

# Biographical Note on Louis de La Vallée Poussin

Member of the Académie Royale de Belgique

Born Liège, Jan. 1, 1869,

Died Brussels, Feb. 18, 1938

by  
Étienne Lamotte

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Translated from the French by Gelongma Migme Chödrön and Karma Trinley; revised by Gelong Lodrö Sangpo

A lively and penetrating intellect, a subtle and constantly awake mind, a passionate taste for research and irrepressible energy directed towards a single goal made Louis de La Vallée Poussin the greatest of the Belgian Indologists. Life was relatively kind to him and spared him the shortcuts that could have distracted him from his work.

French by his father, Belgian by his mother, he belonged to an aristocratic family that was renowned in Belgian science: the geologist Charles de la Vallée Poussin, the mathematicians Philippe Gilbert and Charles de La Vallée Poussin, the jurist Francis de Monge, and the learned Léon de Monge.

His grandfather, Étienne-Pierre-Remy de La Vallée Poussin, participated in the last Napoleonic campaigns and, in 1832, at the command of King Léopold the First, along with other French officers headed by Maréchal Girard, was entrusted with organizing the first army of the independent Belgium. <146> At Namur, he married Marie-Thérèse de Cauwer with whom he had four sons. The second, Gustave, who was born at la Rochelle in 1829 and died in Paris in 1910, married Pauline de Monge de Ferneau, born in Liège in 1845. Four children were born from this union, three sons and a daughter, the eldest of whom was Louis de La Vallée Poussin.

His mother having died when he was seven years of age, Louis, as well as his brothers and sisters, were raised by his maternal grandparents, the de Monges. He was a brilliant student of the classics at Collège Saint-Servais where he was influenced especially by Father Bodson who was later sent to the Mission at Chotanagapur, and by Father Ange Durand, a French Jesuit. He had a strong passion for Greek studies and excelled in the composition of Latin verses.

His studies at the College completed, from 1884 to 1885 he attended the courses at the University of Liège, passed his exams with the highest distinction and, at the age of nineteen, received the diploma of Doctor in Philosophy and Literature. Louis Roersch taught him the rigorous principles of critique and philology, whereas Delboeuf communicated to him the taste for dialectic.

The reading of Charles Lyall's *Asiatic Studies* gave the young doctor the taste for orientalism, and he went to Louvain where Charles de Harlez and Philippe Colinet, two self-taught newcomers to the science, taught him the rudiments of Sanskrit, Pāli, and Avestan, and initiated him into the methods of comparative linguistics. <147>

His stay in Paris of three years, from 1890 to 1893, revealed itself to be infinitely more fruitful. At the Sorbonne, he followed Victor Henry's course in Sanskrit and was one of the first students of Sylvain Lévi at the École Pratique des Hautes-Études. He won the friendship of Auguste Barth and Émile

Senart, thus building cordial relations of mutual understanding with the French orientalist by whom he was particularly influenced and which continued up to the time of his death.

In 1893, Louis de La Vallée Poussin went to Leyden to study with Henri Kern who was regarded as one of the greatest scholars of the nineteenth century. Kern taught him the language of the Gāthās without forcing him to share in his own theories of the mythical origin of religion.

With the knowledge of Sanskrit, Pāli, and Avestan, the young scholar was armed for his work. Subsequently he was able to add thereto the knowledge of Tibetan which he studied on his own and of which he finally acquired an immense vocabulary. He had reached the age of about fifty when he undertook the study of Chinese. He had been impelled to do so by the needs of his profession, for many important Buddhist texts, originally written in Sanskrit, have come down to us only in their Chinese translations. <148> This Chinese of translation constitutes a literary language of a special type that evolved in the course of time. We may distinguish three periods of translation:

- the archaic translations, clumsy and hesitant, originating in the fourth century;
- the early translations, free in interpretation and flowing in style, represented mainly by Kumārajīva (401–409) and Paramārtha (546–567);
- the later translations characterized by a technical terminology which Hiuan-tsang (645–664) introduced for the Sūtras and the Abhidharma, Yi-tsing (692–713) for the Vinaya, Amoghavajra (723–774) for the Tantra.

