

***Pañcatantra* Deconstructed. On the Nepalese Recension (CUL MS Or. 727), Court Poets and Raiders of the Lost Ur-Text**

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South Asian narrative literature played a very central role in the process of spreading themes, stories and even literary genres all around Asia and Europe. One of the most famous and influential South Asian collection of stories is the *Pañcatantra*, “Five Books [on Worldly Wisdom].” According to Franklin Edgerton, it is the most translated and adapted work after the Bible. However, a closer look at the textual tradition (or rather *traditions*) of this text as well as at scholarly studies reveals an altogether different situation. First of all, there still is no clear answer as to how the *Pañcatantra* actually looked like or as to its actual purpose—was it really a didactic text meant to teach young princes in the art of politics (*nīti*)? Keeping within the (still very broad) boundaries of the South Asian recensions of this text, I would like to draw the attention to four different works, trying to highlight briefly their mutual differences and similarities. This approach should enable to understand better their role in the history of *Pañcatantra* studies. The first work analyzed, the *Tantrākhyāyika*, belongs to the Kashmirian recension of the *Pañcatantra* and according to Johannes Hertel is the closest to the “Ur-*Pañcantantra*.” I will then briefly mention two other texts belonging to the Kashmirian recension, Kṣemendra’s *Bṛhatkathāmañjarī* and Somadeva’s *Kathāsaritsāgara*, poetical adaptations of the lost *Bṛhatkathā* by the mythical author Guṇaḍhya, both written in the 11th century. The fourth and last work is the little known Nepalese recension of the *Pañcatantra*, called *Tantrākhyāna*. This work is known mostly in its Newari version, in which Sanskrit stanzas at the beginning of each story have been retained. However, a manuscript of the complete Sanskrit text (ms Or. 727) is kept at the Cambridge University Library. Despite its geographical provenance, in Hertel’s opinion the *Tantrākhyāna* is more akin to the Southern recension of the *Pañcatantra* than to the Kashmirian recension.