Florinda De Simini
**Of Gods and Books**

# Studies in Manuscript Cultures

Edited by
Michael Friedrich
Harunaga Isaacson
Jörg B. Quenzer

## Volume 8

Florinda De Simini

# Of Gods and Books

Ritual and Knowledge Transmission
in the Manuscript Cultures of Premodern India

DE GRUYTER

ISBN 978-3-11-047772-6
e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-047881-5
e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-047776-4
ISSN 2365-9696




**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**
A CIP catalog record for this book has been applied for at the Library of Congress.

**Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at http://dnb.dnb.de.



Printing and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck
♾ Printed on acid-free paper
Printed in Germany

www.degruyter.com

# Contents

# Preface

In the following pages, I shall present the results of research projects undertaken partly during my doctoral studies, and partly in the two and half years between my doctoral defence at the University of Turin in May 2013 and the final writing-up of this book in winter 2015. The *leitmotiv* of the four chapters comprising the volume that I now present to a broader readership – scholars of Indology, manuscript studies, and ritual studies – is the investigation of ritual practices involving, and in most cases primarily centred on, the use of manuscripts. Manuscripts and rituals, and thus manuscript and ritual cultures, are two areas in which Indic cultural regions have traditionally been very prolific, offering abundant material for different types of analysis. The perspective offered in this book focuses on the intersection and interplay of these two complex entities, for which I have adopted a textual and philological approach. The topics under discussion are thus examined through the prescriptions and descriptions found in the Sanskrit textual sources, with sparse references to epigraphical evidence both in Sanskrit and in other classical Indian languages. My main sources are normative texts addressed to an audience of lay practitioners which were composed in a time span of about ten centuries, ranging approximately from the sixth and seventh century to the seventeenth. They reflect the views of various communities contributing to the religious landscape of premodern India, though the most specific focus is on the literature of the Śaivas and the Dharmaśāstra. Buddhist texts are taken into consideration only as a point of comparison in the analysis of analogous phenomena in Śaiva contexts, while Jaina literature does not make an appearance within the sizeable body of sources on which this study is based.[1]

**1** The need to narrow down the range of sources on which this research is based, as well as my specialization in different doctrinal and textual traditions and the availability of unpublished Śaiva texts containing valuable information on the topics under investigation, are the main reasons for my excluding the Jaina materials from the scope of this book. However, the study of the Jaina manuscript cultures is a promising field of study in which scholars have produced and continue to publish important pieces of scholarship. Above all, I refer the reader to Cort 1995, Balbir 2010 and 2014, and Hegewaldt 2015, all contributions based on a direct study of manuscripts of Jain texts within the context of their production and uses. A relevant point of comparison for the topics in this book is the passage from the *Svopajñavṛtti* by Hemacandra (twelfth century) to which Cort (1995, p. 78 fn. 7) calls attention. Here, commenting on *Yogaśāstra* 3.119, Hemacandra names the manuscripts of Jain scriptures as one of the three main objects that lay Śvetāmbaras must donate, the other two being the images of the Jina and the temples where these images are installed.

This book therefore aims to offer some insight into how the textual and religious traditions of India have treated manuscripts, regarded simultaneously as a means of transmitting knowledge and as objects of worship; moreover, it strives to deepen our understanding of the practices connected to the production and use of manuscripts amid the world view and material culture of the people who in fact first conceived and handled those manuscripts through which knowledge has been transmitted and preserved through the centuries. It is perhaps relevant to point out to the reader that this study on manuscripts and rituals had started out as one on textual criticism and traditional hermeneutics. Then, when I first started perusing the Dharmaśāstra literature in search of an 'orthodox' viewpoint on scriptures and authoritative texts, and the ways one should materially deal with their transmission, I stumbled upon the descriptions of the donative rituals and worship ceremonies that are examined in detail in the chapters of this volume. These texts in part provided an answer to some of the questions I had in mind — for example, what is the role of the manuscript in the transmission of a text, and how does its material form interact with its scriptural status. On the other hand, this set of sources also inspired new topics, such as the use of manuscripts in the same manner as icons, with the corollary identification of the manuscripts with the gods they are believed to embody; the equivalence between the purity of the manuscript-icon and the correctness of the text it transmits, whose pristine conditions the devotees are exhorted to preserve; and the magical agency of the manuscripts, which overlaps with that of the text when they are used in performative contexts.[2] These are just a few of the points that are touched upon in the textual sources used for this book. For the authors of these texts, it was especially relevant to establish a connection between the various ritual uses of manuscripts and religious institutions. On the one hand, monasteries are evoked not only as the repositories of manuscripts, but also as the primary location in which they were used — both in rituals and as teaching and learning tools; on the other hand, the selection of the texts whose manuscripts should be used in ritual is meant to set a boundary between orthodox and heterodox, authoritative and

**2** In applying this opposition between the 'iconic' and 'performative' aspects of the use of manuscripts, I refer to the tripartite 'dimension of scriptures' illustrated in Watts 2015. The third of such dimensions, which according to this categorization are intrinsic to scriptures and necessary to their nature and function as scriptures, would be the semantic aspect, which applies to the cases in which a scripture is actually used as a text. Throughout the book I will sporadically refer to this terminology in order to highlight the different functions with which the manuscript, not necessarily of a scripture, should be used according to the sources that I examine.

non-authoritative texts. In this case, the ritual practice overlaps with a hermeneutic stance, and the uses of a manuscript contribute to enhancing the status not only of the physical manuscript, but also of the text it contains. In the eyes of the lay devotees who sponsored these practices for their own spiritual and material benefit, the cultic contexts in which a manuscript was used was sufficient evidence for it being the receptacle of incontrovertible authority.

As I shall point out in the chapters of this book, several of the manuscripts that have been handed down to us and that are now used for textual studies and critical editions have been produced, copied, and preserved for reasons that go beyond the transmission of the text, and are rather concerned with the expectation of material and immaterial benefits. However, the study of the manuscripts alone is not sufficient to fully understand the ideology surrounding these practices, their genesis and development. Integrating the study of the manuscripts as objects with that of the manuscripts as carriers of texts, and thus turning to the information that the latter can provide, has proved to be the sole method conducive to having a more comprehensive idea of the culture in which these peculiar artefacts emerged and with which they actively interacted.

This book is the result of several long years of research and writing in three different European towns, namely Naples, Hamburg, and Leiden, where I could work under the guidance of the extremely knowledgeable and generous scholars whom I now have the privilege of calling my teachers. To them I want to express my most sincere gratitude. I especially want to thank Francesco Sferra (University of Naples), a teacher and a friend, who has been on my side since the very beginning of my Sanskrit studies, and has supported, challenged, and instructed me throughout the years leading up to the completion of this book. This research was prompted and nurtured by our countless conversations and reading sessions which have greatly enriched the past ten years of my life. Harunaga Isaacson (University of Hamburg) and Peter Bisschop (University of Leiden) have always been very generous with their time and knowledge, reading with me, perusing my work and sharing their opinions and suggestions. I will always be grateful for all the help they offered me, both while working on my doctoral thesis and in finalizing this book.

I would also like to thank Alexis Sanderson (University of Oxford) and Raffaele Torella (University of Rome) for their constant support, which has found expression in the many exchanges of ideas and research materials that have deeply enriched my understanding of the topics that I try to investigate in the following pages.

This book would have never existed in this shape, and would probably never have been published at this date, without the tireless efforts and constant exhortations of Michael Friedrich (University of Hamburg), whose support and insights have been very valuable to me in these last years. My deepest gratitude goes to him and to the other editors of the series *Studies in Manuscript Cultures*, Harunaga Isaacson and Jörg B. Quenzer (University of Hamburg), for having made it possible for me to conceive and publish this book as a volume in their monograph series.

I also feel deeply indebted to the people who have assisted me by doing meticulous editorial work on this volume, trying very hard to get rid of all the contradictions and inconsistencies that affected my writing. Kristen de Joseph and Peter Pritchard are responsible for the revision of the English; Kristen de Joseph has moreover significantly helped me with the editing of the whole volume, and has personally compiled the indexes. Cosima Schwarke has been a very precious ally throughout the whole editorial process, mediating with the publisher and helping (saving) me during the final revisions of the proofs.

I would like to use this opportunity to thank all the institutions that have offered financial support with my work on this book. These are the University of Turin, which granted me a three-year full doctoral scholarship; the University of Naples L'Orientale, my current home institution, which has funded me with a two-year postdoctoral grant, recently extended; the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures of the University of Hamburg (SFB 950), which offered me two short research scholarships during my doctorate, and has recently awarded me a six-month Petra-Kappert-Fellowship to allow me to do research at their institution; the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, which funded a six-month research period in Hamburg; and the Jan Gonda Fund Foundation, thanks to which I could work in Leiden in the months preceding and following my doctoral defense. The most conspicuous source of these grants which have allowed me to move forward in my education and academic career are therefore the Ministero Italiano dell'Università e della Ricerca and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, to which I feel enormously indebted.

My thanks also go to all the libraries that have granted me access to their manuscript collections, in particular the University Library of Cambridge and the team of the project 'The intellectual and religious traditions of South Asia as seen through the Sanskrit manuscript collections of the University Library, Cambridge' headed by Vincenzo Vergiani (University of Cambridge); the 'Nepalese-German Manuscript Cataloguing Project' and the Nepal Research Centre which, especially with the precious assistance of Namraj Gurung, helped me access the invaluable manuscript materials of the National Archives and the Kesar Library

of Kathmandu; the Bodleian Library (Oxford); the Library of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine (London); the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland (London); the Adyar Library and Research Centre (Chennai); the Saraswathi Mahal Library (Thanjavur); the Institut Français de Pondichéry (Pondicherry); the Asiatic Society (Calcutta); and the manuscript library of the Banaras Hindu University (Varanasi).

I furthermore want to express my gratitude to all the scholars who have offered me help with single issues connected to the research in this book, and who have been ready to share their knowledge and materials with me, above all Diwakar Acharya, Gérard Colas, Martin Delhey, Jonathan Duquette, Vincent Eltschinger, Camillo Formigatti, Marco Franceschini, Dominic Goodall, Kengo Harimoto, Nirajan Kafle Borayin Larios, Tim Lubin, Carmela Mastrangelo, Nina Mirnig, Elena Mucciarelli, Patrick Olivelle, Sarah Pierce-Taylor, Judit Törzsök, and Eva Wilden.

Thanks to my students at the University of Naples, whose reasonable and unreasonable doubts, and dispassionate interest for India's past and present history, have taught me how to look at things from a perspective that I would have never considered until a few years ago.