In order to become initiated into Buddhist Chinese, Louis de La Vallée Poussin had at his disposal only the *Petit dictionnaire chinois-français* of A. Debesse and the *Vocabulary of Buddhist Terms and Names* of O. Rosenberg. With these very rudimentary working tools, he achieved an unequalled mastery of Buddhist Chinese, a mastery which won the admiration of professional Sinologists and opened wide the gates of the Chinese Tripiṭaka for him.

Having opted for Belgian nationality, he was named Professor at the University of Ghent in 1894. For thirty-five years, he taught Sanskrit and Greek and Latin comparative grammar. He did not really like to lecture in front of large audiences made up of young people in search of a degree. On the other hand, he reserved all his care and attention for hand-picked students who were capable of following him. <149> Over the course of time, he developed a number of illustrious students such as the Japanese H. Ui, C. Akumana, R. Yamabe, S. Miyamoto; the Indian P.L. Vaidya and N. Dutt; the Belgian J. Mansion, and the Dutch J. Rahder.

From the beginning of his career, the young Indologist specialized in the study of Buddhism. The doctrine of Śākyamuni as it appears in the Pāli canonical scriptures was already known by the great works of Rhys Davids and Oldenberg. At first, Louis de La Vallée Poussin was interested in the Hindu-ized and relatively late form of Buddhism known by the name of Tantrism. To it he dedicated a large work which appeared in 1898 under the title of *Bouddhisme, Études et Matériaux*. It was very well not received critically and the historian, E. J. Rapson, refused to see authentic Buddhism in “l’infect tantrisme” (“this vile tantrism”). Indeed, the tantras underlie all the Indian systems and, starting from the eighth century, completely dominated Buddhist religiosity. Louis de La Vallée Poussin had no difficulty in defending himself but, sensitive to the criticism addressed to him, he abandoned the study of magical rituals to the ethnologists and returned to the summits of Buddhist scholasticism which he was unique in being able to climb with assured steps. <150>



Later I will examine his scientific production which was already considerable when the First World War took place. Having taken refuge at Cambridge in 1914, he organized classes for young Belgians, published an edition of the *Mahāniddesa* in collaboration with E. J. Thomas, made an inventory of the Jain manuscripts in the Cambridge Library, and drew up the catalogue of the Tibetan manuscripts of Touen-huang kept in the India Office Library. This catalogue remained unpublished until 1962 when it appeared under the auspices of the Commonwealth Relations Office. Endeavoring to revive the *Muséon*, two volumes of which had appeared by the Cambridge Press, he gave at Oxford, in 1918, the small *Hibbert Lectures* and, at the School of Oriental Studies of London, the *Forlong Lectures*.

At the end of the war, he returned to Belgium and resumed teaching at the University of Ghent. He redoubled his activity and undertook the translation of Vasubandhu's *Kośa* and Hiuan-tsang's *Siddhi*, the two lengthy works which were to immortalize him. In 1921, he established the *Société Belge d'Études Orientales* in Brussels, organized conferences there and directed its publications.

In 1929, the Flemishization of the University of Ghent took place. Along with several of his colleagues, Louis de La Vallée Poussin requested and was granted definitive leave of absence, maintaining his functional title. Relieved of his teaching load, he was able henceforth to devote all of his time to his own research. <151> By not welcoming him into its professorial staff, the University of Louvain lost the opportunity to increase its own prestige and influence.

The scholar then turned to the École des Hautes-Études in the rue de la Concorde where he gave a series of courses and conferences, and to the Institut Belge des Hautes-Études where, in 1931, he established a new orientalist review entitled *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques*. The first five volumes are mainly from his own hand but, not to speak of the Belgian contribution, there are also articles signed by the greatest names of French and foreign Far-Eastern studies, namely: J. Bacot, P. Demiéville, M. Lalou, H. Maspero, E. Obermiller, P. Pelliot, J. Przyluski, R. des Rotours, G. Tucci and A. Waley and others who offered him enthusiastic collaboration.

