**Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada**
**Cahiers de la Société bibliographique du Canada**

# Ornithology, Anthropology, and the History of Medicine in Casey Wood's Asian and Pacific Travels and Collections, c.1920-36

# Ornithologie, anthropologie et histoire de la médecine à travers les collections de Casey Wood et ses voyages en Asie et dans le Pacifique, v.1920-36

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Volume 59, 2022

Rare Birds and Rare Books: Casey Albert Wood and the McGill Libraries

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1102208ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.33137/pbsc.v59i1.37869

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

The Bibliographical Society of Canada/La Société bibliographique du Canada

ISSN

0067-6896 (imprimé)
2562-8941 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Winterbottom, A. (2022). Ornithology, Anthropology, and the History of Medicine in Casey Wood's Asian and Pacific Travels and Collections, c.1920-36. *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada / Cahiers de la Société bibliographique du Canada*, *59*, 19–42. https://doi.org/10.33137/pbsc.v59i1.37869

Résumé de l'article

Pour Casey Wood, l'arrivée de la retraite fut l'occasion d'élargir ses horizons, aussi bien en matière de voyages que pour satisfaire sa curiosité intellectuelle. Son intérêt pour l'ornithologie, développé tout particulièrement aux îles Fidji, dans le Pacifique Sud, et à Ceylan (aujourd'hui le Sri Lanka), en Asie du Sud, l'amena à constituer deux vastes collections de tableaux illustrant les oiseaux de ces îles. Bien que ces deux collections originales aient été réservées à la Bibliothèque Blacker-Wood, à Ceylan ces peintures formèrent également la base de l'ouvrage The Coloured Plates of the Birds of Ceylon, [Planches en couleurs illustrant les oiseaux de Ceylan], publié entre 1927 et 1935. À Ceylan et au Cachemire, M. Wood recueillit des manuscrits et des lithographies se rapportant principalement à l'histoire de la médecine. Sa collection de manuscrits sur feuilles de palmier (olas) de Ceylan était tout particulièrement impressionnante, avec plus de 220 spécimens que l'on peut encore retrouver à la Bibliothèque Osler et dans le Département des livres rares et collections spéciales, au sein des bibliothèques de l'Université McGill. M. Wood collectionna également des objets des plus diversifiés, allant de l'échantillonnage d'œufs, de nids et de peaux d'oiseaux aux îles Fidji à la collecte d'objets curatifs à Ceylan. Ces derniers, au nombre de près de deux cents, furent recueillis à l'origine pour le Musée de la Médecine et se trouvent aujourd'hui dans les murs du Musée Redpath, à l'Université McGill. Ils constituent une ressource tout à fait unique de représentations culturelles physiques du monde de la médecine. Les voyages de M. Wood l'amenèrent à rencontrer un large éventail de personnalités, allant du prospecteur de plantes américain David Fairchild à Rabindranath Tagore, qui joua un rôle central dans la renaissance du Bengale. Les observations de M. Wood au cours de ses périples fournissent des perspectives intéressantes sur les pratiques de l'histoire naturelle et l'élaboration de collections dans les sociétés coloniales à l'aube de la seconde guerre mondiale.

# Ornithology, Anthropology, and the History of Medicine in Casey Wood's Asian and Pacific Travels and Collections, c.1920–36

Anna Winterbottom

**Abstract**

Casey Wood's retirement allowed him time to expand his horizons, both in terms of his travel and the scope of his intellectual enquiries. His ornithological interests in Fiji in the South Pacific and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in South Asia led him to fund the production of two large-scale collections of paintings illustrating the birds of these two islands. Both original collections were reserved for the Blacker-Wood collection at McGill, but in Ceylon these paintings also formed the basis of *The Coloured Plates of the Birds of Ceylon*, published between 1927 and 1935. In Ceylon and Kashmir, Wood collected manuscripts and lithographs, mainly relating to the history of medicine. His collection of palm-leaf manuscripts (*olas*) from Ceylon was particularly extensive, with over 120 remaining in the Osler and Rare Books and Special Collections branches of the McGill libraries. Wood also collected physical objects, beginning with bird skins, nests, and eggs in Fiji and branching out to include objects associated with healing in Ceylon. The objects from Ceylon, numbering around two hundred, were originally collected for the Medical Museum and are now housed in the Redpath Museum at McGill. They represent a unique resource for the material culture of medicine. Wood's travels brought him into contact with a wide range of people, from the American plant prospector David Fairchild to Rabindranath Tagore, a central figure in the Bengali renaissance. Wood's reflections on his journeys provide some interesting insights into practices of natural history and collecting in late colonial societies on the brink of the second world war.

**Résumé**

Pour Casey Wood, l'arrivée de la retraite fut l'occasion d'élargir ses horizons, aussi bien en matière de voyages que pour satisfaire sa

curiosité intellectuelle. Son intérêt pour l'ornithologie, développé tout particulièrement aux îles Fidji, dans le Pacifique Sud, et à Ceylan (aujourd'hui le Sri Lanka), en Asie du Sud, l'amena à constituer deux vastes collections de tableaux illustrant les oiseaux de ces îles. Bien que ces deux collections originales aient été réservées à la Collection Blacker-Wood, à Ceylan ces peintures formèrent également la base de l'ouvrage *The Coloured Plates of the Birds of Ceylon*, [Planches en couleurs illustrant les oiseaux de Ceylan], publié entre 1927 et 1935. À Ceylan et au Cachemire, M. Wood recueillit des manuscrits et des lithographies se rapportant principalement à l'histoire de la médecine. Sa collection de manuscrits sur feuilles de palmier (*olas*) de Ceylan était tout particulièrement impressionnante, avec plus de 120 spécimens que l'on peut encore retrouver à la Bibliothèque Osler et dans le Département des livres rares et collections spéciales, au sein des bibliothèques de l'Université McGill. M. Wood collectionna également des objets des plus diversifiés, allant de l'échantillonnage d'œufs, de nids et de peaux d'oiseaux aux îles Fidji à la collecte d'objets curatifs à Ceylan. Ces derniers, au nombre de près de deux cents, furent recueillis à l'origine pour le Musée de la Médecine et se trouvent aujourd'hui dans les murs du Musée Redpath, à l'Université McGill. Ils constituent une ressource tout à fait unique de représentations culturelles physiques du monde de la médecine. Les voyages de M. Wood l'amenèrent à rencontrer un large éventail de personnalités, allant du prospecteur de plantes américain David Fairchild à Rabindranath Tagore, qui joua un rôle central dans la renaissance du Bengale. Les observations de M. Wood au cours de ses périples fournissent des perspectives intéressantes sur les pratiques de l'histoire naturelle et l'élaboration de collections dans les sociétés coloniales à l'aube de la seconde guerre mondiale.