On a more personal note, I would like to thank my parents, Alba and Domenico, for all the love, encouragement, and understanding with which they have supported me throughout the completion of this task. Finally, I want to express my deepest gratitude to all the friends and loved ones who during these years have sustained me in various ways, by sharing bits of their knowledge with me and/or by making my life one that is worth living, thanks to their love and invaluable friendship. *Vos estis sal terrae*. Their names are, in a dry alphabetical sequence: Maria Arpaia, Jung Lan Bang, Antonella Brita, Stefania Cavaliere, Giovanni Ciotti, Vincenzo Cozzolino, Daniele Cuneo, Victor D'Avella, Kristen de Joseph, Jonathan Duquette, Raffaele Esposito, Nicoletta Fossa, Kengo Harimoto, Nirajan Kafle, Mrinal Kaul, Andrey Klebanov, Werner Knobl, Vito Lorusso, Fabio Managò, Stefano Managò, Valentino Mandrich, Antonio Manieri, Nina Mirnig, Paolo Nicodemo, Marianne Oort, Tania Quero, Serena Saccone, and Luisa Villani.

Special thanks go to the late Helmut Krasser.

Napoli, 15 ottobre 2016

# 1 Manuscripts, Ritual, and the State in Indian Sources

Existing scholarship on the topic of manuscripts as objects of worship and ritual focus in precolonial India has tended to concentrate on Buddhism, and to present the phenomenon, if not exclusively, then at least as primarily Buddhistic.[1] This approach seems to have particular merit when we consider what comprises the earliest literary and archaeological attestations of this practice, which are limited almost exclusively to the vast range of the early Mahāyāna. It is indubitable that the 'cult of the book', meaning the devotion paid to the manuscripts of textual scriptures, was a hot topic in early Mahāyāna worship. Both the relevance of this practice and its connection with the still much debated historical and religious phenomenon that is Mahāyāna has been acknowledged by scholars since the dawn of Buddhist studies.[2] At the same time, it is largely accepted that the devotion towards manuscripts prescribed by texts of the early Mahāyāna, and the sacralizing power attributed to these manuscripts, has had a profound influence on the manuscript cultures of India. This is due to the fact that it fuelled the production of manuscripts for reasons other than the transmission of texts—reasons such as the quest for divine protection, the accretion of spiritual merit, or the making of pious offerings. The current state of the evidence, which will be briefly surveyed in the following pages, allows us to safely maintain that early Mahāyāna sources account for the emergence of the cult of the book as a key element in lay devotional practice and popular belief, which would come to have a bearing on visual culture in several artistic fields. However, in the early Middle Ages—if we adopt the Gupta period (fourth to fifth century CE) as the watershed fictitiously dividing the ancient from the medieval—the discourse is enriched by devotional scriptures of Brahmanical authorship, which claim to divulge teachings that were originally taught by the gods themselves. By firmly integrating it into Brahmanical institutions, these works appropriate the cult of the book and develop it in such a particular way that the further popularity and development of these ritual practices can hardly be assessed without considering the contribution of this hugely diversified body of literature, namely the medieval Purāṇas.

**1** Schopen 2010 has attempted to draw parallels between the Mahāyāna Sūtras and Purāṇas, acknowledging that the topics connected with the ritual uses of books in Purāṇic literature still need systematization (Schopen 2010, p. 47).

**2** See Drewes 2007, pp. 101–102, where he lists several of the scholars who have identified the veneration of manuscripts as a Mahāyāna practice.

Śaiva sources played a key role in this development, both by strengthening and promoting a specific ideology that backed the religious and ritual aspects of medieval Indian manuscript culture, as well as by preserving information on the writing culture of India for the time to come.

## 1.1 Indian Manuscripts in Art and Ritual: The Case of Buddhism

Scholars of Buddhist studies have often stressed the emphasis that the *Prajñāpāramitā* ('Perfection of Wisdom') literature places on the worship of scriptures in their written form; self-referential passages in these works encourage the copying of their text in new manuscripts and venerating it with flowers, incense, umbrellas, banners, and other ritual tools.[3] It is difficult to evaluate whether such passages are as old as the *Prajñāpāramitā* itself, especially because our knowledge of it is often based on manuscripts that are from a much later date than the emergence of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, possibly in the last century BCE.[4] However, references to the copying of the text and the dona-

**3** Several passages are collected in Schopen 1975, one of the most quoted studies on the topic and for which also see below; I moreover refer the reader to Schopen 2010 and Drewes 2007 and 2011, where further bibliography is also provided. One of the many possible examples of such passages on the writing and worship of the *Prajñāpāramitā* manuscripts is found in chapter 32 of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, where the *Prajñāpāramitā* is the subject of various activities: 'this *Prajñāpāramitā* must be listened to, learned, transmitted, read', but also, '[...] has to be written down; by the authority of the Tathāgata, having nicely copied [this *Prajñāpāramitā*] into a big manuscript with letters that are very well-defined, [the *Prajñāpāramitā*] has to be honoured, has to be homaged, has to be respected, has to be worshipped, has to be adored, has to be revered with flowers, incences, perfumes, garlands, unguents, powders, robes, musical instruments, clothes, umbrellas, banners, bells, flags, and rows of lamps all around and multiform worship ceremonies'; (Wogihara 1932–35, pp. 989–90) *iyaṃ prajñāpāramitā śrotavyodgrahītavyā dhārayitavyā vācayitavyā* [...] *likhitavyā tathāgatādhiṣṭānena mahāpustake pravyaktapravyaktair akṣaraiḥ sulikhitāṃ kṛtvā satkartavyā gurukartavyā mānayitavyā pūjayitavyā 'rcayitavyā 'pacāyitavyā puṣpair dhūpair gandhair mālyair vilepanaiś cūrṇaiś cīvarair vādyair vastraiś chattrair dhvajair ghaṇṭābhiḥ patākābhiḥ samantāc ca dīpamālābhir bahuvidhābhiś ca pūjābhiḥ.*

**4** For an outline of the *Prajñāpāramitā* scriptures, their manuscripts, commentaries, and translations, including some thoughts on how to date the emergence of this early Mahāyāna literature, I refer the reader to Zacchetti 2015. Here the scholar remarks on the difficulty of establishing a firm chronological setting for the emergence and early development of the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras, calling attention to the few fixed points in this chronology. These are the early Chinese translations—the earliest of which can be dated to November 24, 179 CE, and was probably based

tion of its manuscripts are already contained in the second-century fragmentary version of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* in Gāndhārī;[5] sections listing the transcribing of the text at the head of a series of other activities are found in a sixth- or seventh-century manuscript of the *Vajracchedikā*, and in the Gilgit manuscript (again from the sixth or seventh century) of the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*.[6] As observed by Schopen, the notion of the manuscript as a sacred object became so relevant for the Mahāyāna communities that some Sūtras, like the *Aparimitāyuḥsūtra* and the *Amoghapāśahṛdayasūtra*, were almost entirely devoted to describing the merits deriving from the acts of copying and worshipping their texts. Major Mahāyāna Sūtras also adopted such a 'self-promoting strategy' by inserting sections in which they listed the merits gained through the transcription, recitation, veneration, and circulation of their own texts, as attested, for example, by several passages of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*. In one of these, the Buddha predicts the achievement of a 'perfect awakening' for anyone who, besides memorising or reciting a religious text,[7] 'will write it,

on an original text in Gāndhārī (Zacchetti 2015, p. 182)—which seem to confirm a historical primacy for what Zacchetti calls the '*Aṣṭasāhasrikā* subfamily'; the finding of ancient manuscripts has contributed other fixed chronological points. The earliest manuscript evidence for the existence of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature is the fragmentary birchbark manuscript of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* in Gāndhārī that has been carbon dated to between 47 and 147 CE (Zacchetti 2015, p. 181; on the text of this manuscript, belonging to the 'Split collection', see Falk and Karashima 2012 and 2013). Despite the manuscript transmitting an early version of the text, it has been argued that this text already shows traces of being the re-elaboration of an earlier version. Other early manuscript fragments are those of an ancient Sanskrit manuscript of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, probably found near Bamiyan and dated, on paleaographical grounds, to the third century (Zacchetti 2015, p. 182).

**5** See Falk and Karashima 2013, pp. 106–107 and ff. I thank Martin Delhey for drawing my attention to this point. The text edited by Falk and Karashima and the relevant bibliographical materials are available online: <https://www.gandhari.org/a_manuscript.php?catid=CKM0371> (last accessed: 10/7/2016).

**6** Schopen 2010, pp. 43–44.

**7** The following is the translation given by Schopen (2010, pp. 44–45), based, according to his statements, on the Sanskrit text of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* of the Gilgit manuscript as in Gnoli 1987, p. 533, plates XV–XVI, fols. 15b[L7]–16a[L2]. Schopen, however, does not reproduce the relevant Sanskrit text, of which I offer here a transcription from the manuscript reproduced in the above-mentioned plates in brackets are the portions of text that are unreadable in the manuscript and that I have supplied from the edition; in roman type the letters that are only partly readable: (fol.135v = plate XVb) *ya i*[L8]*to dharmmaparyāyād aṃtaśa ekagāthā***O***m api dhārayiṣyanti vācayiṣyanti prakāśayiṣyanti saṅgrā*<ha>*yiṣyanti likhi*[L9]*ṣyanti likhitaṃ cānusmariṣyanti kālena ca kālaṃ vyavalokayiṣyanti . tasmiṃś ca pustake tathāgatagauravam utpādayiṣyanti* [L10] *śāstṛe gauraveṇasatkariṣyan*ti<guru>*kariṣyanti mānayiṣyanti pūjayiṣyaṃti taṃ ca*

or will call it to mind when written, will continually gaze at it, will manifest in regard to that manuscript the reverence due to the Tathāgata [...] and will worship that manuscript with flowers, incense, perfumes, garlands, unguents, aromatic powders, cloths, umbrellas, flags, banners, music, and exclamations of 'adoration to you' and cupped hands'. By becoming objects of veneration, texts and manuscripts of Buddhist Sūtras were attributed powers that could also extend to the protection of the state, starting a pattern that would remain relevant with the transmission of these texts in Central and East Asia. This is particularly evident in the case of the *Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*, whose chapter 4 gives a prophecy concerning the four great kings who will safeguard the country where the Sūtra is upheld, a passage that was already available in Dharmakṣema's Chinese translation of 417 CE.[8]

Early Buddhist literature also features references to the donation of manuscripts and writing implements as a meritorious act. Examples collected by Skilling (2014) range from the non-Mahāyāna *Karmavibhaṅga* to long Mahāyāna Sūtras such as the *Akṣayamatinirdeśa* and other scriptures of Mahāyana literature. In the sources that Skilling takes into consideration, the giving of manuscripts is always regarded as one of the hallmarks of wisdom. The *Karmavibhaṅga*, for instance, lists the behaviours that are conducive to 'great wisdom' (*mahāprajñā*) as follows:[9]

> Here a certain person is by nature inquisitive. He resorts to wise ascetics and Brahmans, and avoids ignorant ones. He explains the True Dharma, and criticizes false *dharma*s. He promotes the security and confidence of the Dharma-preachers, and applauds those who say what is beneficial. He avoids those who say what is unbeneficial. He praises right view, and he blames wrong view. He donates ink, manuscripts, and pens. He does not drink alcohol [...].

