




Return of the Ancestors. Sharing an Intangible Heritage

Kavinda Bibile  / Carola Krebs  / Maria Schetelich 

Abstract: The following paper presents a project in progress to reprocess and reconstitute photographs, diary entries, and publications of the German anthropologist Egon von Eickstedt, whose research trip to then Ceylon in the 1920ies made an important contribution to the historiography of Sri Lanka's indigenous people and their contribution to the country's history. The paper was written in a multi-perspective way by three different authors (Dr. Maria Schetelich, Indologist, and Carola Krebs, ethnologist and custodian of South Asia collections at the GRASSI Museum of Ethnology Leipzig) and it mainly gives the word to a representative of a community of origin, Mr. Kavinda Bibile, to whom the files and records stored in Germany were made accessible. The concerned museum collection comprises 280 artefacts, 400 photographs, diaries and numerous publications written in German.

Keywords: Bibile; Veddah; Egon von Eickstedt; intangible heritage; history of Sri Lanka

The following paper presents a project in progress to reprocess and reconstitute photographs, diary entries, and publications by the German anthropologist Egon von Eickstedt (1892-1963), whose research trip to then-Ceylon in the 1920ies provided important insights on the historiography of Sri Lanka's indigenous people and their contribution to the country's history. The paper was written in a multi-perspective way by three different authors. It mainly gives voice to a representative of a community of origin, Mr. Kavinda Bibile, to whom the files and records stored in Germany were made accessible. In this paper Kavinda Bibile will explain the history of his family as it was collected and transferred over generations. Therefore, missing bibliographical references might occur. The museum collection concerned comprises 280 artefacts, 400 photographs, diaries and numerous publications written in German.

History of the Collection

In 1926, the then-State Research Institute for Ethnology in Leipzig (Staatlich-Sächsisches Forschungsinstitut für Völkerkunde Leipzig) sent an expedition to India. The research assignment was

mainly anthropological in nature. The declared goal, according to the nomenclature of the time, was studying the so-called Indian 'primitive peoples' and their relationship with their neighbors. The commissioned explorer, Baron Egon von Eickstedt, had studied anthropology, medicine, philosophy, ethnology, geography, history and linguistics in Berlin and Frankfurt am Main. Born in Jersitz near Posen, what is now Poznan (Poland), he became a prominent figure in anthropology and race theory during National Socialism. After World War II, he continued to work as professor of anthropology at the University of Mainz.¹ The ethnologist and anthropologist Felix von Luschan (1854-1924), who von Eickstedt had met in Berlin, had drawn the young man's attention to anthropology in World War I, during his voluntary service in the medical corps, by assigning him to studies of Indian prisoners of war, formerly serving with the British army. This became the starting point for von Eickstedt's interest in India, which years later

¹ For further information and his historical rating, please refer to: Andreas Lüdecke: Rassen, Schädel und Gelehrte. Zur politischen Funktion der anthropologischen Forschung und Lehre in der Tradition Egon von Eickstedts, Frankfurt/M. 2000; Dirk Preuß: „Anthropologe und Forschungsreisender“. Biographie und Anthropologie Egon Freiherr von Eickstedts (1892-1965), Munich 2009.

made him seem suitable for the Leipzig endeavor. As early as 1923, von Eickstedt had met the then-director of the Leipzig Ethnological Museum, Karl Weule (1864-1926), at a conference. During the expedition's planning phase, Karl Weule, who also taught at the university, agreed with him ethnographic collecting activities for the Leipzig museum in addition to anthropological studies. Weule himself did not live to see the start of the expedition. He died in spring 1923, which is why the further supervision passed into the hands of his successor, Prof. Fritz Krause (1881-1963).

Planned to last for one and a half years only, von Eickstedt's expedition started in November 1926, but extended its deadline by a whole year. It led the then-34-year-old (initially accompanied by his wife Enjo) in seven partial expeditions across the entire Indian subcontinent as well as to what was then Ceylon and Burma, and to the archipelago of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Von Eickstedt made use of the British colonial infrastructure, but worked without official research permission and was mainly helped by local scientists and officials. Interim reports on his research were published in the *Ethnologischer und Anthropologischer Anzeiger* (Ethnographic and Anthropological Index) and in the Leipzig daily press.²

The expedition's yield for the Leipzig museum included about 1.700 objects that von Eickstedt had collected from a wide variety of communities. Von Eickstedt took with him the approximately 15.000 photo negatives as well as his diaries to Breslau University, where he had been appointed to the chair of anthropology and ethnology in 1928. Towards the end of World War II, von Eickstedt was evacuated from destroyed Breslau. In 1947, he was entrusted with directing the Institute for Anthropology at the University of Mainz (West Germany, later BRD). However, no detailed evaluation of his research material ever took place.³ After von Eickstedt's death in 1963, it disappeared from the scene for a long time and was later considered lost. Because the Saxon ethnological museums in Leipzig

and Dresden that preserved the objects belonged to the eastern part of post-war Germany (GDR), the connection between the object collection and its photographic documentation was broken. Starting in the late 1980ies, however, there was correspondence between Ilse Schwidetzki, von Eickstedt's assistant in Mainz, and the two South Asian custodians at the Dresden and Leipzig ethnological museums who handled the von Eickstedt collection.

"Mrs. Schwidetzki [...] may have known about the expedition materials stored somewhere, but did not sift them", wrote Lydia Icke Schwalbe, South Asia Curator at the Dresden Museum of Ethnology in 2014, summarizing in an email:

*"When she succeeded von Eickstedt (at short notice), the unprocessed material was moved from the director's room to the basement and forgotten about again. I became aware of photos from Eickstedt's visits in connection with my studies in Ranchi, in the editorial office of 'Man in India' in Sarat Chandra Roy's house, which I found in the desk of S.C. Roy. Thereupon I tried [...] to find more pictures and information in Germany [...]. At that time, I was told by the Leipzig university and the Mainz institute that everything had been 'lost'. When, in the course of a restructure at the University of Mainz (1995?), after the anthropological institute was taken over by Prof. Bernhardt, the institute's basement had to be cleared out, the old duffle bags were discovered in which von Eickstedt himself had managed to collect some working materials from the completely destroyed Breslau in several adventurous journeys in 1946. [...] The contents of the bags have only now (1995-1996?) been seen. Prof. Bernhardt recognized Eickstedt's unprocessed expedition material and planned to process the valuable anthropological-historical find himself, but failed because of the 'Indian' records, ethnographic terms and names. He did, however, instruct his secretary, Frau Kanzler [...], who had taken over from his predecessors, to attach the photographs to index cards with rough attributions that von Eickstedt had made for the negatives. She could read von Eickstedt's writing, but was not sure about names and technical terms, which neither she or Prof. Bernhardt knew anything about at all. So finally, the request came to me in Dresden, asking whether I could help with the identification. That's how I came to Mainz."*⁴

2 Egon von Eickstedt: Erster anthropologischer Bericht Ceylon, in: *Anthropologischer Anzeiger* 4 (1927), No. 3, 208-219; Egon von Eickstedt: Erster ethnologischer Bericht Ceylon, in: *Ethnologischer Anzeiger* 1 1927, No. 5, 133-141.

3 Ilse Schwidetzki et al.: Biographie. Egon von Eickstedt (10.4.1892-20.12.1965), in: *Homo. Zeitschrift für vergleichende Biologie des Menschen* 43 (1992), No. 1, 3-28.