## Introduction

Casey Wood (1856–1942) retired from a long career as an ophthalmologist in 1917 and completed his service in the US Army Medical Corp in 1920. Following his retirement, Casey Wood was free to devote more attention to his interests in book collecting, ornithology, and the history of medicine. He travelled widely, always in the company of his wife, Emma Shearer Wood (1861–1951), and often with their niece and Casey's frequent collaborator, F. Marjorie Fyfe (1892–1965). This article discusses Casey Wood's activities in Asia and the Pacific, with a particular focus on Fiji, Ceylon (now

Sri Lanka), and Kashmir. Wood's writings from this period help illuminate the connections between his interests. In Fiji, he moved from observing birds to collecting skins, nests, eggs, and caged birds. His time in Ceylon also prompted him to expand some of his existing interest in collecting medical books to include palm leaf manuscript books (olas) on medical subjects and even objects related to healing Throughout his travels, he relied on local people and colonial officials for information about the birds he observed and the books and objects he collected.

The Woods first spent time in British Guiana during 1920, followed by London and Barbados the following year. In 1923, they took a long cruise around Oceania, spending several months in Fiji and also visiting Australia and New Zealand. In 1924, accompanied by Fyfe, the Woods sailed via England to South Asia, where they spent most of their time in Ceylon and passed the summer of 1926 in Kashmir. After brief visits to Japan and the Philippines, they returned to Ceylon in mid-1926, remaining there until the following spring. After returning to the United States and spending time in Europe, the Woods returned to Ceylon in early 1933 and remained there until the beginning of 1934. Casey Wood's accounts of his travels across these locations provide interesting information about his collecting strategies, the social status and networks of artists and collectors in the late colonial period, and evolving policies on conservation and the preservation of antiquities.

## Illustrating Ornithology in Fiji and Ceylon

During his travels, Casey Wood invested his time in several connected interests. The first was ornithology. This interest arose from his ophthalmological work and his interest in birds' eyesight.[1] This initial focus had expanded into a more general interest in birds, and in both Fiji and Ceylon he commissioned paintings and collections of birds and supported and contributed to publications on the local avifauna. Both islands are home to a number of endemic and rare species, which Wood documented in a series of publications in ornithology journals. His published work on Fiji began with a short piece, "The Birds of Fiji," which was published as part of a government handbook in

[1] Robert Montgomerie, "Casey Wood and the Fundus Oculi of Birds 1917," *Archives of Natural History* 49, no. 2 (2022).

1923.[2] After returning to the United States, he began a collaboration with Alexander Wetmore of the United States National Museum to catalogue the birds of Fiji in more detail. This collaboration resulted in a series of articles published in *The Ibis* during 1925 and 1926.[3] As he had earlier done in his study of the *fundus oculi*, Wood hired artists to assist him in his work. Wood commissioned or acquired paintings of birds from four artists in Fiji: W. J. Belcher (1883–1949), C. R. Bulling, Elie Cheverlange (1876–1961), and Albert E. Ward (b. 1875). In total, the unpublished collection "Paintings of the Birds of Fiji" in the Blacker Wood Collection includes 125 bird paintings showing the birds in their natural environment. Wetmore named a new subspecies documented in this series, *Lalage maculosa woodi* (the Polynesian Triller), in honour of Casey Wood.[4]

In Ceylon, Wood became similarly involved in efforts to document the island's avian life. While Walter Ernest Wait (b. 1878)'s *Manual of the Birds of Ceylon* had been published in 1925, Wood found it unsatisfactory because of its black and white illustrations. He spoke to the Governor of Ceylon, Cecil Clementi, and the director of the Colombo Museum, Joseph Pearson, about publishing an updated version with colour illustrations. He then commissioned George Morrison Reid Henry (1891–1983), entomologist and ornithologist to the Colombo Museum, to paint watercolours of the birds in their surroundings. Henry also made notes on the habitats and behaviour of the birds he painted.[5] The original paintings were to be reserved for the Blacker Wood Library, but they were loaned to the Government

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[2] Casey Wood, "The Birds of Fiji," in *Handbook of Fiji, 1924* (Suva: S. Bach, 1923).

[3] Casey Wood and Alexander Wetmore, "A Collection of Birds from the Fiji Islands," *The Ibis* 67, no. 4 (1925): 814–855 and "A collection of birds from the Fiji Islands." *The Ibis* 68, no. 1 (1926): 91–136. See also Victoria Dickenson, "Seeing birds," forthcoming article in *Archives of Natural History*.

[4] W. J. Belcher, C. R. Bulling, E. Cheverlange and A. E. Ward, *Paintings of the birds of Fiji*, (1917). Seven folder volumes containing 125 paintings. *Lalage woodi* is depicted in folios IX, LXLVII, and CXIII. Casey Albert Wood Collection, MSG 1203. Blacker Wood library, Rare Books & Special Collections, McGill University Library. (All manuscript references below are to this collection unless otherwise noted.)

[5] Henry's notes are in pencil on the back of G. M. R. Henry and W. E Wait, "A collection of original drawings commissioned for the Blacker Wood library." in *Original Water Colour Drawings of the Birds of Ceylon*, (1924). MSG 1203. McGill University Library .


Figure 1. *Lalage maculosa woodi*, by W.J. Belcher, 1923.

Press to form the basis of an illustrated version of Wait's work.[6] The result was *The Coloured Plates of the Birds of Ceylon*, published in four

[6] Wood describes this process in a note written 28 January 1927 at the Hotel Suisse, Kandy headed, "The history of the coloured plates of the Birds of Ceylon," included in the "Prospectus of the Coloured Plates of the Birds of Ceylon." MSG 1203. McGill University Library.

parts between 1927 and 1935 and attributed jointly to Henry and Wait.[7] Despite his patronage of and deep involvement in this work, Wood was content to rely on others to publish the results, perhaps in recognition of his own status as an amateur ornithologist.

