

For more than twenty years, the manuscript that gave rise to this book was deliberately kept in a drawer at the Château de l'Anglais. Before being written, its pages were experienced inside the Château and, during my research, outside. This introduction, a short story within a story, traces the successive stages of an incredible adventure, in the manner of the kokeshi, the Japanese nesting dolls that inspired the famous Russian matryoshkas. As a precaution, the bilingual French-English manuscript was registered in August 2006 with the SACD, the Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers, under the title "Le Château de l'Anglais, légendes et mystère/Villa Smith revisited". At this time in my life, events led me to focus on other interests and to set different priorities, so that the registration had to be renewed every five years to end in August 2021, with the now confirmed prospect of publication of my work!

It was 1994, the year that marked the fiftieth anniversary of Antoine de Saint Exupéry's death and, with my husband, we had just found the rare pearl during the still hesitant search for a second home on the French Riviera. It is true that I wanted to return to my linguistic roots after ten years spent between Rome and India where my husband was posted as a diplomat at the Italian Embassy in Delhi. However, I was far from imagining that by the greatest of coincidences we would feel such a "coup de coeur" for this extravagant building overlooking the Baie des Anges and the port of Nice, the work of an English colonel who returned from India in the mid-19th century. But can we really speak of chance when India is involved? Among the hundreds of offers for a second home on the Côte d'Azur, how is it that a vague wish on our part turns into an irresistible opportunity that was not even advertised on the real estate market? Perhaps the old stones of the Château de l'Anglais were waiting for someone to rediscover and tell the story of Colonel Robert Smith (1787-1873) from the inside! This is how the idea for this book came about, by chance, but not really by chance!

Who was Robert Smith really? What was the story of his life and of this oriental-looking building that bears his architectural signature?

The commonplaces and superficial answers I heard around me were not enough. Sitting on the terrace, on one of those winter days when the blue of the sea and the sky merge on the horizon and illuminate a white city against a backdrop of snowy peaks, I tried to imagine the Colonel's emotion as he stood in front of this grandiose panorama, alone on a bare promontory with no other communication with the city than the small boat that carried him from the harbour to the entrance of his estate. This character fascinated me to the utmost, all the more so as his itinerary, one hundred and fifty years before us, had been the same: Delhi-Rome-Nice! I therefore resolved to undertake my own research, starting with a few visits to the city's libraries. There is nothing more natural than to be interested in the place where one lives, but there was a kind of magic at the Castle, as if the genius of the place was inciting me to deepen my research. Thus, thanks to the recommendation of the Italian Consul General in Nice, the doors of the Departmental Archives, the Municipal Archives, the Cessole Library and the Villa Masséna were opened to me and precious assistance was offered by those in charge. Even if their names appear in the Acknowledgements, I would like to express my gratitude to them from the outset, because without their kind presence, finding these archival documents would have been very difficult for a "newcomer" to Nice. A meeting particularly dear to my heart enabled me to make rigorous progress in my research on the Château de l'Anglais, since it was the Territorial Curator of Heritage of the Alpes Maritimes, Luc Thévenon, with whom I have kept a very warm relationship. While he was preparing a book on the Folies de Nice, in which the work of Robert Smith figured prominently, he was our guest at the Château de l'Anglais on several occasions.

As I scoured the press of the time and progressed in my exploration of the land registry and archives, I became more and more intrigued by the Colonel's personality which seemed shrouded in mystery. The local sources, mostly in French, gave a lot of space to the Château but gave no description of Colonel Smith that was of interest. I soon realised that to find out more I would have to go directly to Britain. It helped that English was my mother's language (my mother was Belgian and my father American) and that I had started my career as a simultaneous interpreter in London in the 1970s. Thus, I had no trouble establishing fruitful contacts with the Director of the British India

Office in London, the Director of the State Museum in Penang, the Curator of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter, and the Vice-Curator of the Yale Center for British Art in the United States. I was also able to consult the archives of the East India Company and the collection of works attributed to Robert Smith at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

Chance, which by dint of repetition became a sign of destiny, put Raymond Head in my path, whom I can safely describe as Robert Smith's "biographer". Composer and musicologist, passionate about English colonial history, he had compiled the various sources of information on the Colonel's life in India. In fact, recent texts in French are inspired directly or indirectly by the data compiled by Head. For several months, we had long conversations and corresponded in an attempt to elucidate the mystery surrounding the Colonel's life after his return to Europe. This meeting marked a decisive turning point in my research and, in 1996, I commissioned Raymond Head to write a monograph on Robert Smith which formed the basis on which I was able to build my narrative.