4 E-Mail to Carola Krebs, April 9th 2022.

Finally, in 2003, the photographic estate together with von Eickstedt's diaries was handed over to the Dresden Ethnological Museum. It comprises 14.524 photographs and 11 diaries, including the yield from von Eickstedt's second expedition, which took him primarily to Southeast and East Asia between 1937 and 1939. Since then, numerous projects have been carried out to process the extensive material.⁵ The first results were published by various authors in the State Ethnographic Collections of Saxony Yearbook (*Jahrbuch der Staatlichen Ethnographischen Sammlungen Sachsen*) in 2013, in Volume XLVI. We would like to expressly refer to these at this point.⁶

The indigenous Veddah had been the first stop on von Eickstedt's expedition in 1927. He and his wife had chosen Bibile as a starting point, a central place in the southeast of the island which was then under the regency of the local land administrator, 'Ratamahattaya' Charles William Bibile (1894-1936), himself of Veddah ancestry. From there, the couple had visited various Veddah communities in the surrounding countryside in the localities of Danigala, Bingoda, and Hennebedde to conduct anthropological surveys and build the ethnographic collection promised to the Leipzig museum. They were supported by the Bibile family, who not only helped

them out with advice and transport but, as he later acknowledged, also made historical and genealogical archive material accessible to him.⁷

Thus, von Eickstedt broadened his original focus on anthropological-ethnological studies by including historical aspects. He elaborately sketched the historical role of the Veddah, which had before been neglected by official policy. Their contribution as reliable allies of the ruling powers, confirmed by historical sources from as early as 400 B.C., were used by von Eickstedt as a strong argument against their classification by earlier anthropologists as 'primitive' and 'wild' people. On the contrary, he called those relations a social symbiosis defined through mutual interests.⁸

In 2005, Carola Krebs carried out a research project in Sri Lanka to meet the descendants of the groups of Veddah people that von Eickstedt had visited, to share knowledge and copies of the photographs and to identify objects and photographic contents. We came to understand how and why von Eickstedt's photo series and corresponding diary entries as well as his publications had a direct relevance to the life of the contemporary Veddah community and their social problems.⁹

Once more, it became clear how necessary it is to preserve the collections and to share them with a wider audience. Thus, digitization, transcription

5 Carola Krebs / Katja Müller: *Ins Innere Indiens. Die Expedition des Egon Freiherr von Eickstedt 1926-1929*, in: Claus Deimel / Sebastian Lentz / Bernhard Streck (eds.): *Auf der Suche nach Vielfalt. Ethnographie und Geographie in Leipzig*, Leipzig 2009, 321-328; Exh. cat. Leipzig (GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde, 22.6.-26.8.2012: *The Subjective Object. Von der (Wieder-)Aneignung anthropologischer Bilder*, edited by Anna Sophie Springer, Leipzig 2012.

6 Carola Krebs: *Mit Kamera und Messlatte – vom Wert anthropologischer Fotografien am Beispiel der von Eickstedt-Sammlung*, in: Claus Deimel (ed.): *Jahrbuch der Staatlichen Ethnographischen Sammlungen Sachsen*, vol. XLVI, Berlin 2013, 211-214.

7 In his anthropological report on the Ceylon expedition von Eickstedt writes: "Der kleine Beitrag hat aber immerhin den Vorzug einer guten Verbürgtheit des zugrundeliegenden genealogischen und historischen Quellenmaterials. Ein nicht geringer Teil wurde mir durch das freundliche Interesse meines Freundes C.W. Bibile zu Bibile [...] zugänglich, wofür ich ihm auch an dieser Stelle bestens danke. Die Eigenart des Materials erforderte eine Aufarbeitung an Ort und Stelle, und ich habe daher die wenigen Ruhetage nach einer anstrengenden Durchquerung der ostceylonischen Dschungel zur Niederschrift dieser Daten benutzt" (However, this small contribution has the advantage of a good reliability of the underlying genealogical and historical source material. A considerable part became accessible to me by the friendly interest of my friend C.W. Bibile of Bibile, for which I thank him dearly at this point. The peculiarity of the material required a processing on the spot, and I have therefore used the few days of rest after a strenuous crossing of the East Ceylon jungles to write down these data). See Egon von Eickstedt: *Rassengeschichte einer singhalesisch-weddaischen Adelsfamilie*, in: *Archiv für Rassen- und Gesellschaftsbiologie* 19 (1927), No. 4, 369-438, here: 370.

8 Egon von Eickstedt: *Die historische Stellung der Weddas und die Frühbesiedlung Ceylons*, in: Fritz Krause (ed.): *Ethnologische Studien. Den Teilnehmern an der Feier der Einweihung des Grassimuseums in Leipzig am 30. September überreicht vom Rat der Stadt Leipzig*, Leipzig 1929, 40-74.

9 Evelyn Elsing: *Die Veddah. Fragen und Antworten im Wandel der Jahrhunderte*, Munich 1997; David Blundall: *Vedda (vanniyaletto) as folk life: intangible cultural heritage in Sri Lanka*, in: *Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association Bulletin* 32 (2012), 23-28.

and translation into English were a prerequisite. Although the first efforts to digitize started as early as 2004, this was not completed until 2015. Within the framework of the externally DFG-funded *Weltsichten* (Worldviews) project, photographic estates of explorers from the period 1870 to 1950 were digitized and published in the Deutsche Fotothek's image database. "For researchers from the countries of origin, these image sources can be of great interest as testimonies to their history and can now provide the basis for transcontinental discourses", reads the description of the project on the relevant website of the German Saxon State Library (SLUB).¹⁰

This is exactly what happened when the museum received an email from Kavinda Bibile in 2020 after the following sequence of events had taken place. Kavinda had randomly seen photographs of Bibile Walauwa ("ancestral home") and his grandparents on a stranger's Facebook page. On further inquiry within the family, Kavinda learnt that his elder brother had heard from his grandmother (Sylvia Bibile) that a German count and countess had come to Bibile Walauwa to visit his grandparents and that the count had asked the couple whether they could wear their wedding regalia for a photo shoot. Unfortunately, the names of the count and countess were not known, as Sylvia Bibile had long forgotten their names by the 1980ies.

Kavinda then asked his good friend, erudite Sri Lankan historian and architect Ismeth Raheem, to check the historical records for any 'German count and countess' who may have visited Sri Lanka in the 1920ies. After some diligent research, Ismeth Raheem got back to Kavinda suggesting the name Baron Egon Freiherr von Eickstedt, who had come to study the Veddahs. Kavinda then searched among his grandfather's papers and found a letter signed by a "von Eickstedt". The two pieces of information from Raheem's research and Charles William Bibile's papers both had the name "von Eickstedt", and that clinched the name of the photographer. Further research on von Eickstedt carried out by Kavinda via the Internet spurred him on to write to the museum in Germany as follows:

*"[...] My name is Kavinda Ranil Bibile, a born Sri Lankan now living in Vancouver, Canada. My ancestral hometown in Sri Lanka is the town of Bibile. In 1927, the German Ethnologist and Anthropologist Baron Egon Freiherr von Eickstedt visited Ceylon to study the 'aboriginals' of Sri Lanka, the Veddahs (Vaddas). During (and after) his visit he was in close contact with my grandfather Charles William (C.W.) Bibile of Bibile Walauwa, Bibile. Baron von Eickstedt even stayed with my grandparents at Bibile Walauwa. C.W. Bibile was the 'Ratemahattaya' (Chieftain) of Wellassa of which Bibile was the main village. Wellassa was the territory in which the majority of the Veddahs roamed at that time and C.W. Bibile was a descendent of Veddah Chieftains as was his father, and so on, going back to 1611 A.D. when a Veddah Chieftain by the name of Maha Kaira Vanniya was given the lands of Bibile to rule over by the King of Kandy at the time for services rendered in defending the Kandyan Kingdom. I am currently working on a family history of the Bibiles. While going through some of my grandfather's papers I came across a letter that Baron von Eickstedt had written to my grandfather in 1927 from India after leaving Ceylon. I attach a copy herewith for your information and archival records. Baron von Eickstedt took some amazing photographs during his visit in 1927. Recently I got to know that his photographs are at your museum – the Grassi Museum in Leipzig [...]. The purpose of my writing to you is to seek your help in obtaining high resolution images from this collection insofar as it pertains to the Bibile Family, the Veddahs, and Baron von Eickstedt's expedition in Bibile. [...] I am also a writer and have published articles in the Sri Lankan papers and journals. A field of particular interest to me is the area of Bibile and its surrounds, as well as the Veddahs and their old territories east of Bibile. I attach two of my articles about that area for your information. For further research on this area of interest I also need to obtain copies of Eickstedt's Ceylon Expedition."*¹¹

This was the starting point of a cooperation that continues until today and is bringing the old history of the Bibile family and their place back to light.

¹⁰ Link zum Zitat: <https://www.slub-dresden.de/entdecken/kunst-fotografie-design/deutsche-fotothek>, <25.09.2023>.

¹¹ E-Mail to Carola Krebs, January 18th 2021.

The Bibile Family, its Veddah Ancestry and the Historical and Geographical Background

The island now known as Sri Lanka had many names in the past: ‘Tambapanni’ and its Greek derivative ‘Taprobane’, as well as ‘Serendip’ used by the Arabs, and Ceylon.¹² The Veddahs were the original inhabitants, i.e. the ‘aboriginal people’ of the island and had been there for millennia when the first invaders from India, led by a Prince Vijaya, arrived in 543 B.C. and started the ‘recorded history’ of the island as the Sinhala people. The Veddahs thereafter roamed in the southern and eastern parts of the island identified as the Ruhuna kingdom, comprising a large part of the Uva Province in which is situated an area known as ‘Wellassa’ and the ‘Maha Wedirata’ (the Great Veddah Country), with the place named ‘Bibile’.¹³ There followed numerous wars and invasions by South Indians, and later by the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British, until, in 1815, the British managed to take over the whole island.