In the works he sponsored on the birds of Fiji and Ceylon, Wood was particularly concerned that the artists should correctly portray the colours of the birds. These, he wrote, were often wrongly shown because paintings were made from preserved specimens in which there had been changes to the plumage because of post-mortem exposure to heat and light. Thus, the birds for both collections were drawn in their natural habitat or, when this was not possible, in cages or from recently prepared skins. He also had the artists make sketches of the natural environment, including trees that the birds frequented, and of their food and sometimes their nests and eggs.[8]

Wood was particularly interested in birds with unusual habits, and he published articles on the Baya Weaverbird (*Ploceus philippinus*) and Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*), both of which are found in Ceylon and elsewhere in South and Southeast Asia. Wood often went beyond observing birds' behaviour to speculate about their reasons for this behaviour, questioning in the case of the Baya whether its intention was to build canopies or if the structures it often made and abandoned were half-finished nests.[9] In a circular letter from the South Seas in 1923 ("Letter from Fiji"), in which he wondered why the "Bosun bird" (the Red-tailed Tropicbird, *Pheathon rubricandus*) is attracted to ships' lights while other birds are not, he situated his observations as part of an exercise in comparative psychology.[10] Wood also had a strong personal affection for birds, notably his series of pet parrots named John. At one stage in his memoirs, he compared being asked to leave his pet behind in Rome during an outbreak of

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7 G. M. R. Henry and W. E Wait. *Coloured Plates of the Birds of Ceylon* (London: Taylor & Francis: 1927–35).

8 *The Birds of Fiji*, note by Casey Wood dated 10 November 1923. MSG 1203. McGill University Library.

9 Casey Wood, "The Nest of the Baya Weaver Bird," *The Auk* 43, no. 3 (1926): 295–302.

10 Casey A. Wood to various recipients, Suva, Fiji Islands 12 November 1923. Typescript letter. Correspondence. MSG 1203. McGill University Library. This letter was published as part of a series of eleven instalments entitled "In sunny southern seas, letters from Oceania," in the *Montreal Gazette* between 20 and 23 May 1923.

parrot fever to being forced to abandon a child.[11] He also adopted other birds during his travels. In Kartabo, British Guiana he wrote about his "pet curassow," who came to his tent each morning to be petted and fed while allowing no one else to touch him.[12] In Ceylon, he adopted a Yellow-eared Bulbul (*Kelaartia penicillata*) that had fallen from its nest near the Hotel Suisse where Wood was staying in Kandy. Wood fed the bird on papaya and potato, and the bulbul travelled with them to Kashmir and then California, where the bird found a home at the children's museum in Los Angeles.[13]


Figure 2. Yellow-eared Bulbul by G.M. Henry, July 1926.

Wood's time in Fiji was also connected to his travel to Ceylon through Albert E. Ward, who between 1917 and 1921 produced some of the paintings that Wood eventually included in the "Paintings of the Birds of Fiji" series. Ward apparently ran a studio in Suva where he produced life-size bird paintings. Wood may have been made

11 Casey Wood, typescript memoir, "Some Recollections of a Long Life" (hereafter "Recollections"), 159. MSG 1203. McGill University Library.

12 Casey Wood, circular letter from Kartabo, "Recollections," (1920): 187–88. McGill University Library.

13 Wood, "Recollections," 161. McGill University Library.

aware of him by the curator of birds at the Smithsonian Institution.[14] Perhaps as a result of Wood's writings, the government of Fiji became concerned about the negative effects of the Small Indian Mongoose (*Urva auropunctatus*) on the avian life of the island. Mongooses had been introduced from India in order to control the rats that were attacking the sugarcane crops, but they also ate birds' eggs and had been driving some birds to the brink of extinction.[15] The depletion of these bird populations removed the natural control on pests like the Levuana moth (*Levuana iridescens*), which laid its eggs on coconut trees. The government's proposal was that insectivorous birds should be introduced in order to control such pests. The initial target country from which to import birds was Australia, but interest shifted towards Ceylon, where Ward arrived by the end of 1926. The Ceylon government rejected his proposal to take insectivorous birds from Ceylon to Fiji after consulting a group of tea planters, who argued that none could be spared from Ceylon because they were needed to control the island's own pests. Ward moved on to India following this decision.[16] Wood's opinion of the plan is unclear, but during one interview he spoke of the folly of "introducing anything anywhere."[17] The example of the mongoose, now considered one of the most invasive animal species, highlights how one animal introduction could lead to a series of others, each having their own effects on the wildlife.[18]

## Natural History, Economic Botany, and Late Colonial Societies

Wood sometimes expanded from his focus on birds to write on natural history more widely. In two pieces published in the

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[14] Smithsonian Institution's Museum Curator in the Division of Birds, Charles Richmond, dated 8 August 1923. MSG 1203. McGill University Library.

[15] C. G. Morley and L. Winder, "The Effect of the Small Indian Mongoose (*Urva auropunctatus*), Island Quality and Habitat on the Distribution of Native and Endemic Birds on Small Islands within Fiji," *PLOS ONE* 8, no. 1 (2013): e53842. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0053842

[16] Clippings from the *Ceylon Times*, 2 December 1925 and 10 December 1925, 135–6. MSG 1203. McGill University Library.

[17] Newspaper clipping, no details of publication or date given (p. 106). MSG 1203. McGill University Library.

[18] For discussion, see Russell H. Messing and Mark G. Wright. "Biological Control of Invasive Species: Solution or Pollution?" *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 4, no. 3 (2006): 132–140.

Smithsonian's *Annual Reports* for 1928 and 1932, Wood reflects on the forest and jungles of Ceylon and Kashmir, respectively.[19] Wood in fact had planned a larger work on sylvan landscapes with a global scope.[20] In these articles and elsewhere Wood combined an aesthetic appreciation for the natural world with a focus on economic botany, which he believed would improve the conditions for the local people. For example, in one interview he suggested that a trade should be set up between Canada and Fiji, focusing on canned pineapple and coconut.[21] Ironically, this focus on the development of trade and industry, which was in-line with late colonial thinking, was accompanied by an awareness of the destructive effects of developed, resource-intensive societies on both nature and traditional societies. In the same Interview, he predicted that "fifty years will see the end of the race of native Fijians," because of their susceptibility to diseases like measles, influenza, and tuberculosis. Similarly, in a lecture given in Australia about his time in British Guiana entitled "Wearing Clothes Kills Native," Wood claimed that missionary attempts to persuade the local people of Guiana to wear clothes resulted in them swimming in their clothes and often dying of influenza as a result.[22] He also understood the deleterious effects that colonialism and industrial development were having on wildlife. For example, he quoted a Māori saying, "Formerly, when we went into the forest, and stood under a tree, we could not hear ourselves speak for the noise of the birds—every tree was full of them. Now many of the birds have died out."[23]

Wood's combination of interest in exploiting the natural environment and concern about its fragility were reflective of his time. In the interwar years, both cash-strapped colonial governments and the American and Canadian regimes were investing in natural

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19 Casey A. Wood, "Through Forest and Jungle in Kashmir and Other Parts of North India," *Smithsonian Institute, Annual Report for the Year Ending June 30, 1932* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1933): 307–326.