The 21st century is on the horizon and the drafting of the manuscript is progressing with, as a corollary for the co-ownership, the now certain prospect of the estate being listed as a Historic Monument. The risk of demolition of the Château, which had already withstood various attempts at property speculation, is now a thing of the past with the Prefectoral Decree of Inscription on the Inventory in 2000. However, the dilapidated state of the building required urgent restoration, which became a bone of contention between some of the co-owners and the main reason why, discouraged and disillusioned by their closed-mindedness and the immobility that followed, I decided to close the pages of my manuscript while waiting for the right moment to publish it, a moment that in life, sooner or later, always arrives! In fact, twenty-one years later, as I write these few lines, the ideal conditions seem to have been met, since the co-owners have unanimously voted to renovate their common property and, for my part, I have found a publisher who is passionate about everything related to the culture and heritage of this magnificent region. By a happy coincidence, the French government has just announced its support for the candidacy of the City of Nice for inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List as the "Capital of Riviera Tourism",

This book is neither a treatise on history nor a biography in the strict sense of the term. Rather, it is inspired by the art of storytelling where, to the historical rigour and precision based on known and proven facts, is added an element of imagination whose purpose is to fill in the blanks in the Colonel's life story and to bring to life, in all verisimilitude but in a novelistic way, this character who is all too often ignored in 19th century English colonial history. My research has led me to sketch a multi-faceted portrait of this extraordinary man and to paint a historical fresco that takes the reader from the great adventure of the East India Company during the pre-Victorian era to the charms of the Nice Savoyarde before the plebiscite of 1860, with a few detours through England and Italy.

While the main figure of this book is undoubtedly the Château, it remains inseparable from its creator, a fearless military man, an accomplished architect, a talented painter and a fervent spiritual aspirant: four aspects of his personality that lend themselves ideally to a presentation of the story in four chapters. The Château de l'Anglais, originally Villa Smith, was built between 1856 and 1861 at a pivotal time in the history of Nice, when it was passing from the House of Savoy to France and beginning its vocation as the European capital of winter resorts, where the English were privileged guests in an increasingly cosmopolitan context. An original construction in more ways than one, Smith's architectural work served as an example to foreign winterers and was at the origin of the urbanisation of Mont Boron. In the presence of such a surprising achievement, I wanted to revive the spirit that presided over its construction from 1856 onwards, before the Château de l'Anglais was sold to a social aristocrat in 1875, then to a hotelier at the end of the Second World War, only to become bogged down in a banal real estate chronicle. It was as if, above the tumult of the condominium, the Colonel wanted me to hear his voice!

This unusual legacy is bequeathed to us by a multi-faceted personality: a former engineer officer in the East India Company's army, a draughtsman, topographer and watercolourist, a refined painter and architect, a botanist, an early curator of Delhi's major Mughal monuments and a person responsible for the realisation of important engineering works in Asia. From his enlistment at the age of eighteen as a cadet in the East India Company until his return to Europe in 1832 at the age of 45, Smith's military career in the East and the development of his artistic talents follow two parallel paths punctuated by easily definable spatial and temporal markers. Up to this point, we stick to the chronicle of clearly documented facts.

After that, all that is known about him is summed up in a few sentences. Robert Smith spent the next twenty years in total anonymity, devoting himself mainly to his passion for painting, between England and Italy, where he married a wealthy French noblewoman in Florence and settled in Rome. Widowed in 1850, he returned to England where he began construction of an imposing building in Paignton and, just a few years later, the Château de l'Anglais in Nice.

Why, after having achieved a certain notoriety in Delhi, did the Colonel, who had returned to civilian life, disappear from the scene only to reappear in the middle of the 19th century as the architect and owner of two astonishing buildings, the Redcliffe Towers in Paignton and the Château de l'Anglais in Nice? The chronicle remains irrevocably silent on this mystery. One is therefore entitled to ask questions and to try to answer them intuitively without fearing to use one's imagination, all the more so as the banality of the surname Smith, like Dupont in France, has in no way facilitated the research!

Did Smith shut himself up in the silence of those who had long ago learned to bend to the will of fate? In fact, towards the middle of the nineteenth century in England, the aristocracy and the upper middle class felt a barely concealed intolerance and condescension for English nabobs who, like Smith, returned to their homeland with large fortunes and a wealth of extraordinary experiences drawn from the life and spirituality of India. As an aesthete and artist, did the retired Colonel prefer to go into exile in Italy to better cultivate his taste for the arts in Florence, Venice and Rome, which attracted the fine minds of the time from all over Europe? However, this plausible explanation only lifts a part of the veil that covers the Smith mystery.