Apart from bridge, cross-word puzzles, and short vacations in Savoy where he met two faithful friends, Marcelle Lalou and Jean Przyluski, Louis de La Vallée Poussin allowed himself no distraction. During the last ten years of his life, he hardly left his office in the avenue Molière in Brussels. It was there that I met him; subsequently he granted me his friendship and trust and spent every Sunday and Thursday afternoon with me. <152> Together we read, in the original Sanskrit, the *Bhagavadgītā* and the commentary by Śaṅkara on the *Brahmasūtra* and, in their Tibetan and Chinese versions, the *Samdhinirmocana* and the *Mahāyānasamgraha*.

In view of his frail and thin silhouette, visitors were struck by his piercing gaze and the blackness of his hair. Even with the lapse of time, it is difficult for me to define his personality: an aristocratic distinction that, while maintaining a distance, was inclined to favor the most humble; an intensity of life that shone from him and that seemed to raise one to a higher level; a complete absence of dogmatism that contrasted with the certainty of his judgment and the firmness of his opinions; a playful and impulsive side, as if he did not mean to be taken seriously.

Still more than the work he accomplished, the fire that devoured him consumed him prematurely. He had always been thin and delicate, but during the winter of 1937, his strength rapidly declined, leaving intact the lucidity of his mind and his power to work. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of February, 1938, he was visited again by his physician and, in order to prepare to be examined, he left his desk to sit down in an

armchair. The doctor departed and Madame de La Vallée Poussin<sup>1</sup> went out of the room for a moment to get the prescribed medicine. <153> When she returned several minutes later, her husband had passed away with his mind at peace and with the assurance that he had accomplished what had to be done.

In the *Bibliographie bouddhique*, addendum XXIII, part 2 which appeared in 1955, Mademoiselle Marcelle Lalou made an inventory in chronological order of Louis de La Vallée Poussin's publications which numbered 324. Among these are about twenty great works in several volumes, about 100 monographs and review articles often of considerable length, and finally, a long series of notes and reports. The work encompasses the whole of Buddhist scholasticism which the writer initially took up in a disorganized manner but which he ended up by mastering in its most characteristic aspects in his publications.

1. He contributed to the knowledge of the canonical scriptures with the publication and translation of fragments of the *āgamas* found in Central Asia by Sir Aurel Stein (# 82, 87, 98, 99)<sup>2</sup> and the edition of a *vinaya* preserved in an Oxford manuscript (# 114). <154>

2. He was the great specialist on the Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma, which is similar to the Pāli Abhidharma but much more developed.

He translated numerous extracts of the Abhidharma-with-six-legs: *Jñānaprasthāna* (# 131, 144, 170, 181, 182); *Prajñaptiśāstra* (# 131); *Dhātukāya* (# 131, 180); *Vijñānakāya* (# 117, 128, 131); *Samgītiparyāya* (# 131).

He had read in its entirety the enormous *Mahāvibhāṣā* of the Arhats of Kaśmir, used it abundantly in his notes on the *Kośa* and translated several extracts (# 131, 135, 142, 144, 145, 173, 181, 182, 297, 301). He often expressed to me the wish of some day seeing this great summary of Hīnayānist Buddhism translated.

Still in the same realm, his major work was the translation of the *Abhidharmakośa*, carried out between 1923 and 1931. It is in five volumes, almost all of them more than 300 pages, plus an introductory and a separate volume and an index. As its name indicates, the *Kośa* is the *Treasury of Scholasticism* where the genius Vasubandhu (fifth century) expounded, on the basis of Sarvāstivādin doctrines, his personal ideas, largely dependent on the Sautrāntika school. The importance of the work has always been recognized: it is the origin of the Japanese sect of Kusha and, in Europe, Burnouf had already noted his interest in it. But specialists all backed away from its study bristling with difficulties. <155> At the cost of relentless labor, Louis de La Vallée Poussin triumphed over it using the original Sanskrit of the *kārikās*, part of which had been given to him by S. Lévi, the Tibetan version, and the Chinese versions of Paramārtha and Hiuan-tsang, the Sanskrit commentary of Yaśomitra as well as the Japanese glosses.