20 In a document dated 1930–1934, Wood outlines a work with sections on Fiji; Tonga, Samoa, and Tahiti; Australia; Canada; Dominica and her sister islands; Malaysia and the Philippines; Ceylon; Kashmir; Central America; British Guiana; and Central Europe. MSG 1203. McGill University Library.

21 Cutting headed "Collection given to McGill Library" (no date or publication details given). MSG 1203. McGill University Library.

22 Wood, "Recollections," 187; typed copy of an article in an Australian newspaper. McGill University Library.

23 Casey A. Wood to various recipients, Suva, Fiji Islands 12 November 1923. MSG 1203. McGill University Library.

resources that were valuable on the global market or which they believed could benefit their own agricultural sectors. Wood notes this in his personal writings on Ceylon where he observes the increasing American investment in rubber plantations in Southeast Asia and how the introduction of Siberian pears had revolutionized the American pear market. He also had a personal encounter with an American officer named David Fairchild (1869–1954) who, Wood wrote, was "going around the earth in a specially constructed government yacht collecting (not coins but) plants, cuttings etc. for the Agriculture Department, and has had many interesting adventures."[24] Fairchild was responsible for founding the department concerned with the introduction of plants and seeds in the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and was one of the first to realize the value of the genetic resources contained in plants. Between 1925 and 1931, he visited more than fifty-two countries to collect germplasm and information about the local uses of plants.[25] Fairchild was responsible for introducing numerous exotic plants to the US, including mangos, dates, Egyptian cotton, and bamboo.[26] Such investigations would become more common, and more contentious, later in the twentieth century.

Despite his observations on the difficulties for Indigenous people and environments in the face of colonial rule, Wood generally depicted British colonialism as a benevolent, if ultimately doomed, force. In his memoirs, Wood notes that his own travels in Cairo, on the Riviera, and in Rome overlapped with those of President Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919). He relates that in Cairo, the Young Egyptian Party gave Roosevelt a great reception, "expecting to hear his approval of their sincere but often ill-advised efforts to bring about their complete independence." Roosevelt had instead cautioned that the drive towards independence must be tempered with common sense and that he did not believe that Egypt was "ready to

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[24] Casey Wood, "Intimate notes on Ceylon life, by a visitor in 1925," (quotation from p. 8). MSG 1203. McGill University Library.

[25] Javier Francisco-Ortega, Arnoldo Santos-Guerra, Janet L. Mosely, Nancy Korber, and Marianne Swan, "David Fairchild Expeditions to the Canary Islands: Plant Collections and Research Outcomes," *Brittonia*, 64, no. 4 (2012): 421–437.

[26] Robert Alvarez, "The March of Empire: Mangos, Avocados, and the Politics of Transfer," *Gastronomica,* 3, no. 7 (2007). David Fairchild, *The World Was My Garden: Travels of a Plant Explorer* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1939); see 140–42 for the transfer of Egyptian cotton to Arizona.

throw off the British yoke."[27] Wood's own views appear to have been similar—that the colonies should reach a state of "maturity" before striving for independence. Wood crossed paths with other famous travellers as well; his scrapbook of photos of Ceylon contains an image of Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) visiting the Art Club in Colombo in 1933 (Figure 3).[28] Tagore was a key figure in the Bengal renaissance and an opponent of British colonialism in his later years. In visiting Ceylon—Jaffna in particular—as Gandhi had in 1928, Tagore helped cement the link between the independence movements of India and Ceylon. Aside from the photograph, however, Wood made no comment on Tagore's presence.

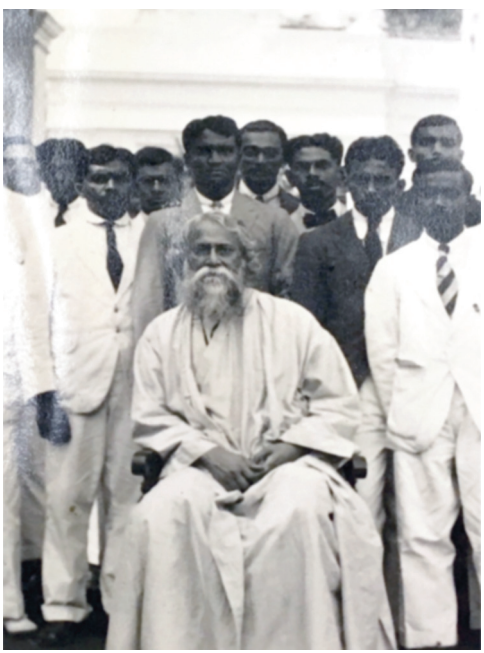

Figure 3. Rabindranath Tagore, Colombo, 1933.

[27] Casey Wood, "Recollections," 140. The reference is apparently to Roosevelt's "Law and Order in Egypt" speech, delivered at the National University in Cairo in 1910.

[28] Casey Wood, "Views of Kandy, Ceylon, and neighbourhood, Vol. 1, 1933." MSG 1203. McGill University Library.

Wood himself was treated as a minor celebrity during his travels. This can be demonstrated by the fact that his quip to a journalist on arrival in England about having come to hear the nightingale sing was repeated in national newspapers and even mocked in the popular satirical paper *Punch*.[29] His status as a well-known ophthalmologist and naturalist often earned him the status of an expert in the colonies and he was consulted on a range of subjects. During his relatively short stays in Fiji and Ceylon, and even shorter periods spent elsewhere, Wood forged social connections that proved invaluable to his work. Moving in elite colonial circles, Wood corresponded with and attended social gatherings held by the governors of Ceylon and Fiji and the maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir. Wood formed closer friendships with medical men, naturalists, planters, colonial officials and their wives, museum staff, antique dealers, and artists. These men and women hosted him, guided him to birds' locations, collected books and objects on his behalf, and undertook commissions to paint birds or to seek out information about where a rare species could be found.

Some of the men Wood commissioned to produce illustrations were from the poorer sections of white colonial society and Wood provided important patronage for them. For example, W. J. Belcher (1883–1949), who painted several Fijian birds for Wood and collected bird skins for Wetmore, had fallen on hard times. Belcher was born in England but grew up in New Zealand, where he worked on the family farm. He was largely self-taught as an artist and ornithologist. After his marriage in 1918, he moved to Fiji where his employment included running a shooting gallery in Suva.[30] By the time he met Wood, however, he was working as a road roller driver. Belcher appealed to Wood to help him find more gainful employment, at one point writing to Wood that his wife had left him because of his low wages and that he had been forced to live in a "native hut" and had therefore been unable to paint.[31] Wood's letters to Belcher are kind but betray some annoyance at the delays that Belcher's personal troubles caused. Nonetheless, he referred to Belcher as the most efficient and important of the artists he had employed in Fiji and praised his

[29] Wood, "Recollections," 192–8, including a letter from England dated 10 May 1922. McGill University Library.

