Preface

This volume reflects and celebrates the work carried out in the frame of the project 'The intellectual and religious traditions of South Asia as seen through the Sanskrit manuscript collections of the University Library, Cambridge',[1] funded by a Standard Route research grant of the British Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The project, which was officially launched in November 2011, had the duration of three years. I served as the Principal Investigator with the assistance of two research associates, Daniele Cuneo and Camillo A. Formigatti, who are the co-editors of this volume. The project's main goal was to create a complete electronic catalogue of the Sanskrit – and generally South Asian[2] – manuscripts held in the University Library (henceforth UL[3]) of Cambridge and digitise about one-third of the collections,[4] linking the catalogue entries to the digital images (wherever these are available).[5]

Most of the contributions stem from presentations given at two workshops organised in April 2013[6] and September 2014[7] at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies of the University of Cambridge, while some (including my own) are independent contributions. However, all of them reflect the diverse efforts of the authors to engage – each in her or his often very personal way – with various aspects of the manuscript cultures of pre-modern South Asia. At the origin of this endeavour there is the shared awareness and recognition that the material features of the technology that allowed knowledge to be stored and circulated –

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1 We used to call it the Sanskrit Manuscripts Project, which is how I will refer to it in the following pages.

2 Notably, the UL collections include substantial numbers of manuscripts in Prakrit, Tamil, Malayalam, and other medieval Indian languages.

3 Note that throughout the volume the acronym UL will refer to the Cambridge University Library. Similarly, shelf-marks starting with either Add. or Or. identify manuscripts kept in the Cambridge University Library, unless otherwise specified.

4 Due to the limited budget at our disposal, we could not aim at the complete digitisation of all the Sanskrit holdings in the UL.

5 The catalogue is now accessible online in the Sanskrit Manuscripts section of the Cambridge Digital Library: http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/sanskrit

As is known, before the Sanskrit Manuscripts Project was launched, the only available print catalogue of the Cambridge collections was Cecil Bendall's remarkable 1883 *Catalogue of the Buddhist Sanskrit Manuscripts in the University Library, Cambridge*, which – as the title indicates – only covers the Buddhist manuscripts acquired until that year.

6 'Buddhist Manuscript Culture: Textuality and Materiality', 12–13 April 2013**.**

7 'The South Asian Manuscript Book. Material, Textual and Historical Investigations', 25–27 September 2014**.**

namely, the manuscript – inevitably affected the ways in which knowledge itself was produced, organised, and transmitted in that world (and within it, in innumerable local variations). Thus, the interest of manuscripts lies not only in their being the repositories of intellectual, religious, and aesthetic contents, but also in their being artefacts of a specific culture, each of them the unique outcome of the convergence of a number of factors: the availability of materials (such as palm leaf, paper, ink, pigments, etc.), the technical know-hows involved in its production (the preparation of the leaves, the scribe's mastery of one or more scripts, the artists' illuminations, etc.), the social conventions and constraints, the laws of offer and demand for certain works, the existence of formal and informal institutions supporting the cultivation of given systems of knowledge, the individual passions and beliefs, and so on.

The most innovative aspect of the project, for which there were hardly any precedents within the field of South Asian studies, was the creation of an electronic catalogue linking the individual records to digital images, and it posed some considerable technical challenges that demanded creative solutions. Already at the application stage, and in consultation with Grant Young, then Head of Digital Content of the UL (who later acted as Project Manager for all the aspects that concerned the library), and Burkhard Quessel, Curator of Tibetan Manuscripts at the British Library, it was decided that the records would be prepared in XML using the manuscript description module of TEI P5, an internationally recognised metadata standard that had been adopted by the UL in 2009. One of the first tasks that our team had to undertake was the adaptation of the TEI P5 module, mostly developed for Western materials, to the quite different characteristics of South Asian manuscripts in terms of formats, materials, foliation, etc.[8] Our team made the conceptual decisions about the necessary changes to the TEI module, with the advice of the project's consultants, Harunaga Isaacson and Dominic Goodall, renowned Sanskritists with a unique experience of manuscripts.[9] Luckily, our task was enormously facilitated by the launch of the UL's new digital platform, the Cambridge Digital Library, in 2012, during the first year of the project. For all the technical aspects of the project's setup we could rely on the invaluable assistance of Grant Young and his collaborators – in particular

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8 For a more accurate description of this and other technical/theoretical aspects of the cataloguing, see Formigatti (forthcoming), '<title type="alt" xml:lang="eng"> From the Shelves to the Web: Cataloging Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Digital Era</title>', in Elena Mucciarelli and Heike Oberlin (eds), *Paper & Pixel: Digital Humanities in Indology*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

9 In particular, Harunaga Isaacson has been for several years the director of the Nepalese-German Manuscript Cataloguing Project (NGMCP) funded by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft).

