Preface

This volume attempts to investigate manuscripts from a well-defined perspective, namely that of paratextual studies. The term paratext was coined by Gérard Genette in his work *Seuils* (1987) in order to engage with an open category found in modern printed books in Western societies, including titles, prefaces, introductions, footnotes, and also certain illustrations and decorations.¹ In the years since Genette’s theoretical exercise, literary theory has extensively studied paratexts and explored further paratexts which were not accounted for in *Seuils*, such as subscriptions and glossaries.² Furthermore, the concept of paratext has been then applied not only to printed books – although the majority of secondary literature focuses on this topic – but also to other fields within media studies, such as manuscripts, orality, films and television, and even digital media.³ The recent years have witnessed the emergence of some pioneering studies which adopt the paratextual approach to engage with manuscripts.⁴ It should be said, however, that the number of such studies is rather limited and most of them do not embrace a cross-cultural perspective. This volume is an attempt to fill this gap, at least in part.

The study of paratexts helps reveal the numerous ways in which texts are instantiated in manuscripts by tracing the temporal and spatial coordinates of these objects, each of which is a unique artefact. In this respect, we move beyond the idea that a paratext is just a “threshold” – according to Genette’s seminal definition – that introduces readers to texts, along the guidelines traced by their authors and editors. In our view, paratexts pertain not just to texts but also to their carriers – in our case, manuscripts. As emerged from the research carried out by “Project Area A: Paratexts” of the Sonderforschungsbereich 950 – Manuskriptkulturen in Asien, Afrika und Europa (University of Hamburg), paratexts have at least three main functions, namely (1) structuring (e.g. offering navigation aids that guide the reader, such as tables of contents), (2) commenting (e.g. glosses and annotations that offer interpretations and explanations of a text), and (3) documenting. The latter category is at the centre of the contributions found in this volume.

Various aspects of manuscripts in their social environments are reflected both in the texts they contain and in their materiality, as well as in their paratexts,

² See, for instance, Watson 2010.
⁴ See, for instance, Gameson 2002; Buzi 2005; Reynhout 2006; Görke/Hirschler 2011.
which can be seen as the intersection between texts and materiality. In their capacity as texts in their own right, paratexts mirror the activities of everyone involved in the production, transmission, dissemination and reception of the manuscript and its content: authors, editors, scribes, artisans, commentators, readers, sellers, owners and so on. In particular, the various types and layers of paratexts document the temporal and spatial dimensions of the process of production and transmission of manuscripts. Time and space are universal categories to which each object or person is linked, and paratexts translate into texts – in other words, they give voice to the history of every single manuscript.

Broadly speaking, paratexts can be divided into two sub-categories. The first provides explicit temporal and spatial information; this is the case for colophons, prefaces, postfaces, etc., in which the date and place of production are usually recorded. The second sub-category, on the other hand, contains non-explicit information that can only be accessed by means of philological, palaeographical, codicological and material-based investigation; glosses may be written in a language or register which is peculiar to a specific region and moment in time, for example.

Paratexts are ‘settings’ for the textualisation both of historical events and, at times, of the intimate impulses and emotions of individual people. In certain manuscripts paratexts depict a more vivid picture of the historical role of manuscripts as real objects in the hands of real people; it is there that opinions, feelings, inclinations, etc. of the individuals involved in the production and transmission of manuscripts can find their textual transposition.

It is with these considerations in mind that we invite our readers to cross the ‘threshold’ of this volume, which introduces them to several manuscript cultures spanning three continents (Asia, Africa and Europe) and one millennium (from the tenth to the twentieth century).

Some of the articles venture into uncharted territory, since there are still many manuscript cultures (or sub-areas of manuscript cultures) where works on paratexts have yet to be written. This is particularly true for many Asian and African cultures. Moving beyond earlier work on Old Mande manuscripts from West Africa, Darya Ogorodnikova’s analysis of colophons and glosses written in Arabic and several vernaculars demonstrates how their authorship, sponsorship, provenance and transmission can be reconstructed through various kinds of temporal and spatial information contained in paratextual components. This type of information is often only available in part and is therefore of limited use for exact identification of time and space with regard to the manuscripts. Nevertheless, it furnishes modern scholars with new ways of re-establishing the history of the manuscripts and rectifying
any previously erroneous classifications. As the first study ever to probe into the paratextual features of this corpus of manuscripts, it also points out the current limitations which apply to the study of Old Mande manuscripts as well as outlining its future prospects.

Various colophons in a selected corpus of Tai Lü and Tai Khün manuscripts produced in northern Laos, southwestern Yunnan and eastern Myanmar are the main focus of Apiradee Techasiriwan’s enquiry. As she demonstrates with detailed examples, the majority of colophons exhibit a refined system of dating and reveal the names of the scribes, donors and sponsors and in many cases the names of the places where the manuscripts were produced and kept as well. By investigating the paper, ink, layout and the different sets of scripts used in the manuscripts, she seeks to find out how combining paratextual and non-paratextual elements provides a viable way of dating and locating the production of the manuscripts and tracing their transmission.