[30] William J. Belcher and R. B. Sibson. "Introduction," in *Birds of Fiji in Colour*. (Auckland N. Z.: Collins, 1972), unpaginated.

[31] Casey Wood and W. J. Belcher's correspondence is in "The Birds of Fiji." MSG 1203. McGill University Library.

ability to depict birds in their natural environments.[32] Two similar photographs taken in Fiji show Belcher with one of his paintings and Wood himself with a pet bird.[33] Belcher's fortunes improved in later life, partly as a result of Wood's patronage. He was employed by Rollo Beck (1870–1950), who was an ornithologist, explorer, and contact of Wood's, on the Whitney South Seas expedition. He also married again, to Rose Tapa'au Adams, from Apia in Samoa. Many of his works remain in the Fiji Museum and some were published posthumously.[34]

Figure 4. W.J. Belcher with one of his paintings, 1923.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Photographs from "The expedition of W. J. Belcher and Casey A. Wood on a collecting trip to Vanua Levu, Fiji 1923". MSG 1203. McGill University Library.

[34] Belcher and Sibson. "Introduction," in *Birds of Fiji*.

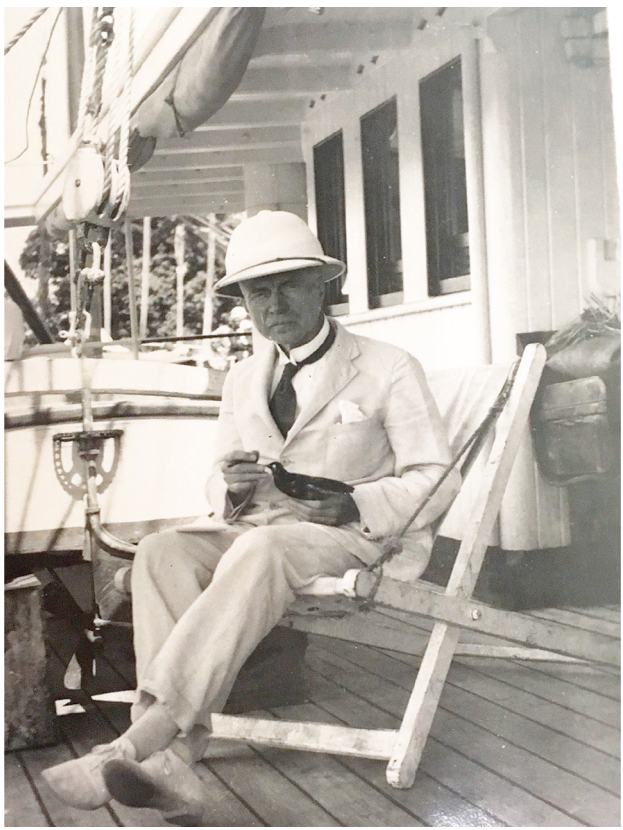

Figure 5. Casey Wood with a pet bird aboard the John Forrest, 1923

George Morrison Reid Henry (1891–1983) was also from the less privileged sections of white colonial society. Born in Ceylon as the son of a tea estate manager in 1891, he had developed a love of natural history as a boy. He received a series of commissions, his first illustrating reports on marine biology published by the Ceylon Company of Pearl Fishers. By the time Wood encountered him, Henry was entomologist and ornithologist at the Colombo Museum. Nonetheless, Henry felt his own position to be insecure, given the preference of the colonial bureaucracy for European experts from outside the colony and, later, the gradual transfer of governmental positions to people of Sri Lankan ethnicities. Henry was recommended to Wood by the museum director Joseph Pearson and

travelled with Wood to various parts of the island to observe birds in habitat. Wood referred to Henry affectionately, writing that during walks with Wood and his wife and niece, the artist had been able to identify the calls of all the birds they encountered.[35] Henry, however, wrote in his autobiography that Wood could be a demanding patron. He expected Henry to work faster than his duties at the museum and his pious refusal to work on Sunday allowed. Henry also wrote that Wood was "obsessed with the work of the Fijian artist Belcher and the great Audubon," and that the former's style was alien to him. Nonetheless, Henry also recorded his gratitude for Wood's help, which included introductions to well-known naturalists in London, and on which Henry was later able to draw during his retirement to England. Like Belcher, Henry became involved with the Whitney South Sea expedition.[36] Henry finally published his own "A Guide to the Birds of Ceylon" in 1955 with a second edition in 1971.[37]

## From Ornithology to Anthropology and the History of Medicine

Although Wood would probably not have considered himself an anthropologist, the term can be used to describe parts of his collections and his methods of collecting information about them. Wood's collections began not with people but with birds; however, he made extensive use of local knowledge in his bird collections, both directly and indirectly, through his friends and contacts. For example, a letter from Belcher to Wood reports interviewing fifty native Fijians for information about an elusive bird.[38] Wood often wrote about human interactions with birds, observing that the Buddhist faith of most people in Ceylon helped to protect birds.[39] In the same piece, he related several Sinhalese legends relating to birds. Despite only

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35 Casey A. Wood. "Intimate notes on Ceylon life, by a visitor in 1925." MSG 1203. McGill University Library.

36 American Museum of Natural History, "Whitney South Sea Expedition of the American Museum of Natural History (1920–1941)," http://data.library.amnh.org/archives-authorities/id/amnhc_2000164.

37 G. M. R. Henry and Christine Johnson. *Pearls to Painting: A Naturalist in Ceylon: The Memoirs of George Morrison Reid Henry*. (Colombo: WHT Publications, 2000), 76–77.