Huw Jones – with whom we established a fruitful and friendly cooperation that continued throughout the lifespan of the project and beyond. I take this opportunity to express our heartfelt gratitude to all of them.

The core of the work consisted in the painstaking and time-consuming direct inspection of each manuscript, and the careful recording of its physical and codicological features: support material, script, number of folios, number of lines per folio, foliation, illustrations, hands, etc., but also, as far as possible, type of layout, graphic and decorative devices, marginal annotations, colophons, scribal colophons and other paratexts – all features that are frequently neglected and omitted in conventional printed catalogues.[10] Besides, our team inspected the contents of each manuscript, to confirm or correct its identification as given in the hand-list(s), or establish it independently, as far as possible, in those (not too infrequent) cases in which the work was only vaguely identified as falling into a general category, such as 'devotional poem', 'work on *jyotiṣa*', etc., in the existing hand-list or the partial card catalogue.[11] We also tried to retrace and record the history of each manuscript on the basis of the information contained in sources as diverse as colophons, cover notes, modern hand-lists, and archives: date of production and place of copy; names of scribes, owners, patrons, donors, and other individuals involved in its production and later vicissitudes, up to the time and circumstances of its acquisition by the UL.[12]

This was a massive enterprise, equally daunting and exhilarating, not just because – as I have pointed out above – we often had to start from scratch, but also because the UL collections of South Asian manuscripts, although relatively small (if compared for example with those in the British Library or the Bodleian

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10 The emphasis on the detailed description of minute codicological aspects (such as interlinear space, writing frames, *akṣara* height etc.) fulfils a specific aim, namely the creation of a manuscript description template that could be used for studies in quantitative and comparative codicology. The information gathered and encoded during our cataloguing project can be used to develop a database to query large amount of data, for instance in order to determine the date or place of production of a manuscript lacking the colophon. To achieve this goal, we (especially Camillo Formigatti) collaborated closely with two similar projects, *Transforming Tibetan and Buddhist Book Culture* and *Tibetan Book Evolution and Technology* (TiBET). Both projects were based at the Mongolian and Inner Asia Studies Unit (MIASU) of the University of Cambridge. For these collaborations we wish to thank Hildegard Diemberger, Burkhard Quessel, and Michela Clemente.

11 The latter catalogue was prepared in 1916 by Louis de la Vallée Poussin with the help of Caroline Mary Ridding (1862–1942). On the history of the formation and cataloguing of the UL South Asian collections, see C. A. Formigatti's article in the present volume.

12 For an overview of the provenance of the UL holdings, see Tables 1–2 in Formigatti's contribution to this volume.

Library in Oxford), show considerable internal variety in terms of contents and provenance.[13] All the three main Indian religious traditions – Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism, with many of their own internal strands and branches – are well represented in the Cambridge manuscript collections, and so are some of the traditional *śāstra*s (intellectual traditions) such as grammar (*vyākaraṇa*), astronomy/astrology (*jyotiṣa*) and medicine (*āyurveda*). This (and of course the fact that historically Sanskrit was written in a wide range of regional scripts) also accounts for the variety of scripts found in the Cambridge collections: beside Devanāgarī, one finds Western or Jaina Devanāgarī, Nepālākṣarā (also known as Newari), Tamil, Grantha, Malayalam, Śāradā and Bengali, just to mention those that are attested more frequently. Furthermore, a significant number (approximately one third) of manuscripts come from Nepal, the only region of the subcontinent in which the climate is temperate enough to allow their survival for several centuries. Thus, the UL South Asian manuscript collections cover a time range of almost thirteen centuries, with the oldest dated specimen, Add.1049.1,[14] dating from 828 CE, and several from the early second millennium. Thus, they provide precious evidence of archaic (and poorly attested) forms of the scripts in which they are written.[15] Similarly well represented are early paper manuscripts (14th–15th centuries) from the (mostly Jaina) collections of Western India.[16]

Dealing with such diversity required a variety of expertise, which was secured through the generous collaboration of several colleagues. Many of the authors who have contributed to this volume (and others who for different reasons have not) collaborated with our team to the study and cataloguing of the UL manuscripts, and it is my pleasure here to acknowledge their contribution.

