



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

The social life of a manuscript: textual networks from North India to Nepal and beyond

Littunen, O.P.A.

Citation

Littunen, O. P. A. (2024). The social life of a manuscript: textual networks from North India to Nepal and beyond. *Textual Cultures: Texts, Contexts, Interpretation*, 17(2), 106-136.
doi:10.14434/tc.v17i2.40320

Version: Publisher's Version
License: [Creative Commons CC BY 4.0 license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)
Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4175388>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

The Social Life of a Manuscript

Textual Networks from North India to Nepal and Beyond¹

Olli-Pekka Antero Littunen

ABSTRACT

This essay follows the life of a palm-leaf manuscript, now preserved in Nepal, containing a collection of Hindu texts about the city of Varanasi in North India. Looking at the physical properties of this manuscript, as well as the various additions and alterations it has undergone, one can discover more about the social history of the individuals and communities involved in creating, using, and transporting the manuscript. The manuscript contains texts about a network of religious sites in Varanasi, but because it was transported to Nepal after its creation, it also serves as evidence of connections beyond the city itself. I argue that this manuscript forms part of various larger networks: firstly, it connects locations in Varanasi at the level of narrative; secondly, it forms a link between North India and Nepal by being transported; and lastly, it participates in a network of information exchange between South Asia and Europe through microfilms and digital photographs.

THE HISTORY OF COMMITTING SANSKRIT TEXTS TO WRITING GOES BACK AT least two thousand years.² Nepal is one of the most important sources of the Sanskrit manuscripts that attest this written tradition. Often, such manuscripts are studied for their literary content, using a text-critical approach. Investigating these manuscripts not only as texts but also as physical objects, however, can reveal still other information: reading the additions and alterations they have undergone as evidence of their dynamic

-
1. This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under grant agreement no. 101054849 (PURANA). I would like to thank Peter Bisschop, Elizabeth Cecil, Camillo Formigatti, and the anonymous reviewers for their constructive and extremely helpful feedback. All remaining mistakes are mine.
 2. The textual tradition of the *Mahābhārata* epic probably first arose between 50 BCE and 50 CE (FITZGERALD 2018, 91).

material histories³ can help us retrace the social contexts in which the manuscripts were used.

I focus here on the life of one specific manuscript that has been used and altered in multiple different contexts. The manuscript contains a compendium of Sanskrit texts about sacred sites in the city of Varanasi, a famous pilgrimage destination in Uttar Pradesh, North India, associated with the deity Śiva.⁴ It was produced between the 12th and 14th century CE, not in Varanasi itself, but most likely in the Mithila region, in what is now North India and southern Nepal.⁵

The transportation of the manuscript from North India to Nepal is evidence of networks of exchange that cut across the boundaries of the present-day nation-states. The manuscript can be understood as being mobile across multiple such networks. First, it contains narrative accounts about a group of religious sites in Varanasi that are connected by their sacred power. Secondly, the manuscript itself was physically on the move: it was transported out of North India, ultimately reaching Nepal to end up in its present location, the Kaiser Library in Kathmandu. In the process of being transported via this network, it must have changed hands between various individuals (such as scholars, scribes, religious teachers, royalty, etc.). Thirdly, it was microfilmed and later photographed, allowing it to participate in yet another network, namely a global scholarly exchange of analog and digital media.⁶

-
3. That is, as living and evolving entities; for an overview of the notion of living texts and how it developed, starting in New Testament studies and solidifying in the work of David Parker in the late 1990s (e.g. PARKER 1997, especially chapter 12), see CHEN 2018, 8–15. It should be noted that every written text that can be discussed may be understood to be “alive”, at least in some sense; the only time a text can truly be dead is when no one knows it exists. Thus, living texts are a spectrum — some are more alive than others.
 4. The city has been continuously inhabited since at least the 8th century BCE, first as a commercial center and then as a religious one (BAKKER 1996, 33). It has existed in various forms and taken many names, such as Avimukta, Kāśī, and more recently, Banāras/Benāres. I use Varanasi (without diacritics) throughout the text, because it is the official name of the city.
 5. The dating of the manuscript cannot be established more precisely as of yet. The manuscript itself contains no mention of the date of its initial production. The reasons for dating it between the 12th and 14th century CE, and for tracing it to Mithila instead of Varanasi, are discussed in greater detail below. For the sake of simplicity, I use the dichotomy of (North) India vs. Nepal to designate the area where the manuscript was most likely produced and where it ended up.
 6. For other research regarding the usage and movement of manuscripts and how manuscripts can betray their socio-historical contexts, see e.g. BALBIR 2017

Networks created through transportation, which may be considered an element of intangible cultural heritage shared by various contemporary nation-states, often feature in scholarly discussion on manuscripts and other physical objects (see e.g. FLOOD & FRICKE 2023). The research presented here contributes to this important and ongoing conversation on transcultural and transregional circulation and reception, looking beyond the objects or texts themselves.

Part I: The Contents of the Manuscript

A manuscript's textual content is intimately linked with its use and thus with its social reality as a physical object. The manuscript I discuss here contains a *Vārāṇasīmāhātmya* compendium.⁷ The *Māhātmya* ("greatness", "glorification") genre consists of texts written in praise of a specific entity,

on the Cambridge University Library collection of Jain manuscripts and the people involved in the manuscripts' circulation; BROCKMANN 2014 on scribal annotations and how they can serve as proof of a learned scribe; DE SIMINI 2017 on a Nepalese manuscript that is connected with a specific king, has been provided with an index for ease of use, and whose scribal additions indicate that it was used in public recitation; FORMIGATTI 2014 on manuscript movement in South and Central Asia; FORMIGATTI 2017 on the Cambridge University Library collection (that is, on manuscripts' movement and use also beyond South Asia); FORMIGATTI 2015 and RATIÉ 2018, both on manuscript annotations in North India and Nepal; SANDER 1991 on the material properties, provenance, and contents of Central Asian manuscripts; VAN DER PUTTEN 2022 on manuscript libraries in the Dutch East Indies and what the collections' manuscripts can tell us about their owners and borrowers; and VAN SCHAIK & GALAMBOS 2012 on a manuscript recording the pilgrimage of a Chinese Buddhist monk. See also KOHS & KIENITZ 2022 for a brief discussion on how manuscripts have agency: as magical objects, they can influence humans and shape entire communities, forging social and cultural relations in the process.

7. I use the title "*Vārāṇasīmāhātmya* compendium" to avoid burdening the reader with too much Sanskrit and to emphasize the nature of the text as a compendium containing *Vārāṇasīmāhātmyas*. *Vārāṇasīmāhātmyasaṃgraha* (lit. "Compendium of *Māhātmyas* of *Vārāṇasī*") is the latest title given to the compendium, as used by BISSCHOP 2021. See BISSCHOP 2007 and 2013 for the title "*Vārāṇasīmāhātmya* compendium", which I use here. See also MERSCH 2013 for "*Vārāṇasīmāhātmya* Compendium" (with a capital C), and BISSCHOP 2016 for "a compendium of *Vārāṇasīmāhātmyas*".

most often a place or deity.⁸ The Māhātmyas in this compendium are attributed to various texts called the Purāṇas, “primordial account[s] of primordial things” (FITZGERALD 2014, 42), a voluminous body of texts that narrate stories related to the main deities of Hinduism.⁹ Māhātmyas are embedded in the frame texts that the Purāṇas contain. The compendium does not retain these frame texts in quoting Māhātmyas, and the original narrative context is stripped away. Because the compendium’s citations of the Māhātmyas often do not correspond to the Purāṇas in their current printed forms, one can understand the texts within the manuscript as representing an intermediary phase in the Purāṇas’ evolution.¹⁰ These texts are not static — people change them, add to them, and adapt them according to shifting social realities.¹¹

The purpose of the Māhātmyas is perhaps best illustrated by an example. One of the places mentioned in the compendium (in chapter 30) is a sacred pond called Piśācamocana, where a demonic being (*piśāca*)

8. For some of the most crucial and recent work on Māhātmyas, see e.g. AMBACH, BUCHHOLZ, and HÜSKEN 2022; BAKKER 1986; BISSCHOP 2021; ECK 1999; FELDHAUS 1995 and 2003; and SATHYANARAYANAN & CZERNIAK-DROŻDZOWICZ 2023.

9. It should be noted that Purāṇas are not fossilized texts, but have continuously evolved and adapted amid changing socio-religious contexts (and, to a lesser extent, scribal transmission). Purāṇas are primordial texts in a rhetorical sense; it is not the case that all the material found in them is ancient. They are a dynamic, “productive genre of recording history” (FITZGERALD 2014, 42) that shapes the present and the future, serving as the foundation for many of the traditions and practices now associated with what can be called Hinduism.