38 W. J. Belcher to Casey Wood, dated Suva, Fiji, 1924. MSG 1203. McGill University Library.

39 Casey Wood, plates for "Curious and beautiful birds of Ceylon," *Annual Report for the Year Ending June 30, 1934*. (Smithsonian Institution).

visiting New Zealand for a short time, he also managed to include some Māori names and legends associated with birds.[40]

Wood also made physical collections for museums. This began in Fiji, where he wrote that while he had originally intended to make drawings and paintings of birds observed in the field, he found that this was incompatible with a proper study, because "the use of the opera-glass and interviews with those who 'ought to know' does not, especially in the South Seas, take the place of the bird in the hand. Consequently, I became by proxy, a collector of skins, to which were added, as occasion arose, nests, eggs, and caged specimens. As time passed and I established friendly relations with planters and some of the educated and more intelligent natives, specimens were sent me from all parts of the Group."[41]

In Ceylon, Wood widened the scope of his collecting to include materials and information on the history of medicine. Wood's interest in the history of medicine and in book collecting had been inspired by his old friend William Osler (1849–1919). In 1919, Wood had become an associate editor of the *Annals of Medical History* and he began to publish on the history of medicine, with particular reference to ophthalmology.[42] His articles published in 1920 and 1921 focused on early ophthalmological literature in English and the invention of the spectacles.[43] Wood's travels also created an opportunity for his interests in the history of medicine and in collecting historical works on medicine to expand beyond Europe and America. On occasion, his collecting also strayed well beyond the realm of medical history.

While in Ceylon during 1925 and 1926, Wood began to collect olas (palm leaf manuscript books) on subjects including Buddhism, medicine, zoology, and astrology. Palm leaves are commonly used as writing materials in Sri Lanka, South India, and parts of Southeast Asia. The prepared leaves are inscribed using a stylus, following which they are rubbed with a blackening substance to make the text stand

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40 Casey Wood, "Material for a work on the birds of Fiji, 1920–1927." MSG 1203. McGill University Library.

41 Casey Wood and Alexander Wetmore, "A collection of birds from the Fiji Islands," *The Ibis* 12, no. 1 (1925): 816–17.

42 Effie C. Astbury, *Casey A. Wood (1856–1942): Ophthalmologist, Bookman, Ornithologist: A Bio-Bibliography*. (Montreal: Graduate School of Library Science, McGill University 1981).

43 Casey A. Wood, "The First English monograph on ophthalmology," *Bulletin of the Society of Medical History, Chicago* 2 (1920): 146–157; "The first scientific work on spectacles," *Annals of Medical History*, 3, no. 2 (1921): 150–55; Effie C. Astbury, *Bio-bibliography*, 47.

out. The leaves are often bound between two boards to keep them flat and secured by a cord passing through one or two holes in the manuscript. In Sri Lanka, the leaves of the Talipot palm (*Corypha umbraculifera*) or the Palmyra palm (*Borassus flabellifer*), were used to make olas. As a bibliophile, Wood's collections seem to have been partly motivated by an interest in the physical format of the manuscripts, as the labels attached to them often record in detail the materials that were used for the boards between which the leaves were bound, the medallions that secured the cord in place, and the cord itself, which ran through the manuscript and kept the leaves in order.

Wood might also have been encouraged to begin his collections by his contacts at the Colombo Museum and through a friendship he formed with Andreas Nell (1864–1956). Nell was a Dutch Burgher, a descendant of the Dutch colonists in Ceylon. Like Wood, he was an ophthalmic surgeon by profession, but also published widely on Ceylon's history, mainly in local journals. Nell could read Sinhala, Pali, and perhaps Sanskrit, and he provided translations of some of the olas Wood collected.[44] Though they are less visible in Wood's writings, Wood also relied on the help of other local people in Ceylon. Wood's collection of olas was facilitated by Mr B. Weeraserie, a jeweller based in Kandy, and Mr A. E. Jayasinha, who was a member of staff at the Colombo Museum. It was probably these two men, along with Nell, who supplied descriptions that accompanied many of the olas and that remain on the museum labels attached to objects in McGill's Redpath Museum as well as in Wood's typescript catalogue.

Andreas Nell travelled with Wood and his party to several places around Ceylon. It was with Nell that Wood visited Gampola, where a large hoard of *lari*—silver coins with a fish-hook shape that were made in South Asia, Persia, and Arabia during the medieval and early modern period—were unearthed in the autumn of 1925.[45] Wood bought almost all of the *lari* and eventually donated most of them to the American Numismatic Society.[46] Wood followed this pattern of collecting materials and shipping them off as gifts to institutions in

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44 As noted in Wood's typescript catalogue in the Casey A. Wood Collection, Osler Library Archives, McGill University Library.

45 A photograph of Nell with the "Chatty" or waterpot in which the Gampola *lari* were found is in "Pictures of Ceylon, with some Bird Clippings, Collected by Marjorie Fyfe, 1926–1933." MSG 1203. McGill University Library.

46 Howland Wood, "Numismatic Notes and Monographs," (American Numismatic Society, New York, 1934), http://numismatics.org/digitallibrary/ark:/53695/nnan37508; accessed 14 August 2018. One larin from Wood's collection remains

the United States, Britain, or Canada. He did this with many of the olas that he collected, sending them to various medical libraries.[47] On one occasion in January 1927, Wood was prevented from sending four of these gifts by the post office in Ceylon, in response to government legislation that had restricted the export of antiquities that were more than one hundred years old. To circumvent this regulation, Wood had various experts testify that the olas in question were merely late copies of well-known works.[48] In this, Wood was disingenuous, since he invariably described the olas he sent to his correspondents as rare, unique, and dating from as early as the seventeenth century. In a letter relating to this case, the expert at the Colombo Museum, A. E. Jayasinha, asked Wood to refrain from naming him in his claims about these, perhaps in an effort to distance himself from Wood's underhand methods of collecting.[49]

In 1926, Wood published a paper on Ayurvedic medicine in Ceylon, drawing on the materials he had collected during his first visit.[50] Here, Wood gives a brief history of the island and notes the strong historical connections between India and Ceylon in terms of medicine. Wood mentions some of the well-known medical works produced on the island, referring both to his own collections and to a recent work by John Attygalle, a local physician.[51] Wood notes several specific items of *materia medica*, including the "lilac or neem tree" (*Azadirachta indica* or *kohomba* in Sinhala); medicated oils, including that derived from *Sesamum indicum*; opium as a painkiller; and the practice of using leeches in medicine. He argues that all this would have been considered perfectly rational before discoveries of Oliver Wendell Holmes (a nineteenth-century physician associated with the development of germ theory and of anesthesia), but that progress in medicine in Ceylon ceased with the dawn of the eighteenth century. This view reflected the typical "Orientalist" prejudice held by many

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in the Redpath Museum at McGill (Accession No. 6736), where it is labelled simply "Wire money of Ceylon."

47 Correspondence with the libraries in the Casey A. Wood Collection, MSG 1203, Osler Library Archives, McGill University Library.