Nalini Balbir, with the assistance of Anett Krause from 2013, was responsible for the cataloguing of the rich collection of Jaina manuscripts (for the history of this collection, see Balbir's contribution to this volume), which – as is typical of

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13 Incidentally, I should mention that, while the grant application, and the overall architecture of the project as described therein, were based on the assumption that there were about 1,200 items to be catalogued, the real number turned out to be close to 1,600, partly because some manuscripts were not recorded in the main hand-list to which I had had access, and partly because some bundles turned out to contain several independent manuscripts.

14 https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-01049-00001/1

15 On the palaeography of some of the earliest manuscripts in Cambridge and in Nepal see Kengo Harimoto's contribution to this volume. Among the most remarkable documents kept in the UL it is worth mentioning a 12th-century manuscript in the extremely rare Bhaikṣukī script; on this manuscript see Dragomir Dimitrov (2010), *The Bhaikṣukī manuscript of the Candrālaṃkāra* (Harvard Oriental Series 72), Cambridge, Mass.

16 On the Jaina manuscripts in the UL see Nalini Balbir's contribution to this volume.

this religious tradition – includes both texts in Prakrit (mostly canonical) and Sanskrit, often beautifully illuminated.

Francesco Sferra and Harunaga Isaacson advised us with the cataloguing of Buddhist Tantric materials. In the same field of studies, Gergely Hidas inspected the numerous Dhāraṇī manuscripts and prepared most of their catalogue records as well as other entries on copies of works on Tantric ritual.

Florinda De Simini assisted us with the cataloguing of the manuscripts – often of considerable antiquity – of the so-called Śivadharma corpus,[17] while Nina Mirnig prepared the records of some manuscripts of Purāṇas and Hindu Tantras. Giovanni Ciotti assisted us with the cataloguing of works on *vedalakṣaṇa* (i.e. *śikṣā*, Vedic recitation, etc.), Charles Li helped with works on *kāvya*, grammar and *vāstuśāstra*, and Elena Mucciarelli with Vedic works. Hugo David, who spent two years in Cambridge as a Newton International Fellow, generously devoted part of his time to the cataloguing of the manuscripts containing works of the classical philosophical systems (*darśana*s) in the UL.

The UL manuscript collections also reflect the variety of literary cultures of pre-modern India. Even though the name of the project contained the phrase 'Sanskrit manuscripts', we were aware from the beginning that the collections also contain a substantial number of manuscripts in other pre-modern South Asian languages. Over the centuries each of these literary cultures developed its own particular features, but they existed alongside and within the prevailing cosmopolitan Sanskrit tradition, and often overlapped and influenced one another, participating in the same broader cultural phenomena. Among these regional literary cultures, the one that is best attested in the UL collections is the Tamil, with approximately 50 manuscripts. For their inspection and study, the project could rely on the expertise of Eva Wilden, Emmanuel Francis, and Jean-Luc Chevillard.

Tamil manuscripts were only some of the South Indian manuscripts that found their way into the UL collections at various times in the history of the library. In that part of the subcontinent palm leaf remained in use as the main writing support until the late 19th–early 20th centuries, even after the spread of printing.[18] As a consequence, they are all relatively young (less that two hundred years old), because the hot humid climate causes their rapid deterioration. Nevertheless, especially in Kerala the commitment of the local Brahmins to preserve and hand down the works of the tradition was so strong that they regularly produced

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17 On this corpus, see the article De Simini and Mirnig have contributed to this volume.
18 See Emmanuel Francis' contribution to this volume, which looks at some aspects of the transition from manuscript to printed book (and vice versa!).

new copies of most works in their possession even when the scholarly and religious traditions that had originally produced them had died out, thus collectively making the region a major repository of texts of the pre-modern cultural legacy. A significant number of the UL South Indian manuscripts were acquired as part of the so-called Stolper collection in the late 1990's, and apparently enumerated in the main hand-list and ostensibly provided with a classmark.[19] In fact the bundles bore no labels linking them to the listed classmarks, so it was necessary to inspect them carefully from scratch. It was Professor Kesavan Veluthat who first started sorting out the manuscripts by language and script and identifying some of the works contained in them during a four days' visit to Cambridge in 2013. But the great bulk of the work, which took months, was carried out by Marco Franceschini, a leading expert on the history of the Grantha script used to write Sanskrit in Dravidian South India, and Elisa Ganser, who helped us with the manuscripts in Malayalam script,[20] with the contribution of Francis and Wilden for the Tamil manuscripts.