Why did a rather introverted man with little inclination to socialising embark on this colossal double enterprise, in precarious health conditions, alone, father of a young child and at a very advanced age, if we consider that the average life expectancy at the time was 55? Why did he decorate his private homes with symbolic elements that express a quest with universal initiatory resonance? What mysterious reason did the Colonel leave Nice before completing the construction of all the annexes and the development of the park on his estate?

In this regard, Raymond Head puts forward a singular hypothesis, albeit based on plausible premises. He focuses on an esoteric interpretation of Smith's work, which would have expressed, through architecture and painting, his belonging to a current of thought that advocated a rapprochement between the spiritual culture of the West and the East. Smith is said to have been associated with an initiatory brotherhood, although no mention of affiliation to any obedience has been found to this day. Encouraged by Raymond Head to concentrate my research on initiatory symbolism and on the Hindu reform movements of the nineteenth century, I was able to draw on my long experience of India, where, after having carried out numerous missions for the United Nations as an interpreter, I resided for five years and to which I returned several times afterwards.

Robert Smith, back in Europe, would have formed a genuine community of spirit with a few long-time friends, steeped as he was in an intense experience in pre-Victorian India and eager to see the syncretism between the spiritualities of the two worlds survive the 'imperial and puritanical normalisation' of the Raj in the second half of the nineteenth century. The symbols that adorn the facades of his homes proclaimed a set of beliefs intended to be seen during the Colonel's lifetime. They survive him as silent witnesses to his search for a fusion of Western and Eastern values.

Clearly, the architectural imprint of the Château de l'Anglais is not the product of a fashion, nor does it align with the emerging trends in the taste for the exotic that characterise other properties built at the same time on the Côte d'Azur. Its original style, admired by some and reviled by others,

expresses a design that transcends the designer of the Château de l'Anglais, for whom the Rotunda would have represented a little-known temple dedicated to a buried knowledge.

The narrative is structured around four chapters with notes and a series of appendices and bibliographies in English and French.

The first chapter traces Robert Smith's career from his youth in England to the height of his military career in India. It then describes his return to civilian life in Europe in complete anonymity until he began building his two castles, in Paignton, England and on Mont Boron in Nice.

The second chapter paints a picture of Savoyard Nice before the 1860s when it became part of France. Quotations from tourist guides and the local press of the time, as well as extracts from literary works, allow us to reconstruct a reasoned chronicle of Smith's architectural adventure. The Colonel's personality and original imprint are amply presented through his four residences: an elegant bungalow in Delhi on the ramparts of the Red Fort, a splendid villa on the Palatine in Rome and an imposing castle in Devonshire, built almost at the same time as the Château de l'Anglais in Nice.

The third chapter outlines the figure of the artist, presenting some of his most significant works from those that have been catalogued. These represent only a limited portion of Robert Smith's prolific output, from his teenage years to his final years in Paignton.

The fourth chapter seeks to unravel the enigma of both the design and construction of the Englishman's Castle and the symbolic representations that have survived to the present day on its walls. A plausible interpretation of the Colonel's noble intentions is put forward in the historical context of the universalist currents of thought of the time.

Photocopies of some of the relevant archival documents and reproductions of Robert Smith's work as a painter, architect and curator of historical monuments are appended.

When the Château de l'Anglais is mentioned today, it is usually limited to the fact that it was built by an eccentric English colonel returning from a long stay in India in the mid-19th century. Many people suggest that it is an architectural 'folly' of that time, even giving it the popular sobriquet of the Château du Fada, even though it embodies the material success and spiritual grandeur of Colonel Robert Smith. This book aims to demonstrate that this emblematic monument of Nice's heritage and the enigmatic and solitary being who conceived and built it deserve more attention and consideration at a time when the city of Nice has been announced as a candidate for inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List as the "Capital of Riviera Tourism".

Seen from the outside, the Château de l'Anglais, like India, speaks directly to the heart. Now firmly established in the urban landscape of Nice, it still leaves no one indifferent, especially in winter when the setting sun sets fire to the snowy peaks of this sublime marble landscape. A breathtaking view, certainly one of the most beautiful of the entire Côte d'Azur.

Experienced from the inside, the Château has a kind of aura, a particular atmosphere reminiscent of the personality of the man who built it on a predestined site and occupied it for a time before disappearing into oblivion again.

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