a.3.(1.)]

2. **Memoir of Pitambar Singh (Pitāmbar Simhar Caritra).** The memoir of this Bengali convert who died at Serampore in 1805 at the age of sixty was first composed in Bengali by William Ward (No. 6 in the Bengali Tract Series). It is part verse, part prose. The title-page states that it is No. 11 — presumably in the series of tracts printed at Cuttack? — and the 3rd edition of 5,000 copies. The previous two editions may well have been printed at Serampore or Calcutta. [Two copies: 14121.a.3.(2.) and 14121.a.3.(12.)]

3. **God is a Spirit (Īśvar Ātmasvārūp).** This is again part verse, part prose, and is very probably, like the preceding item, an Oriya version of a Serampore Bengali tract. According to the title-page, this is tract No. 10 and the 2nd edition of 5,000 copies. Again the previous edition was not necessarily printed at Cuttack. [14121.a.3.(11.)]

4. **Oriya First Catechism (Dharmar Biṣayare Kathābārtta. Pratham Bhāg).** This is the 6th edition of 5,000 copies, but the earlier editions were most likely printed at the Serampore Mission Press. The British Library also has a copy of the *Oriya Second Catechism* printed at Serampore for the General Baptist Missionary Society in 1831. [14121.a.3.(13.)]

It is recorded that no less than 50,000 tracts were circulated in 1838, but again it must be emphasized that not all of these were necessarily printed at Cuttack itself. The Orissa Mission continued, even after the establishment of its own press, to have works published in both Serampore and Calcutta just as before. The Cuttack press did, however, expand rapidly. The very next year, the Orissa Tract Society (its initials O.T.S. appear on many Cuttack title-pages) was formed by the General Baptist Missionary Society to stimulate the preparation of tracts in what was considered an area desperately in need of enlightenment. Stimulation there certainly was for during 1839 the staggering total of 429,500 tracts and books were circulated. It must surely have needed the combined resources of the Cuttack press and outside presses to produce that number.

Also in 1839 an edition of the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles ‘with the former versions in Bangali and Oriya diligently compared and revised’ by Sutton, appeared. This was the very first Bible translation to be printed at the Cuttack press. In 1840 Sutton’s
Figs. 8–11. Four other Oriya tracts printed at Cuttack in 1838 (Reduced)
complete revised version of the New Testament was printed (fig. 12). In March 1841, William Brooks was appointed ‘missionary printer’ at Cuttack, thus relieving Sutton of the burden of supervising the mechanics of printing. This left him free to concentrate on the work of translation and compilation, and a further four years’ sustained effort saw the entire Old Testament revised and printed in three parts between 1842 and 1844.

At the same time as he was engaged in the major task of Bible translation, Sutton was also busy compiling an Oriya dictionary which was published in three volumes, the first in 1841, the second and third in 1843. In the prefaces to all three volumes, he makes some interesting comments on his experiences as both translator and printer, on the problems encountered and the methods adopted to solve them. The first volume comprises an English–Oriya dictionary with a grammatical summary and a list of official terms in use in Orissa. In his preface Sutton notes the great influx of words of Sanskrit origin (i.e. *tatsamas*) into Oriya, ‘much more extensively understood throughout the province . . . than many pure Oriya words’. He adds: ‘As the proudest Oriya objects not to words derived from this source their employment would gradually tend to a much closer approximation between Bengali and Oriya than now exists. This consideration has influenced the writer in all his Biblical translations and original compositions.’ He also remarks: ‘The author has been obliged to be his own printer, and that at a country station, where, without knowing ought of the business himself, he has been necessitated to teach men and boys who never saw a type, and who barely knew sufficient of English to distinguish one letter from another . . . He had moreover before he could proceed to printing to obtain a new fount of types cast on a small body, in order to range with the English, and bring the work within its present dimensions. Partly, however, from the too brittle nature of the metal, and partly from the reduction in the size, the compound letters became peculiarly liable to break off in printing.’ The second volume contains a dictionary of Oriya synonyms. Sutton gave a list of Oriya words to his pundit, Bhubananand Nyāyālañkār, who then supplied his own definitions of them. The preface stresses the need for the orthography of Oriya to be standardized, a first attempt at which has been made in this dictionary.

