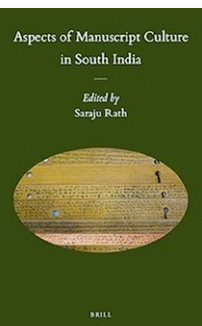
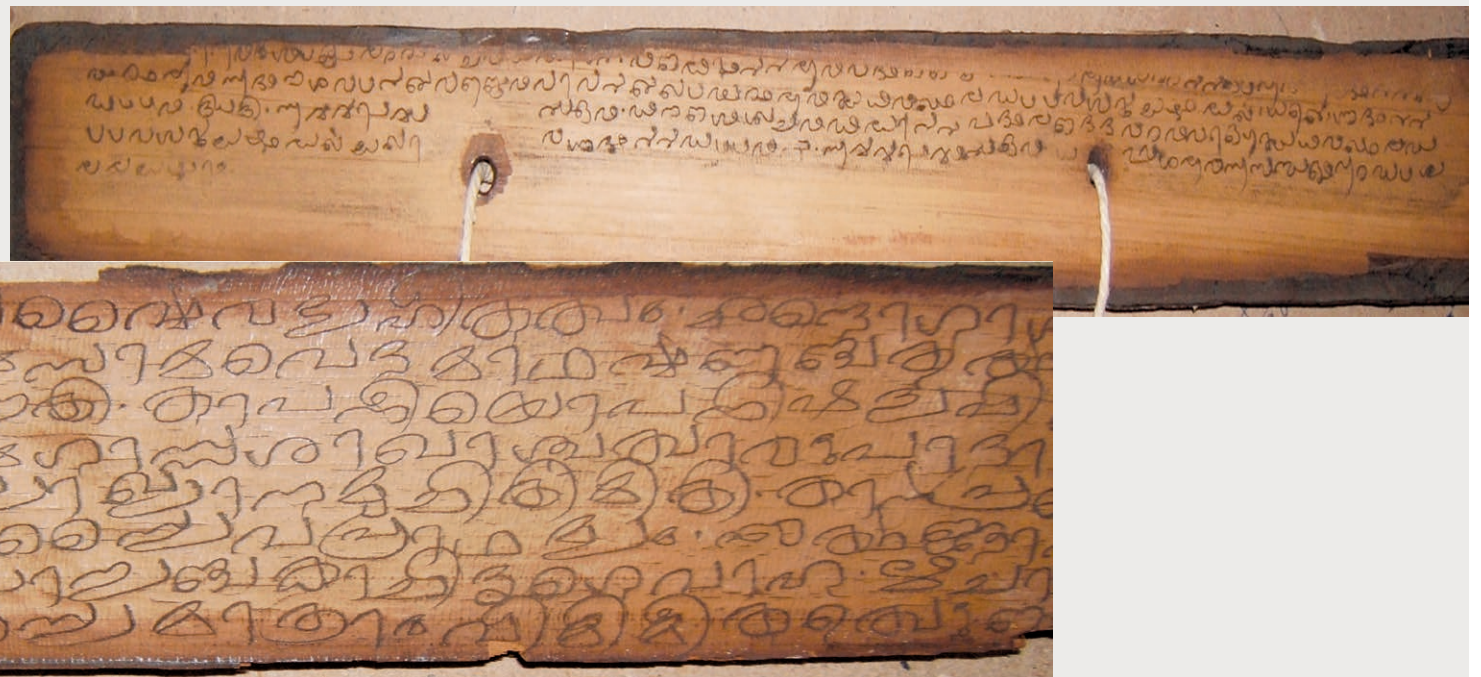


# Aspects of manuscript culture in South India

Our knowledge of South Indian texts, including those aged more than a millennium, is based on manuscripts that are generally speaking seldom older than 3 or 4 centuries. These texts did however set forth a tradition that significantly influenced Asian scholarship and culture. In order to advance our expertise with reference to these manuscripts as text sources it is of great importance to research their historical origins, production, distribution and acquisition, both in the past and present.

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MANUSCRIPT CULTURE, oral transmission and the traditions of South India include multifaceted phenomena that are yet to be fully fathomed. This volume marks an important advancement in the research into South Indian manuscripts. Jan E.M. Houben and Saraju Rath introduce the various aspects of (South) Indian manuscript culture by seeking answers to the following questions: "When and how did it start and develop?" and "When and how did it end?" The outcome of this quest results in two, until now, somewhat unconsidered temporal contours of Indian manuscript culture. The authors argue that the significant parameter here is the equilibrium between (1) manuscript culture and (2) orality and memory culture. They conclude their in-depth overview with a Timeline Manuscript Culture in 'India' representing the temporal contours and the main parameters of competing means of textual transmission.

In Chapter 2 Saraju Rath discusses not only the origins of M.A.J. van Manen's Sanskrit palm manuscripts collection but also how and why they were acquired from c.1928 onwards. Their arrival in Leiden was the result of a collaboration between Johan van Manen (the then General Secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal) and Prof. J. Ph. Vogel, the founder of the Indological Institute Kern (Leiden, 1925). The author sketches the life and work of van Manen and gives us an interesting survey of the European context with regard to the Johan van Manen Collection. The 588 South Indian palm leaf manuscripts dating from the 16th or 17th century include texts on Vedic ritual, philosophical texts, epics, and even information on medical topics. A complete list of titles is available through [www.iias.nl/profile/saraju-rath](http://www.iias.nl/profile/saraju-rath). These texts will be assessed in a forthcoming publication.

## Establishment of well known manuscript collections

In Chapter 3, G. Colas examines manuscripts that the French Jesuits had sent from South India to Europe at the start of the 18th century. The author describes the acquisition of some of the earliest collections of Sanskrit manuscripts outside India. They later proved to be of great importance for the development of Indology in Europe.