10. Though now lost as such, the source texts the creators of the compendium had were Purāṇas that changed their names over time, became incorporated in other Purāṇas, or disappeared as overlapping texts became more popular. Some of the texts as they now appear in the manuscript are clearly altered versions of older texts, adapted to the context of Varanasi. As the compendium does not include all the Hindu religious sites in the city, a compiler may have wanted to create a collection of Māhātmya texts to glorify a specific set of locations. See HAZRA 1940 for some approximate dates of Purāṇas, and BISSCHOP 2021, 6–7 for a chart of this manuscript’s attributions to the Purāṇas.

11. Using existing material to create new texts in a way that makes it clear that the material has been reused and made to fit a new purpose can be called “adaptive reuse” (FRESCHI & MAAS 2017, 13–14). The South Asian tradition abounds in textual reuse, in the form of both direct quotations and the creation of new material by combining and adapting earlier texts. For various accounts of such reuse in the South Asian context, see the edited volume by FRESCHI & MAAS (2017).

attained liberation (*mocana*) by following the advice of an ascetic named Śaṅkukarṇa, who was performing worship there. The text states that a pilgrim who visits the site and drinks the water there that has been offered to Śiva will also be liberated. In other words, the texts normally mention the locations, the events that occurred there, and the prospective rewards for worshippers (most often liberation). The importance of these texts is thus related to their being emplaced; their sanctity was connected to “spiritually charged natural places and the shrines that proliferated around them” (CECIL 2020, 2).¹² Many locations described in the compendium may be identified by the same names even today, and in this way, the *Māhātmyas* grant access to the physical reality of Varanasi’s past. Even if one cannot be sure that the locations are the same now as they were hundreds of years ago, the social history of the manuscript becomes more evident when the manuscript and its texts can be linked to existing places.

The manuscript is a rich and unique resource due to three characteristics: the intermediate state of its texts; its various levels of additions and corrections; and the geographical connections the manuscript forms. Mithila had a long-lasting political, religious, social, and scholarly influence on Nepal, especially in the 14th century CE (SLUSSER 1982, 68); connections between Nepal and Varanasi in particular go back to at least the second millennium CE, but were most likely present already in the first millennium (GAENZLE 2006, 304). Libraries in Kathmandu preserve manuscripts produced in Varanasi as early as the 12th century CE (BISSCHOP 2021, 19).¹³ In addition to discussing Varanasi itself, what distinguishes the manuscript in question is how it bears the marks of various geographical and social contexts through its successive alterations. These alterations, made during various phases of the manuscript’s

12. Similarly to Cecil’s notion of how a “geographically emplaced vision actually suggests a more inclusive tradition” (CECIL 2020, 28), the emplaced nature of these *Māhātmyas* points toward Varanasi being understood as a place that can grant liberation to anyone who spends time and performs worship there. Even if the texts themselves often refer directly only to individuals from the higher classes, the liberating power of Varanasi as an emplaced, religiously charged site extends beyond the upper strata of society. For more details, see CECIL 2020, 26–29.

13. These other manuscripts are not *Māhātmyas*, and thus do not focus on Varanasi or its sacred sites, but instead discuss other topics such as law and proper conduct. The manuscripts in question are those of the *Bṛhatkālottara*, *Harivaṃśa*, *Jayadrathayāmala*, and *Manusmṛti* (BISSCHOP 2021, 19). They have been filmed by the Nepalese-German Manuscript Preservation Project (NGMPP) on reels A 27/5, A 996/3, C 44/4, and A 43/1, respectively.

life, are evidence of the manuscript's role in the communities and lives of those who have had access to it.

Part II: The Manuscript and Its Communities

Palm-leaf manuscripts were most often copied on demand, being commissioned by private individuals or even royal libraries for use in their collections (HANNEDER 2017, 232–33). Copying also ensures the survival of a textual tradition: palm-leaf manuscripts quickly deteriorate in the South Asian climate and need to be recopied to preserve their contents.¹⁴ Due to its more favorable climate, palm-leaf manuscripts can survive longer in Nepal than in India. The oldest dated manuscripts in Nepal are from the 9th century; older manuscripts also exist — likely from the 6th to 8th centuries CE — but are undated.¹⁵

-
14. Many factors can have a negative effect on the health of a manuscript, such as air quality and climate; insects and rodents; improper handling and storage; destructive restoration attempts; and staining (WILAND et al. 2022, 250–54).
 15. One manuscript, that of a medical text called the *Suśrutasamhitā*, dates to 878 or 879 CE, while a manuscript of the early *Skandapurāṇa* dates to 811 CE (HARIMOTO 2011, 87–90; and 2017, 361). A manuscript of the *Pārameśvaratantra* from Nepal, now at Cambridge University Library (Add.1049.1), has been dated to 829 CE (2017, 361). Some fragments of the so-called “Gilgit manuscripts” that have been found in Nepal, originally from the Northwest of the Indian subcontinent, can be dated between the 6th and 8th centuries CE (2011, 100). The oldest extant manuscript in Nepal is a Buddhist *Daśabhūmikasūtra* manuscript from the 6th century CE at the latest (93–95); see HARIMOTO (2011, 93, footnote 6) for more manuscripts of approximately the same age. See also MATSUDA (1996, xv–xviii), who dates the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* manuscript between the 5th and 7th centuries CE. The manuscript bundles Matsuda used for his publication have been filmed by the NGMPP on reels A 38/5 and A 39/13; see HARIMOTO (2011, 93, footnote 7) for more details. On the *Suśrutasamhitā* manuscript, see WUJASTYK et al. 2023. The *Suśrutasamhitā* manuscript (Kesar Library Accession No. 699) has been filmed by the NGMPP on reel C 80/7. The early *Skandapurāṇa* manuscript (National Archives Kathmandu accession number 2–229) has been filmed by the NGMPP on reel B11/4. The *Skandapurāṇa* Project, a long-standing initiative to edit and translate the voluminous early *Skandapurāṇa* has been ongoing since the 1990s; see <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/research/research-projects/humanities/the-skandapurāṇa-project>. See also ADRIAENSEN,

The manuscript discussed here can be dated sometime between the 12th and 14th centuries CE. The most likely scenario is that the manuscript was produced in Mithila just before or during the early 14th century, and then taken to Nepal. It was probably copied from earlier manuscripts written in Varanasi itself.¹⁶ The script of the manuscript in question is remarkably close to that of other manuscripts produced in Mithila around the 14th century (Diwakar ACHARYA, personal communication, 2023). Furthermore, the extensive cultural relations between 14th-century Mithila and Nepal add support to this hypothesis.¹⁷

The Production of the Manuscript and Its Alterations

At least two or (more likely) three people participated in the original production of the manuscript, which was later altered by two “readers” in Nepal in the 16th and 17th centuries CE (see Appendixes 1 and 2 for details).¹⁸ The two readers in Nepal, and at least one person reading the manuscript before it reached Nepal, felt the need to change and add to it.

BAKKER, & ISAACSON 1998, 32 for details regarding the manuscript of the early *Skandapurāṇa*.

16. Dated manuscripts in a similar script were produced in Varanasi between the 12th and 13th centuries (BISSCHOP 2021, 19). The quality of the palm leaves of these manuscripts, however, is different; in the manuscript discussed here, the leaves appear to be thicker and of a more brittle and inferior quality. In any case, as we do not know the earliest storage conditions of any of these manuscripts, we cannot base our conclusion solely on its physical and palaeographical properties. See footnote 13 above for the manuscripts.
17. It is also worth noting that although the texts deal with Varanasi, the first chapter starts by mentioning the sage Yājñavalkya, who is in Mithila (see Appendix 1.4). A first text that explicitly locates itself in Mithila could have been purposely selected to make the compendium fit that geographical and cultural context.
18. For the purposes of the manuscript under study, it is impossible to draw a clear distinction between the authors, scribes, compilers, readers, and reciters of the exemplar being copied. All of these distinctions may overlap when it comes to the production and transmission of old palm-leaf manuscripts. I use the term “scribe” to refer to a range of practices that involve applying ink to palm leaves, but when more precise distinctions are necessary, I use other terms — such as “reader” — to indicate specific sub-functions of the scribes. See “The Final Folios” and Appendix 1.3 below for details regarding the dates of the two readers in Nepal.

There are two types of alterations. The first are corrections made in Old Nāgarī script — that is, the script in which the manuscript was originally written — to indicate minor alterations, such as changing short vowels to long vowels or vice versa. The second are corrections and additions made in Nepālākṣarā script (by the two readers in Nepal) — that is, a different script than used in the original production of the manuscript (see Fig. 1, below).¹⁹ These Nepālākṣarā alterations have two layers: one fainter and more worn — i.e., older — and another with darker, more recently added ink. The use of two different scripts is relevant: the Old Nāgarī script helps in dating and placing the manuscript in question, while the presence of the Nepālākṣarā script shows that the manuscript continued to be used even after it entered Nepal.