Analogously, the opposite activities are said to lead to false knowledge (*duṣprajñā*). Skilling notes the association between the gift of writing materials and the

---

*pustakaṃ puṣpadhūpagandhamālya*$_{[111]}$<vi>le*panacūrṇacīva*<racchatradhvajapatākāv>*ai*<dyādibhir namaskārā>*ṃ*jalikarmabhiś *ca pūjayiṣ*<yant>*i*.

**8** See Ludvik 2007, pp. 152–53, noting that the protective functions of this text are still given much importance in Japan.

**9** This text reproduces, with minor changes, the translation of Skilling 2014, pp. 504–505. For the Sanskrit text, see Kudo 2004, § 14 p. 68: *ihekatyaḥ paripṛcchakajātīyobhavati | paṇḍitān* śramaṇān* bhahmaṇān** (20v.4) *sevate | du{ḥ}ṣprajñān* brāhmaṇānparivajayati | saddharma dīpayati | asa «dharmma» vigarhati | dharmabhāṇakānā vaisāradyaṃ varddhaya{ṃ}ti*<|> (20v. 5) *hitabhāṣitānāṃ sādhukāraṃ dadāti | asaṃhibhāṣiṇāḥ pariharati | saṃmyak*dṛṣṭi varṇṇayati | mithyādṛṣṭi vigarhati | masīpusta*(21r.1)*ka[l]ekh*[i]*ṇīpradānāni dadāti*<|>*na ca madyaṃ pibati* ||.

figure of the *dharmabhāṇaka*s, literally 'preachers of the Dharma', who are in fact designated as the recipients of these gifts in the further sources that he considers. The *Akṣayamatinirdeśa* and the related *Bodhisattvapiṭaka*, for instance, regard these Dharma-preachers as the donees of four gifts that are said to contribute to the accumulation of knowledge (**jñānasambhāra*).[10] These are the gifts of birchbark, ink, and manuscripts; the gift of 'thrones of Dharma' (**dharmāsana*); the gifts of wealth, honour, and praise; and the gift of directing praise toward the Dharma-preachers[11]—each of which is given 'in order to make a comprehensive collection of the Dharma'. In brief, one of the options foresees that a lay devotee should donate to the *dharmabhāṇaka*s all that is necessary for writing down the scriptures and for maintenance of the preachers themselves. These considerations run parallel to the passages in the Śaiva texts exhorting the donation of manuscripts and writing tools to the Śaiva teachers and *yogin*s (see § 2.1). The fact that these Buddhist sources differentiate between birchbark—used as writing surface[12]—and manuscripts might suggest that one should donate both a completed manuscript as well as the material for producing a new copy in order to enable the *dharmabhāṇaka*s to accomplish a 'collection of Dharma' (**dharmasaṃgraha* in the reconstructed Sanskrit). Such instructions are mentioned, with only a few variations, in several other Mahāyāna scriptures,[13] as well as in the *Ratnāvalī* (v. 3.38), attributed to Nāgārjuna (second or third century). Some scholars however believe that this may be a work of uncertain authorship, but in any case written before the sixth century.[14] It

**10** See Edgerton 1953, p. 580, s.v. *saṃbhāra*, translating the latter as 'equipment' and, in the case of the expressions *bodhisaṃbhāro* or *saṃbhārobodhisattvānām*, 'equipment for (those destined for) enlightenment', consisting of *puṇya* and *jñāna*.

**11** See Skilling 2014, p. 506, for the translation, p. 516 for the Tibetan text, which reproduces Braarvig 1993, 123.6.

**12** Skilling 2014, pp. 511–15, observes that, in these sources, 'When a writing surface is mentioned, it is birchbark' (p. 511). The extent of the birchbark zone, where manuscripts of this material have been found, mostly includes Northwest India, Afghanistan, and Chinese Central Asia. In order to explain the constant mention of the birchbark as a writing material, Skilling relies on the reasoning of Salomon, according to whom birchbark was presumably cheap in the past and therefore widely used; he also recalls the association between the use of birchbark and the writing down of *mantra*s or protective texts and *dhāraṇī*, to be carried on the body or installed in *stūpa*s (see below).

**13** Examples from the *Bodhisattvapiṭaka* (*Ratnakūṭa* no. 12), *Vinayaviniścaya-upāliparipṛcchā* (*Ratnakūṭa* no. 24), *Subāhu-paripṛcchā* (*Ratnakūṭa* no. 26), the *Catuṣkanirhārasūtra* and the *Anavataptanāgarājaparipṛcchā* are cited in Skilling 2014, pp. 506–508 (translations) and pp. 517–18 (texts).

**14** See Vetter 1992, also referred to in Sanderson 2009, p. 103.

therefore still reflects a relatively early stage of the tradition. Colophons of Buddhist manuscripts, moreover, confirm from an early date that those manuscripts had actually been produced as objects of meritorious donations, namely donations meant to garner religious merit for the donors, who at times were associated with other people who could benefit from this donation. While more examples of this will be adduced further on in this study, it is worth mentioning here two early manuscripts of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, a Mahāyāna Sūtra that, as observed above, makes several remarks on the importance of its own written transmission and veneration. One is the colophon of 'manuscript C' from the Gilgit collection, which reports the text of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, (the same manuscript from which we have cited the text in fn. 7). The so-called 'Gilgit collection', which was actually found at Naupur (Pakistan), close to Gilgit, is the only extant collection of Indian manuscripts from early times.[15] The surviving colophons show that this manuscript collection, on which more will be said in § 2.3, was formed mainly between the sixth and seventh century CE, and that some of its manuscripts were understood as Dharmic gifts (*dharmadeya*), pious donations made in exchange for religious merits; in certain instances, the patronage of the local dynasty, the Patola-Śāhis, is evident.[16] The colophon of manuscript C of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, which follows the end of the text, mentions at least 44 people as the donors of this manuscript, most of whom are laypeople, but also a few monks and senior monks, the latter designated as *mahādharmabhāṇaka*s.[17] As observed by von Hinüber,[18] 'this, then, is the first time in the history of Indian Buddhism that a group of lay people venerating the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* speaks to us directly'. Another colophon, probably attached to 'manuscript A' of the Gilgit *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, confirms the same use for this manuscript.[19] As attested by the proper names,

**15** For an exhaustive, updated introduction to the Gilgit manuscripts, see von Hinüber 2014.

**16** The surviving colophons of the Gilgit manuscripts have been studied in von Hinüber 1980. In this regard, see also von Hinüber 2004.

**17** The names mentioned in this colophon, which have been studied in von Hinüber 1980, 2004, and 2012, seem to refer to a fairly international group of people, including both locals and devotees with an Iranian background. The donation of this manuscript was conceived as a large enterprise, as evidenced both by the large number of donors and by the presence of senior monks. Fourteen of the people mentioned as donors were dead at the time of donation, and consequently the merits they earned were obtained by transference.

**18** Von Hinüber 2012, p. 56.

**19** Von Hinüber 2012, pp. 58–59. The final colophon of this manuscript, unlike the one of manuscript C, does not immediately follow the end of the work, but is found on a stray folio without pagination, so its connection to the manuscript, though likely, is only tentative.

in both cases some of the lay donors had an Iranian background; scholars figured that a few of the Buddhist texts popular in Gilgit, like the same *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* or the *Saṃghātasūtra*, were also popular in Central Asia, specifically in the area of Khotan. Paratexts from a Khotanese manuscript of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* in fact attest that, also in this area, manuscripts of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* were objects of lay worship and pious donation from a relatively early date, which in this case can be traced back to the eighth to ninth century.[20]

Buddhist texts thus attest the practice of donating manuscripts and writing materials from early times on, directly associating these acts with the circulation of the Dharma and, in the case of some Mahāyāna texts, with the conduct of a Bodhisattva. However, the instructions provided in this regard are very scanty. Moreover, these sources do not seem to provide exhaustive descriptions as to how the ritual donations should be performed. What emerges clearly from the above-cited passages, and is confirmed by some of the main Mahāyāna Sūtras such as the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* and the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, is the importance of the figure of the *dharmabhāṇaka*, whose role in the production and

**20** In von Hinüber 2014a, the scholar examines the colophons of a manuscript consisting of 396 total folios, which was discovered at the end of the nineteenth century in the proximity of Khotan, then split into different fragments and distributed to different institutions. The bulk of this manuscript had been bought by the Russian consul in Kashgar, possibly in 1903, and is therefore known as the 'Kashgar Manuscript'. The paratexts, written in late Khotanese, were firstly examined by Emmerich, who noted the Khotanese provenance of this manuscript. The manuscript is undated; von Hinüber opts for dating it to the eighth to the early ninth century, as opposed to Emmerich who, on the basis of the language used in the paratexts, proposed to date it from the ninth to the tenth century—thus making this manuscript almost a contemporary of the earliest Nepalese manuscripts of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, which date back to the eleventh century (von Hinüber 2014a, p. 137). The principal donor of this manuscript is identified as Jalapuñānā, accompanied by her husband Jalapuña. Several people are associated with the main sponsors in this donation, among which the deceased parents of Suviprabhā, as well as the two sons and three daughters of the couple. More family members are mentioned in the final colophon, up to a total of some 50 people. Information on the donors and the people associated with them in donating the manuscript is distributed between the fragmentary final colophon and the 18 colophons added at the end of 18 chapters of the work (which counts a total of 28 chapters, so not all of them were followed by a paratext). The manuscript also seems to have been prepared to feature paintings, which however were never realized (von Hinüber 2014a, p. 147). Von Hinüber (2014a, pp. 135–36) lists 13 manuscripts or fragments of manuscripts of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* that may have been copied in the area of Khotan, which highlights the popularity of the text in that region; nevertheless, this Sūtra has most likely never been translated into Khotanese (von Hinüber 2014a, pp. 147–48). Besides the Kashgar manuscript, two more *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* manuscripts from Khotan are examined in von Hinüber 2015, who again on the basis of information in the paratexts identifies both as donations of lay devotees.

