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Three botanical albums in the Thanjavur Maharaja Serfoji's Saraswati Mahal Library in India

James J. White

A private collection of botanical paintings was assembled by Raja Serfagee of Thanjavur (or Tanjavur, previously called Tanjore. The Raja's name also has been spelled as Sarabhoji, Saraboji, Serafogi and Serfoji II by various authors.). This scholar and king ruled Tanjor in Tamil Nadu (southern India) from 1798 to 1832. Tutored in drawings by Danish Lutheran missionaries, he commissioned artists to record natural-history subjects.

The Saraswati Library (also spelled Sarasvati, the name refers to the goddess of wisdom and learning and patron deity of music and the arts) in Thanjavur reports three bound, presumably very early 19th-century, volumes with 19, 61 and 11 botanical paintings respectively, a total of 91—a number that falls far short of the 300 paintings reported in the following citation:

Narayanaswami, V. (comp.). 1965. *A bibliography of Indology. Vol. 2. Indian botany. Part II. K-Z*. Calcutta, National Library. ●●Entry 3815: Saraswati Mahal Library, Tanjore. Three hundred paintings of S. Indian plants in colour, executed under the orders of the late Serafogi Maharaja of Tanjore. Manuscript. The paintings are of Royal folio sizes, well executed and in excellent condition. Names written in English with Tamil equivalents. Latin names are mostly incorrect and incomplete.

On the day that I visited the library (2 December 1992), two albums were displayed in a locked case, one album opened to a painting of a banana flower and the other to a "parengi"

(apparently Tamil for the *Cucumis* depicted). The albums were labelled "Botanical Pictures Painted by Serfogi's Artists."

The names in the following list presumably are titles as rendered on the artworks (including variant spellings, capitalization and spacing) and are reproduced precisely as submitted by the chemical conservator at the library, with some corrections and guesses by the author in square brackets. Not all plates are identified. Unfortunately photographs are not available.

Book I (19 paintings)

1. Maramandaray
2. (No title)
3. (No title)
4. Norium rdorum [*Nerium odorum* = *N. oleander*]
5. Sanseviera [*Sansevieria*] zeylama
6. Ranieum Javanicum
7. Somni Perum
8. Cassia Fistula
9. Vanda Tok burgi
10. Sun flower
11. Peas
12. (No title)
13. variety of cassia
14. Ballotranthas
15. Nasturtium
16. (No title)
17. Hybiscus [*Hibiscus*]

18. *Gatropha* [*Jatropha*] *curcas*
19. Erooa Hemp leaved Hibiscens [*Hibiscus*]

Book II (61 paintings)

1. Nut meg
2. Orhua squarhosa
3. Horse Gram shrub
4. *Solanum trilobatom*
5. Guettarda soeciose [*speciosa*?]
6. Yellow pandnus [*Pandanus*]
7. (No title)
8. *Michilia* [*Michelia*] *champaca*
9. (No title)
10. (No title)
11. Boer Bana Pepanda
12. Mango tree
13. enohoribia [*Euphorbia*] *antiquorum*
14. Red roses
15. Anesoneles
16. *Plumbago zeylamica* [*zeylanica*]
17. *Heliotrooium* [*Heliotropium*] *Indica*
18. (No title)
19. *Palathus Indica*
20. *Pulomar Indica*
21. *Vinca Posea* [*rosea*]
22. *Justica* [*Justicia*] *Tranque Berensis*
23. *Artabotris is* [*Artabotrys*] *odoratissimus*
24. *Pavatth* [*Pavetta*?] *Indica*
25. *Curailigo* [*Curculigo*?] *odoratissimus*
26. Board [Broad-] leaved Rosebay flower
27. (No title)
28. *Cochlospermum Gossypium*
29. Chay Root-Diden Lantia Umbellala
30. *Tragia Involucrata*
31. A medical plant belonging to *Fiscus* [*Ficus*?]
32. (No title)
33. *Capia orientalis*
34. *Physalis Somnifera*
35. *Phyllanthis* [*Phyllanthus*] *Niruri*
36. *Bignonia chelonoides*
37. Munusoos Elengi
38. *Cocoina* [*Coccinea*?] *Indica*
39. A variety of cassia

40. *Polygale* [*Polygala*] *Glabra*
41. (No title)
42. Kurulu
43. *Caosicum* [*Capsicum*?] *pratescens chittis*
44. *Lablab culoaths* [*cultratus*? = *Dolichos lablab*]
45. A soecies [species] of *Monordica dioria* [*Momordica dioica*]
46. *Cynanchum*
47. Banyan tree
48. A branched palmyra tree
49. Seemai Ecngi
50. *Solanum Jacquine* [*jacquini*]
51. (No title)
52. Red Nerium oderum [*odorum*]
53. *Aloe Littoralis*
54. *Caryota urens*
55. A Thorny plant
56. Bace Acgle
57. *Carthonus* [*Carthamus*?] *Tridonus*
58. *Tragia canvasina* [*cannabina*?]
59. *Pholomes* [*Phlomis*] *Indica*
60. (No title)
61. (No title)

Book III (11 paintings)

1. Plantain flower
2. The stump of a plantin [plantain] tree
3. Cassia
4. *Vitas* [*Vitis*?] *quadrangularis*
5. *Scilla Indica*
6. *Bryokhyllum* [*Bryophyllum*?] *calycinum*
7. *Glogiosa* [*Gloriosa*] *superba*
8. Serne carpus [*Semecarpus*] *anacardium*
9. (No title)
10. (No title)
11. (No title)

For additional information on Raja Serfa-gee, see Mildred Archer's *Natural history drawings in the India Office Library* (London, 1962) and *Company paintings: Indian paintings of the British period* (London, 1992). The India Office Library in London possesses an album of

117 watercolor and gouache drawings of zoological subjects by Indian artists, ca. 1802, working under the direction of the Raja.

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