For over 2,300 years, between the arrival of Prince Vijaya in 543 B.C. and the British capture of the whole island in 1815, there was a long history of kings and queens and fractious sub-kingdoms and wars. The British ruled Ceylon as a colony from 1815 until 1948, when it was granted independence. The village named Bibile, situated in the Lower Uva Hills of Sri Lanka, was ruled by a family who also carried the name Bibile. These people were descendants of ancient Veddah chieftains who had intermarried over the centuries with Kandyan Sinhalese chieftain families.¹⁴ An old family document in the hands of the author Kavinda Bibile states, inter alia:



Figure 1: Map of historical Sri Lanka. Three states of the ancient Sinhalese kingdom, 2010, O/C., 8 × 11 cm.

“Maha Kaira Wanniya was a scion of Veddah Royalty, and a ruler of the Ruhuna country during the reign of King Rajasingha I (1581-1593 AD). For valuable services rendered, his sons were granted on sannas, the village of Bibilegama, in the Wellassa Division in the year 1611 AD where Maha Kaira Wanniya took up his residence with his family.¹⁵ His descendants held the village until the abolition of the Ratamahattaya system in the 1930s. Through more than three hundred and fifty years, generation after generation of this family ruled the area. The RM-ship¹⁶ of that area was handed over to the Bibiles from the very inception of the system in 1818.”¹⁷

12 From ‘Serendib’ is derived the word ‘serendipity’, which refers to the pleasure of accidentally finding something good and pleasant.

13 See Figure 1: Map of historical Sri Lanka below.

14 Historical relations between the Indigenous people of Sri Lanka and the former kingdom of Kandy have yet remained largely unnoticed by historical research. See also Von Eickstedt 1927 (see FN 7); Von Eickstedt 1929 (see FN 8); and J.C. Van Sanden: The Chieftains of Ceylon, Colombo 1936.

15 A ‘sannas’ was a land deed issued by the Kandyan king. It was either engraved on copper plate or engraved on ola leaf (the dried leaves from the Talipot palm tree). For further information see Dries Lyna / Luc Bulton: Material Pluralism and Symbolic Violence: Palm Leaf Deeds and Paper Land Grants in Colonial Sri Lanka, 1680-1795, in: Law and History Review 41 (2023), 453-477.

16 ‘Ratamahattaya’ (or ‘Rate Mahattaya’), often abbreviated to ‘RM’. The ‘RM’ positions that existed under the Kandyan kingdom were reinstated, with some changes, by the British in 1819, four years after they took over the entirety of the Kandyan kingdom. Von Eickstedt often referred to his interlocutor Charles William Bibile as ‘RM’.

17 Undated document, in: Private archive K. Bibile, Vancouver.



Figure 2: The Bibile Ratemahattaya Charles William Bibile and family, and the family elephant “Mudianse”, in the Walauwa garden, 1927, Photograph by Egon von Eickstedt, O/C., 12 × 8 cm, Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, F 2003-1/E0034.

The geographical location of Bibile in the heartland of the Maha Wedirata made it the ideal jumping-off point for scholars and explorers such as Fritz (1859-1942) and Paul (1856-1929) Sarasin, Charles (1873-1940) and Brenda (1883-1965) Seligmann, Emil Schmidt (1837-1906), or Wilhelm Geiger (1856-1943),¹⁸ and von Eickstedt who came to study the Veddahs. The Bibile family with their Veddah ancestry, being the local rulers even under the British colonial administration, enjoyed a great deal of respect and power in the region. Thus, all scholars, explorers, ethnographers, and linguists from Europe who came to study the Veddahs used Bibile village as a base and the Bibile chieftains (the ‘Ratemahattayas’) as advisors having intimate knowledge of local history, terrain, wildlife, safety, and the ability to locate and communicate with the Veddahs in their own language, as well as having the respect of the Veddahs, due to being considered one of their own kind. The Bibile Ratemahattaya also provided numerous essential resources including jungle guides, trackers, porters and victuals, sometimes even lending out the Ratemahattaya’s own horse and working elephant to traverse the roadless jungles. The ancestral home of the Bibile family, known as ‘Bibile Walauwa’, became a base of operations.

Egon von Eickstedt arrived in Bibile in 1927 and during his time there he obtained the *Bibile Family History* from the Ratemahattaya Charles William Bibile and meticulously copied it down. Today, von Eickstedt’s detailed family tree of the Bibiles,

18 For details on Sarasin, Geiger, Seligmann and Schmidt see below.



Figure 3: The Bibile Ratemahattaya (seated front row center) with minor chiefs in the Walauwa garden, 1927, Photograph by Egon von Eickstedt, O/C., 12 × 8 cm, Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, F 2003-1/E0185.

beginning with the Veddah chieftain Maha Kaira Wanniya,¹⁹ whose family tree the author received from the GRASSI Museum, is the best such document available to the family. We are grateful to von Eickstedt’s meticulous record keeping and the German museum system for having carefully preserved these records, and to the team at the GRASSI Museum (Maria Schetelich and Carola Krebs) for their translations into English which have enabled a wider audience, including the Bibile family, to read them.²⁰

Some other information the author has seen amongst the family papers is a petition signed by Charles William Bibile to the British Agent after the sudden death of his father William Reginold Bibile in 1918:

*“The Ratemahattayaship of Wellassa has been almost in the Petitioner’s Family from 1819. His great grandfather held it for 31 years from that year, grandfather for 16 years, and later his father up to his death. The Petitioner himself has acted in the office on three different occasions.”*²¹

19 He lived during the reign of King Rajasingha I of Kandy (1554-1593). His precise dates of living are unknown, but he established himself in Bibile in 1611.

20 Due to its size and complexity the authors have not included the family tree in this paper, but it is available at the GRASSI Museum in Leipzig.

21 Petition signed by Charles William Bibile to the British Agent, [1918], in: Private archive K. Bibile, Vancouver.

Working with those dates and other family records give us the periods for the line of Bibile Ratemahattayas since 1819:

- 1819-1850 (31 years) Hinbánda
- 1864-1880 (16 years) Abesundera Bibile (1825-1901)
- 1889-1918 (29 years) William Reginold Bibile (1865-1918) (died whilst Ratemahattaya)
- 1918-1936 (18 years) Charles William Bibile (1894-1936) (died whilst Ratemahattaya)

Charles William Bibile's son Senaka Bibile (1920-1977) did not follow his father into the Ratemahattayaship but instead went to medical college and became a distinguished doctor and an international expert in pharmacology.²²



Figure 4: Pencil drawn portrait of Abesundara Bibile, Ratemahattaya of Bibile 1864-1880, 1927. Photograph by Egon von Eickstedt, O/C., 7,3 × 12 cm, in: Archiv für Rassen- und Gesellschafts-Biologie. Beilage zu Band 19 (1927), No. 4, plate 1.

22 The institution of the RM-ship itself was gradually abolished.

Abesundara Bibile (1825-1901), Ratemahattaya of Bibile from 1864 to 1880:

The German anthropologist Emil Schmidt (1837-1906) is said to have been in Bibile around the beginning of August 1889. He describes Abesundara Bibile's entrance into the room where his son and successor William Reginold Bibile was talking to Emil Schmidt:

“After a long time came [...] the father of the Rátemahátmaya, in European dress, a beautiful Sinhalese head with a high forehead and long rolling white beard. Indeed, Abesúndare Bibile had been the characteristic anthropological typus of a distinguished Kandyan, the north Indian blood of his father Hinbánda absolutely dominating and the old Wedda blood of his mother Loku Ménika absolutely no longer recognizable.”²³

Other than that, this brief description and the photographs reproduced above, we do not know much about Abesundara Bibile.

William Reginold Bibile (1865-1918), Ratemahattaya of Bibile from 1889 to 1918:

Emil Schmidt describes the then-Ratemahattaya (William Reginold Bibile) in 1889, the year he became Ratemahattaya at the age of 24:

“He was yet a young man, Sinhalese, but with his long, straight, pitch black hair parted in the middle and combed back, with his hard-featured, bony face, the dark piercing eyes, strongly protruding aquiline nose [...]. His movements and manners were polished in a European way.”²⁴

Official educational records of this lineage commence with William Reginold Bibile, who was born in 1865. In 1872, the Ceylon Missionary Society (CMS), which was part of the Church of England, set up a boys' educational institution in Kandy called Trinity College Kandy (Trinity), styled on the lines of the great public schools of England such as Eton

23 Emil Schmidt: Ceylon, Berlin 1898, 39.

24 Emil Schmidt: Ceylon. Eine Reisebeschreibung, Berlin 1897, 72.



Figure 5: Pencil drawn portrait of William Reginold Bibile, Ratamahattaya of Bibile 1889-1918, 1927. Photograph by Egon von Eickstedt, O/C., 7,8 × 13,2 cm, in: Archiv für Rassen- und Gesellschafts-Biologie. Beilage zu Band 19 (1927), No. 4, plate 1.

and Harrow. In 2022, Trinity College Kandy celebrated the 150th anniversary of its foundation.²⁵ At that time, Kandy was a whole day's arduous journey from Bibile, over the mountains and across many unbridged rivers. Aiming to attract students from all over the island, Trinity commenced operations as a boarding school, and three generations of Bibiles boarded there, only journeying back to Bibile for long school vacations.