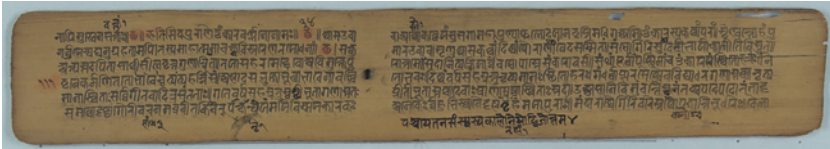


Figure 1. Folio 111 verso, with 6 lines of text Old Nāgarī and various marginal and in-text corrections and alterations in Nepālākṣarā script (mainly in darker ink).²⁰

The fact that the chapters of the manuscript were not originally numbered — all the chapter numbering was added only later — also attests to the continued use of the manuscript (see Appendix 1.5 for examples). The orange ink that often embellishes the chapter numbering (see Appendixes 1.3 and 1.5) helps in quickly identifying where the chapters end. Based on similarities in the darkness of the ink and the stroke size, the numbering was likely added by the later reader in 17th-century CE Nepal.

The production process involved professional scribes, who copied existing material to create the manuscript as we now have it. If the

19. I have chosen to use the ambiguous descriptive term “Nepālākṣarā” (lit. “Nepalese syllable”, in the feminine gender to indicate a script) for the corrections and additions made in Nepal, following the approach of Vincenzo Vergiani (2017, 81, footnote 6). The parts written in Nepālākṣarā script are often inconsistent in their use of diacritics, smudged, and messy, making it difficult to more precisely identify the script. Various scripts exist for writing Sanskrit, and the same script can be used to write different languages (see e.g. SALOMON 1998 for an overview of Indic writing systems as related to epigraphy).

20. All the images in this article have been reproduced with the permission of Peter Bisschop.

manuscript was produced in Mithila by copying material originally produced in Varanasi, the scribes might have been sponsored by local Maithili brahmins or royalty who were interested in texts about the sanctity of Varanasi. If these scribes were in Varanasi, they might have been employed by the Gāhaḍavālas, who had seized control of the area from the Kalacuri dynasty at the end of the 11th century CE (BAKKER & ISAACSON 2004, 66–67).

Scribes commissioned to copy manuscripts were often “illiterate, uneducated, or uninterested” and paid according to the number of syllables they wrote (HANNEDER 2017, 224). Such circumstances inevitably lead to later corrections made by more literate readers (224).²¹ If one assumes that the initial scribes were indeed not interested in correcting their mistakes, it is feasible that these minor corrections were made by a more literate and interested individual who could be called a “supervisor”. However, even if later readers in Nepal or a supervisor checking the manuscript were more literate than the initial scribes, it does not mean that they objectively improved the texts; they merely changed them according to their understanding of Sanskrit and each text’s content.

Further, the palm leaves are protected by wooden covers (see Figs. 2 and 3, below), which were likely added only after the original production of the manuscript.²² The manuscript is incomplete — perhaps due to missing folios in an earlier manuscript that it was copied from — as the text abruptly cuts off in the concluding chapter.²³

21. It was also common for a scribe to write down what another person read aloud from an earlier manuscript (SATHAYE 2017, 54), leading to further misunderstandings and errors.

22. Various manuscripts with similar wooden covers, of comparable size and relatively close in age to the manuscript discussed here, are now at the Cambridge University Library. See *Hiraṇyasaptaka*, *Khaḍgapūjāvidhi* (Add.1691.1), 4.5 x 31.5 cm, likely 12th century CE; *Jayamaṅgalā* (Add.2251.1), 4.5 x 30.5 cm, likely 13th century CE; and *Kriyākāṇḍakramāvalī* (Add.1406), 4.4–5.4 x 31.1–31.4 cm, ca. 14th or 15th century CE. Adding unwritten leaves and wooden covers to manuscripts is common, as they protect and stabilize the manuscript (CIOTTI 2023, 157).

23. Here, the term “folio” means a single palm leaf, consisting of two sides, “recto” and “verso”, which signify the un-numbered and numbered sides of the palm leaf, respectively. The manuscript is simultaneously multiple-text and composite. A multiple-text manuscript is a manuscript that contains multiple texts, but is a result of a single production process — differentiating it from a “composite manuscript” which is created from already existing, independent units (FRIEDRICH & SCHWARKE

The Titles of the Manuscript

More evidence of continued use can be found in the various titles of the manuscript. There are two types of titles: namely, those that call the manuscript a compendium, and those that do not. There are two titles on the top wooden cover (see Fig. 2, below). The first one, on the left side, was likely added by one of the readers in Nepal. The text is unclear, but the title is loosely translatable as “Compendium on the Essence of Kāśī [. . .]”.²⁴ The second, on the right side, is also unclear and very faint, but it was most likely written in Nepal as well. This second title can be rendered as “Māhātmya of Varanasi”.²⁵ The cataloguers at the Kaiser Library affixed a paper label to the cover, containing a title that would later be altered; other details about the manuscript are provided on a different paper label.²⁶ The earlier title on this paper label translates to “Compendium on the Essence of Varanasi”, the later one to “Māhātmya of Varanasi”.²⁷ On the first folio, yet another title was written, also in Nepal;²⁸ most likely, this title is also supposed to mean “Māhātmya of Varanasi”. The latest title, “Compendium of Māhātmyas of Varanasi”, was suggested by Peter Bisschop (2021, 7).²⁹

2016, 15–16). The bulk of the manuscript was created during a single production process. Up to and including folio 145, it is presumably a single codicological unit. Folio 146 has additional material that was likely not part of the original production process, and 147, the last folio, might have been added later. However, doubts can also be raised about folio 12 being a part of the same codicological unit, as it is the only folio that has two string holes. See more details in Appendixes 1 and 2. For a discussion of composite and multiple-text manuscripts and codicological units, see e.g. FORMIGATTI 2015, 9–50; FRIEDRICH & SCHWARKE 2016; and BAUSI, FRIEDRICH, & MANIACI 2019.

24. Nepālākṣarā; *Kāśīsārpraṭhisamgraha(ja)ro* (sic). Round brackets in Sanskrit words signify unclear syllables. Note that Kāśī, as mentioned above, is another name for Varanasi.
25. Very faint Nepālākṣarā (?); *Vārṇāsīmāhātmyaḥ* (sic; for *Vārṇāsīmāhātmyam*).
26. Devanāgarī script; explaining that the manuscript is a palm-leaf manuscript, has 144 folios, and is written in the “Newārī” script (see Fig. 2, below). The identification of the script is incorrect, and the manuscript has 145 numbered folios and two unnumbered ones. See Appendix 1 and footnote 48 below for details. The Devanāgarī script could be called the most prolific successor of the aforementioned (old) Nāgarī script, as it is the primary script used for various languages in present-day South Asia.
27. Devanāgarī; before correction, *Vārṇāsīsārpraṭhisamgraha*; after correction, *Vārṇāsīmāhātmya*.
28. Nepālākṣarā; *Vārṇāśāmāhātmaḥ*, preceded by the number 1 (sic; see Fig. 4, below).
29. *Vārṇāsīmāhātmyasamgraha*.

This suggested title is a hypothetical, reconstructed one, based on the various other titles and the nature of the manuscript as containing a compendium of Māhātmyas. In sum, the titles of the manuscript reveal two slightly different understandings of its contents. To some — such as Bisschop and the person who wrote the title on the left side of the top wooden cover — it was clear that the manuscript contained a compendium of texts. However, for others, such as the person who wrote the second title on the right side of the cover, the manuscript might have represented a more general, singular text: a “Māhātmya of Varanasi” instead of a compendium.



Figure 2. The top wooden cover.



Figure 3. The bottom wooden cover.



Figure 4. Folio 1 recto.

The Final Folios

Besides the alterations and titles of the manuscript, the last numbered folio and two additional folios placed after it at the end of the manuscript also provide useful information regarding when and how the manuscript was used. The verso of the last numbered folio has notes written in Nepālākṣarā. These notes — based on the script, the handwriting, and the

presence of two layers of text (one older and one newer) — were made by two different scribes, likely the two readers in Nepal. The two layers of text seem to match the two types of Nepālākṣarā alterations made to the manuscript. The notes contain words of praise, but most importantly, two numbers indicating years corresponding to 1530 and 1669 CE (see Fig. 5, below). Besides the years, the notes also mention two months and days (see Appendix 1.3 for details). These dates may well correspond to the times when the two Nepalese readers used and altered the manuscript amid a recitation or reading in a public or private ritual context.



Figure 5. Folio 145 verso, containing words of praise and two dates.