P. Perumal, in Chapter 8, deals with the production (processing, writing on, and the preservation) of palm leaves with regard to the Sanskrit manuscripts in Tamil Nadu with a focus on the Thanjavur Sarasvati Mahal Library. It is one of the oldest medieval libraries in the world; and is playing its modern role by assisting the Government of India in its 'National Mission for Manuscripts', which aims to identify, document, preserve and digitize rare manuscripts.

In Chapter 13, Kenneth G. Zysk gives a brief survey of manuscript collections in India and abroad; and illustrates how cataloguing Sanskrit manuscripts can enhance the regional and general intellectual history of India.

## On relatively small manuscripts collections

In Chapter 5, Masato Fujii discusses the research concerning the Jaiminiya Sāmaveda traditions and the role played by the manuscripts on the Sāmaveda (the third of the four Vedas) in the past and at present. The rare Jaiminiya version of the Sāmaveda is found only in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Extensive field work resulted in a historical and geographical survey of the Jaiminiya traditions whereby significant information on the brahminical erudition and manuscript culture at the level of South Indian villages was revealed.

Sreeramula R. Sarma reports, in Chapter 11, how he saved the palm leaf manuscripts from his grandfather's book chest to then deal with the way they were preserved and how they may have been acquired. We are also informed in which manner the family tradition linked to these manuscripts evolved through time, their age and orthography. The nine manuscripts and six palm leaf rolls discussed in this essay had been produced to serve either Brahmins or members of their family.

Dominik Wujastyk (Chapter 12) describes the manuscript library established by Ramasubba Sastrigal in c.1900. Even today his descendants strive to uphold the intellectual exchanges initiated by King Sahaji of Thanjavur (South India) in c.1693. The Brahmin villagers are still able to recall in which dwellings the seventeenth-century scholars once lived and how they came together in order to discuss intellectual issues. The author's field photographs taken in 2005 depict locations and individuals, thus throwing a captivating light on this unique pocket of time-honoured tradition.

## Determination of the date

Three contributions deal with issues concerning the dates of manuscripts. Firstly the various characteristics of the South Indian drama manuscripts are discussed by Anna Aurelio Esposito (Chapter 4). She examines the text flow, punctuation, verses, stage directions, scribal errors, variant endings and the abbreviation of sentences. By comparing these phenomena, one can establish a chronology, perhaps even an approximate date, for undated manuscripts.

Secondly, in Chapter 9, Kim Plofker states that despite the useful contents of colophons of Sanskrit texts dealing with exact sciences (mathematical astronomy/astrology) the academic study of these texts often discards any example of mathematical scholarship. Having argued that a preliminary indication of the influence of astronomy, mathematics and astrology on the production and description of Sanskrit manuscripts must be established, the author concludes that the awareness of the science of timekeeping as well as of chronological data acquired by means of horoscopes and calendric techniques lead us up an important path to enhance our insight into the production and history of Sanskrit manuscripts in India.

Top: Manuscript showing *grantha-vaṭṭeluttu* variety. Courtesy: Vaidika Samshodhana Mandal, Pune.

Below: Manuscript showing *grantha-malayalam* variety. Courtesy: Vaidika Samshodhana Mandal, Pune. Pictures by Saraju Rath.

Thirdly, Saraju Rath (Chapter 10) deals with a specialized script in which Sanskrit and Vedic texts are written. Grantha shows regional variation and relatively clear stages of development from c.500 A.D. up to the present day. She discusses its varieties, the geographical differentiation and developments over time in order to clarify distinctive characteristics and stages based on text-characters taken directly from manuscripts found in various locations and periods. The parameters presented here can be used when determining the dates of grantha scripts in manuscripts and their places of origin.

The case study presented by Cezary Galewicz in Chapter 6 concerns a highly regarded text, the *Yāmālāśṭakatantra*. Its fragmented history is transmitted in the circle of Rigvedic pundits where it is orally reproduced. This has consequences with regard to the problems of identifying a specific text in manuscripts carrying the above name. The author argues that, in order to solve this problem, it is necessary to cross disciplinary boundaries and come up with new methodologies.

Heike Moser introduces the 'Bhāsa Research Group' in Chapter 7. This project carries out research into the numerous aspects of Mahābhārata plays. It may be added here that the UNESCO awarded an example of this tradition, Kutiyattam, with the title "Masterpiece of the Oral and Tangible Heritage of Humanity". The accumulated documentation with a reference to this Sanskrit theatre tradition includes c.300 hours of footage and thousands of photographs. For the most recent status of this research group visit: [www.indologie.uni-wuerzburg.de/bhasa/rahmen](http://www.indologie.uni-wuerzburg.de/bhasa/rahmen).

## The publication

The Editor of *Aspects of Manuscript Culture in South India* has indeed achieved the following objectives: (a) researching the production, distribution and collection of palm leaf manuscripts in the past and present, (b) enhancing the quality and quantity of data on the rich history of manuscripts to be found in various present-day collections both within and outside India and (c) exploring the background of the Johan van Manen Collection.

Brill's Indological Library Volume 40 presents us with a state-of-the-art publication that includes an innovation: a selection of the b/w illustrations (including folios from manuscripts, field photographs, and maps) first inserted in their respective chapters return in the final section of the book, but now in full colour. The research under review here is the outcome of an international workshop organized at the International Institute for Asian Studies (Leiden) in 2007. It will be of interest to scholars and to students active in the fields of indology, manuscriptology, paleography, the cultural-cum-intellectual history of South Asia, oral traditions and memory culture. The fact that it is dedicated to the Dutch orientalist Johan van Manen (1887-1943) is therefore all the more appropriate.

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