One knows Buddhism to the extent that one studies the *Kośa*, and it is sad that here in Europe the great work of Louis de La Vallée Poussin has never gone beyond the narrow circle of specialists. The

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<sup>1</sup> On October 16, 1895, Louis de La Vallée Poussin had married Mademoiselle Marguerite de Schaetzen, the daughter of Chevalier Oscar de Schaetzen, at Tongre.

<sup>2</sup> These and the following numbers refer to the retrospective of the work of Louis de La Vallée Poussin, published under the care of M. Lalou in volume XXIII, part 2 of the *Bibliographie bouddhique*, Paris, 1955.

few copies that remain are indeed priceless. A reprinting or better, a new edition, taking into account recent discoveries, is urgently needed.

3. In India, the beginnings of our era marked an important turning-point in the evolution of the Buddhist doctrines. The religious ideal was modified; it was no longer a matter of the conquering of *Nirvaṇā* by the individual practitioner, but rather of attaining Buddhahood by dedicating oneself indefinitely to the welfare of beings. This is what is called the Mahāyāna or the Great Vehicle

When Louis de La Vallée Poussin started his studies, the Mahāyāna was known in Europe only by the translation of some of the developed *sūtras*, such as the *Lotus* by Burnouf. <156> Practically all the great philosophical schools that systematized the new doctrines were unknown: the relativist school of the Mādhyamikas, followers of universal emptiness, and the idealist school of the Yocācāras who posed the existence of Mind-Only.

Louis de La Vallée Poussin rescued from oblivion the most characteristic works of the great Mādhyamika masters, Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva (second–third centuries), Bhāvaviveka (sixth century), Candrakīrti (seventh century) and Śāntideva (eighth century). He edited in Sanskrit (amended by the Tibetan version) the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* of Nāgārjuna with the commentary by Candrakīrti (# 91) which is the major work of the school. The editor, who knew it better than anyone, did not judge it the right time to translate it, and it was not until 1959 that the translation was finally carried out under the care of five orientalists working in an disorganised manner: a Russian, a Pole, a Belgian, a Dutch and finally, a Swiss.

On the other hand, the master translated the *Jewel in the Hand* by Bhāvaviveka (# 196) from the Chinese, a polemical work bristling with difficulties; he edited the Tibetan and translated almost all of the *Madhyamakāvatāra* by Candrakīrti (# 85, 62, 79, 84); he published the Sanskrit commentary by Prajñākaramati on the *Bodhicaryāvatara* (# 46), a mystical poem of which he also produced an especially elegant French translation (# 66). <157>

4. We know how much our knowledge of idealist Buddhism owes to the discoveries and works of Sylvain Lévi. Louis de La Vallée Poussin rivaled his illustrious friend by providing the detailed analysis of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (# 51, 80), by carrying out, on the basis of the Tibetan version, the first French translation of Vasubandhu's *Viṃśatikā* (# 86),<sup>3</sup> by editing the original text and the Tibetan version of Vasubandhu's *Treatise on the Three Natures* (# 197).

But the major work on this subject is the *Siddhi of Hiuan-tsang*, translated and annotated by Louis de La Vallée Poussin in 1928 and 1929, a work of 820 pages including appendices very valuable for the history of this great school where the Buddhist mind reached its highest summits. The *Siddhi* is a commentary on the *Triṃśikā* of Vasubandhu where Hiuan-tsang sets out the ins and outs of the doctrine of Mind Only according to the works of the six teachers of the Asaṅga–Vasubandhu school. In the scale of values, it is to the Mahāyāna what the *Kośa* is to Sthavirian Buddhism.

By these works, in the words of his peers, Louis de La Vallée Poussin “established himself in the first rank among the scholars of the Occident and enjoys unsurpassable prestige in the entire Far East” (S. Lévi). <158>

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<sup>3</sup> The text of which S. Lévi later discovered the original Sanskrit and which he published, along with a new translation, in 1925–32



Celebrating the twenty-fifth centenary of the birth of Śākyamuni, Japan struck eight gold medals to recognize the services rendered to Buddhist studies. One of these medals was awarded to Louis de La Vallée Poussin because of his exceptional merits. He was the only scholar of occidental origin to receive this flattering distinction.