The third and final volume, an Oriya–English dictionary containing some 20,000 entries, has perhaps the most interesting preface of all. Sutton reveals that he first began to compile a dictionary while he was still in the process of learning Oriya but then abandoned it as worthless, being only ‘an imperfect Oriya version of a Bangali dictionary.’ He later tried again with better results due to the collaboration of several local pundits, though this too was not without its difficulties and frustrations: ‘Nothing can be more aggravating than the pertinacity with which different pundits insist upon their own definitions, where perhaps all are wrong.’ Sutton also pays tribute here to William Carey of Serampore as ‘the first European student of the Oriya language . . . [who] prepared, or caused to be prepared, the first works in Oriya’. He does, however, have some criticism of Carey’s methods: ‘It is . . . evident that the Doctor knew comparatively little of the peculiarities which distinguish the Oriya from the Bangali; and his pundit, though perhaps the best Oriya scholar of his day, allowed his translations to go forth with the most palpable neglect of those peculiarities.’ Sutton and his Orissa colleagues came to realize this because they
THE NEW TESTAMENT
OF
OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR
JESUS CHRIST,
IN THE ORIYA LANGUAGE.

A NEW TRANSLATION,
WITH THE FORMER VERSIONS IN BANGALI, AND ORIYA'
Diligently Compared and Revised,
BY THE ORISSA BAPTIST MISSIONARIES.

CUTTACK:
Printed for the American and Foreign Bible Society,
at the Orissa Mission Press,
MDCCCLX.

Fig. 12. The revised edition of the complete New Testament, Cuttack,
1840
employed a pundit who pursued the same course: 'It was obvious that there was a Bangáli air about our first publications which attached not to Native works; but our veneration for the Doctor, and the great reputation of his pundit, inclined us to think they could not have erred.' But it was, characteristically, Carey himself who encouraged Sutton to revise his own Oriya translations of the Old and New Testaments, saying 'I have done my share, and I now make it over to you'. Finally, Sutton explains that he has included and not expunged so many 'vulgarisms' simply in order that Europeans may be made aware of the insults that are commonly hurled at them, especially by the palkee or litter bearers whose songs he describes as 'insufferably filthy'.

As the Cuttack press continued to flourish, first under Sutton and then under Brooks, it also took on the work of producing tracts for teaching purposes in the government vernacular schools which largely replaced those established by the missionaries themselves. In 1845, for instance, out of the total number of 62,700 items printed, 2,700 were school books and other official publications; 53,000 were Christian tracts; and the remaining 7,000 were Bible translations. By 1858 the press was providing employment for eighteen persons, mostly young men who had been brought up in the Asylum at Cuttack, and had printed, in the twenty years since its establishment, a total of 952,700 tracts of between twelve and thirty-six pages, 77,000 Gospels, 31,050 miscellaneous portions of Scripture, 25,575 'bona fide religious volumes', and 34,750 volumes or parts of educational series. These figures do not include the editions of the Old and New Testaments and Sutton’s dictionary and do not take into account the relatively small amount of work done in English and the considerable amount in Oriya undertaken for the government.

Thus, the Cuttack Mission Press, which still continues to operate today though on a very limited scale, played an important part after Serampore in the development of early Oriya printing. It established the printing of Oriya in its homeland for the first time and brought it out of the shadow of Bengali. It also, thanks to the knowledge and industry of Amos Sutton, laid the foundation of modern Oriya philology.

1 The writer’s interest in this topic was aroused by the notes on Cuttack in D. E. Rhodes, India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma and Thailand (The Spread of Printing, Eastern Hemisphere) (Amsterdam, 1969), p. 53.


3 The collection at present comprises some 2,500 printed books and 25 manuscripts.


5 Though the Portuguese certainly had settlements in Orissa, see J. J. A. Campos, History of the Portuguese in Bengal (Calcutta, 1919), I have not seen any evidence that they ever established any printing press in the region.