The two additional folios contain unclear astronomical calculations (in a variant of Maithilī script), likely connected with the times when the manuscript was used. These calculations are presented in the form of charts. A tentative reading of these charts is that there are three columns, of which the first indicates the date, the second the position of the moon (perhaps giving lunar calendar details for solar months [Diwakar ACHARYA, personal communication, 2023]), and the third additional information. It could be that what we see in the charts is a monthly program of ritual use; yet another option is that the charts indicate when earlier material was copied onto these specific palm leaves.

The recto of the last additional folio contains the start of another text (see Fig. 6, below), also in a similar Maithilī script, whereas its verso

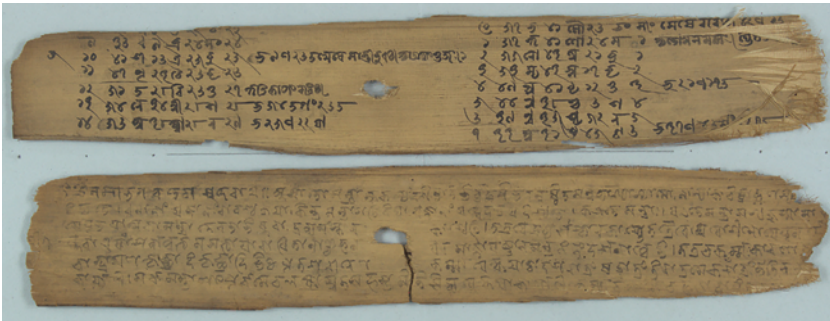


Figure 6. Folio *146 verso, containing astronomical calculations, and folio *147 recto, containing the start of another text.

side is blank. This last folio was perhaps added to protect the rest of the manuscript before the addition of the wooden covers, as it bears no relation to the charts or other contents of the manuscript. These additional folios offer another piece of evidence to suggest that the manuscript was produced in Mithila.

Transporting the Manuscript

Another indication of the importance of the manuscript is its transportation.³⁰ The act of transporting the manuscript from North India to Nepal implies a larger network involving the movement of individuals and information between these two areas. From the time of the manuscript's production between the 12th to 14th centuries CE and 1530 CE (the time of the earlier reader in Nepal), one cannot know how the manuscript was used or where it circulated. Somewhere within this timeframe, the manuscript was brought to Nepal from the South, most likely from Mithila, but perhaps from Varanasi itself.

Nepalese nobility going on pilgrimage to Varanasi — an activity entailing donations, ancestral rites, and even the establishment of temples — has been a popular phenomenon at least since the start of the second millennium CE (GAENZLE 2006, 304–05).³¹ Similarly, figures from Varanasi are also recorded as having visited Nepal. An inscription likely dating from 1143/1144 CE tells of a religious teacher who traveled from Varanasi to Nepal and initiated several princes while there (BAKKER & ISAACSON 2004, 72–74).³² The Kalacuri kings who controlled 11th-century Varanasi had advisors who were part of a wider religious network, serving

30. For other accounts of the importance of manuscript transportation, see e.g. FORMIGATTI 2014.

31. A noble called Luṃgu Bhāro built the Gajendramokṣa Nārāyaṇ temple in 1576 CE; king Siddhinarasiṃha Malla visited on a pilgrimage in 1652 CE, and king Prthvī Nārāyaṇ Śāh in the mid-18th century CE; and (then ex-)king Rāṇa Bahādur Śāh went into exile in Varanasi from 1800 to 1804 CE (GAENZLE 2006, 305). For more details and examples, see GAENZLE 2006.

32. Namely Rudraśiva, a teacher of the Śaiva Siddhānta tradition. For more on Śaiva Siddhānta, see e.g. DAVIS 1991. See DAVIS 2000 for an introduction to the Mattamayūras, the specific Śaiva Siddhānta sect in question. See also CHUDAL (2020, 34–35), who writes about several later Nepalese intellectuals who migrated to Varanasi in the 19th and 20th centuries CE to print and publish literature. Education in Sanskrit, English, medicine, and engineering was another reason people from Nepal went to Varanasi (37–38).

kings far beyond the Kalacuri kingdom (SMITH 2017, 269–71).³³ Although not attested in textual or epigraphical sources, it is possible that this religious network reached Mithila as well.

Mithila was intricately connected with Nepal through royalty and the movement of learned individuals, who most likely brought manuscripts with them (REGMI 1965, 294–95). The Malla kings of Nepal often had marriage partners from Mithila, and after Mithila was conquered in the early 14th century, king Harasiṃha escaped toward Nepal with his family, followed by others, among whom were many Maithili brahmins (SLUSSER 1982, 65–66). Although Harasiṃha himself seems to have died on the way, his family and many of the Maithili intelligentsia reached their destination (SLUSSER 67; BRINKHAUS 1987, 83). Especially after 1380 CE, and during the reign of king Jayasthitirājamalla (1382–1395 CE), there was significant immigration from Mithila to Nepal (PETECH 1984, 128; 137).³⁴ Amid these waves of migration, brahmins from Mithila became famous for their high level of knowledge and were highly sought after in Nepal.³⁵

Although it is now clear that Varanasi had connections with Nepal, due to the other evidence presented above — its physical properties, script, and final folios — it is more likely that the manuscript was brought to Nepal by someone from Mithila. It is plausible that the manuscript was taken to Nepal by a Maithili brahmin in the wake of Harasiṃha in the early 14th century, during the immigration wave after 1380 CE, or by someone else who arrived before 1530 CE (the date of the earlier reader in Nepal).³⁶

33. This religious network was also Śaiva Siddhānta.

34. In fact, Jayasthitirājamalla himself might have been from Mithila (PETECH 1984, 127–29; SLUSSER 1982, 58). BRINKHAUS (1991, 118) disagrees, instead proposing that this origin was attributed to him by later Malla kings who considered the unknown nature of Jayasthitirājamalla's past a blemish on their own dynastic history. See also FORMIGATTI 2016, 55 and REGMI 1965, esp. 273–77 and 350.

35. King Yakṣamalla brought Maithili brahmins to supervise the national Paśupati shrine in the 15th century, and in the 17th century, king Śivasimpha — through a gift exchange with the king in Mithila — got four brahmins sent to Nepal to replace his inept family priest (SLUSSER 1982, 66). See also FORMIGATTI 2016 for a discussion of the cultural history of Nepal between the 14th and 17th centuries CE.

36. Manuscripts were sometimes produced as gifts to be donated to gain merit, but due to the inferior quality of the manuscript in question, gifting was likely not the case here. A manuscript made to be gifted, especially to royalty, would presumably have been of better quality. See SATHAYE 2017, 62–65 for an (idealized) account of manuscript gifting, involving public recitation, as described in a Sanskrit text.

In sum, the manuscript is evidence of an information network that connected North India with Nepal and involved the transportation of palm-leaf manuscripts. This network was associated with royalty, brahmins, and religious teachers. Additionally, as the texts of the manuscript chart and praise religious sites within Varanasi, a network is created linking places in the city itself.

The Manuscript Post-Circulation

As the manuscript has not been on the move throughout its entire history, it is now time to turn to the life of the manuscript at its current location, where it has been kept ever since its physical movement ceased. The manuscript is currently housed at the Kaiser Library in Kathmandu, named after its founder, Keśar (Kaiser) Śamser Rāṇā (1892–1964). Keśar Rāṇā was a member of the Nepalese royalty, held various civil and military positions throughout his life, and was an avid collector of literary material since his youth (DIMITROV & TAMOT 2007, 26–28). This manuscript and others like it began to be collected in his library sometime after 1909. When the manuscript was acquired by Keśar Rāṇā, it was most likely still being read, or at least being glanced through by himself and those he deemed worthy to view his collection. After initially being opened for permitted scholars starting in 1951, when the Nepal Cultural Council was formed under Keśar Rāṇā's patronage, his collection was finally made publicly available in 1968, a few years after his death (29–30). Notably, while in the possession of Keśar Rāṇā and the Kaiser Library, the manuscript was taken out of circulation. It was no longer transported to other locations, and in this way, the geographical connections formed by the manuscript — as a physical object — came to an end at the Kaiser Library.

In 2007, the manuscript was still in a manuscript room that was not environmentally monitored, and where manuscripts were kept bound in cloth in ordinary metal cupboards (DIMITROV & TAMOT 2007, 35).³⁷ A

37. It should be noted that various traditional methods can help preserve manuscripts, although it is unclear if any such methods were employed for the manuscript discussed here. Red dye in South Asia often contains compounds that deter fiber-eating insects and block ultraviolet light. Fabric colored yellow with turmeric protects against fungi and repels insects; cotton absorbs moisture; and silk deters bookworms (HOUGHTLING 2023, 71–73). Manuscripts placed in manuscript boxes can be wrapped with colored cloth, and the boxes themselves can also be treated to prevent insect damage (71–72). The place of storage

project aimed at improving the facilities of the Kaiser Library was already in motion by that year. However, the 2015 Nepal earthquake severely damaged the library, with further renovations being planned in 2019 (SIJAPATI 2019). The level of success of the renovations remains unclear to me; in other words, the current condition of the manuscript is a mystery, at least for now.