How did he proceed in his work? When the original Sanskrit was available, most often he would simply collect the manuscripts, collate them, amend them with the help of the Tibetan version, and finally edit them.

On the other hand, if the Sanskrit text was lost, he would have recourse to the Tibetan and Chinese collections, i.e., the Tibetan Kanjur and Tenjur, the Chinese Tripiṭaka. By comparing the versions when they existed in these two languages, he would mentally reconstruct the original Sanskrit, then make his translation while maintaining in it the Indian technical terms. Thus his work appears in the form of a half-French, half-Sanskrit version, disconcerting for the non-initiate, but convenient for the specialist. By this procedure he differed from Th. Stcherbatsky whose translations tend toward paraphrasis, and from S. Lévi who rendered the Indian technical terms by French equivalents made up of components in such a way as to match the very structure of the original term. <159>

Once his translation was set up, Louis de La Vallée Poussin would go on to the lengthy and patient work of annotation, identifying the canonical passages cited without reference, explaining the obscure points by comparing them with similar texts, and being inspired closely by indigenous commentaries when he had them at his disposal.

One of his colleagues held the *bhāṣya* and *ṭīkā* in low esteem because, said he, what a commentator looks for and finds in the scripture he is glossing is his own mind in the framework of his own contemporary beliefs and his own school. Be that as it may, replied Louis de La Vallée Poussin, the modern exegetist is even farther separated from the ancient author in time and space and his judgment is not at all sheltered from prejudices, far from it!

In Louis de La Vallée Poussin the philosopher was coupled with the historian of religions. The study of a new document was for him the opportunity to distinguish its characteristic point. Thus he forged ahead, adding to things and, when necessary, ceaselessly correcting himself. At the beginning of his career, he was content with formulating problems and engaging in arguments with his colleagues, as is evidenced in his first monographs: *Histoire du bouddhisme*, 1898 (# 18); *Religions de l'Inde*, 1901 (# 27); *Dogmatique bouddhique*, 1902 (# 31 and 35); <160> *Opinions sur l'histoire de la dogmatique*, 1909 (# 70). But little by little, his stance became clearer as shown by his *Notions sur les religions de l'Inde: Védisme et Brahmanisme*, 1910 (# not listed); *Bouddhisme et Religions de l'Inde*, which appeared in 1912 in *Christus* (# 90). Only in 1930 did his *opinions* become certainties and the master was finally agreeable to revealing his thoughts in the *Dogme et la philosophie du bouddhisme* (# 148), a brief but substantial synthesis which he supplemented by two articles, both entitled *Buddhism*, which appeared respectively in the *Catholic Truth Society* (# 201) and the *Legacy of India* (# 202).

An entire book would be needed to summarize his ideas on early Buddhism about which, at his time, there were so many hasty hypotheses flying around. Here we will be content to point out his main ideas.

Buddhism is not derived from the speculations of the Brahmanas and the Upaniṣads nor is it their *Reformation*; rather, it is a branch of magical asceticism or Yoga that, from its origin, is initially foreign to any speculation (# 308).

The buddha Śākyamuni is a complex figure. He cannot be considered either as an elaboration of a solar myth (Kern) or as a dead god, or as simply a historical individual (Oldenberg). <161> Nevertheless, the monks of the old schools at a very early time thought that he had been a great god and truly divine.

The nature of *nirvāṇa* was the sole point on which Louis de La Vallée Poussin let himself be guided by his own personal leanings. He acknowledged that it is “the object of his most devoted convictions” and to it he dedicated no less than two books and ten articles, among which one must highlight *The Way to Nirvāṇa*, 1917 (# 105), *Le Nirvāṇa*, 1925 (# 126) and *Une dernière note sur le Nirvāṇa*, 1932 (# 178). In his opinion and contrary to accepted opinions, the *nirvāṇa* of the early Buddhists is not a complete annihilation; rather, it is the entity that touches the ascetic who has entered into the concentration without mind; it is the principle of the appeasement of desire; it is a kind of eschatological absolute, the other shore of transmigration, the supreme goal, immortality. Nevertheless, he willingly recognized that various Buddhist sects and schools that developed over the course of time had quite different conceptions of *nirvāṇa*.