The photo below, taken in about 1880, eight years after Trinity opened, includes William Reginold Bibile and three future Ratamahattayas in

25 For more information on Trinity College Kandy, see <https://trinitycollege.lk/>, <25.09.2023>; and Kavinda Ranil Bibile: A meeting of cultures, the Chapel of Trinity College Kandy, Kandy 2019, <https://trinitycollege.lk/2019/01/17/a-meeting-of-cultures-the-chapel-of-trinity-college-kandy/>, <25.09.2023>.

the front row alone. There are five further future Ratamahattayas in the other rows. The Kandyan aristocracy and future leaders clearly felt that they had to provide this model of liberal English education to their children.



A photo group taken at Trinity College Kandy, about the year 1880.

FIRST ROW.

Robert Samaranayake (Station Master, C. G. R. Nugegoda), P. B. Madugalle, (R. M. Kandy), T. B. Abeyakoon, (dead), Robert Dulléwe, (President V. T. Four Korles), Harry Wickremesekera, T. R. Weragama, (R. M. Matale), L. B. Balankulam, (Senior R. M. Anuradhapura), P. B. Wandurugala, (Landed Proprietor, Kurunegala), W. R. Bibile, (R. M., Uva), Henry Perera, (dead), Rev. A. B. Karunaratna, (Curate All Saints, Galle), T. B. Disanayaka, (Chilaw, dead).

Figure 6: A photo group taken at Trinity College Kandy, about 1880, O/C., 14 × 16 cm. Unknown photographer, Archives of Trinity College Kandy.

Thus, it was that Abesundara Bibile enrolled his son and heir, William Reginold Bibile, into Trinity at the very inception of the school. William Reginold Bibile became the first of several generations of Bibiles to attend Trinity, which provides an admixture of British (Western) values and Sri Lankan ethos. Trinity has no religious compunctions, students are free to follow their own religion; the Bibiles were Buddhists in this Anglican Church-run school. William Reginold Bibile's liberal education at Trinity played a major role in developing his skills and administrative abilities such that, even after becoming the Ratamahattaya of Wellassa in 1889, he was sent by the British to various locations to resolve diverse issues, from implementing irrigation schemes to quelling lawlessness in remote areas, to controlling the cholera epidemic of 1907. The Colonial Secretary wrote:

“Mr. Bibile, I need hardly say, is a most capable and energetic Chief with a thorough knowledge of English and I think that his services will be a great

advantage in the Viyaluwa Division.”²⁶ Samples of grateful appreciations from residents in areas where William Reginold Bibile helped squash the cholera epidemic and reinvigorate a critical irrigation scheme are:

“Dear Sir, Will you kindly express the thanks of the Moneragalla members of this Association to Mr. W.R. Bibile for the energetic way in which he tackled the late cholera epidemic in the district. When he arrived here things were much out of hand, but he, at once, proceeded to take the necessary measures for stamping out the disease. We regret that this matter was inadvertently not brought before your notice at the last meeting.

*We are dear Sir, Yours faithfully, (Signed) A. C. Mathew, John F. Templer, J. H. Betts and J. P. Ireson”*²⁷

“Mr. J.J. Robinson said he proposed that the letter be accepted by the Association, passed as a resolution, and published, and a copy of it be sent to Mr. Bibile, thereby showing our admiration of the work he had done in connection with the stamping out of the outbreak of the epidemic in Mupane. He was sure that if they knew what things were like before Mr. Bibile arrived, and what he did when he came there, would astonish many as to the backdoor methods that were in practice. He was sure there was no person more grateful to Mr. Bibile for the services rendered than their worthy Government Agent of Uva.

*The meeting unanimously agreed to adopt Mr. Robinson’s proposal.”*²⁸

*“Mr. W.R. Bibile, late R. M. of the plata bearing his name, is back again in service. He is a splendid ‘cholera’ Ratemahatmeya. His energy contributed largely to control the disease in Welassa. He left for Buttala on the 20th instant, and for this kind of work we have in him a fearless and reliable R.M.”*²⁹

And on the irrigation scheme:

*“The Okkampitiya Irrigation Scheme is now apparently proving much to be the success it was expected to be, when it was started by the late Mr. F. C. Fisher, whose memory is still held in respect by the villagers. This scheme was one time threatened with failures, owing to the villager standing in need of encouragement and material help; but since the division has been under the supervision of the present Ratemahatmeya Mr. W. R. Bibile, the failure has been averted and the Scheme made the success it now is.”*³⁰

Transcribed below is another handwritten extract from a news item published at his death, this one acknowledging his services to the Veddahs:

*“Death of a Great Kandyan Chief Bibile Ratemahatmaya, who has just died, was a unique personality and typical of all that is best in the Kandyan, of whom there is no finer race anywhere in the East. Educated at Trinity College, Kandy, the dead Chief was, temperamentally, the best person the Government could have selected to preside over the destinies of the Veddah country. Warm-hearted sympathy for the wild men of Ceylon combined with a rare tact and indomitable courage quite reconciled him to his self-imposed exile. To adequately fill his place would be a task of great difficulty. Indirectly we might mention that the instalment we give today of Dr. R.L. Spittle’s lecture On a Jungle River in Ceylon deals with the country over which the deceased Chief held sway for so many years.”*³¹

26 Sir Reginald Edward Stubbs [Colonial Secretary of Ceylon, 1913-1919]: Appreciation at the death of William Reginold Bibile [handwritten extract from local press, c. 1918], in: Private archive K. Bibile, Vancouver.

27 Anonymous: The Recent Outbreak of Cholera in Munpane, in: The Times of Ceylon, 22nd April 1907 [undated extract], in: Private archive K. Bibile, Vancouver.

28 Anonymous: The Recent Outbreak of Cholera in Munpane, in: The Times of Ceylon, 22nd April 1907 [undated extract], in: Private archive K. Bibile, Vancouver.

29 Anonymous: Preventive Measures at Passara, in: The Times of Ceylon, 22nd [24th] October 1906, [undated extract], in: Private archive K. Bibile, Vancouver.

30 Anonymous: [on Okkampitiya Irrigation Scheme], in: The Times of Ceylon, 25th October 1903 [undated extract], in: Private archive K. Bibile, Vancouver.

31 Anonymous: Appreciation at the death of William Reginold Bibile [handwritten extract from local press, c. 1918], in: Private archive K. Bibile, Vancouver.

In 1907, the Colonial Ceylon government commissioned the British anthropologist Charles Seligmann (1873-1940) and his wife Brenda (1883-1965) to carry out a detailed anthropological study of the Veddahs. Upon their arrival in December 1907, the colony's governor Sir Henry McCallum (1852-1919) assigned William Reginold Bibile to accompany them into the Maha Wedirata and to be of assistance. William Reginold Bibile is referred to in several places in their book *The Veddahs*, published by Cambridge University Press in 1911. An extracted paragraph states, inter alia:

*"[...] That this influence was, however, of importance is shown by the fact that the families of the present aristocracy of the Vedda country are proud of their Vedda descent, which is equally acknowledged by themselves and the less wild Veddahs. Thus, Mr. W.R. Bibile Ratemahatmaya pointed out to me that long ago his people were Veddahs, and that even after certain of his ancestors had settled down and had intermarried so as to be classed as Sinhalese, there were subsequent infusions of Vedda blood into the family. It was clear that this relationship to the Veddahs was the reason for the prestige he undoubtedly enjoyed among the Danigala and the Henebedda Veddahs. For the same reason one of his relatives was allowed to pasture his cattle on Henebedda territory in the neighbourhood of Pattiavelagalge cave described in Chapter V. This was about 100 years ago, and may have been connected with the troubles of the revolution which undoubtedly led to an influx of Sinhalese into the wilds of the Vedda country."*³²

On completing their field work, Sir Henry McCallum requested Seligmann to address a special general meeting of the Royal Asiatic Society at the Colombo Museum on 25th May 1908 and to give a lecture to the members titled *Notes on Recent Work Among the Veddahs*. The meeting was packed, there was an energetic discussion at the end, and the governor had the following to say of William Reginold Bibile and his intimate knowledge of the Veddahs:

*"[...] recently I had a conversation on this subject of the Veddahs with Mr. Bibile, who attended him in the expedition. Mr. Bibile is the Ratemahatmaya of the Uva District, and he assured me that according to his belief what was called in Dr. Seligmann's lecture pure Veddahs or Rock Veddahs no longer exist-that they are wholly extinct, in fact.**

**The Ratemahatmaya, if anybody, should know ; and his view is shared by Mr. H. Parker, no mean authority, as well as by other Europeans long resident in Ceylon who have been not infrequently brought into contact with the Veddahs, and are familiar with the country they inhabit. It may fairly, therefore, be open to doubt whether Drs. Moszkowski and Seligmann ever saw a really wild Veddah, if indeed any such still survive. B., Hon. Sec."*³³

In the 1990ies, William Reginold Bibile's great grandson, this paper's co-author, managed to trace the Seligmanns' diaries and field notes to the archives of the London School of Economics, obtained a microfilm of both diaries, and printed copies of them which are now deposited at the National Archives in Colombo, Sri Lanka.³⁴ There are many interesting observations therein about William Reginold Bibile and his family, life in the Waulauwa, and great observations made in and around Bibile and the Veddahs, outside of anthropological work. For the record, and for the information of any future historians, William Reginold Bibile's diaries are deposited in the library of the University of Peradeniya, in Sri Lanka. Another appreciation of William Reginold Bibile appeared in the local press after his death, which stated, inter alia:

³² Charles G. Seligmann: *The Veddahs*, Cambridge 1911, 13-14.

³³ Proceedings of a special general meeting of the Royal Asiatic Society at the Colombo Museum on 25th May 1908, in: *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society XXI* (1908), No. 61, 81-83, here: 83.

³⁴ Record 25.182 Ranil Bibile 1994.

“The Government Agent Mr. F.C. Fisher who appreciated Bibile RM’s progressive ideas and energy with his sympathy for the people and his constant desire to study their welfare and become acquainted with them pretty closely. Untamed jungle Veddahs were accessible to his influence and he became known outside the island as the friend and guide to ethnologists. These visitors always felt and expressed admiration for his local knowledge and gratitude for his assistance, for example the brothers Sarasin and Prof Seligmann. An amusing interlude in Prof. Seligmann’s tour is known to us. The learned professor wished to force Bibile RM to compel the Veddahs to do certain acts which the RM refused to do. The Professor, unmindful of the fact that the Chief of the District was lent to him by the government, and under the impression that he was his subordinate made a complaint in a letter to Prof Willey, then director of the Colombo Museum who accepted the RM’s position. The matter ended most agreeably and the Explorer wrote most gratefully to Bibile RM when leaving the Uva Province.”³⁵

Charles William Bibile (1894-1936), Ratemahattaya of Bibile from 1918 to 1936:

Charles William Bibile too was educated at Trinity College Kandy and went on to the Agricultural Instruction School at Peradeniya near Kandy where he received a gold medal for his studies.³⁶ Thereafter he was appointed the ‘Agricultural Instructor’ for the whole region of Uva Dissawa and won the respect of all. The Walauwa-owning chieftains had agricultural lands including rice fields, and as such, a sound knowledge of agriculture was critical. It was their main source of income. Once they attained the position of Ratemahattaya, they had official duties too, along with a government income. Charles William Bibile was appointed as the Ratemahattaya of Wellassa by the Hon. Governor of Ceylon on 1st October 1918, to take over the post upon the death of his father, William Reginold Bibile.

35 Anonymous: Appreciation at the death of William Reginold Bibile [handwritten extract from local press, c. 1918], in: Private archive K. Bibile, Vancouver.

36 The Gold Medal is always given to the best student in the ‘batch’, i.e. the best student in that year. Prof. Senaka Bibile also won gold medals in Medical School as the best student.

Charles William Bibile, like all the Bibile Ratemahattayas and their progeny, had an intimate knowledge of the Veddahs, especially those living in the territory they administered as Ratemahattayas. As such, and like his progenitors, scholars and anthropologists both local and from abroad researching the Veddahs continued to visit Bibile and Bibile Walauwa.

There was the German orientalist Wilhelm Geiger (1856-1943),³⁷ who visited Charles William Bibile in 1926 and wrote him a thankful letter signed in the local Sinhala script. But most notably there was the ethnographer Egon Freiherr von Eickstedt, who visited Bibile and mounted a major expedition from Bibile into the Maha Wedirata with tons of equipment and provisions, and numerous porters to carry the expedition equipment into the jungle, as well as borrowing Charles William Bibile’s elephant “Mudianse” and his horse. Enjo von Eickstedt seems to have developed a fondness for the elephant, for she later wrote to Charles William Bibile’s wife Sylvia from India (where they had gone after Sri Lanka for further ethnographic studies) referring to the elephant as “my Mudianse”. “We have again an elephant, the State Elephant. But it is not so fine a beast as my Mudianse”.³⁸

Below we find a photograph of Charles William Bibile and his wife taken by von Eickstedt, who wanted them to dress up in their finest chieftain regalia for a series of photographs. All chieftains dressed up in their regalia for their weddings and ceremonial occasions. Cameras were rare in those days, but von Eickstedt obviously travelled with elaborate equipment and a good stock of photographic plates, as ethnographers fortunately tended to do. As a result, these von Eickstedt series are the best photographs the family has of these ancestors.

37 Wilhelm Geiger: *Unter tropischer Sonne. Wanderungen, Studien, Begegnungen in Ceylon und Java*, Bonn 1930.

38 Letter from Enjo von Eickstedt to Sylvia Bibile, [without place, c. 1927], in: Private archive K. Bibile, Vancouver.



Figure 7: Charles William Bibile and his wife, 1927, O/C., 7,5 × 11,2 cm, Photograph by Egon von Eickstedt, Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, F 2003-1/E0180.

For the author it was the serendipitous sighting of an old Bibile Walauwa photograph (later found to be one of a series taken by von Eickstedt) on social media that led to a lot of ‘detective’ work that eventually took him to the GRASSI Museum, with which this research and collaboration continues. The extract from the *Ceylon Civil List* of 1926 lists Charles William Bibile as a Member of the National Food Products Committee and shows both, the importance the colonial government placed on food production, and the high regard in which Charles William Bibile was held nationally, due to his knowledge of agriculture and his work ethic.

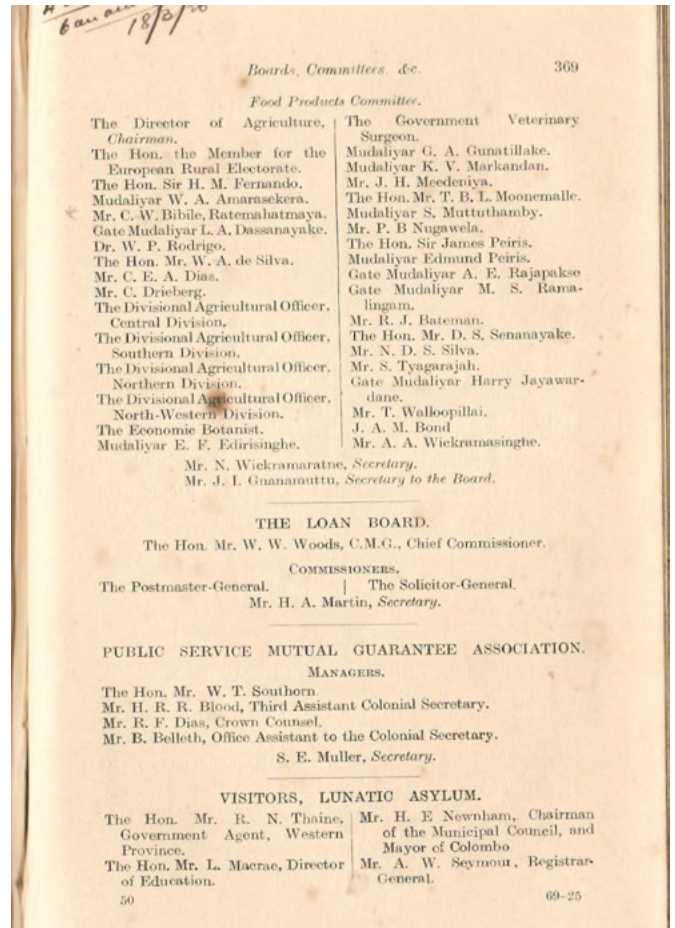


Figure 8: List of Food Committee members, page 369, “Ceylon Civil List”, Colombo, January 1926, O/C., 14,5 × 12 cm. Private archive K. Bibile, Vancouver.