dissemination of Mahāyāna literature has been stressed by several scholars.[21] The word *bhāṇaka*, literally 'speaker', is used in early Buddhist literature to denote those professionals who were charged with the recitation and oral transmission of the canon.[22] In the context of Mahāyāna, according to Drewes, who shares here Shizutami's view, *dharmabhāṇaka*s might have been the actual composers of the early Mahāyāna literature, and this central role would explain the high reverence that the texts pay to these figures.[23] Buddhist sources often depict *dharmabhāṇaka*s as teachers but, although primarily identified with the activity of teaching orally, textual sources also connect them with the writing down of texts, which is presented as an equal alternative.[24] *Dharmabhāṇaka*s are indeed mentioned in the colophons of Buddhist manuscripts, sometimes even in the function of copyists.[25] Drewes sees the emergence of the Mahāyāna as a 'textual movement' promoted by circles of preaching authors and teachers, whose peripatetic lifestyle helped disseminate the texts; according to this interpretation, the centrality of the text in the emergence of the Mahāyāna, as testified by the self-awareness of being part of a 'new textual revelation', is the main drive behind the renewed focus that Mahāyāna literature puts on textual practice, including the cultic use of manuscripts.[26]

The thorny question of the emergence and nature of Mahāyāna Buddhism does not fall within the scope of this work, or its author's specialization. It is

**21** Among the most recent studies, see Ludvik 2007 in her survey on the *Suvarṇabhāsottama* (pp. 146–57), Nance 2008, Drewes 2011, and Gummer 2012.

**22** On *bhāṇaka*s in the Pāli canon, see Norman 1997, pp. 35–48; considerations on the shift to the written transmission of the canonical texts, which however did not replace the tradition of reciting and learning them by heart, are in Norman 1997, pp. 65–79.

**23** Drewes 2011, pp. 331–32. On the other hand, von Hinüber has argued that *bhāṇaka*s may also have redacted the Pali *nikāya*s (von Hinüber 1996, p. 25). In Buddhist sources, the *dharmabhāṇaka*s are said to be regarded as Buddhas, and therefore the devotees are exhorted to provide them with everything they desire. On the oral transmission of early Mahāyāna texts, see also Drewes 2015.

**24** See Drewes 2011, p. 339, quoting a passage from the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* stating that one should follow the *dharmabhāṇaka* 'until he has this *Prajñāpāramitā* in either mnemic or book form' (Wogihara 1932–35, p. 582: *yāvad asyeyaṃ pajñāpāramitā kāyagatā vā bhaviṣyati pustakagatā vā*).

**25** See Drewes 2011, p. 361, referring among others to one case from Gilgit. Kim (2013, pp. 259–60) reports that *dharmabhāṇaka*s are also attested among the copyists of the Buddhist manuscripts that she examines, and specifically notes that the manuscripts copied by *dharmabhāṇaka*s stand out for the very distinguished quality of their production and design.

**26** See Drewes 2011, p. 362. Here he also stresses that Mahāyāna texts never show awareness of the existence of a separate Mahāyāna institution, because these preaching circles always moved within traditional Buddhist institutions.

however important to bear in mind, as a premise to the topics that constitute the backbone of this work, that the cult of the manuscript promoted in early Mahāyāna scriptures is attributed a formative function in the development of the Mahāyāna. More specifically, an often cited article written by Schopen (1975) argues that those passages in early Mahāyāna literature that encourage the cult of the book indeed reflect a competition between two cults—that of the bodily relics of the Buddha deposited in *stūpa*s, and that of the Buddha's Dharmic body, i.e. the Mahāyāna texts. Schopen's interpretation is based on a few passages from Mahāyāna texts (such as the already mentioned *Vajracchedikā*, *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, and *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*) in which the place where the scripture is located, transcribed, venerated, etc. is said, according to his translation, to 'become a shrine' (*caityabhūta*); in other passages he adduces, the two cults—that of the *stūpa* and of the manuscript—are compared to the advantage of the cult of the manuscript.[27] According to this interpretation, the cult of manuscripts may therefore have been patterned on the cult of the *stūpa*s containing the earthly relics of the Buddha, though developing as a rejection of that cult, whose centrality had been maintained by Hirakawa (1974). The difference is that the cult of the book offered the possibility of 'making a shrine' out of any place on earth where worship takes place, in contrast with the strong geographical localization of *stūpa*s and their cult. Regardless of one's interpretation of these data (see also Vetter 1994), the cult of the manuscript played an important role in the propagation of the *Prajñāpāramitā* and early Mahāyānic literature and practices.

Schopen's view was recently opposed by Drewes, who maintains that the expression *caityabhūta* is far more likely to be interpreted—as most of the scholarly tradition before Schopen had done—as a metaphor ('like a shrine'); it is thus meant to underscore the greatness of the practice of manuscript worship by comparing it to the *stūpa*.[28] As Drewes remarks, there are several passages in South Asian Buddhist texts in which prominent people are compared to a

**27** Schopen 1975, pp. 154–55.

**28** Drewes 2007, pp. 104–105. Schopen has replied to this criticism (2010, p. 48) by remarking that the scholastic tradition spanning from the fifth to the eighth century overwhelmingly opts for the interpretation that he eventually adopts—that °*bhūta* at the end of the compound indicates a complete identification, not a mere comparison. He also supports his view on the basis of Dharmakīrti's assertions regarding a similar compound ending in °*bhūta*.

shrine in order to emphasize their importance (without diminishing the importance of the shrine).[29] In Drewes's view, the main objective of the *caitya-bhūta* expressions, when referring to the copying and veneration of the manuscripts, is to promote the use of the latter as a protective measure for private houses and other places, as the mere presence of the manuscript in its written form and the veneration paid to it would have turned these places into sacred locations. He thus argues that the other, similar expressions on which Schopen had based his deductions also needed to be understood as hyperbolic statements;[30] considering that the cult of the *stūpa* is in no way belittled by Mahāyāna texts, and how scarce the archaeological evidence for the practice of enshrining entire manuscripts of Mahāyāna Sūtras, Drewes concludes that the veneration of texts, while important, was neither an innovation of the Mahāyāna[31] nor the foundation of a new cultic practice to the detriment of the

**29** Drewes 2007, pp. 105–107. There are, for instance, many *caitya* comparisons in the stories of the Buddha's conception, in which his future mother Māyā is repeatedly compared to a shrine; see Drewes 2007, p. 107, referring to the *Mahāvastu*, the *Nidānakathā*, and the *Lalitavistara*.

**30** The reference here is to the passages in which the place where the Sūtra is worshipped is equated with a *bodhimaṇḍa*, where the Buddha achieved awakening (see, for instance, *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* in Wogihara 1932–35, pp. 205–207), as well as to the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* passages stating that one should build a *stūpa* wherever the Sūtra is read, memorized, written down, etc. (Wogihara and Tsuchida 1934–35, pp. 290–91 and 330–31). In this regard, Drewes argues (2007, pp. 122–23) that this statement cannot be taken literally because the foot of a tree or a monastic cell, which are very unlikely locations for the building of a *stūpa*, are also among the places mentioned in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*.

**31** Note that this view is in open disagreement with the arguments of Veidlinger 2006 and 2007, according to whom the reverential attitude towards writing and manuscripts promoted in the literature of the Mahāyāna and actively supported by laypeople also inspired the emergence of an analogous tendency in non-canonical Pāli literature. Veidlinger notes that early generations of Theravāda Buddhists, those responsible for composing the Pāli canon, did not intimate any knowledge of the cultic or apotropaic function of the manuscripts of scriptures. Although one should be careful not to read a general tendency in what is simply an *argumentum ex silentio*, Veidlinger shows that only in the twelfth-century sub-commentarial period, coinciding with the unification of the Buddhist *saṅgha* in Sri Lanka, do we find more instructions on the cultic status of the Pāli texts, at times also confirmed by archaeological findings. Examples of this can be drawn from all the three regions that have served as the homeland for the production of Buddhist Pāli literature until the nineteenth century, namely Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand. Sections of the *Mahāvaṃsa* composed after the thirteenth century tell stories of Sri Lankan kings worshipping Buddhist scriptures (Veidlinger 2006, p. 417). Another significant case is that of the ca. seventeenth-century Burmese *Gandhavaṃsa* which, in the style of Mahāyāna Sūtras, ends with verses praising the meritoriousness of producing manuscripts of scriptures, which are said to be even more important than the images of the Buddha (Veidlinger 2006, p. 425). A 1536 Thai inscription from Wat Khema in Sukhodaya attests that lay devotees gave gifts for the preservation

*stūpa* cult.[32]

Turning to the archaeological evidence, Drewes specifically remarks on the scarcity of evidence for whole manuscripts[33] or portions of manuscripts of Mahāyāna Sūtras enshrined in the *stūpa*s, with the exception of the Dhāraṇī-sūtras. On the contrary, the practice of depositing fragments of texts or formulas in *stūpa*s as votive offerings is well attested. Based on the belief that the teachings of the Buddha are one of his 'body' (*dharmakāya*), fragments of Buddhist scriptures or objects inscribed with protective formulas have in fact been deposited as relics into *stūpa*s and images in areas of Buddhist influence, not only in India but also in Tibet and East Asia.[34] Bentor has showed that such a practice, very popular in Tibetan Buddhism, originated in India and is attested in early Buddhist Sūtras such as the **Pratyutpannabuddhasaṃmukhāvasthitasamādhi* (13.8–9), in a passage that is also found in early Chinese translations of the text from the third century.[35] In many cases, however, it is not manuscripts containing entire texts that are deposited into *stūpa*s and images, but small pieces of scriptures, the most common being the Dhāraṇīsūtras, Buddhist texts made of protective formulas (*dhāraṇī*), which were already being produced in the first half of the first millennium; the Dhāraṇīsūtras themselves offer the possibility of placing either the entire text or just the *mantra*s contained

of the *Mahāvessantara* manuscript, and that this was made a focus of worship (*pūjā*) by having a copy of the text made (Veidlinger 2006, p. 428). In Veidlinger's analysis, this late concern with the veneration of the scriptures and the ritualization of their production developed only as a consequence of Mahāyāna Buddhist influence, whose presence is amply attested in all of the above mentioned regions. Moreover, there is substantial iconographic evidence that both Sri Lanka and Burma in the era of Pagan were influenced by the Pāla art which, as proved by Kinnard 1999 and Kim 2013, was deeply informed by the notion of making the cultic value of manuscripts equal to that of divine icons. One example mentioned by Veidlinger and particularly pertinent to the aim of this study is the unearthing, in the area of the Irrawady river in Burma, of statues representing Avalokiteśvara, on which the Bodhisattva is depicted as holding a manuscript in one of his hands (Veidlinger 2006, pp. 432–33). A similar Avalokiteśvara holding a manuscript has also been found in the area of Dvaravati, in modern-day Thailand (Veidlinger 2006, p. 438).