The Copy of the Manuscript

Having discussed the palm-leaf manuscript itself and the networks its physical transportation created, I will now discuss its paper copy, which serves as evidence of the continued life of its textual content. The copy is written in Devanāgarī script.³⁸ It has a slightly different title, written in Nepālākṣarā: “Māhātmya of Varanasi as told in various Purāṇas”.³⁹ There is another, partially illegible and overwritten title, also in Nepālākṣarā, namely *Matsyapurāṇa*, signifying that the text had previously been identified with the Purāṇa of that name. The age and provenance of the copy are unclear, but it might have been produced in the Kathmandu valley or in the plains further south, perhaps by Maithili brahmins, in the 18th century CE (Diwakar ACHARYA, personal communication, 2023).⁴⁰

If the compendium had been deemed important in the early second millennium, one would have expected more surviving copies. However,

can also matter, as smoke produced in kitchens can help keep insects away (76). See also CIOTTI 2023, 177–81 for a discussion on wrapping manuscripts in textiles. A project testing the use of storage to protect against insects in a controlled environment, undertaken by the Asa Archives in Kathmandu with the aim of storing rolled palm-leaf manuscripts can serve as an example of a successful modern attempt at conservation (TAKAGI, CHUDO, & MAEDA 2005, under “Photography, Measuring, Record Keeping and Storage”).

38. The copy was privately owned by Praveen Sharma at the time of microfilming. It is incomplete, and in its total length of 144 folios, it records the text only up to the verso side of the 87th folio of the palm-leaf manuscript.
39. *Nānāpurāṇoktavārāṇasīmāhātmyam* (sic; see Fig. 7). Note that an NGMPP label placed before the start (and again photographed at the end) of the paper manuscript has corrected °*māhātmyam* to °*māhātmyam*. Further, the fact that the two titles are in Nepālākṣarā instead of Devanāgarī signifies that they were probably added after the original production of the copy.
40. The NGMPP label indicates a date of filming, but the label is faded from this part and quite unclear. The date may be 11 September 1979.

it is certainly important from a scholarly perspective, and the existence of the paper manuscript itself is noteworthy, as it signifies the fact that the compendium was considered at least important enough to be copied to a new medium. The relatively good physical condition of the copy can mean that for most of its existence, it has been in a place where it was not extensively used, such as a private collection. One could thus say that although the compendium was not the most popular, it had an audience of early connoisseurs (at least one person in India and another in Nepal) who wanted to ensure its survival.

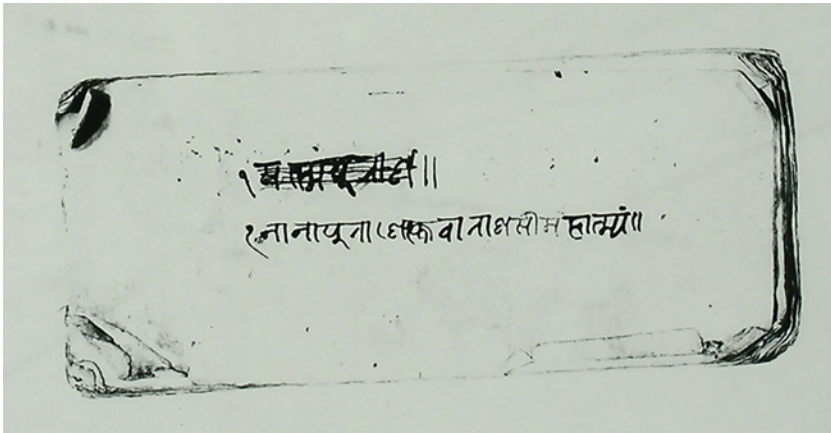


Figure 7. Folio 1 recto of the paper apograph (digitized microfilm).

Part III: Digital Means of Accessing the Manuscript and Their Impact on Research

The transportation of microfilms and color photographs from Nepal to Europe creates yet another network of information exchange — albeit one that revolves around academic purposes. This later network has been formed indirectly, through analog and digital means, rather than involving the transportation of the physical manuscript itself.

The means I have to access the palm-leaf manuscript consists of color photographs taken in April 2010.⁴¹ There are also two microfilms of the

41. I have been kindly provided these photographs by Peter Bisschop. As for the paper copy, I have been able to consult black and white digital images of the microfilm (NGMPP reel E 766/7).

manuscript, made for academic use by the Nepalese-German Manuscript Preservation Project (NGMPP).⁴²

There is an observable trend for scholars researching manuscripts to rely more on digital reproductions than on consulting the original copies.⁴³ The upside is that photographs and digital scans of the microfilms are easy to access on a computer and may preserve information that is now lost in the physical manuscripts.⁴⁴ The downside is that the quality and thickness of the palm leaves are difficult to estimate based on images, as is identifying differences between the ink of the earlier text and that of later additions, and distinguishing whether an unclear blot of ink is a stain or a meaningful addition. The difference between using color photographs and viewing a physical manuscript may be small, and perhaps insignificant when it comes to research based mainly on the textual material, for which digital images are usually sufficient. In the words of Dick van der Meij discussing the digitization of manuscript collections in Indonesia: “[. . .] codicologists and philologists still need to consult physical manuscripts if only to get the ‘feel’ of them, to smell them, to touch the paper and see how the ink and other writing agents have attached to it” (2017, 148). Viewing a manuscript in person can thus help us place and date it more accurately and provide more information about its contents and the individuals involved in its creation and use.

42. One microfilm is in Berlin, Germany; another, at the National Archives of Kathmandu (DIMITROV & TAMOT 2007, 31). The original negatives are housed in Kathmandu. The microfilms were made at the Kaiser Library by the NGMPP in one of two phases, namely 28 October 1975 to 31 August 1976 or 30 October 1983 to 31 January 1984. Alongside all the other microfilms created by the NGMPP, these two phases of microfilm creation produced 124 microfilm reels in total, containing 1168 manuscripts — that is, more than 100,000 folios, containing approximately 1350 separate texts. Of these manuscripts, 486 are old palm-leaf manuscripts (DIMITROV & TAMOT 2007, 31). Overall, the NGMPP has done an invaluable job cataloguing manuscripts in Nepal, reproducing “virtually all the manuscripts (around 190,000) held in Nepalese collections.” (VERGIANI 2017, 80).

43. There are exceptions, however; see e.g. FORMIGATTI 2015 and KLEBANOV 2021.

44. Regarding the microfilms in Kathmandu, some were already showing signs of deterioration in 2007, and it is unclear how many still survive at the present time (Diwakar ACHARYA, personal communication, 2023; DIMITROV & TAMOT 2007, 35). Additionally, if one looks at the long-term situation, microfilms and paper copies have shorter lifespans than palm-leaf manuscripts themselves. Due to the easily ignitable nature of the earlier type of microfilm, acetate-based microfilms began being used, and such microfilms unfortunately disintegrate after only a few decades (HANNEDER 2017, 223–24).

Conclusion

The manuscript in question and others like it were shaped by their environments, and in return, shaped the communities involved. This manuscript combines the mythical with the geographical, the textual with the physical: it forms a part of multi-layered networks connecting religious sites in Varanasi through narrative, linking North India and Nepal by being physically transported between these areas, and forging an information network between South Asia and Europe through microfilms and photographs. Its lifespan has been significantly extended by the climate of Nepal. The longevity of the manuscript allows contemporary scholars access to historical phases in the life of the text, which may not have been preserved had the manuscript remained in India. These phases, evinced through alterations in the manuscript, suggest the contributions of individual agents and networks over time.

A detailed understanding of manuscripts as material texts contributes to a clearer picture of when the manuscripts were created, how they were used, and what they can tell us about the communities surrounding them. As a result, our knowledge about the centuries-old connections between North India and Nepal can become more nuanced, providing us with a more detailed picture of networks involving sacred sites, the transportation of manuscripts, and the sharing of information. Considering various aspects of physical objects, texts, and individuals — even if some information inevitably remains speculative — is crucial to producing more interdisciplinary and widely applicable research.

Leiden Institute for Area Studies (LIAS), Leiden University

Appendix 1 — Manuscript Details⁴⁵

1.1. Previous editions of the texts of the manuscript

Parts of the manuscript have previously been edited and studied: chapters 1–13 by Peter Bisschop (2021), chapter 23 by Sanne Mersch, and chapters 19 and 30–32 by myself (LITTUNEN 2022).