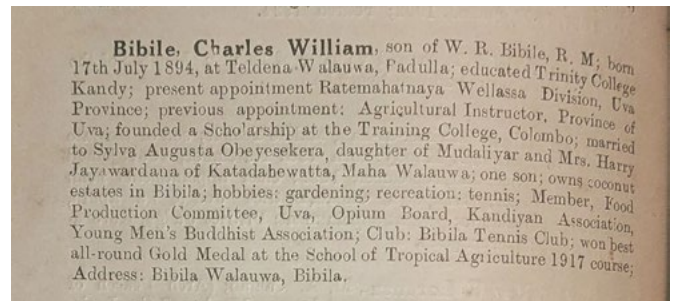


Figure 9: Extract from *Ceylon's Who's Who* (Third Edition), Colombo 1928. Private archive K. Bibile, Vancouver.

Charles William Bibile also had an abiding interest in wildlife, and corresponded with another eminent Sri Lankan wildlife lover and Veddah researcher and writer named Richard Lionel Spittel.³⁹ Just like William Reginold Bibile, Charles William Bibile refused to summon Veddahs from

³⁹ Richard L. Spittel (1881-1969), of Sri Lankan Burgher (Dutch) origin, prominent surgeon and medical officer in British Service, anthropologist, naturalist and writer, specialized in documenting the Veddahs and wildlife in their forest habitat in novels and films (now preserved in the Edinburgh Museum). The first international school in Sri Lanka was founded in his memory in Colombo in 1985, at Wycherley, Spittel's former house.

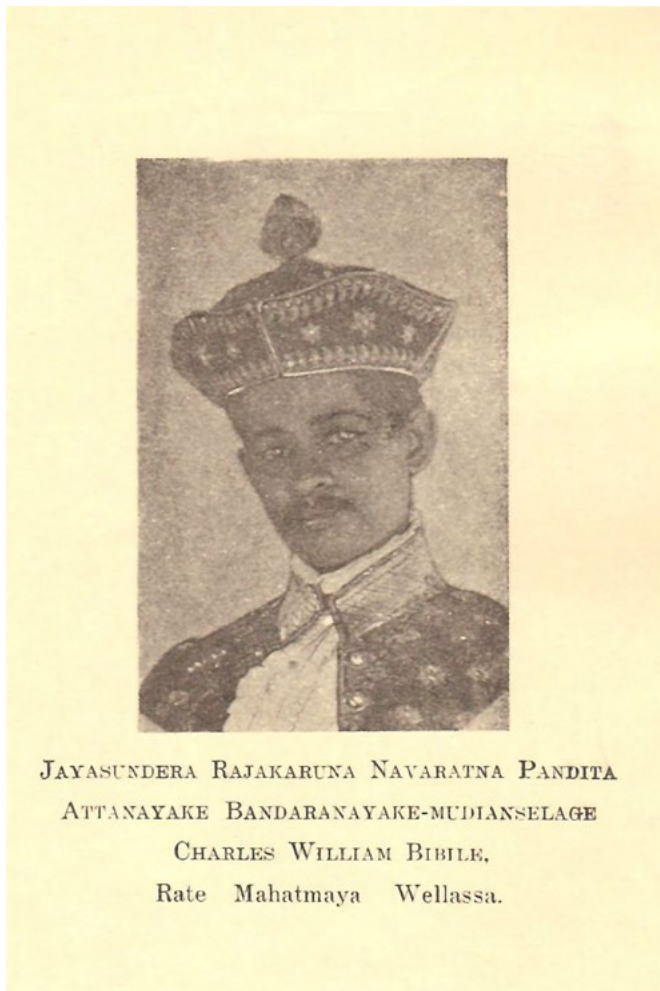


Figure 10: Portrait photograph of Charles William Bibile, in: Excerpt from *Chieftains of Ceylon*, page 36, Colombo 1929, O/C., 16,5 × 7,5 cm. Private archive K. Bibile, Vancouver.

the wilds to the relatively civilized environment of Bibile just so they could be viewed as ‘exhibits’ by visitors and researchers who were too lazy to trek to the Maha Wedirata. Spittel agrees with Charles William Bibile in part of a letter they exchanged on wildlife:

*“I am indeed very glad to hear that you do not permit the Veddass to come at the beck and call of visitors who are too lazy to take the trouble to visit them. The Veddass certainly do not show off well at such occasions, but merely make fools of themselves, wanting to shake hands etc. I wish some of the other RMs too would follow you.”*⁴⁰

40 Letter from Richard Lionel Spittel to Charles William Bibile, [Colombo, undated], in: Private archive K. Bibile, Vancouver.



Figure 11: Charles William Bibile's tomb at Bibile, O/C., 11,2 × 6,5 cm, Vancouver. Photograph by Kavinda Bibile.

Professor Senaka William Bibile (1920-1977), Dean of the Peradeniya Medical School, Sri Lanka, Chairman of the State Pharmaceutical Corporation of Sri Lanka, and Geneva-Based International Consultant on Pharmaceutical Policies for UNCTAD

Senaka William Bibile was the eldest son of Charles William Bibile and was seven years old when von Eickstedt visited Bibile Walauwa in 1927. He is pictured here by von Eickstedt:



Figure 12: Senaka Bibile at the age of 7, 1927, Photograph by Egon von Eickstedt.

Again, we have to be grateful to von Eickstedt and his liberal use of precious photographic plates, because this is the earliest photograph we have of Senaka Bibile, who was the author's father. Senaka William Bibile also went to Trinity College Kandy and had an illustrious career there, excelling in both studies and sports. Amazingly, the von Eickstedts saw and observed the potential in him already at the age of seven, and later wrote to Mrs. Bibile referring to "little clever Senaka": "What are you doing? I hope you are all going well. I think little clever Senaka will have leave now and stay at home. And Anand and Chandra and Wimela and Sudja? Give all my love to the children!"⁴¹

From an early age, during school holidays which he spent in Bibile, Senaka William Bibile accompanied his father Charles William Bibile on his circuits in the Maha Wedirata, which inculcated in him a love and respect for the Veddah communities. It was also his voluntary work with the Social Service Union at Trinity, with its unique and long-standing outreach programs and clinics for the slum dwellers of Mahaiyawa that gave him an insight into another world, far removed from a privileged life in his ancestral Walauwa at Bibile and the boarding house at Trinity. These experiences with city slum dwellers and the rural poor made a lasting impression on his young mind, with far-reaching consequences for the good. He saw the link between ignorance, ill health, and poverty. Thus, he began his lifelong dedication to social justice and health care; and he aspired to be a doctor.

Sadly, at the height of his school career in 1936, tragedy struck. His father, Charles William Bibile, died at the young age of 42. Although the family possessed ancestral village lands, without the father's government salary, their economic circumstances changed abruptly. School fees were no longer affordable and, as the eldest of six school-going children, Senaka decided to leave Trinity to seek employment. But the visionary principal of Trinity at the time, the Reverend Robert Stopford (1901-1976), who later became the Bishop of London, would not hear of it. He searched for a benefactor and found Trinity alumnus D.B. Ellepola, who saw the promising

talent Senaka displayed and agreed to help with his school fees. In his final year at Trinity, Senaka also won the coveted Fraser Scholarship.

Entering Ceylon Medical College with no funds, Senaka had to top the cohort each and every year to win the one scholarship on offer. That only sufficed to pay his university fees. At his dingy 'digs' in Borella he had to wash dishes and clean drains to pay for his frugal meals and bed. In the midst of all his examination pressures and financial worries he played rugby for the university team and took part in various extra-curricular activities. Yet, his academic achievements did not suffer, and they speak for themselves. He passed his First, Second, and Final M.B. Examinations all with First Class Honours, and won the coveted *Djunjishaw Dadabhoy Gold Medal* for medicine and the *Rockwood Gold Medal* for surgery in his finals.