**32** Drewes 2007, pp. 133–36.

**33** With the sole exception of the Bower manuscripts, for which see below and Drewes 2007, p. 130. Here Drewes argues that in 'all other cases in which manuscripts have reportedly been found in *stūpa*s in South or Central Asia, either this identification seems to be incorrect or the contents of the manuscripts are unknown', discussing the evidence in fn. 42.

**34** For a study of this phenomenon, I refer the reader to Bentor 1995.

**35** Bentor 1995, p. 251.

in them inside *stūpa*s and images of the Buddha.[36] The power of some texts is believed to be transmitted to the supports on which they are inscribed, which do not necessarily correspond to manuscripts. For instance, a very popular text all across Asia that is found inscribed on artifacts and deposited in many Buddhist sites is a single verse that has now become famous as the epitome of the Buddha's teachings on the dependent origination or on the four truths of the nobles:[37] since at least the second century, this verse has been recorded in reliquary inscriptions or incised on clay seals as an alternative to depositing bodily relics of the Buddha.[38] Moreover, there are countless occurrences of this verse in the colophons of Buddhist manuscripts in various languages. An exceptional case of an entire manuscript found enshrined in a *stūpa* is the so-called Bower manuscript, at least according to the information provided by Hamilton Bower, who bought the manuscript in 1890.[39] Written on birchbark, probably in the first half of the sixth century, the manuscript contains the *Mahāmāyūrī*, one of the texts of the *Pañcarakṣā* (see below), along with several other protective *dhāraṇī*s.

Thus, the pan-Buddhist emergence of an early literature of 'protective texts' (*rakṣā*)—characterized by a certain phraseology (including frequent invocations to protective beings, fixed clauses, protective *mantra*s, and so on) and intended to be recited for apotropaic reasons—is connected to these archaeological findings.[40] However, the protective powers held by these texts were quickly

**36** For considerations on the term *dhāraṇī* and its understanding in the context of Mahāyāna Buddhism, as well as the scholarship on it, see Davidson 2009 and 2014, Hidas 2015; observations on the topic, especially regarding the interrelationships between *mantra*s and *dhāraṇī*s, are also in Skilling 1992, pp. 150–58.

**37** Boucher 1991, p. 11: 'Those *dharma*s which arise from a cause, the Tathāgata has declared their cause. And that which is the cessation of them, thus the great renunciant has taught'; *ye dharmā hetuprabhavā hetuṃ teṣāṃ tathāgato hy avadat | teṣāṃ ca yo nirodha evaṃvādī mahāśramaṇaḥ ||*.

**38** For a survey of the attestations, see Boucher 1991, p. 4.

**39** On the Bower manuscript, see Hoernle 1893–1912; a brief outline is also given by Drewes 2007, p. 130.

**40** On this topic, see Skilling 1992, who applies to this literature the term *rakṣā*, since this occurs both in Sanskrit and in Pali sources (in the equivalent *rakkhā*); the emergence of this category of texts, which as he specifies is rather pan-Indian (see § 1.2 for more insights into the non-Buddhist sources), reflects a focus on the presence of the Buddha and a need for his protection that is well expressed in early literature and art (Skilling 1992, pp. 110–13). The classes of texts that Skilling includes into this discussion are (1992, p. 113): 1) the *paritta* of the Theravādins; 2) the Mahāsūtras of the Mūlasarvāstivādins; 3) the *svasti*-, *svastyayana*-, *maṅgala-gāthā*s; and 4) the texts of some of the *Pañcarakṣā* collections, though he admits that these categories are often

transferred to the manuscripts (or any other support) onto which the texts were copied, as testified by one of the most popular collections of protective Buddhist works, the 'Five Protections' (*Pañcarakṣā*). This collection of five early Sanskrit works[41] is well known in India, Nepal, and Tibet, and it consists of purely protective texts, uniquely devoted to explicating their own apotropaic functions, thus providing the user with various protective formulas. Each of these texts eventually become associated over time with a female deity who is believed to protect the devotees against specific diseases and personal misfortunes.[42] These texts, while praising their own powers, explicitly require assembling amulets with the *mantra*s they teach: the *Mahāpratisarā*, for instance, instructs the devotees to paint an amulet with its *dhāraṇī*s and to wear it on the neck or on the arm, or to put it in a flagstaff over a *caitya*. Amulets bearing the protective formulas given by the *Pañcarakṣā* have been attested in archaeological findings.[43] After all, the word *pratisara* itself has meant 'amulet' since its

---

overlapping. The specific phraseology of these texts is dealt with on pp. 144–58. As for the historical background, Skilling suggests, 'the heyday of the *rakṣā* movement was from the second century B.C. to the third century A.D.', according to textual and archaeological evidence (Skilling 1992, p. 164). Buddhist 'protective' literature has been recently reconsidered by Strauch (2014a) in the light of the evidence of an early Gāndhārī text preserved in a manuscript of the Bajaur collection.

**41** Skilling 1992, pp. 138–44. Note that Skilling observes that it would be more correct to speak of the collection in the plural, as there are two different collections, one in Sanskrit and the other one in Tibetan, which only share three out of five texts (1992, p. 138). Referring to one of the texts of the Sanskrit collection, the *Mahāpratisarāmahāvidyārājñī*, Hidas (2012, p. 9) observes that the earliest Chinese translation was made in 693 CE and the Gilgit manuscripts of the text date to the early seventh century. These are *terminus ante quem* for the emergence of this text at least in the late sixth century, although it can be assumed that earlier layers were already extant in the fifth century (Hidas 2012, p. 21 and fn. 4).

**42** The five deities are Mahāpratisarā, Mahāsāhasrapramardanī, Mahāmāyūrī, Mahāśītavatī, and Mahāmantrāṇusāriṇī. However, as Hidas observes in his introduction to the critical edition of the *Mahāpratisarāmahāvidyārājñī* (2012, p. 27 fn. 11), the connection with a deity does not seem to be primary: although the text contains a few invocations addressed to a feminine pronoun, it does not expand much on the topic, focusing rather on the powers of the text itself and that of its *mantra*s. The stress on the deity and the consequent deification of the text might therefore have become strengthened after its composition and during the first transmission of the text. This feature had however become so entrenched that it contributed to the development of the well defined iconography that is exemplified in the illustrated multiple-text manuscripts of the *Pañcarakṣā*.

**43** Hidas notes that more than 20 printed or painted amulets inscribed with Sanskrit *dhāraṇī*s and *mantra*s of the *Mahāpratisarāmahāvidyārajñī* have been found in Central Asia (Hidas 2012, p. 7 and fn. 4; these paper or silk talismans are written in Siddham script, a few also with Chinese characters). No talismans survive from South Asia, but Hidas states that he has witnessed the

earliest attestations in the *Atharvaveda*, where it is used to denote either a 'protective thread' or a 'magical formula'.[44]

As pointed out in the Introduction, manuscripts of the *Pañcarakṣā* are still used for worship and public readings among the Newar Buddhists of Nepal, just like the manuscripts of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. The *Pañcarakṣā* must have entered the ritual practice rather early, aided by the apotropaic functions and talismanic uses of its manuscripts and by the progressive association of the works with specific deities. Their use for ritual donations is attested by the Gilgit manuscripts, whose colophons report the names of the donors who sought protection through the transcription and offering of these manuscripts;[45] further evidence for the practice is the increased production of illustrated multiple-text manuscripts in eastern India and Nepal, where the *Pañcarakṣā* had become one of the most popular texts for illustration from the eleventh century onward (see below). The establishment of a precise iconography of the five deities, which were portrayed in the manuscripts, testifies that the process of the text's deification had favoured its cultic use, as also in the case of the *Prajñāpāramitā*.[46]

The field of visual art has made an enormous contribution to the study of the presence and relevance of manuscripts in the Buddhist cult, both by enabling us to confirm (or disprove) some of the allegations made in the written sources, and by providing a general historical background for these practices. This study has taken two main directions: on the one hand, the critical analysis of the decorative programs of the manuscripts and their wooden covers, when available; on the other, identifying the representations of manuscripts and understanding them in the context of iconographic art. As regards the first line of

---

production of such amulets in Nepal (2012 p. 7, fn. 5). Amulets of this text were produced in Southeast Asia up to the Philippines, with the earliest attested in ninth-century Java, while eastern India and Nepal attest to the production of a great number of manuscripts of this text, which in the case of Nepal is copied until the twentieth century (Hidas 2012, p. 8).

**44** Hidas 2012, p. 22.

**45** See von Hinüber 2014, pp. 80–81 and fn. 13, with further bibliography on the topic. Here (p. 81 and fn. 15) von Hinüber also observes that in two manuscripts of the *Mahāpratisarāvidyārājñī* (nos. 6 and 15) the names of the donors are written by a hand that is clearly different from that of the scribe, a sign that these manuscripts were also prefabricated and the names of the purchasers added later. As further proof, the Gilgit collection also contains the example of a manuscript in which the names of the donors are left blank (von Hinüber 2014, p. 80 fn. 14).

**46** For a study of the development of an iconographic program in the *Pañcarakṣā* manuscripts, and its connection with their use as objects of worship and donation, see especially Kim 2010 and 2013.

study, scholars have assumed a direct connection between the emergence of the practice of decorating manuscripts and manuscript covers and the use of the same as objects of ritualized devotion,[47] also due to the link between figuration and worship in Indian art. Such observation have already been made by Pal (1978), who noticed the absence of a direct relationship between texts and images in illuminated manuscripts from Nepal—a trend that is only attested from the eleventh century—and surmised that this happened because manuscripts (and, as a consequence, the images they hosted) were used as cultic objects and pious gifts, just like icons of the gods.[48] According to this view, the aim of the images depicted on manuscripts or on their covers is not to illustrate the text, but rather to function as a support to worship. Moreover, Pal emphasizes the protective function that images might have played towards the hosting manuscripts, and the role that their donation to Buddhist and Hindu monasteries might have had in boosting the production of such illuminated manuscripts.