48 The correspondence that relates to this incident is in a large envelope of loose materials related to Sri Lanka in MSG 1203. McGill University Library.

49 A. S. Jayasinha to Casey Wood dated 16 January 1927 in MSG 1203. McGill University Library.

50 Casey Wood, "Ayurvedic Medicine in Ancient and Medieval Ceylon," *Annals of Medical History* 8 (1926): 435–45.

51 John Attygalle, *Sinhalese Materia Medica*. (Colombo Apothecaries, 1917).

western scholars at the time that Asia had once been the site of great civilizations but was now in a state of decline.

## Collecting Books and Objects in Kashmir and Ceylon

Wood left Ceylon to travel to Kashmir in February 1926. On the way, he sought out bookdealers in Delhi, Lahore, and Agra.[52] Wood had apparently had some interest in the literature of the East even in his boyhood. In his memoirs, he recalled reading Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat*, translated by Edward Fitzgerald, probably at about the same time that Kipling was writing about it in *Stalky and Co*. He added, "when I was in India I got several lithographed copies of the original—in Persian of course."[53] As Anaïs Salamon details in her contribution to this journal, Wood later donated significant collections of both Persian and Arabic manuscripts and lithographs as well as some materials in Ottoman Turkish, Malay, and Urdu to McGill. Most of these collections were made on his behalf by scholars who were familiar with the languages in question, but Wood also acquired some works directly.

Despite his admiration for oriental literature, Wood had less respect for contemporary Asian culture, and he made especially derogatory comments about Muslims. These contrasting attitudes are revealed in his accounts of collecting books in Kashmir. In his account of the summer spent there, Wood described Kashmir as a hub for the distribution of literature since the time of Kublai Khan. In the bazaars of Srinagar, he wrote, it was still possible to find older manuscripts as well as book covers, and old and new literature from Persia and Afghanistan was still being imported for sale. Wood admitted, however, that his preferred method of book collecting was to seek out "a hanger-on of an impoverished family of substance" who was willing to sell their treasures. The next best bet, he wrote, was a curio dealer, men he described as "illiterate Hindus, Jews, Armenians, and Muhammadans."[54] Wood records his efforts to find "The thirty and one tales of the parrot" (presumably the *Tutinama*, a fourteenth-century Persian work), which he compares

52 Effie C. Astbury, *Bio-bibliography*.
53 Casey Wood, "Recollections" 60. McGill University Library.
54 "On the Banks of the Hydaspes: A Summer in Kashmir, by Casey Wood. Illustrated with original photographs by Marjorie Fyfe," Casey A. Wood Collection, Osler Library Archives, McGill University Library.

with the Arabian nights. He notes that on a visit to a carpet shop he encountered about a dozen Persian manuscripts, among these a copy of this work, well-illustrated with miniatures. He also bought a copy of a small volume of Persian poetry, including mythical-lyrical verses composed by "two eminent Persian poets" (no names are given) that was "according to its seal once in the library of Uleg Beg." Uleg or Ulūgh Beg (1394–1449) was the Timurid ruler of Samarkand and the patron of the great observatory there. The current location of these manuscripts is unknown, but some of the book covers and pen cases (*qalamdān*) that Wood acquired in Kashmir remain at McGill.[55]

In 1933, when he returned to Ceylon, Wood wrote that he had come with three intentions: to collect objects for the McGill Medical Museum to illustrate the progress of Ayurvedic medicine, to collect manuscripts for the Blacker and Wood libraries, and to arrange for the continuation of "that now well-known and successful publication, 'The Coloured Plates of the Birds of Ceylon.'"[56] With Wood's backing, a further volume of *The Coloured Plates of the Birds of Ceylon* was printed in 1935. As a contemporary review in *Nature* commented, this volume consisted of only sixteen figures and minimal text. The reviewer did praise the work, however, for Henry's beautiful images and for the selection of tropical birds particularly worthy of illustration in colour.[57] As a brief review in *The Auk* explained, the lack of any systematic order or numbering was intended so that the user could rearrange the work in the desired order.[58]

Wood resumed his collections for the Medical Museum and libraries with the help of Andreas Nell. There are 123 olas remaining from Wood's collections in the McGill libraries, most still accompanied by descriptive labels by Wood. They are now held in the Osler Library and in the Rare Books and Special Collections. Many were later catalogued by Poleman in his 1938 census of Indic Manuscripts in North America.[59] Wood had also collected objects

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55 Some are featured in the digital exhibition by Adam Gacek, "Strokes and Hairlines, Elegant Writing and its Place in Muslim Book Culture" (McGill University, 2013) http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/strokes_hairlines/browse.php?p=006.

56 Casey Wood, "Recollections" 248. McGill University Library.

57 Coloured Plates of the Birds of Ceylon. *Nature* 137, no. 91 (1936) https://doi.org/10.1038/137091b0

58 W. S. "Henry and Wait on the Birds of Ceylon." *The Auk*, 45 no. 2 (1928): 240–41.

59 H. I. Poleman, *A Census of Indic Manuscripts in the United States and Canada* (New Haven, Conn., 1938), 381–89.

during his first visit to Ceylon, including some ceremonial daggers, several of which apparently belonged to vederalas (an anglicisation of Sinhala word derived from the Sanskrit term for doctor, vaidya), which are now in the Redpath Museum at McGill.[60]

The McGill Medical Museum was under the direction of Maude Abbott and it was to her that Wood sent a second series of objects from Sri Lanka.[61] After the closure of the Medical Museum, the artefacts were transferred to the Redpath Museum where they remain today. The objects date mainly from the Kandyan period of Sri Lankan history (1595–1815), although Wood dated some items somewhat earlier or later. Wood originally attached precise dates to many items, but he later admitted that he probably should have labelled them merely "'very old (pre-1400)', 'old' (1400–1600), or 'modern' (1600–1800)."[62] The items can be split roughly into costumes and accessories, texts, knives and daggers, containers, instruments for operating on the body, and weights and measures. They are made from materials including ivory, horn, wood, metal, and coconut, and many are delicately carved or decorated using lacquer. Themes evoked in their ornamentation include symbols present elsewhere in Sri Lankan art including real and mythical animals.[63]

Several of the Sri Lankan objects now at the Redpath Museum reflect Wood's own interest in ophthalmology. One of the most striking objects in the collection is a mask that depicts eye disease.[64] According to the label that accompanies it, the mask was intended to be worn during a ritual dance designed to cast out the *Kana Sanni Yakka* demon, thought to be responsible for causing blindness. These ritual dances were important components of healing in Sri Lanka. As Mark S. Bailey and H. Janaka de Silva recently pointed out, the mask worn during the dances also serve a practical function in

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60 According to his correspondence in MSG 1203–3–7, p. 144. Rare Books & Special Collections, McGill University Library. Surviving examples of daggers in the Redpath Museum include Cat. nos. 644 a-c, 715a-b and 716a-b.