1.2. Conventions and symbols

*	missing syllable / reconstructed title or numbering
()	encloses unclear syllables
--	encloses deleted syllables
++	encloses added syllables
ac	before correction (<i>ante correctionem</i>)
pc	after correction (<i>post correctionem</i>)

1.3. Description

Physical location: Kaiser Library, Kathmandu, Nepal. Accession number 66 / 0009. Microfilmed by the Nepalese-German Manuscript Preservation Project (NGMPP) on 12 September 1987. Reel no. C 6/3, inventory number 85289. Photographed in Kathmandu on April 19, 2010.

Date of production, place, scribe(s), and readers: Between the 12th and 14th centuries CE. Presumably either Mithila or Varanasi. Scribe(s) unknown. Corrected twice by unknown readers in Nepālākṣarā: in 650 Nepāla/1530 CE, on the 14th day of the lunar fortnight in the Vaiśākha month (corresponding to April–May), and in 789 Nepāla/1669 CE, on the 13th day of the lunar fortnight of the Mārgaśīrṣa month (corresponding to November–December).

Titles: *Kāśīsārapraṭhisamgraha(ja)ro* (Nepālākṣarā, added to the left side of the wooden cover, likely by a reader in 1530 CE or 1669 CE, after the original production of the manuscript); *Vārṇāsīmahātmyaḥ* (very faint, on the right side of the wooden cover; unclear script with no top line); *Vārṇāsīsārapraṭhisamgraha* (Devanāgarī, black ink, added by Kaiser Library cataloguers but later changed to *Vārṇāsīmāhātmya*, being corrected in blue ink); *Vārṇāsāmahātmaḥ* (Nepālākṣarā, folio 1 recto, likely added by a reader in Nepal).

45. The description provided here largely follows the approach of Camillo Formigatti (2022, 189–95).

Languages: Sanskrit verses in the main body of the text; Maithilī prose (?) in the last (unnumbered) folio, containing the start of another text, possibly dealing with *prāyaścitta* (expiation) related to the *candrāyaṇa* vow.

Material, extent, and dimension: oblong palm leaf; 147 folios, of which 145 numbered folios (numbering on folio 145 is partially illegible)⁴⁶ and 2 unnumbered folios at the end; folio height approximately 4.7 cm, width 32 cm.

Condition: incomplete. The text cuts off in the (presumably) last chapter. Some folios have holes and/or torn edges (Kaiser Library cataloguers note worm damage). Almost all the folios have *akṣaras* that are either faded or smudged, and thus hard to read. Folios 13v–14r are almost entirely faded and smudged. Some *akṣaras* in the manuscript have been retraced, which has created more smudging.

Binding and covers: original binding holes, but no string. Wooden covers. On the front cover, *kāśīsārapraṭhisamgraha(ja)ro* (left side) and *vārṇāsīmahātmyaḥ* (right side, very faint; script unclear, with no top line). Labels affixed to the front cover: *vārṇāsīsārapraṭhisamgraha* (in black ink), changed to *vārṇāsīmāhātmya* with the addition of *tārapatrako patra 144 nevārītakṣara naṃ 066* (in blue ink). On the back cover, no text.⁴⁷

Script and scribes: at least two, likely three hands alternate without a clearly distinguishable pattern in the original production process of the manuscript. It is often difficult to distinguish whether the change in writing is a result of a change in the scribe or the stylus used. First, second, and third (?) hands: Old Nāgarī script in black ink, some parts darker and others more faint. Fourth and fifth hand (first and second reader in Nepal): Nepālākṣarā in black ink, corrections and additions throughout the manuscript. Orange color often added to *daṇḍas*, chapter numbering, and symbols, sometimes to speaker changes and folio numbering, and once to an entire colophon (on 99r).⁴⁸

Foliation: Nepālākṣarā numerals, mid-left margin, verso.

46. One can make out three numbers, of which the penultimate one is partially legible, and the last one is legible. The last number is 5, and the penultimate one most likely a 4. Thus, it is relatively certain that the numbering of the folio is 145.

47. It should be noted that the term “binding” might not be the most accurate for palm-leaf manuscripts, as they are not “bound” in the same way as a book would be. See CIOTTI 2023 for more information about manuscript binding across various traditions.

48. A label made at the Kaiser Library during the photographing process in 2010, placed before the start of the manuscript, identifies the script as being old/Eastern (*prācīn*) “Newārī”, but this identification is incorrect. Only the alterations made in Nepal are in a script that could be called Newārī.

Layout: 4–6 lines per page (12 folios with 6 lines, 89 with 5 lines, and 44 with 4 lines), approximately 55–60 *akṣaras* per line, and 9–10 verses per folio. One string hole, approximately in the middle of the folios in a blank space; except for folio 12, which has two string holes and three columns of text (the left string hole is the same size and in the same position as the holes on the other folios, the second is smaller and only slightly to the right, leaving the middle column of text very narrow, accommodating only 5 or 6 *akṣaras*). Thus, folio 12 may be part of another codicological unit (see Fig. 12, below).⁴⁹ Folios *146–*147 are also part of another codicological unit. They contain new material, namely astronomical calculations and the start of a new text in Maithilī. Folio *147 was likely added to protect the manuscript before the addition of the wooden covers.

Marginalia: some marginal corrections, mainly single words or syllables.

Date of acquisition: unknown. Acquired by Keśar Śamser Rāṇā presumably in the late 19th/early 20th century CE, and placed in the Kaiser Library on or after 1909 CE.

1.4. *Incipit and explicit*

The excerpts are reproduced diplomatically, with no attempt made to reconstruct or correct the text, except by introducing word separation. Note that the incipit and explicit are from two different texts and have been reproduced here mainly to show the start of the compendium's texts as set in Mithila (in the incipit) and the abrupt ending of the compendium (in the explicit).

Incipit: [1v] *om namaḥ śivāya // mithilāsthāṃ mahātmānaṃ mājñavalkyaṃ mahāmuniṃ / devarātasutaṃ śāntaṃ ṛṣisaṃghaiḥ samāvṛtaṃ // brāhmaṇair vedatattvajñaiḥ śrūtimantraviśāradaḥ // yatibhi * * * mais tu purāṇārthaviśāradaḥ //*⁵⁰

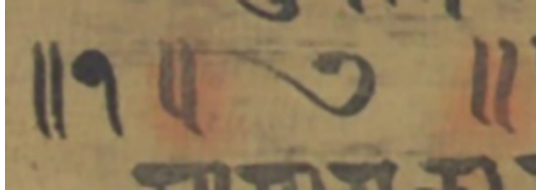
Explicit: [145r] *sāktāya caiva tapase aśvānyaniyamāya ca / namo yogarahasyāya yogadāpanamo stu mahyaṃ sarvā-sarvā-tmanā kāmaṃ prayacchabhagava -/- t prabho / yanmamṛtyubhayaṃ deva pramāryayitum arhasi / majjāmānaṃ mahādeva trāhimām-trāhimām- saraṇāgataṃ / sa evaṃ stūyamānā.*

49. One might assume that the second string hole is a result of piercing the palm leaf in the wrong place, as the hole has seemingly not been used for string. However, there are instances where two holes have been made in a palm-leaf manuscript, and the second has deliberately not been used (CIOTTI 2023, 163).

50. For an edited version of the incipit, see BISSCHOP 2021, 25: *mithilāsthāṃ mahātmānaṃ yājñavalkyaṃ mahāmuniṃ / devarātasutaṃ śāntaṃ ṛṣisaṃghaiḥ samāvṛtaṃ // 1 // brāhmaṇair vedatattvajñaiḥ śrūtimantraviśāradaḥ / yatibhir mokṣakāmais tu purāṇārthaviśāradaḥ // 2 //*

1.5. Chapter numbering

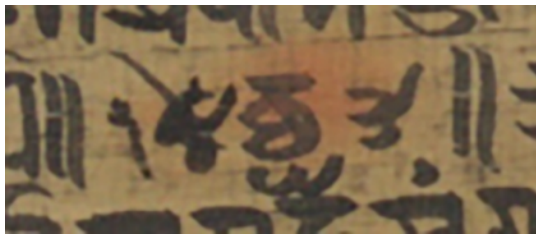
This list provides five examples of chapter numbering. All the chapter numbering was added after the original production of the manuscript.



Chapter 1 (folio 9 recto). Pc, darker ink, marginal addition (left). Additional *siddham* symbol after number.⁵¹



Chapter 3 (folio 13 recto). Pc, darker ink. *Puṣpikā* created from a simple circle symbol.