Giovanni Ciotti and Marco Franceschini present a pioneering study on colophons found in manuscripts from Tamil Nadu. They focus on the temporal elements, producing a thorough description of both the syntax and the graphic variants of the various dating elements. Furthermore, they offer an analysis of the problems concerning the spatial information contained in colophons – an aspect which is not devoid of ambiguities when carefully examined. The article argues that manuscripts containing texts in different languages (Tamil, Sanskrit and Manipravalam) or different scripts (Tamilian Grantha and Tamil) belong to the same manuscript culture.

As for manuscript traditions that have long been objects of scholarly attention, the field of paratextual studies still remains to be explored in full. Focusing on a group of manuscripts associated with the Donglin School in seventeenth-century China, Hang Lin delves into various paratextual components and certain taboo characters to explore the related information about the production, provenance and transmission of manuscripts. Moreover, these features contain expressions of appreciation not only of the value of the manuscripts, but also of the dignity of their authors. Different temporal and spatial information found in the components equips historians with effective tools for locating the Donglin manuscripts and other literati manuscripts from late imperial China in time, space and tradition.

Furthermore, Max Jakob Fölster investigates ownership marks, which in the form of seal imprints are another prominent feature of Chinese manuscripts. By analysing these paratexts, he is able to trace the route across Mainland China and Taiwan followed by a late imperial copy of the *Annals of the Ming Family* (a text
composed in the fourteenth century), which is nowadays held at the National Central Library (Taipei). This case study shows that even an average manuscript from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can contain a paratextual apparatus rich enough to enable the reconstruction of its several relocations. The story of this manuscript not only reflects the development of book collecting in China in the first part of the twentieth century, with its increasing interest for historiographical texts in the 1920s, but also reminds us of how multi-local the life of any manuscripts can be.

After a brief overview of the corpus of paratexts found in Church Slavonic manuscripts, Kristina Nikolovska engages with a particular colophon written by a monk called Isaija in a copy of the Slavonic translation of the *Corpus Dionysi-acum* (1371). Its marked apocalyptic character is seen as a response to the decline of the Serbian Empire and the parallel rise of the Ottoman Empire. Isaija verbalised conceptual transformations and the anxieties through which scribes and writers understood and perceived the ongoing historical events. These paratexts have long played an important role in academic discourse on the subject of Slavonic national identities.

Paratexts are also instrumental in tracing the temporal and spatial coordinates of certain traditions of knowledge since they document when and where the manuscripts were produced and used. Vito Lorusso, for instance, examines the relocation of manuscripts and scribes from the Greek to the Italian peninsula and the nature of the rise of the Renaissance manuscript culture as it emerges from a study focusing on paratexts. He thus presents us with another set of events that followed the aftermath of the fall of the Byzantine Empire and the implications of the fall for the profound transformation that affected Greek manuscript culture. In doing so, Lorusso also investigates specific case studies by employing philological, palaeographical and codicological tools.

Finally, Stéphane Ancel investigates paratexts from the region of Təgray in Ethiopia, concentrating in particular on the issue of manuscripts’ ownership. By studying the legal bearing of paratexts, he is able to shed light on the peculiarities of the interplay between individual ownership, donations and institutional (religious) ownership. Furthermore, Ancel touches upon the issue of manuscripts’ distribution and the history of their relocations. Paratexts containing spatial information can in fact mention one or more places that do not correspond to the place where the manuscript has been found. Other paratexts can also help reconnect certain manuscripts to a grand-narrative. This is the case of the Mäqdäla manuscripts, which bear witness on their pages of the impact of the British colonial enterprise on Ethiopia and its cultural eritage.
To conclude, the approach taken by the current volume is that of studying how the information contained in paratexts can help deepen our understanding of the relevant manuscript culture. A great deal of data about manuscript cultures is revealed from the study of texts, including what kind of texts were copied, how many copies were produced and in what circumstances they were created. However, other aspects of the same manuscript cultures can only be retrieved by studying paratexts. Fundamental categories which emerge from the study of paratexts in this regard are those of time and space, since they concern various aspects of a manuscript’s production, transmission, dissemination, usage and reception. These are the main coordinates to which the authors of the articles in this volume will refer.

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The initial idea of a volume on the topic of paratexts as sources for reconstructing the temporal and spatial features of manuscripts emerged following a very productive workshop called ‘Reconstructing Space and Time’, which was held on the 25th and 26th of October 2013 at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC) at the University of Hamburg. The workshop provided a valuable forum for discussing paratexts in manuscripts and devising a concept for the current project.

The success of the workshop was due greatly to the enthusiasm and hard work of the presenters of the papers, who gathered in Hamburg from all over Europe to share their latest research experiences and discuss topics of common interest in the field of manuscripts and paratexts. The focus here was on the kinds of spatial and temporal information that can be found in paratexts and how they can be linked to broader narratives concerning manuscript cultures.

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