61 Casey Wood, "Memoir," 235. Casey A. Wood Collection, Osler Library Archives, McGill University Library; Casey Wood to Maude Abbott, 16 June 1933. McGill University Library.

62 Casey Wood, "The Outfit of a Native Doctor (Vederala) in Ancient and Medieval Times" Casey A. Wood Collection, Osler Library Archives, unpublished paper.

63 For a discussion of these decorative themes and their significance, see Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956).

64 Redpath Museum, Acc. 92.02.171.

portraying the physical manifestations of disease.[65] This is certainly true of the Redpath mask, which clearly depicts symptoms of eye disease. Other examples include two ivory cases intended to contain a series of medicated eye pencils, one of which Wood considered to date from the fourteenth century,[66] and a set of lid forceps, which accompanied instruments for treating the nose and ears.[67] These implements for treating the eyes are apparently unique; no similar items exist in the main Sri Lankan museums, and I have not seen other examples elsewhere.

Wood's second visit to Sri Lanka and the objects he collected resulted in another article for the *Annals of Medical History*, this time dealing with what he termed the "heterodox" aspects of healing.[68] Like many of his contemporaries, Wood made a sharp distinction between those aspects of healing he regarded as rational and those he considered "superstition." Wood compared the ritual dances performed in Sri Lanka to ward off disease to the faith in saints' relics in medieval Europe and regarded both as being largely lower-class phenomena.[69] Some of the views Wood expressed could be compared with the so-called "Protestant" Buddhist movement in twentieth-century Sri Lanka, which tried to separate "true religion" from "superstition."[70] In fact, as more recent scholars have shown, in the Kandyan period ritual dance and theatre (*kolam*) were considered components of healing and exorcism (*tovil*) and its practitioners received royal patronage.[71] Despite Wood's typical prejudices, the scope of his collecting was unusually wide for his time and Maude Abbott was correct in describing Wood's collections of materials

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65 Mark S. Bailey and H. Janaka de Silva, "Sri Lankan Sanni Masks: An Ancient Classification of Disease." *British Medical Journal* 333, no. 7582 (2006): 1327–28.

66 Redpath Museum, Acc. 92.02.107 and 92.02.109.

67 Redpath Museum, Acc. 92.02.110.

68 Casey Wood, "Sinhalese and South Indian Ceremonials in the Prevention and Treatment of Disease," *Annals of Medical History* 6 (1934): 483–90.

69 Ibid.

70 K. Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750–1900.* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1976).

71 Bruce Kapferer, *A Celebration of Demons: Exorcism and the Aesthetics of Healing in Sri Lanka.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 14; Marianne Nürnberger, *Dance Is the Language of the Gods.* (Amsterdam: V.U. University Press, 1998).

from Ceylon as unique.[72] I have discussed this collection in more detail elsewhere.[73]

While Wood's descriptions of his time in Ceylon give an idyllic impression, discontent with colonial rule was bubbling below the surface, having broken out in riots during the 1910s. In August 1927, Mrs. Zaidee Brown wrote to Emma Wood regarding the arrival of the new governor, "He'll find it very difficult, as things are in a dreadful way out here just now politically."[74] The Ceylon government of this period was investing heavily in developmental schemes and cultural initiatives in response to the questioning of colonial rule by the nationalist movement. Wood's collections might have had a minor influence on cultural policy in Ceylon. Around the time he was visiting the island, the colonial government was debating whether to provide funding for traditional medicine. In 1927, the *Ceylon Daily News* declared Wood's collections "a valuable contribution to the now smouldering controversy on the question of State support for the indigenous system [of medicine]."[75] Two years later, despite opposition from Western-trained doctors, the government lent support to a college to provide training in Ayurveda, Unani, and Siddha medicine and the Ayurvedic Medical Congress was established, mirroring similar movements in India.[76]

## Conclusions

In his memoir, Wood wrote: "E[mma] & I have acquired cosmopolitan views of men and things all over the world. I believe we are (would be now) as much at home in Shanghai, Suva (Fiji), or Melbourne as in Chicago, New York, or London; perhaps we are as familiar with Kashmir, Agra, Colombo, or Cairo as with our present legal residence, Pasadena, California. All this has had its mingled advantages and

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72 Casey Wood, "Recollections" 235. Casey A. Wood Collection, Osler Library Archives, McGill University Library; letter to Dr Maude Abbott 16 June 1933.

73 Anna Winterbottom, "Material Culture and Healing Practice Museum Objects from Kandyan-Period Lanka (ca. 1595–1815)" *Asian Medicine* 15 (2021): 251–90

74 Mrs (Zaidee) George Brown to Mrs Emma Wood, "A few intimate notes on life in Ceylon by a visitor during 1925." 9 August 1927, MSG 1203. McGill University Library.

75 *Ceylon Daily News*, 7 September 1927.

76 Margaret Jones, *Health Policy in Britain's Model Colony: Ceylon (1900–1948)*. (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2004), 90–95.

disadvantages. From feeling at home nearly everywhere on earth we have become folks without a home or more or less citizens of all countries."[77] The world that Wood knew, connected by colonial empires and steamer lines, would soon disappear in the chaos of the Second World War and would later be replaced by a new world of newly independent nations linked by commercial airlines. Wood's travels and collections in this period show how his interconnected interests in ornithology, collecting rare books and manuscripts, and the history of medicine and ophthalmology led him to new interests. His collections of Sri Lankan materials at McGill remain important and, so far, underused resources for studying the medical practice and material culture in the island. Wood's travels also highlight some aspects of late colonial thought about environment and society. These include the tensions between the economic benefits of introducing exotic species and their potential environment effects and between investing in projects of economic development while also attempting to preserve or restore "traditional" culture. More broadly, Wood's writings and the artworks he commissioned provide a valuable insight into a world on the brink of change.

## Author biography

Anna Winterbottom (McGill) works on the early modern history of medicine, science, and environment, with a particular focus on the Indian Ocean region and the colonial presence there. She is the author of *Hybrid Knowledge in the Early East India Company World* (2016) and co-editor of *Medicine and Healing in the Indian Ocean World* (2015) and *The East India Company and the Natural World* (2014).



https://doi.org/10.33137/pbsc.v59i1.37869

77 Casey Wood, "Recollections" 97–98. McGill University Library.