7 See the Revd. F. A. Cox, History of the Baptist Missionary Society, from 1702 to 1842 . . . to which is added a Sketch of the General Baptist Mission (London, 1842), vol. 2 [after the Appendix].


See Progress of the Baptist Mission in India, at the close of 1813, an appendix to Specimens of Editions of the Sacred Scriptures in the Eastern Languages ... (Serampore, 1813). See also A Third Memoir of the Translations Carrying on at Serampore (London, 1812), p. 13.

A particular form of Kṛṣṇa, the 8th avatāra or incarnation of the god Viṣṇu. See K. C. Mishra, The Cult of Jagannātha (Calcutta, 1971). Curiously enough, Serampore was also a centre for the worship of Jagannātha.

A Brief Sketch of the Rise and Progress of the Orissa Mission (Cutack, 1858), p. 4.


Memoir Relative to the Translations of the Sacred Scriptures (Serampore, 1808), p. 19. It was cast under Carey's supervision by Indian craftsmen trained by Pañcānā Karma kar who had been the pupil of the famous printer Charles Wilkins.

Ibid., p. 8. See also Ninth Memoir Respecting the Translations ... (Serampore, 1823), pp. 8, 10.


Ninth Memoir, etc., p. 29.

These are listed in J. Peggs, op. cit., p. 315.

Ibid., p. 199; see also pp. 221-3.

The Thirtieth Annual Report of the Religious Tract Society (1829), p. 40. The 31st Annual Report notes that they have continued to produce talipat leaf tracts, but there is no further mention of them.

The College of Fort William, etc., p. 230, states that 'a grammar of the Oriissa language' is being prepared by Pooroosh Ram in conjunction with Dr. Carey. This was apparently never published. Could it be that the manuscript or proofs were destroyed in the Serampore fire of March 1812?


Ibid., p. v.

Ibid., p. ix.

J. Peggs, op. cit., p. 316.

I am grateful to the Baptist Missionary Society for permission to quote from their manuscript Minutes of Transactions at the Meetings of the Committee of the General Baptist Missionary Society Instituted at Boston 1816, pp. 180-1.

J. Peggs, op. cit., p. 316. It appears that Sutton soon found one press insufficient and that another was procured at a later date. T. H. Darlow and H. F. Moule, op. cit., p. 1170, wrongly state that the press was established 'about 1836'.


Quoted by A. Sutton, Oriissa and its Evangelization, etc., pp. 319-20.

The Fortieth Report, etc., p. 24.

The Forty-First Report, etc., p. 20.

Ibid., p. 21.

The British Library has copies of ten tracts published at Cuttack in 1839. Four of these are listed by D. E. Rhodes, op. cit., p. 53. The remaining six are:

(i) Abridgement of Baxters Call to the Unconverted (Pāpipānānkar prati Nibedan Pustak). [14121.a.2.(3.)]

(ii) The True Refuge (Satya Āśray). No. 27. 3rd ed. 15,000 copies. [14121.a.3.(4.)]

(iii) Three Words of Instruction (Upadesār Tiniā Kathā). No. 25. 5,000 copies. [14121.a.3.(5.)]

(iv) The Claims to Divine Origin of Christianity and Hinduism Contrasted (Īśvarānkar Dātī Sāstra ki). O.T.S. No. 5. 3rd ed. 10,000 copies. [14121.a.4.(1.)]


(vi) Death's Judgement & Futurity (Mṛtyu, Bīṣār
Din, Paralokar Biṣay). O.T.S. No. 22. 10,000 copies. [14121.a.4.(15.)]

42 Minutes of Transactions, etc., p. 242. See footnote 32.

43 A. Sutton, An Oriya Dictionary in three volumes (Cutack, 1841–3), vol. i, p. 3.

44 Ibid.


46 Ibid., vol. 3, p. iii.

47 Ibid., p. iv.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., p. v.


51 A Brief Sketch of the Rise and Progress, etc., pp. 27, 32.