Later he obtained his Ph.D. from the University of Edinburgh, was the first Professor of Pharmacology at the Faculty of Medicine in Colombo, then became Dean of the Faculty of Medicine in Peradeniya. During this time, he formulated the innovative 'Rational Drugs Policy' for Sri Lanka and set up the Pharmaceutical Corporation, better known as Osu Sala. It was this pioneering work that carried him into the international sphere, working for the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in Geneva in conjunction with the World Health Organization, setting up rational drugs policies in developing countries. Canada has also now adopted the generic drug prescription which was first formulated in Sri Lanka by Senaka Bibile in the 1970ies. The Health Action International (HAI) newsletter of April 1990, published by the International Organization of Consumer Unions (IOCU), stated that:

*"Singlehandedly he conceived, formulated, developed and implemented a people's oriented drug policy in Sri Lanka in the early 1970s. The pharmaceutical reforms initiated in Sri Lanka by Bibile have been transformed into a global action programme."*⁴²

During the 35th World Health Assembly in Geneva in May 1982, a senior WHO official stated: "[...] the philosophy guiding WHO's Action Programme on Essential Drugs is based on that recommended by

41 Letter from Enjo von Eickstedt to Sylvia Bibile, [without place, c. 1927], in: Private archive K. Bibile, Vancouver.

42 Anonymous: Senaka Bibile Memorial Award, in: HAI News 52 (April 1990), 12, here: 12.

the late Professor Bibile of Sri Lanka.”⁴³ In 1993, Dr. Hart, the pioneer of the Australian Pharmaceutical Policy Board, remarked when he arrived in Sri Lanka: “Sri Lanka is the summit of a mountain, Senaka Bibile is a glittering lamp on that top. By the glow of that light we, the other countries, formulated the drugs policies.”⁴⁴

Dr. Gamini Buthpitiya, Dean of the Peradeniya Medical Faculty, said at the Bibile Memorial Oration held to commemorate the 50th anniversary of that medical college in Peradeniya:

*“At the very outset, let it be said that Senaka’s contribution to this issue was always based on sound scientific information, prudent economic principles and practical common sense. Nowhere can you see the sway of ideology, rhetoric or emotion in his approach to this problem.”*⁴⁵

Tragically, Senaka William Bibile died at the relatively young age of 57 of a heart-attack in 1977 while on a mission for UNCTAD in Georgetown, Guyana. On February 13th 2022, on the 102nd anniversary of his birth, the government of Sri Lanka and the doctors at the Bibile Regional Hospital joined forces and renamed Bibile Hospital the ‘Professor Senaka Bibile Memorial Hospital’.



Figure 13: Bust of Professor Senaka Bibile at the inauguration of the Professor Senaka Bibile Memorial Hospital, 2022, O/C., 7,3 × 6,1 cm, Vancouver. Photograph by Captain H.U. Bibile.



Figure 14: The author Kavinda Bibile at the Bibile township sign, 2022, O/C., 14,3 × 55,9 cm, Vancouver. Photograph by Captain Hiranjan Bibile.

Anthropologists in Contact with the Bibile Family and their Studies on the Veddah between 1870 and 1930

In the second half of the 19th century, the situation in Europe – although of a highly biased nature due to the colonial policies of Great Britain, France and Germany – was favorable for comparative studies abroad, particularly in Asia. Natural scientists (geographers, geologists, zoologists, anthropologists) could now continue their studies, following the traditions of Humboldt or Darwin in regions of ‘the colonies’ with so-called ‘primitive people’. Of special interest to natural science of that time (geography, zoology, anthropology, etc.) were the ‘wild’ Veddahs of Sri Lanka. For long centuries having lived side by side with the ‘more civilized’ people of Ceylonese society (Sinhalese, Tamils, etc.) and in more or less close contact to the Buddhist kingdoms as well as the centers of colonial power, they seemed to offer ideal ‘material’ for studying the life of early man and the processes of acculturation. Moreover, all these processes had been observed

43 Anonymous 1990 (see FN 42), 12.

44 Stanley E. Abeynayake: Healer who lit the way for the poor. Prof. Senaka W. Bibile’s 32nd death anniversary was yesterday, in: Dailey News. Sri Lanka’s National Newspaper since 1918, 30th September 2009, 1-6, here 6.

45 Gamini Buthpitiya: Senaka Bibile Memorial Oration of the Kandy Society of Medicine – 2011-12 by the Incumbent Dean, Faculty of Medicine Peradeniya 2009-2012, [2012], 3, in: Private archive K. Bibile, Vancouver.

and to a certain extent documented over several centuries in local sources and by foreign travelers, merchants and colonial officials. Historical and contemporary material on the physical appearance of the ‘wild forest people’ and their lives was now available. Well-known were the ‘contact zones’ and peculiar contact forms between the Veddahs and their neighbors like ‘silent barter’,⁴⁶ the provision of warrior force to the kings of Kandy by Veddah chieftains and their elevation to the rank of princes, or the phenomenon of commercializing Veddah traditions by ‘Show-Veddahs’ performing traditional dances, rites, etc. for Sinhalese and foreign tourists for money as a clever tactic to turn outsiders’ interest in their culture into a source of income. Last but not least, interest in the Veddahs was triggered by the prophecy of a worst-case scenario for anthropological research – the ‘wild’ Veddahs were said to be on the verge of extinction.

No wonder then that, on a recommendation from Rudolf Virchow (1821-1902), the German Society of Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory together with the Geographical Society, funded an expedition by the Swiss naturalists Fritz (1859-1942) and Paul (1856-1929) Sarasin to Sri Lanka in 1883-1886. Through them, Virchow, himself a pathologist and physical anthropologist, hoped to acquire more detailed information on the Veddah population of Sri Lanka, but also skulls and bones for his anthropological collection. This is why the Sarasins, whose basic field interests had been zoology and the natural environment, now also turned to physical anthropology (i.e. measuring people) and to ethnology, by including Veddah ergology (everyday culture in the broadest sense) in their research programme. This new scope of research (based on measuring living individuals, collecting body specimens like hair, reporting their health status and taking as many photographs as possible) became a kind of blueprint for further physical-anthropological research in Germany.⁴⁷

46 Silent barter is a form of trade in which the partners have no direct contact. Goods would be left in a prominent position to be picked up by the other trade partner who would in exchange leave his own trade goods. Veddah, for example, exchanged their collected wild honey for garden products from their Sinhalese neighbors in this way.

47 See Fritz Sarasin / Paul Sarasin: *Die Wedda von Ceylon und die sie umgebenden Völkerschaften, ein Versuch die in der Phylogenese des Menschen ruhenden Räthsel der Lösung näher zu bringen*, Wiesbaden 1892/93.

During their Ceylon expedition, the Sarasins collected such a vast and diverse amount of material that it forced them to stay in Berlin for six years in order to properly document it all and to publish the scientific results in three bulky volumes. While the first two volumes are dedicated to their main field of interest, zoology, the third volume (titled *Die Weddas auf Ceylon und die sie umgebenden Völkerschaften. Ein Versuch, die in der Phylogenie des Menschen ruhenden Räthsel der Lösung näher zu bringen* [*The Veddahs of Ceylon and the people living in their surroundings. An attempt to bring the riddles lying hidden in the phylogenesis of man closer to a solution*]) contains photographs of the different Veddah groups with personal details like name, age, place of dwelling. For his later fieldwork, these photographs might have been used by von Eickstedt, for instance:⁴⁸

- from the Danigala mountains: Tuta, Perikabalai and Poromala; Tandi and Tuti.
- from Danigala: Badenai, Kaira.
- from Kolonggala: Kaira, Randuna; Hendi, Henni, Tuti, Latti, Selli.

The 22 short chapters on ergology are significant because they can be said to be the first direct reports in German on Veddah everyday life in a variety of aspects. There is no mention of any officials or other authorities who the Sarasins might have consulted or who might have helped them to obtain their information, and thus, of course, no mention of the Bibile Ratamahattaya whom they surely must have met. It might be worth checking the Sarasin archive (including the photographs) in the Museum der Kulturen (Museum of Cultures) in Basel (Switzerland) because there might be relevant mentions and/or photographs contained there.⁴⁹

The next encounter of the Bibile family with a German scholar occurred in 1889-1890, when Emil Schmidt (1837-1906) came for his first and only visit to Sri Lanka. He was an anatomist by profession, and for some years had been the personal physician of Alfred Krupp (1812-1887), the owner of the famous Krupp Steel Plant. After leaving this position,

48 Sarasin 1892/93 (see FN 47), Vol. 3, Atlas Tafel III-XXVI.

49 The authors do not yet have precise information on the Basel archive holdings.

he chose an academic career, making physical-historical anthropology his special field of research, combining it with ethnology. Nonetheless, his favorite subject remained anatomy. Between 1869 and 1894, he travelled to Northern America and Asia to collect skulls and to measure indigenous people for teaching and research purposes. After his travels to North America, he was the first student in Germany to habilitate in anthropology (1885) and, preceding his travel to Sri Lanka in 1889-1890, he was appointed Associate Professor at the newly-founded Chair of Ethnology at Leipzig University. Schmidt's textbook *Anthropological Methods. Instruction for Methods how to Observe and Collect in Laboratory and on Travel* was addressed to academics as well as lay enthusiasts and so was the account of his travels to Ceylon (Sri Lanka), published in 1897.⁵⁰ Here, Schmidt largely dwells on the beauties of nature and the description of exotic people and manners, but he also talks about field work. He describes his visits to Veddah settlements in the Welasse region, the problem of getting the indigenous people (especially the women) to be measured, and also pays his respect to the valuable help and sensitive assistance of the knowledgeable Bibile Ratemahattaya.