The historical details and scholastic issues that Louis de La Vallée Poussin was led to pursue in detail are countless. Here we will mention only the very complicated question of the Buddhist Councils (# 68, 78), the relationships between action, retribution, and the mental stream (# 31, 35), the functioning of dependent origination of phenomena (# 96), the relative and the absolute according to the Madhyamaka school (# 191, 196, 300), <162> the psychology of the subconscious in the idealist school (# 253), the absolute of Asaṅga (# 141, 300) and, on a more vast scale, the mysticism of the Great Vehicle: the career of the Bodhisattva, the body of the Buddha, etc. (appendix to # 139). A book frequently overlooked, *La Morale Bouddique* (# 130), published in 1927, constitutes an excellent introduction to the study of the *Kośa*; likewise, the best initiation into Nāgārjunian teachings is his *Réflexions sur le Madhyamaka* (# 196) which appeared in 1932. The Madhyamaka, he explains, accepts things in relative truth but denies them in absolute truth: therefore it neither affirms nor rejects them. The nature of things, Reality, is neither existent nor non-existent: it is, rather, the absence of the apparent nature, the emptiness of that which is empty, the non-existence even of what is non-existent. It is a fatal error to hypostasize it as an Absolute. The Russian scholar, Th. Stcherbatsky, who made the Madhyamaka into a pantheistic monism, attacked the article of Louis de La Vallée Poussin. Louis de La Vallée Poussin, tired of being poorly read and badly understood, and already sapped of energy by illness, seemed to draw back in his article *Buddhica*, which appeared in 1938 (# 300). But I continue to believe that his *Réflexions sur le Madhyamaka* of 1932 is still the most correct interpretation of the Nāgārjunian thought. <163>

In his younger days, Louis de La Vallée Poussin did not undergo these retrenchments. His taste for polemic led him into arguments with modernism. With courteous serenity, he opposed the theories of A. J. Edmunds who saw in the canonical Gospels a substitute for Buddhism (# 53). But in actual fact, his apologetic, based above all on solid information, was neither that of a reactionary nor that of a progressivist (cf. *L'Histoire des religions de l'Inde et l'Apologétique* which appeared in the *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, vol. vi, 1912, pp. 490–526). What especially struck him in the religious phenomenon was the sharp conflict, paradoxical in appearance, between philosophical theory or system and practice in the broadest sense of the word. On this subject, he explained himself in a strange memoir entitled *L'esprit systématique et la religion* (# 50), presented in 1904 to the Société Belge de Sociologie. The ideas expressed so freely by a young intellectual at the beginning of the twentieth century are of undeniable documentary interest.



Louis de La Vallée Poussin collaborated in a great number of Asiatic revues, predominantly French and English. In Belgium, he himself directed several. <164> From 1892 to 1915 he filled the issues of the *Muséon*, the Buddhist chronicles of which he was in charge. Starting from 1909, he was one of the main editors of James Hastings' *Dictionary of Religion and Ethics*: thirty-six articles are by his hand and many among them – notably those that he dedicated to Cosmogony and the Mahāyāna – are not yet outdated at this time (1965). From 1921 to 1931, under the title *Notes bouddhiques* numbered from 1 to 29, each constituting a single issue, he swelled the *Bulletin de l'Académie Royale de Belgique*. Finally, from 1932 to 1937, he wrote the major part of the *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* of which he was also in charge.

Yielding to the friendly requests of E. Cavaignac, editor and main compiler of the collection *Histoire du Monde*, Louis de La Vallée Poussin composed a history of India in three volumes (# 124, 140, 230) which appeared during the years between 1924 and 1935. It is not so much a consistent exposition as a clarification of the problems. The author analyzes the sources as completely as possible, then he compares the historians in turn with the view of pointing out their contradictory words. There follows a brief assessment: “Very nice, but doubtful.” <165>

There was an outcry from some: “Why,” they asked, “an entire volume to say that there is nothing to say? In this stream of discordant opinions, there is a latent irony and a practical teaching of agnosticism of which the present time is hardly in need.”