The Gilgit manuscripts offer another case study in which the colophon information can also be assessed in the global context of the manuscripts and the iconographic program of their covers. Klimburg-Salter studied the paintings on two of the extant wooden covers of the manuscripts from Gilgit, the earliest surviving covers associated with Indian manuscripts; she concluded that with the production of these items, 'a change took place in the concept of the book so that books were not seen merely as a media for the conveyance of information but, for some reason or reasons yet unclear, began to be conceived of as objects worthy of beautification'[49] Given how little manuscript evidence from Indian cultural areas dates from a time prior or contemporary to the formation of the

**47** The earliest surviving illustrated manuscript from South Asia was produced in eastern India and is dated to 983 CE (G 4713, Asiatic Society of Bengal), corresponding to Mahīpāla's sixth regnal year (see Kim 2013, p. 46). The practice of illustrating manuscripts was practiced in China already in the ninth century, as shown at Dunhuang; as observed by Kim (*ib.*), there is even earlier evidence from Korea (eighth century). It is possible that this use reached India via trade routes through Gilgit and Kashmir. Pal proposes that the Buddhist practice of illustrating manuscripts might have originated in Central Asia after interactions with the Christian communities (Pal and Meech-Pekarik 1988, p. 11), although Kim (2013, p. 47) remarks that the style of manuscript illustration in South Asia is so peculiar that it is necessary to stress the multi-directionality of this influence.

**48** Pal 1978, p. 37

**49** Klimburg-Salter 1990, p. 817. The two pairs of covers that she examines are identified as MSC1 and MSC2.

Gilgit collection, we should temper Klimburg-Salter's statements about the innovation that these particular manuscripts represented in the history of Indian manuscripts. However, it is undeniable that they may represent one of the earliest incontrovertible pieces of material evidence for the ritual use of manuscripts in areas of Indian culture. As for the iconographic program of the covers, Klimburg-Salter observes that those from Gilgit, representing Buddhas and Bodhisattvas with kneeling figures at their feet, are different from the ones produced later on during the Pāla period with regard to composition, subject matter, and style.[50] The main difference lies in the orientation of the paintings, which in Gilgit are vertical rather than horizontal, parallel to the orientation of the script, the space sometimes divided into panels, which was to be the most prolific decorative style in India and Nepal. These and other features of the subjects portrayed on the covers allowed to assimilate them into the art of Central Asia, where vertical panels (both on cloth and wood) representing the Buddha or the Bodhisattvas, in some cases with donors kneeling at their feet, are popular items, sometimes even used as manuscript covers or votive offerings themselves.[51] This could explain the origin of the manuscript covers of the Gilgit manuscripts, whose production was most likely not contemporary with the manuscripts themselves, but in any case occurred no later than the eighth century.

Further textual and archaeological clues that seem to suggest a ritual use for the manuscripts of the Gilgit collection—or, more precisely, that the collection might have emerged due to the religious function attributed to its samples—are analyzed below, where the evidence will be compared with the instructions given in this regard by the almost contemporary Śaiva work *Śivadharmottara* (see § 2.3). It is now worth observing, however, that the hypothesis of attributing a ritual function to manuscripts has been brought forth in order to explain the formation of some of the main collections of early Indian manuscripts, even though the idea is ultimately not considered tenable for all of them. That manuscripts had been used for the performance of a ritual is what Salomon had proposed in his study of the British Library birchbark fragmentary scrolls of Gāndhārī Buddhist texts in Kharoṣṭhī script (1999), which notably have been found in the original pots in which they had been buried a long time before, presumably in *stūpa* sites. According to Salomon's first interpretation,

**50** Klimburg-Salter 1990, p. 819.
**51** Klimburg-Salter 1990, p. 825.

the British Library scrolls represented a ritual burial for old, 'dead' manuscripts, which would have formed a sort of 'Buddhist genizah'.[52] The main arguments for this explanation were the donative inscriptions found on some of the pots, resembling those recording the ritual dedication of relics and *stūpa*s; and the study of the scribal notations found on the manuscripts, which Salomon had initially interpreted as indications that a new copy of those manuscripts had been produced, and the old ones were set to be discarded. This theory has recently been revised by the same scholar (2009) on the basis of alternative interpretations of the scribal notations on the manuscripts, and on account of new findings, especially those concerning the Senior collection.[53] This is another collection of early Buddhist birchbark scrolls and scroll fragments from Gandhāra that was interred inside inscribed water jars, but has the unique feature that its manuscripts, unlike those of the British Library collection and of the other big groups of Gāndhāran manuscripts—the Bajaur collection and the Schøyen Buddhist collection[54] —are a uniform set of Buddhist Sūtras, all written by the same scribe. The Senior collection has thus been interpreted as a 'commissioned collection',[55] with some of the manuscripts being brand-new at the time of their interment: on account of these findings, the hypothesis now formulated by Salomon for interpreting the four major collections of Gāndhāran manuscripts is that they were all ritually interred or 'buried' in funerary monuments as Dharmic relics, rather than as a form of ritual disposal or genizah.[56]

Another early collection of Gāndhāran manuscripts for which similar hypotheses have been considered is the recently discovered Bajaur collection, named after the Bajaur Agency of Pakistan, near the Afghan border.[57] This collection of birchbark fragments of Buddhist works written in Kharoṣṭhī script was reportedly not found in pots, but in a stone chamber of a Buddhist monastery measuring about a half-meter in diameter. According to Strauch,[58] the Bajaur manuscripts were not ritually interred as proposed by Salomon, but rather stored in a room within the precinct of a Buddhist monastery, in a part of the

**52** Salomon 1999, pp. 81–84.

**53** On the Senior collection, see Salomon 2003 and Allon 2007.

**54** On the Schøyen Buddhist collection, see the official webpage: <http://www.schoyencollection.com/special-collections-introduction/buddhism-collection>. Last accessed: 7/6/2016.

**55** Allon 2007, p. 4.

**56** Salomon 2009, p. 29.

**57** For an introduction on this collection, see Strauch 2008.

**58** Strauch 2014, pp. 467–68.

library functioning as a genizah—thus in compliance with the first interpretation given in Salomon 1999—where the worn-out texts, stored in stone caskets, would still remain within the reach of the monks. Moreover, upon reviewing the archaeological evidence for the instances of water pots deposited in *stūpa*s as manuscript-bearing reliquaries, Strauch finds that none of it can be considered definitive; the only data borne out by the sparse archaeological reports were that manuscripts were indeed contained in reliquaries, but only in the shape of tiny fragments used with apotropaic functions. These fragments were inserted not only in reliquaries but also in the hands of the Buddha statues, in the walls, pressed into or inscribed in clay or metal and in various other contexts, not as whole texts preserved in jars.[59] Therefore, this makes him doubt that the British Library collection could indeed also be interpreted as a ritual deposit of manuscripts in a *stūpa*, as Salomon suggests. According to this view, the only collection that could rightly be regarded as such is the Senior collection, due to the peculiar features that distinguish it from the other three collections of Gāndhāran materials.

A focus on the iconography of illustrated Buddhist manuscripts has characterized the recent studies of Kim (2013). The bulk of her study consists of the analysis of a selection of illustrated Buddhist manuscripts from northeastern India, on the basis of which she attempts to extrapolate data concerning the social history of the cult of the manuscript within the ritual practice of medieval Buddhism. Kim identifies the earliest iconographic attestations of the cultic use of manuscripts in the sixth- to seventh-century Ellora caves 6 and 10, in panels representing the goddess Mahāmāyūrī, one of the 'Five Protections':[60] in a corner, at the feet of the goddess, these panels depict a monk in front of a manuscript lying on a book stand; the monk is apparently intent on reciting or (in the case of cave 6) possibly worshipping the manuscript. According to one theory on the panel, the goddess seems to generate from a corner of the manuscript. Although the possibility of reading these images as representations of the cultic use of manuscripts is subject to interpretation, the connection established between Mahāmāyūrī and a manuscript that is being worshipped or recited recalls the apotropaic agency attributed to the texts of the *Pañcarakṣā*, and reconnects their power to the materiality of the manuscript. Kim also draws attention to a representation that can certainly be identified with a scene of manuscript cult on the base of a statue of the goddess Prajñāpāramitā from Mangalpur (Orissa),

**59** Strauch 2014, pp. 473–74.
**60** Kim 2013, pp. 24–28, fig. 1–1.

dated to the eleventh century:[61] this relief represents a manuscript lying on a stand together with flowers and flanked by a group of worshippers with their hands folded. Kim observes that the man in the first row seems to be endowed with the same iconographic features that are typical of kings, while the women behind him might be members of his family. Other elements of this panel are the officiating monk and the food offerings for the manuscript. The context of this panel is that of the cult of the Buddhist goddess Prajñāpāramitā, her position corresponding exactly to that of the manuscript depicted on the base of her statue. Orissa is homeland to several other depictions of scenes of manuscript worship, always found on the bases of statues representing a Buddhist subject. Kinnard (1999) mentions three such representations, ranging from the ninth to the eleventh century, found on panels at the bottom of Buddha statues in the 'gesture of touching the ground' (*bhūmisparśamudrā*): here the manuscript is constantly depicted on an altar pedestal, flanked by kneeling devotees making offerings or folding their hands in the *añjali* gesture.[62] More samples of this iconographic motif are identified by Kinnard in areas belonging to the cultural milieu of the Pāla kingdom of northeastern India: several of them come from Bodhgayā, traditionally identified as the place where the Buddha achieved his awakening, like an image of Tārā and one of Śākyamuni now preserved in the Bangladesh National Museum, each of whose bases depict manuscripts set on pedestals and being venerated.[63] Kinnard hypothesizes that the function of these depictions may be to represent wisdom (*prajñā*) as supporting and ensouling the Dharma of the Buddha; alternatively, these panels may have had a 'mimetic' function, exhorting and teaching veneration towards Buddhist scriptures. Kinnard reads these depictions of manuscript worship within the broader context of the sponsorship of the Pālas, under which we observe a re-emergence of interest in the *Prajñāpāramitā* from the eighth century, with the composition of Haribhadra's commentary on the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, the *Abhisamayālaṃkārāloka Prajñāpāramitāvyākhyā*.[64] This would also have allowed a growth in the popularity of the 'self-referential' cult of the manuscripts that was implicit in these texts and, Kinnard observes, the creation of a new 'field' of

**61** Kim 2013, pp. 33–36, fig. 1–4; see also Donaldson 2001, vol. 1, pp. 279–82.

**62** The panels described by Kinnard 1999 (chapter 6) are: a ninth-century panel from a Buddha statue from Kiching, Orissa (Kinnard 1999, fig. 12); another image, again on the base of a Buddha statue, from Chandaur, Orissa (fig. 13, eleventh century), as well as one from Ratnagiri (Orissa), now in the Patna museum (chapter 6, fn. 75).

