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Digital Dissemination of Sanskrit Manuscripts The Cambridge University Collections

The collections of South Asian manuscripts in the Cambridge University Library represent an almost untapped source of knowledge and insight into ancient South Asian culture. Among others, they comprise Pali, Sinhala, Burmese, Tamil, Sanskrit and Prakrit manuscripts, but only a small part of the Sanskrit manuscripts has been catalogued by Cecil Bendall in 1883. The Sanskrit Manuscripts Project, Cambridge is currently cataloguing all Sanskrit, Prakrit and Tamil manuscripts in the collections. The short-term aim is the creation of digital catalogue. Therefore, the first part of the paper will focus on both the theoretical principles and the technical aspects involved in the creation of an online catalogue, such as maximum standardization and utmost user friendliness for the output online resource. Particular attention will be devoted to the encoding of information according to the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) standards. The final aim of the project is the creation of database that will enable scholars to retrieve and—above all—cross-reference information about all aspects of the Cambridge collections that will shed light on manuscripts production, transmission, use and circulation in early pre-modern South Asia. For instance, the comparison of physical and textual features —on the one hand, format, layout, script etc. and, on the other, paratexts such as invocations, marginal titles, colophons etc.—might lead to both the dating of previously undated manuscripts and the individuation of scriptoria and other centers of traditional learning and manuscripts production. In order to better highlight the importance of the collections for future research, we will also spotlight some selected paper and palm-leaf manuscripts, in particular a number of Nepalese manuscripts from the 16th to the 18th century of both religious and belletristic theme. These cultural artifacts are the witnesses—both material and textual—of a much understudied period of cultural and political florescence in the Kathmandu valley, a historical phase we are tentatively dubbing the Malla Renaissance.