As is evident from the previous pages, the project was an extraordinary opportunity to create links with Indologists worldwide, strengthening existing collaborations and creating new ones. Besides the collaborative work on the main project goal, the cataloguing of the UL manuscripts, I would also like to mention that Camillo A. Formigatti and Daniele Cuneo contributed to the organisation of the exhibition 'Buddha's Word' curated in 2014 by Hildegard Diemberger with the collaboration of Michela Clemente at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge, which displayed a range of objects (manuscript and printed books, writing implements and materials, and inscribed artefacts of various kinds) produced across Buddhist Asia to disseminate the teaching of Dharma. Another collaboration with a team of researchers at the Fitzwilliam Museum, led by the Keeper of Manuscripts and Printed Books Stella Panayotova, who work on the analysis of the pigments used in manuscripts in medieval Europe and Asia, led to the inclusion of some of the UL illuminated Sanskrit manuscripts into a sample of books that were examined with experimental non-destructive methods of analysis.

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19 Note however that in most cases the list just indicated the script, but gave no indication of the title or even the language of the work contained in the manuscript. On the Stolper collection, see Formigatti's article in this volume.

20 While the majority of manuscripts in the latter set are in Sanskrit, a substantial number are in Malayalam language, so their proper identification and cataloguing will have to be postponed until the resources are found to secure the collaboration of an expert on medieval and modern Malayalam.

Furthermore, the two project workshops were a forum for the dissemination of project findings, but also for a broader reflection and debate on the South Asian manuscript cultures, which covered the whole range of possible ways in which Indological research can engage with manuscripts and manuscript culture(s), from textual criticism to palaeography, codicology, and topical or historical studies.

This diversity is well illustrated in the present volume.[21] The collections themselves are in the limelight from a variety of angles in a number of contributions. Camillo A. Formigatti's paper tells the story of the Cambridge South Asian manuscript collections, and of the scholars who helped to create them, pointing to the important role they have played in the history of Indology. The Jaina collection in the UL is the subject of Nalini Balbir's article, which looks at its history and contents and casts light on the ancient Jaina libraries and, generally, the book culture of this religious group. Vincenzo Vergiani's contribution surveys the contents of Nepalese collections – a task enormously facilitated by the existence of online databases such as the descriptive catalogue of the Nepalese-German Manuscript Cataloguing Project (NGMCP)[22] and the Sanskrit Manuscripts section of the Cambridge Digital Library – in order to attempt a reconstruction of the history of grammatical traditions in Nepal and reflect upon what they reveal about the practice of *vyākaraṇa* in pre-modern South Asia at large. In his article Dominic Goodall presents fascinating evidence – epigraphic, archaeological, literary, and iconographic – that points to the existence of manuscript libraries in medieval Cambodia, one of the most lively centres of the so-called Sanskrit cosmopolis that, at its zenith, expanded well beyond the sub-continent to include most of South East Asia.

Several contributions consist in studies of paratexts, layouts, and other codicological features, which draw attention to the wealth of historical information that can be drawn from these often neglected aspects of manuscript books. Eva Wilden's article deals with what she calls 'satellite stanzas' in Tamil manuscripts and explores their multiple functions as well as their role in the emergence of indigenous literary genres. Paratexts are also the subject of Giovanni Ciotti's and Jürgen Hanneder's papers. The former looks at the annotations in vernacular (Tamil) composed by teachers, but possibly also students, in south-Indian copies of a centrepiece of traditional Sanskrit education such as the *Amarakośa* in order

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22 https://www.aai.uni-hamburg.de/en/forschung/ngmcp

to reconstruct practices of teaching and learning in 19th-century Tamil Nadu, while the latter inspects the traces left by scribes, editors, and proofreaders in Śāradā manuscripts from Kashmir, challenging widespread but superficial assumptions on the production and transmission of literary texts in pre-modern India. The spatial arrangement of the written text on the folio is the focus of Cristina Scherrer-Schaub's contribution, a masterly reflection on the complex relation between orality and textuality as mirrored by the layout of early Buddhist manuscripts, and their lasting impact on later South Asian manuscripts. Many centuries later, the introduction of printing in Buddhist Tibet ushered in a new era in the circulation of textual knowledge, but, as Michela Clemente and Filippo Lunardo show in their article, in its early stages the new technology still bore the visible traces of the craftsmanship of the draftsmen and engravers involved in the production of xylographs. On the other hand, Emmanuel Francis' paper questions simplistic ideas of linear technological progress, presenting the case of manuscript copies of printed books in early modern Tamil Nadu, in which the author considers the socio-cultural and economic factors underlying this seemingly odd phenomenon.