**63** These are figs. 14 and 15 in Kinnard 1999.

**64** For an outlook on the most relevant commentaries of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*—among which Haribhadra's is considered 'the most important Indian commentary'—see Zacchetti 2015, p. 183.

devotion that elevates Prajñāpāramitā to the rank of a deity and worships her like the Buddha, while manuscripts are at the same time introduced into the field of visual culture by being represented in sculptures.[65] This is also evidenced by the emergence of the iconography of the goddess Prajñāpāramitā, attested from the ninth century, which embodies the notion of wisdom by means of iconographic features such as the 'gesture of the setting in motion of the Dharma wheel' (*dharmacakrapravartanamudrā*), recalling the Buddha's first sermon at Sarnath, and the manuscript, often represented atop lotus flowers.[66] The manuscript, as observed by Kinnard, is part of the iconography of several other contemporary representations of Buddhist deities and Bodhisattvas,[67] which leads him to stress that a new cultic focus is placed on the notion of wisdom, which enters the visual culture through all these iconographic means that allow the devotee to partake of the salvific wisdom of the Buddha.[68]

Kim bases such findings on the interpretation given by Kinnard, and stresses the role played by this renewed interest in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature recorded from the eighth and ninth century under the sponsorship of the Pālas as a boost for the cult of the manuscript. In Kim's analysis, crucial evidence is represented by the growth in the production of illustrated Buddhist manuscripts in northeastern India and Nepal in the eleventh and thirteenth century, respectively.[69] The most popular texts for illustration in this area were the *Prajñāpāramitā*, the *Pañcarakṣā*, and the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*. This phenomenon would have been variously motivated by the meritoriousness associated with the production of preciously illustrated manuscripts, and by the iconic status of the latter, causing the cult of the manuscript to become a significant topic in the eastern regions of Magadha, Gauda, and Varendra, connected to Nepal and

**65** On this topic, see Kinnard 1999, chapter 5.

**66** Although it is impossible to establish an 'Ur-image', and a reference to the offerings made to Prajñāpāramitā in the text of the Buddhist monk Faxian (fifth century) has been taken as a hint of the existence of Prajñāpāramitā statues in the fifth century, Kinnard notes that no surviving images of the Prajñāpāramitā can be dated with certainty any earlier than the ninth century (see Kinnard 1999, chapter 5). The preponderance of the surviving images are small bronzes from the tenth century.

**67** In this regard, see his analysis of Cundā, as well as the already mentioned Tārā and Mañjuśrī (Kinnard 1999, chapters 5 and 6), the latter usually being identified with wisdom; Kinnard observes (1999, chapter 6) that the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, though being primarily associated with compassion (*karuṇā*), is also depicted along with the manuscript in some instances.

**68** Kinnard 1999, chapter 6.

**69** Kim 2013, p. 47.

thus to Central Asia through a network of commercial ties.[70] These deductions are supported by a study of the iconographic program of a few manuscripts produced in said areas and the interplay between iconography, text, and object,[71] along with the readings of the colophons. What emerges from the selected samples that Kim examines is that these illustrated manuscripts were indeed objects of donations that were supposed to confer spiritual benefits on the donors; among the latter, a few were monks, while the lion's share was represented by laypeople, both women of higher rank, amounting to some 50% of the donors in the eleventh century, and laymen identifying themselves as Mahāyānist lay practitioners (*upāsaka*), who emerged as a dominant group among donors from the twelfth century onward.[72]

On account of the evidence we are provided with, it can thus be considered very likely that the cultic use of manuscripts may have been popularized in the first place by early Buddhist texts and scriptures, and then became relevant under the Pālas and the contemporary ruling elites of Nepal, thus triggering the production of some of the most precious manuscripts that have survived from that cultural area until present day. Still, and also in consideration of the fact that the availability of manuscript evidence for certain periods of history rather than others is often due to reasons of preservation and climate, it would be highly misleading to try to explain the phenomenon of the use of manuscripts as cultic objects as a purely Buddhist thing. The Pālas have certainly been defined as 'the most robustly Buddhist of all the dynasties' in the sixth to the twelfth century,[73] and 'the most liberal patrons of Buddhist institutions in early

**70** Kim 2013, pp. 9, 16, 37–38. Kim further notes (2013, p. 49) a possible connection between the increase in the production of illustrated Buddhist manuscripts in Nepal and the beginning of *phyi dar*, the second introduction of Buddhism in Tibet (960–1400 CE): a heightened demand for Sanskrit manuscripts in Tibet could be the cause for the thriving of scriptoria in Bengal and Bihar, which offered fertile ground for the cult of the book.

**71** She identifies four main types of illustrated Buddhist manuscripts (see Kim 2013, pp. 54–60 for an introduction, then p. 73ff. for an in-depth analysis of the four classes): manuscripts depicting the episodes of Buddha's life, representing his enlightenment and being thus comparable to *stūpa*s (type A); manuscripts representing holy sites of pilgrimage in Asia, a trend started in the eleventh century in Nepal (type B); images reflecting and symbolizing the text and used to index it, a scheme that became popular by the beginning of the twelfth century in Nepal, and was soon chosen as the most popular way to illustrate a Buddhist manuscript (type C); manuscripts that equal tridimensional *maṇḍala*s through the images of tantric deities, which marks the culmination of the Buddhist book cult in eastern India in the fourteenth century (type D).

**72** For the social implications of this study, see Kim 2013, pp. 213–70.

**73** Sanderson 2009, p. 87. Most of the kings of this dynasty were described in their inscriptions as *paramasaugata*, 'extremely devoted to the Sugata (*scil.* the Buddha)'.

Medieval India';[74] Mahāyāna Buddhism, especially its tantric branches, had grown tremendously under the Pāla emperors who, as is well-known, had also undertaken the endeavour of promoting the construction of what would become the celebrated Buddhist monasteries and centres of Buddhist learning of eastern India.[75] At the same time, it has been shown that this did not prevent a parallel growth of Śaivism, nor ousted its presence in the same areas, which were also heavily influenced by Śāktism. The interplay with Śaivism and more generally with the devotional currents that found their expression in the Purāṇas cannot be overlooked if we want to account for this phenomenon beyond the context of manuscript production under the Pālas. Before wealthy sponsors of the eleventh and twelfth century, under the reign of the Pāla emperors, expressed their religious devotion and social rank by ordering and purchasing expensive manuscripts of Buddhist scriptures—some of which have reached us—the bond between lay devotion and the sponsorship of the production, worship, and donation of manuscripts had taken on enormous importance also for Brahmanical scriptures for the laity, which circulated side by side with Buddhist literature. Above all, this topic had gained centrality in a lay Śaiva scripture called *Śivadharmottara*, whose composition can possibly be placed in northern India in the seventh century, and which enjoyed great popularity in some cases until modern times, as shown by the numerous parallels and borrowings from this text found in Sanskrit literature throughout India (see § 1.3). At the same time, this text, and the collection to which it ended up belonging, is amply attested in Nepal starting possibly from the ninth century, and with more regularity from the eleventh. Further manuscript evidence is attested in different parts of India later on (see § 1.3). Even if we want to hypothesize that the cultic focus that Brahmanical texts placed on the materiality of the scriptures may initially have derived from a rival interplay with its Buddhist counterpart, the topics concerning the use of manuscripts in religious contexts cannot just be reduced to the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature and its dissemination, but must also be assessed on account of the popularity that rituals of manuscripts had gained in the scriptures and religious practice of the Brahmins, to which it is now time to shift our attention.

**74** Sanderson 2009, p. 108.

**75** For a detailed account of the historical sources on these royal monasteries, see Sanderson 2009, pp. 88–107.

## 1.2 Rituals of Power and Knowledge in Brahmanism

Just like the Mahāyāna Sūtras, the medieval Purāṇas, religious literature for uninitiated devotees of the Hindu gods, contain several references to the worship and donation of the manuscripts of scriptures, as well as to the apotropaic and magical powers attributed to them. On the one hand, these texts connect the rites of donation and public reading from a manuscript to the strategy of self-promotion of the texts and the system of beliefs expressed in them. The method adopted by the Purāṇas chiefly consists of extolling the wondrous powers of their texts in order to encourage their circulation, analogous to what happens in Buddhist scriptural literature. This gave rise to the composition of eulogistic sections called *śrutiphala*, dealing with the 'fruits of hearing' the recitation of the Purāṇas: these are paragraphs, usually placed at the beginning or end of a work or section of a work, which list the grand fruits bestowed on the devotees by merely listening to that specific text, or by meditating upon it. The *Śivapurāṇa*, for instance, devotes all of its first seven chapters to praising its own qualities and urging the listening of its teachings, namely by singling out a huge number of the text's properties and the various mundane and ultramundane rewards promised to devotees, and by illustrating all this with exemplary stories.[76] The text concisely explains where these powers come from, as it states,[77] 'For this supreme *Śivapurāṇa*, the foremost treatise, has to be known as the form (*rūpa*) of Śiva on earth, and therefore has to be revered in all possible ways'. The idea that the text shares the same nature of the deity to which it is dedicated (and by which it was originally taught)[78] underlies the textual and material attestations of the practice of the cult of manuscripts in Brahmanical sources, and is eventually what is believed to confer the protective and magical powers attributed to these texts and their manuscripts. Moreover, despite the fact that there are cases in which the text is praised over its material embodiment—like that of the *Śivapurāṇa*, for instance, where the stress is rather on the hearing of the text—the *śrutiphala* sections also contain frequent references to the manuscripts of the texts as holding the same apotropaic powers: they must

**76** On this text and its wondrous powers, see Brown 1986, p. 75. Brown (ib., fn. 27) calls attention to the story of the redemption of the wicked Viduṅga through listening to the *Śivapurāṇa*, and compares this to a similar story found in the *Padmapurāṇa* (*Uttarakhaṇḍa*, 193–98), this time in praise of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* having been listened to.

**77** *Śivapurāṇa* 1.10: *etac chivapurāṇaṃ hi pāramaṃ śāstram uttamam | śivarūpaṃ kṣitau jñeyaṃ sevanīyaṃ ca sarvathā* || 10.