When Charles G. Seligmann came to Sri Lanka with his wife Brenda in 1907, it was not exclusively for research purposes. The Ceylonese governor had appointed him to collaborate in preparing the census of Ceylon by collecting data on the different Veddah communities.⁵¹ He was helped by William Reginold Bibile, who not only served as interpreter but also provided him with valuable details that were not easily available to a foreigner.

Regarding the authenticity of legends on the origins of the four Veddah clans told by the Sinhalese, Seligmann for instance says:

"[...] these legends, varying only slightly in form, can be collected from the Sinhalese all over the country. This as well as the fact that Mr. Bibile heard most of them many years ago from his father, shows that they are not of recent origin or invented for the benefit of the European inquirer."⁵²

50 Emil Schmidt: *Anthropologische Methoden. Anleitung für Methoden zum Beobachten und Sammeln in Laboratorium und auf Reisen*, Leipzig 1888.

51 Seligmann published his results in: *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland XXI* (1909), No. 62.

52 Seligman 1911 (see FN 32), 73.

The Ratemahattaya evidently also talked to Seligmann about the position of women, explaining that they are treated as equals by their fellow Veddahs, but show behavior towards strangers that is different from that within their community. Ratemahattaya Bibile said that all Veddahs have a sense of ownership with regard to hunting land of the group and possessions by individuals. He further explained to Seligmann that hills, rocks, pools or pieces of land could be inherited and that ownership of them was marked by a stone. When Seligmann showed interest in forms of messages, Bibile told him about the role of sticks and other objects used for messaging, and specially mentioned that locks of hair from a deceased person had to be sent to convey the message about his or her death.⁵³

Wilhelm Geiger (1856-1943) was the only visitor to Bibile who had not come to Sri Lanka for anthropological studies and the only scholar who had become so interested in Sinhalese studies by a Sinhalese native, his student Martino da Silva Wikramasinghe (1865-1937), that he abandoned his initial field of research (Iranian philology) to become one of the best specialists on Sinhalese language, canonical Buddhist Pali texts and the history of Sri Lanka. Invited by the then-Ceylonese government to edit and translate the Buddhist chronicles *Dīpavamsa* and *Mahāvamsa*, together with his wife, he travelled to Sri Lanka three times from 1895 onwards. His interest in the historical background of these two texts brought him, on his second trip (1925-1926), to Bibile in search of lost notions about the age-old overland trade routes which started from the north of India and went along the Indian west coast up to the 'Pearl Island' Sri Lanka, the important center of overseas trade. Geiger, like von Eickstedt, developed a friendship with Charles William Bibile, whose intimate knowledge of forest paths helped him to discover remnants of an old route leading from Anuradhapura through the Ruhuna kingdom down to Tissamahārāma on the

53 Seligman 1911 (see FN 32), 108-114. Examples of these are part of the von Eickstedt Collection of objects at the GRASSI Museum.

southern coast.⁵⁴ Up to now, a handwritten note from Geiger is the only evidence of their relationship. Again, it might be promising to check the Geiger archive in Munich for more information.

This also applies to the need to produce a more detailed reconstruction and assessment of the relations between the von Eickstedt couple and the Bibile family, based on continuous new evaluation of the existing archive materials in connection with his published work. Kavinda Bibile's research into the history of his family described above suggests that von Eickstedt's research on lineages and genealogies of Veddah families has at least contributed to a chapter of Sri Lankan history that has still many blank spots – the status of princes given to the Veddah chieftains by the Kandyan kings in exchange for their services in times of war and peace, and the implications for the Ratamahattaya office in more recent times have not yet found an adequate place in publications on Sri Lankan history. It was possibly William Reginold Bibile who drew attention to this important historical problem in view of a larger public for the first time via his conversations with Seligmann.

Conclusion

We understand our common restitution project as a work in progress, based on mutual exchange of knowledge, multidisciplinary in its methodical approach, and thus resulting in intellectual benefits for both sides. It deliberately follows the approach of 'We *with* the Other' recommended by ICOM to substitute the traditional 'We *for* the Other' as our guiding principle for the role museums should play in our global world.

With regards to the early decolonial turn in the GDR's museology, ethnography, and ethnographic museums, and with regards to museum development aid and formation of indigenous museum

staff, the good intentions have been tainted by an idea of northern hemisphere supremacy. Nevertheless, the curatorial staff are well prepared for a different collaborative future through the collections (see Flitsch & Noack Boas's blog).⁵⁵ Who of us, still steeped in GDR ethnography,⁵⁶ could have anticipated back in the 1980ies when Icke Schwalbe rediscovered von Eickstedt's heritage, that 40 years later we, and a Sri Lankan of Veddah lineage whose grandfather Ratamahattaya Charles William Bibile assisted von Eickstedt in 1927, would be collaborating as self-confident modern coevals, looking at this history together – albeit still from different perspectives? Long after colonialism ended, Kavinda Bibile is in search of traces of his family history and its context. Racial assumptions and anthropometric measuring have not stopped him from being amazed by the puzzle pieces he is managing to piece together through the collection, or the decades of meticulous care taken by museum staff to preserve them. For whom in the end? For the communities of origin of course at first hand, to recover, to reorient, to relaunch; as much as for us to finally learn that the 'wild', the 'primitive' has always been constructed as a means of domination. It seems to us that we have much to gain from dialogue and from finally knowing that, in the judgement and critique of my contemporaneous as well as historical other, there always lies a necessary healing and hopefully thoroughly transformative reflection on us as well. This is what Kavinda Bibile has taught us.

54 During the last twenty years, the early history of the Ruhuna kingdom received the particular interest of historians, archaeologists and bio-archaeologists. See David Blundall: Revisiting Cultural Heritage in Sri Lanka. The Vedda (vanniyaletto), in: Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association Bulletin 26 (2006), 163-167; Hans-Joachim Weisshaar / Helmut Roth / W. Wijeyapala (eds.): Ancient Ruhuna. Sri-Lankan-German Archaeological Project in the Southern Province, Mayence 2001; Patrick Roberts / Rebecca Hamilton / Dolores R. Piperno: Tropical forests as key sites of the 'Anthropocene'. Past and present perspectives, in: Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America 118 (2021), No. 40, 1-7.

55 <https://boasblogs.org/de/dcnr/museums-material-culture-and-universities/>, <25.10.2023>.

56 Mareile Flitsch / Karoline Noack: Überlegungen zur Parallelität und Zeitgenossenschaft der DDR/BRD- Ethnologien im Hinblick auf eine Standortbestimmung mit Zukunftsaussichten, in: Zeitschrift für Ethnologie 144 (2019), Special Issue: One Hundred and Fifty Years of the Zeitschrift für Ethnologie – a Look Back and Ahead, 163-198.


ORCID®

Kavinda Bibile 

<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-0953-6663>

Carola Krebs 

<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-4724-9165>

Maria Schetelich 

<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-4558-8034>

List of picture credits and copyrights

Figure 1: Public Domain, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Principality_of_Ruhuna#/media/File:1000pxancien_trisinalaya-locator-map.svg.png, <18.09.2023>.

Figure 2: © Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

Figure 3: © Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

Figure 4: Photograph by Kavinda Bibile

Figure 5: Photograph by Kavinda Bibile

Figure 6: Photograph by Kavinda Bibile

Figure 7: © Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

Figure 8: Photograph by Kavinda Bibile

Figure 9: Photograph by Kavinda Bibile

Figure 10: Photograph by Kavinda Bibile

Figure 11: Photograph by Kavinda Bibile

Figure 12: © Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

Figure 13: Photograph by Captain H.U. Bibile

Figure 14: Photograph by Captain Hiranjan Bibile

Acknowledgments

Kavinda Bibile would like to acknowledge the immense amount of information garnered from ethnographers and even linguists who have visited the island of Sri Lanka over a long period of time, from the 19th century onwards, to study the Veddahs. Their writings and photographs have given us wonderful windows into the past which, coupled with some Bibile family documents in the author's possession, and recent valuable inputs from the team at the GRASSI Museum has enabled us to compile this document. However, if the early scholars and ethnographers who travelled so far, often at considerable danger and great discomfort to themselves, had not recorded and photographed peoples like the Veddahs of Ceylon, we would be far less knowledgeable about our own histories and cultural backgrounds than we are today.

Reference

Kavinda Bibile / Carola Krebs / Maria Schetelich: Return of the Ancestors. Sharing an Intangible Heritage, in: *transfer – Zeitschrift für Provenienzforschung und Sammlungsgeschichte / Journal for Provenance Research and the History of Collection* 2 (2023), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.48640/tf.2023.1.101809>, 174-192.