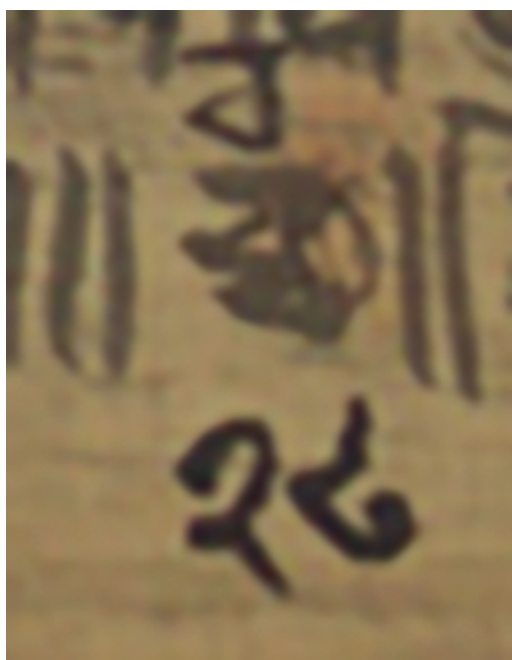


Chapter 14 (folio 74 recto). Pc. 4 has likely been corrected from a 3. *Puṣpikā* created from an earlier character (*cha*). A possible *siddham* symbol under the numbering, on the left side of the *puṣpikā*.

51. For a study on symbols in South Asian manuscripts, see BHATTARAI 2020, especially chapter 3.



Chapter 21 (folio 83 verso). Pc, marginal addition (top). Unclear due to a hole.



Chapter 28 (folio 99 recto). Pc, darker ink, marginal addition. No *daṇḍas*.

Appendix 2 — Scribal Comparison

2.1. Characters and diacritics

The first column on the left indicates the initial corresponding to the scribe (A or B), the second the consonant in question, and the top line the added diacritic. This chart does not consider the possibility of a third scribe, as it is not clear whether the change that could indicate a third scribe is that of the stylus or the person themselves. For the possible third scribe, see Figs. 10 and 11 below.

		-	ā	i	ī	u	ū	e	ai	o	au	ṛ	ṁ	ḥ
A	k													
B	k													
A	ṇ													
B	ṇ													
A	d													
B	d													
A	b h													
B	b h													

2.2. Layout

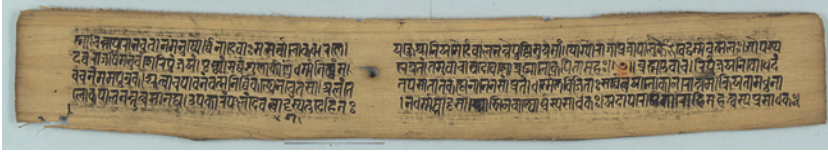


Figure 8. Folio 60 recto, written by the first scribe.



Figure 9. Folio 60 verso, written by the second scribe. Note that although the hand changes, the layout is the same as in 60 recto.



Figure 10. Folio 65 recto, showing a change from the second to a possible third scribe.



Figure 11. Folios 87 verso to 88 recto, displaying a change of layout and stylus, and a change to a potential third scribe. Note that the use of the thinner stylus starts from the end of 87 verso, at a *pāda* break, instead of at the start of 88 recto.



Figure 12. Folio 12 verso, showing a second string hole and a three-column layout.

Works Cited

Manuscripts

- Hiranyasaptaka, Khaḍgapūjāvidhi*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Add.1691.1. <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-01691-00001/>.
- Jayamaṅgalā*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Add.2251.1. <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-02251-00001/>.
- Kriyākāṇḍakramāvalī*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Add.1406. <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-01406/>.
- Vārāṇasīmāhātmya compendium (**Vārāṇasīmāhātmyasamgraha*). Kathmandu, Kaiser Library, MS accession number 66. NGMPP reel C 6/3. Apograph: Private collection, Praveen Sharma. NGMPP reel E 766/7.

Printed and Digital Sources

- ADRIAENSEN, R., H.T. BAKKER, and H. ISAACSON. 1998. *The Skandapurāṇa Vol I: Adhyāyas 1–25*. Groningen: Egbert Forsten.
- AMBACH, Malini, Jonas BUCHHOLZ, and Ute HÜSKEN, eds. 2022. *Temples, Texts, and Networks: South Indian Perspectives*. Heidelberg: Heidelberg Asian Studies Publishing.
- BAKKER, Hans. 1986. *Ayodhyā*. Groningen: Forsten.
- . 1996. “Construction and Reconstruction of Sacred Space in Vārāṇasī”. *Numen*, 43.1: 32–55.
- BAKKER, Hans T., and Harunaga ISAACSON. 2004. *The Skandapurāṇa Vol IIA: Adhyāyas 26–31.14: The Vārāṇasī Cycle*. Groningen: Egbert Forsten.
- BALBIR, Nalini. 2017. “The Cambridge Jain Manuscripts: Provenances, Highlights, Colophons”. In *Indic Manuscript Cultures through the Ages: Material, Textual, and Historical Investigations*, edited by Vincenzo VERGIANI, Daniele CUNEO, and Camillo Alessio FORMIGATTI, 47–76. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- BAUSI, Alessandro, Michael FRIEDRICH, and Marilena MANIACI. 2019. *The Emergence of Multiple-Text Manuscripts*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- BHATTARAI, Bidur. 2020. *Dividing Texts: Conventions of Visual Text-Organisation in Nepalese and North Indian Manuscripts*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- BISSCHOP, Peter C. 2007. “Notes on a Vārāṇasīmāhātmya Compendium”. *Newsletter of the NGMCP*, 5: 21–23.
- . 2013. “The Abode of the Pañcamudrās: A Yoginī Temple in Early Medieval Vārāṇasī”. In “Yoginī” in *South Asia: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, edited by Istvan KEUL, 47–60. London: Routledge.
- . 2016. “A 12th-century Vārāṇasīmāhātmya and its Account of a Hypethral Yoginī-Temple”. In *Tantric Studies: Fruits of a Franco-German Project on Early Tantra*, edited by Dominic GOODALL and Harunaga ISAACSON, 113–33. Pondicherry: Institut Français De Pondichéry; École Française D’Extrême-Orient.

- . 2021. *The Vārāṇasīmāhātmya of the Bhairavaprādurbhāva: A 12th-Century Glorification of Vārāṇasī*. Puducherry: Institut Français De Pondichéry; École Française D'Extrême-Orient.
- BRINKHAUS, Horst. 1987. *The Pradyumna-Prabhāvatī Legend in Nepal: A Study of the Hindu Myth of the Draining of the Nepal Valley*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH.
- . 1991. "The Descent of the Nepalese Malla Dynasty as Reflected by Local Chroniclers". *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 111: 118–22.
- BROCKMANN, Christian. 2014. "Scribal Annotation as Evidence of Learning in Manuscripts from the First Byzantine Humanism: The 'Philosophical Collection'". In *Manuscript Cultures: Mapping the Field*, 1: 11–34. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- CECIL, Elizabeth A. 2020. *Mapping the Pāśupata Landscape. Narrative, Place, and the Śaiva Imaginary in Early Medieval North India*. Leiden: Brill.
- CHEN, Ruixuan. 2018. *The Nandimitrāvadāna: A Living Text from the Buddhist Tradition*. PhD dissertation, Leiden University.
- CHUDAL, Alaka Atreya. 2020. "Nepali Intellectuals in Exile: The History of Nepali Printing in 19th- and 20th-Century Benares". *Journal of South Asian Intellectual History*, 3: 34–59.
- CIOTTI, Giovanni. 2023. "Strategies for Binding Pothi Manuscripts". In *Tied and Bound: A Comparative View on Manuscript Binding*, edited by Alessandro BAUSI and Michael FRIEDRICH, 155–89. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- DAVIS, Richard H. 1991. *Ritual in an Oscillating Universe: Worshipping Śiva in Medieval India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- . 2000. "Praises of the Drunken Peacocks". In *Tantra in Practice*, edited by David Gordon WHITE, 131–45. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- DE SIMINI, Florinda. 2017. "Long Live the King (and His Manuscripts)!" In *Manuscript of the Month 2015–2017*. Accessed November 17, 2023. <https://www.csmc.uni-hamburg.de/publications/mom-1/mom-2015-2017.pdf>.
- DIMITROV, Dragomir, and Kashinath TAMOT. 2007. "Kaiser Shamsheer, his Library and his Manuscript Collection". *Newsletter of the NGMCP*, 3: 26–36.
- ECK, Diana L. 1999 [1982]. *Banaras: City of Light*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- FELDDHAUS, Anne. 1995. *Water and Womanhood: Religious Meanings of Rivers in Maharashtra*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . *Connected Places: Region, Pilgrimage, and Geographical Imagination in India*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- FITZGERALD, James L. 2010. "Mahābhārata". In *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, edited by K. A. JACOBSON, H. BASU, A. MALINAR, and V. NARAYANAN. Leiden: Brill.
- . 2014. "History and Primordium in Ancient Indian Historical Writing: *Itihāsa* and *Purāṇa* in the *Mahābhārata* and Beyond". In *Thinking, Recording, and Writing History in the Ancient World*, edited by Kurt A. RAAFLAUB, 41–60. Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