“As for myself,” replied Louis de La Vallée Poussin, “I gladly confine myself, in regard to the large questions that are difficult or impossible to resolve, to the rôle of secretary-reporter; I appreciate the melancholic pleasure of noting the ingenuous hypotheses, the harmful self-importance of some sociologists, the unforeseeable and odd connections that are imposed upon some Indologists.”

Since then, numerous histories of India, often very detailed, have appeared in the East as well as in the West. But a universally highly esteemed historian confided in me recently that, in his opinion, the most complete and most reliable documentation remained that of Louis de La Vallée Poussin.

As a philologist, he had scrupulous respect for the texts and interpreted them without adding anything to them, without taking anything away from them. As a historian and also as a philosopher, he had a horror of subjective constructions and views of the mind. Was he influenced by the Buddhist perspective? Some have posed this question, but I believe that Nāgārjuna himself had no teaching on relativism to give him. For him, doubt was not only methodical but also congenital. <166>

This mental reservation would have complicated life for him, had he not compensated for it by the strength of his religious convictions and his political opinions. Never did he stray from them, avoiding, as he put it, “the endangering of the convictions necessary for our progress.” A wise mixture of critical mind and respect for traditions ensured his equilibrium.

To the passion for study he joined a deep love for France. His inner feelings, cheerfulness or sadness, were closely dependent on the events that were occurring in our neighbor to the south, and he felt, as a personal insult, any criticism directed at it.

His engaging personality and the quality of his scientific work won him the affection of his colleagues and the veneration of his students. Honors came to him without him seeking them: he was a member of the Académie Royale de Belgique, a correspondent of the Institut de France, doctor *honoris causa* of Oxford University, honorary member of l'École Française d'Extrême Orient as well as of the Royal

Asiatic Society. Grand Officer of the Order of the Crown and Commander of the Order of Leopold, he was also holder of numerous foreign orders. His works were honored by the Stanislas Julien prize, awarded to him by l'Institut de France, and the decennial prize in philology for the period 1920 to 1929. <167> On this occasion, Sylvain Lévi paid particularly laudatory testimony to him: "His work," he wrote, "is of unrivalled magnitude . . . No scholar in the area of philology had given so much brilliance to Belgian science." A high scientific and religious Japanese individual, Susumu Yamaguchi, in turn wrote: "The value of Louis de La Vallée Poussin resides in his willingness to obtain at any price the authentic formulation of the Buddhist teaching. . . . From that, to the extent of research of the original text restored in its correct form, the work of Louis de La Vallée Poussin is that of a Guide of the Path." The impact of this praise will be measured by noting that, in *Majjhima* iii, p. 6, the Buddha Śākyamuni is himself defined as *maggakkhāyī*: "He who shows the Way."

More modestly, Louis de La Vallée Poussin one day said to me: "I am the man of the *Kośa*," and it is thus that he will pass into posterity.



**Note:** Besides the retrospective on the work of L. de La Vallée Poussin mentioned above, we may also note:

*Louis de La Vallée Poussin*

- by É. Lamotte, *Revue du Cercle des Alumni de la Fondation Universitaire*, iv, 1933, pp. 1–17;
- by G. Combaz and É. Lamotte, *Le Flambeau*, 1938, pp. 273–86;
- by M. Lalou and J. Przyluski, *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques*, vi, 1938, pp. 5–10;
- by an anonymous writer, *Kampuchea Sauriya* (in Cambodian), X<sup>th</sup> year, p. 3;
- by P. Masson-Oursel, *Journal Asiatique*, CCXXX, 1938, pp. 287–89;
- by H. Ui, S. Miyamoto, S. Yamaguchi, and H. Kuno, *Journal of Buddhist Studies* (in Japanese), II, no. 3, 1938, pp. 143–72.