The field of palaeographical studies is exemplified by Kengo Harimoto's contribution, which inspects the evolution of the script in early-medieval (pre-1000 CE) written documents (both manuscripts and inscriptions) from Nepal, and Marco Franceschini's article, which examines the unusual system of notation of grammatical features in a Grantha manuscript of the *Ṛgveda* Padapāṭha.

Other contributions are examples of classical textual criticism, namely Francesco Sferra's edition of the *Vajrāmṛtamahātantra*, one of the most important and ancient Buddhist *yoginītantra*s, of which only one other copy – now seemingly inaccessible – is known to survive; Gergely Hidas' edition of *Mahā-Daṇḍadhāraṇī-Śītavatī*, a Mahāyāna apotropaic scripture that is included in the Sanskrit *Pañcarakṣā* collection; and Péter-Dániel Szántó's edition of the *Rigyarallitantra*, a Vajrāyāna scripture preserved in two fragments that originally belonged to the same multiple-text manuscript of the *Vajrāmṛta*. All of these contributions contain editions of little known or unpublished works and at the same time relate them to the history of the tradition in which they originated and the development of the respective genres. Similarly related to textual criticism is one of Florinda De Simini's two contributions to the volume, which is a reflection on the pros and cons of traditional stemmatics in light of the author's study of the transmission of a particular corpus, the *Śivadharma*.

Among the cultural and textual studies one finds Daniele Cuneo's paper, which examines the iconographic programme of a manuscript that is full of pictures rather than words – an exquisite illuminated book produced in late medieval

Nepal that according to the author may have been conceived at the same time as a pedagogical tool for princely pupils and as a courtly *objet d'art*. The article co-authored by Florinda De Simini and Nina Mirnig compares different manuscript sets of the *Śivadharma* corpus and sheds light on its formation and ideological premises and goals, drawing insightful conclusions about sectarian dynamics in medieval South Asia. Lata Deokar's article on an unpublished grammatical work, the *Subantaratnākara*, based on a study of its manuscript witnesses, brings back to life the intriguing figure of its author, the Buddhist Subhūticandra (11th–12th centuries), who composed also the *Kavikāmadhenu*, a well-known commentary on the *Amarakośa*. Another unpublished work, a commentary on the *Cāndravyākaraṇa* preserved only in a few (mostly Nepalese) manuscripts, is the focus of Mahesh Deokar's contribution, which points to its importance for the history of the Cāndra system as well as to its influence on the Pāli grammatical tradition. And in his paper Hugo David lays the ground for a critical edition of Śaṅkara's 'longer' commentary (*bhāṣya*) on the *Aitareya Upaniṣad*, a copy of which is kept in the Cambridge University Library, oddly neglected both by the indigenous commentarial tradition and the modern scholarship for reasons still to be ascertained. All these articles are a reminder that not just individual works but whole vast areas of pre-modern South Asian literary culture still need to be properly researched, as they are only preserved in manuscript form. The risk of this immense legacy being lost forever looms large if in the next years no adequate measures are taken to protect, reproduce and safeguard the manuscript collections, in South Asia and worldwide.

Today, almost 3 years after the end of the project, I am happy to be able to say that much has been achieved: the project has managed to create a complete online catalogue of the Sanskrit manuscripts kept in the UL and digitise a substantial portion of the collections, which were its main goals. But I am also ready to admit that much work remains to be done, not only because this is in the nature of research, but also due to some other factors that I have partly mentioned before: the manuscripts turned out to be much more numerous than we thought, and we had to develop and adjust our tools and methods as the project moved on. And of course we made mistakes, which sometimes it took weeks or months to rectify. At present, the online catalogue contains two kinds of records: those that are linked to digital images (almost 600) and the remaining (more than 1,000), without images and ranging in content from basic to very rich and exhaustive. This is where some of the advantages of an online electronic catalogue become apparent. Once the template has been established, enriching or indeed correcting the existing records is relatively easy. This will be necessary in a number of cases, not only for the records of digitised manuscripts that, for lack of time and human resources, could not be adequately catalogued during the lifetime of

the project, but also for all those manuscripts the existence of which was unknown or which the project has made accessible in a way that was unthinkable before, thus stimulating further research on them. It is hoped that in the future a new project will complete the digitisation of the South Asian manuscripts in the Cambridge University Library and integrate and expand the existing catalogue.

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