- FLOOD, Finbarr Barry, and Beate FRICKE. 2023. *Tales Things Tell: Material Histories of Early Globalisms*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- FORMIGATTI, Camillo Alessio. 2014. "Travelling Books". In *Buddha's Word. The Life of Books in Tibet and Beyond*, edited by Mark ELLIOTT, Hildegard DIEMBERGER, and Michela CLEMENTE, 19–24. Cambridge: Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge.
- . 2015. *Sanskrit Annotated Manuscripts from Northern India and Nepal*. PhD dissertation, University of Hamburg.
- . 2017. "Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Cambridge University Library: Three Centuries of History and Preservation". In *Indic Manuscript Cultures through the Ages: Material, Textual, and Historical Investigations*, edited by Vincenzo VERGIANI, Daniele CUNEO, and Camillo Alessio FORMIGATTI, 3–45. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- FRESCHI, Elisa, and Philipp A. MAAS, 2017. "Introduction: Conceptual Reflections on Adaptive Reuse". In *Adaptive Reuse, Aspects of Creativity in South Asian Cultural History*, edited by Elisa FRESCHI and Philipp A. MAAS, 1–25. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- FRIEDRICH, Michael, and Cosima SCHWARKE. 2016. *One-Volume Libraries: Composite and Multiple-Text Manuscripts*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- GAENZSLE, Martin. 2006. "Nepali Places: Appropriations of Space in Banaras". In *Visualizing Space in Banaras: Images, Maps, and the Practice of Representation*, edited by Martin GAENZSLE and Jörg GENGNAGEL, 303–23. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- HANNEDER, Jürgen. 2017. "Pre-modern Sanskrit Authors, Editors, and Readers". In *Indic Manuscript Cultures through the Ages: Material, Textual, and Historical Investigations*, edited by Vincenzo VERGIANI, Daniele CUNEO, and Camillo Alessio FORMIGATTI, 223–38. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- HARIMOTO, Kengo. 2011. "In Search of the Oldest Nepalese Manuscript". *Rivista Degli Studi Orientali, Nuova Serie*, 84: 85–106.
- . 2017. "The Dating of the Cambridge Bodhisattvabhūmi Manuscript Add. 1702". In *Indic Manuscript Cultures through the Ages: Material, Textual, and Historical Investigations*, edited by Vincenzo VERGIANI, Daniele CUNEO, and Camillo Alessio FORMIGATTI, 355–76. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- HAZRA, R.C. 1940. *Studies in the Purāṇic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*. Dacca: The University of Dacca.
- HOUGHTELING, Sylvia. 2023. "Clothing the Book: Texts, Textiles, and an Ethics of Care". In *Old Stacks, New Leaves: The Arts of the Book in South Asia*, edited by Sonal KHULLAR, 67–91. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- KLEBANOV, Andrey. 2021. "On the Textual History of the *Suśrutasaṃhitā* (1): A Study of Three Nepalese Manuscripts". *Ejournal of Indian Medicine*, 12: 1–64.
- KOHS, Michael, and Sabine KIENITZ. 2022. "Agency: How Manuscripts Affect and Create Social Realities". *Manuscript Cultures: Agency: How Manuscripts Affect and Create Social Realities*, 19, 3–6.

- LITTUNEN, Olli-Pekka Antero. 2022. *Māhātmyas as Evolving Entities: A Text-Critical Study of a Selection of Vārāṇasīmāhātmyas Attributed to the Brahmapurāṇa*. MA dissertation, Leiden University.
- MATSUDA, Kazunobu. 1996. *Two Sanskrit Manuscripts of the Daśabhūmikasūtra Preserved at The National Archives, Kathmandu*. Tokyo: The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies for UNESCO, The Toyo Bunko.
- MERSCH, Sanne. 2013. *Travelling Through Time and Space with the Kapālamocanamāhātmya in the Vāyupurāṇa*. MA dissertation, Leiden University.
- PARKER, David C. 1997. *The Living Text of the Gospels*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- PETECH, Luciano. 1984. *Mediaeval History of Nepal (c. 750–1482)*. Roma: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente.
- RATIÉ, Isabelle. 2018. “For an Indian Philology of Margins: The Case of Kashmirian Sanskrit Manuscripts”. In *L’espace du sens: Approches de la philologie indienne. The Space of Meaning: Approaches to Indian Philology, with the collaboration of Michaël Meyer*, edited by Silvia D’INTINO and Sheldon POLLOCK, 305–54. Paris: Collège de France and Difusion De Boccard.
- REGMI, D.R. 1965. *Medieval Nepal: Part 1 (Early Medieval Period 750–1530 A.D.)*. Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay.
- SALOMON, Richard. 1998. *Indian Epigraphy: A Guide to the Study of Inscriptions in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and the Other Indo-Aryan Languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- SANDER, Lore. 1991. “The Earliest Manuscripts from Central Asia and the Sarvāstivāda Mission”. In *Corolla Iranica: Papers in Honour of Professor Dr. David Neil Mackenzie on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday on April 8th, 1991*, edited by Ronald E. EMMERICK and Dieter WEBER, 133–50. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- SATHAYE, Adheesh. 2017. “The Public Life of Sanskrit Manuscripts”. In *Traces of Words: Art and Calligraphy from Asia*, edited by Fuyubi NAKAMURA, 53–66. Vancouver: Figure 1 Publishing.
- SATHYANARAYANAN, R, and Marzenna CZERNIAK-DROZDŹOWICZ. 2023. *The Holy Island in the Kāverī: A Hagiotopeography. Critical Edition and Translation of the Śrīraṅgamāhātmya*. Pondicherry: Institut Français De Pondichéry; École Française D’Extrême-Orient.
- SIJAPATI, Alisha. 2019. “Three of Nepal’s largest public libraries were badly damaged in the 2015 earthquake. Only one has risen from the debris.”. Accessed September 13, 2023. <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2019/04/02/three-of-nepals-largest-public-libraries-were-badly-damaged-in-the-2015-earthquake-only-one-has-risen-from-the-debris>.
- SLUSSER, Mary Shepherd. 1982. *Nepal Mandala: A Cultural Study of the Kathmandu Valley*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- SMITH, Travis. 2007. *The Sacred Center and its Peripheries: Śaivism and the Vārāṇasī Śthala-Purāṇas*. PhD dissertation, Columbia University.

- TAKAGI, N., Yoriko CHUDO, and Reiko MAEDA. 2005. "Conservation and Digitisation of Rolled Palm Leaf Manuscripts in Nepal". Accessed September 25, 2023. <https://asianart.com/articles/tamsuks/index.html>.
- VAN DER MEIJ, Dick. 2017. *Indonesian Manuscripts from the Islands of Java, Madura, Bali and Lombok*. Leiden: Brill.
- VAN DER PUTTEN, Jan. 2022. "Customised Manuscripts to Shape a Community of Readers? Overbeck's Collection of Rental Manuscripts from Palembang (Indonesia)". *Manuscript Cultures: Agency: How Manuscripts Affect and Create Social Realities*, 19: 183–94.
- VAN SCHAİK, Sam, and Imre GALAMBOS. 2012. *Manuscripts and Travellers: The Sino-Tibetan Documents of a Tenth-century Buddhist Pilgrim*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- VERGIANI, Vincenzo. 2017. "A Tentative History of the Sanskrit Grammatical Traditions in Nepal through the Manuscript Collections". In *Indic Manuscript Cultures through the Ages: Material, Textual, and Historical Investigations*, edited by Vincenzo VERGIANI, Daniele CUNEO, and Camillo Alessio FORMIGATTI, 77–130. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- WILAND, J., Rick BROWN, Lizzie FULLER, Lea HAVELOCK, Jackie JOHNSON, Dorothy KENN, Paulina KRALK, Marya MUZART, Jessica POLLARD, and Jenny SNOWDON. 2022. "A Literature Review of Palm Leaf Manuscript Conservation — Part 1: A Historic Overview, Leaf Preparation, Materials and Medial, Palm Leaf Manuscripts at the British Library and the Common Types of Damage". *Journal of the Institute of Conservation*, 45.3: 236–59.
- WUJASTYK, D., Jason BIRCH, Andrey KLEBANOV, Madhu K. PARAMESWARAN, Madhusudan RIMAL, Deepto CHAKRABORTY, Harshal BHATT, Vandana LELE, and Paras MEHTA. 2023. *On the Plastic Surgery of the Ears and Nose: The Nepalese Version of the Suśrutasaṃhitā*. Heidelberg: Heidelberg Asian Studies Publishing.