**78** On the notion of the identification of text and gods in Purāṇas, see references from the *Padmapurāṇa* and the *Agnipurāṇa* given by Brown 1986, pp. 81–83.

therefore be written down, worshipped, donated, and used for recitation. A further example is that of the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*, a Bengali Mahāpurāṇa that in one of its last chapters (12.14) endorses the circulation of the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* itself both by exhorting worshippers to read it and listen to it, and by giving instructions for writing down the text and donating its manuscripts.[79] The idea that the texts and their manuscripts could protect those who showed devotion towards them gave rise to the practice of using these as amulets. It is attested both by the production of small manuscripts of 'auspicious' Purāṇic excerpts that could easily be carried around as shields against misfortune and bad signs,[80] and by a special category of religious compositions specifically called 'armour' (*kavaca* or *varman*).[81]

**79** References to these and similar instructions in the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* and the *Agnipurāṇa* are given by Brown 1986; for the *Agnipurāṇa*, see also below, especially § 4.2.

**80** A possible example that concerns the topic of this work is the manuscript of the Cambridge University Library Add. 2836 (pictures and record: <http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-02836/1>, last accessed: 6/6/2016), in which the sixth chapter of the *Śivadharmaśāstra*, used for the performance of appeasement rites (see below and §§ 2.1 and 2.5), is transmitted in a fourteenth-century Nepalese palm-leaf manuscript containing other short chapters extracted from other Purāṇas and measuring 4.5 x 21.4 cm. The majority of the Nepalese manuscripts transmitting this chapter and those I could inspect directly offer a selection of chapters from Purāṇas to which a special auspiciousness must have been attached (see De Simini 2016).

**81** These are a category of religious hymns (*stotra*s) to which a special sacrality was attached. Gonda (1977, p. 247) defines a *kavaca* as 'a protective charm, a powerful *mantra*, believed to enable the person who, while knowing its meaning, pronounces it, to neutralise evil influences, to propitiate the planets, to protect children, to ward off death, etc.' This sub-genre of 'armour-texts' became popular in tantric literature (Goudriaan-Gupta 1981, p. 4). As in the case of the Purāṇas, their protective functions mainly reside in their association with a specific deity invoked in the prayer, and from whom the protection is ultimately bestowed. Thus, it is no coincidence that *kavaca*s are usually named after deities: we find, for instance, a *Śivakavaca*, a *Devīkavaca*, etc. The apotropaic power inherited from the deity to whom the composition is devoted can additionally be transferred to the material support of the text. A splendid example of this development comes from the aforementioned *Devīkavaca*. This text was copied hundreds of times, and it is not difficult to assume that the frequency of its attestations is connected both with the meritoriousness attached to it and with its use as an amulet. Only the catalogue of the Nepalese-German Manuscript Cataloguing Project reports 248 *Devīkavaca* manuscripts, of various types and sizes. By contrast, the Sanskrit collection of the Cambridge University Library records only two pieces, of which one (Add. 1578) is highly remarkable: this is a Nepalese manuscript made of a single birchbark folio, a very rare material in this region, and the text of the *Devīkavaca* is written in concentric circles, a possible hint that this manuscript was not conceived to have any textual function. Pictures of this manuscript and its record are available online: http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-01578/1 (last accessed: 6/6/2016). The use of

One could argue that, on this point, both Buddhist and Brahmanical texts do replicate the same refrains, as has been duly observed by Schopen (2010). He remarks that, in Buddhist as in Purāṇic sources (for the latter he mostly relies on Brown 1986), the manuscript 'is not just a sacred object, but also a sacralizing presence', transforming the space around itself into a sacred spot.[82] Insisting on the parallels with Buddhist attestations in the Mahāyāna Sūtras, Schopen further argues that the implication of this notion is that there is no need to invoke a religious officiant in handling the manuscript, as it suffices to place it somewhere—private houses are also mentioned in the sources—in order to turn that place into a shrine.[83] This would largely be true if we were to restrict our attention to those scattered references to the religious obligation of worshipping the manuscripts of scriptures that can be found in the *śrutiphala* or in the glorification (*māhātmya*) of some Purāṇas (see the case of the *Agnipurāṇa* examined in chapter 2 and 3, or the *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa* referred to in the Introduction). There is, however, a crucial difference that emerges in the Purāṇas, namely that these sources, besides generically referring to manuscripts as foci of worship and donation, also testify to the existence of a specific ritual category that is entirely centred on the use of manuscripts. Literary and inscriptional sources call it the 'gift of knowledge' (*vidyādāna*) and, as the name itself suggests, its core ritual activity consists of the donation of knowledge, which in the case of the accounts of the Purāṇas or Purāṇic-like works can be embodied in a manuscript. The donation of the manuscript is, however, only the peak in a series of structured ritual activities where many of the common uses and functions of the manuscript are ritualized, and as such do require the presence of priestly intermediaries. In the works that contain the most complete accounts of the gift of knowledge—above all the *Śivadharmottara*, the *Nandipurāṇa*, and the *Devīpurāṇa*, along with the shorter passages from the *Bhaviṣyottarapurāṇa* and the *Agnipurāṇa*— its main steps are as follows:

birchbark for writing down *kavaca*s is coherent with the instructions given, for instance, in chapter 70 of the *Devīpurāṇa*, on the making of a *Vināyakakavaca*, for which the use of this writing material is specifically required (*Devīpurāṇa* 70.3). The use of birchbark as a writing support for magic spells is also required by Pāñcarātra texts like the *Ahirbudhnyasaṃhitā* and the *Lakṣmītantra*. This idea is also attested in early Buddhist literature, as observed by Skilling 2014, pp. 511–15 (see above, fn. 12).

**82** Schopen 2010, p. 39.

**83** Schopen 2010, pp. 40–42. This is used as an argument to criticize Drewes's translation of the expression *caityabhūta* in the Mahāyāna Sūtras as a comparison ('like a shrine'), instead of interpreting it as implying a complete identification of the place where the manuscript is present within a sacred space (see § 1.1).

the production and copying of the manuscript from a previously existing exemplar; the correction of the newly produced copy; a public procession that carries the new manuscript to a temple or a space that is sacred in any other form; the donation of the manuscript to the temple; the performance of appeasement rites; the performance of public readings; and instructions on the daily worship and preservation of the manuscript. Even the initial activities, connected with the assembly of the manuscript and its transcription, are conceived in a highly ritualized environment in which the manuscript is the object of great devotion, on the model of the cult of divine icons that is one of the distinctive traits of medieval Hinduism. The information provided by the literary sources thus allows the reconstruction of the more general ideological and religious context within which we must understand practices such as the donation of manuscripts or their production in the service of acquiring religious merit, practices which are attested in the colophons of a significant number of Indian manuscripts. Moreover, moving from the literal meaning of 'donation of manuscripts', the gift of knowledge as described in textual sources could also include activities that were only indirectly linked to the act of giving away manuscripts: it is clear, for instance, that the public readings of the manuscripts, besides being connected to their donation to the temple, could also be considered a gift of knowledge on their own (see §§ 2.1 and 2.4); furthermore, especially in the *Śivadharmottara*, which gives the most important account on the topic, the gift of knowledge is not exclusively a gift of knowledge but also a gift to knowledgeable people, whether it was connected to the manuscripts themselves (for instance, the donation of writing tools and materials), or it consisted of money or food or any other form of material support that would enable these people to further their study or teaching activities.

The gift of knowledge described in the Purāṇas, which would inspire the formation of analogous rituals attested in tantric sources up to modern times (see chapter 4), is thus a paradigm that, on the one hand, is linked with the developments that led to the emergence of devotional currents within Brahmanism; on the other hand, it also hints at the formation of Śaiva monastic and educational institutions (*maṭha* and *āśrama*), the endowment of which is envisaged—in this case only by the *Śivadharmottara*—in the form of a gift of knowledge, for this is the ultimate support that a very wealthy donor (read: a king) can grant to religious institutions. All the activities arranged under the category of a gift of knowledge, however, primarily centre on manuscripts, even though the focus might seem to be lost in certain points. Far from simply urging their worship and donation, the gift of knowledge in the Purāṇic sources connects manuscripts and the ritualization of their functions with some of the main Brahmanic institutions, thus turning the

manuscripts of scriptures into one of the crucial factors that characterize the interplay between religious life and political leaders. The development of a structured ritual linked to existing institutions represents an important shift, a change that is worth examining in order to understand the bigger picture of the ritual, soteriological, and iconic functions traditionally attributed to manuscripts in premodern India.

Through the gift of knowledge, the cult of the book was tied to Brahmanic institutions, the first and most obvious of which being that of the 'gift', *dāna*. That the gift of knowledge must primarily be understood in light of the 'Brahmanic theory of the gift'[84] is demanded not only by its name, but also by the fact that it is one of the *dāna* categories which the specialized medieval digests from the twelfth century onward (see chapter 3) afford the utmost relevance, although they do not include the gift of knowledge in any of the known taxonomies (there is one exception that will be dealt with below). The tradition of the Dharmaśāstra, which is also reflected in the Purāṇas, only deals with one of the six typologies of gifts, that is with the *dharmadāna*, the 'Dharma gift', which the *Devalasmṛti*—a late work[85] whose definitions of *dāna* and its various components are frequently quoted in medieval digests on gifting—defines as,[86] 'What [one] constantly gives to recipients independently of [any] purpose, [but] with the sole intention of giving'. According to this definition, therefore, the *dharmadāna* is a 'constant' (*nitya*) ritual, a wording that refers to a tripartite classification of Indian rites, divided into those that must be performed throughout a whole lifetime; those that are optional (*kāmya*), solely performed in order to achieve specific results; and those rituals that are carried out only under certain circumstances (and are thus called 'occasional', *naimittika*). The rituals classified as *nitya*, namely 'eternal',

**84** The theory of gifting presented in the Dharmaśāstra, with special reference to the work of Lakṣmīdhara, is dealt with in detail in the introduction to the critical edition of Lakṣmīdhara's *Dānakāṇḍa* by Brick (2014), on which the following information on the general rules for the ritual gifting are based. I thank David Brick for his assistance in providing me with materials on the topic, and his observations on my previous work.

**85** The *Devalasmṛti* is considered a late work composed in northwestern India due to its allusion to foreign invasions and the mention of punishments for the kidnapping of women, which have been read as a possible reference to the Turkish invasions that started in the eighth century (Lariviere 2004, p. 622).

**86** *Dānakāṇḍa* 1.5: *pātrebhyo dīyate nityam anapekṣya prayojanam | kevalaṃ tyāgabuddhyā yad dharmadānaṃ tad ucyate* || 5. In the preceding stanza the *Devalasmṛti* enumerates six 'bases of the gift' (*Dānakāṇḍa*, p. 288): 'Dharma, worldly gain, passion, shame, joy, and fear—these, they say, are the six bases of gifting' *dharmam arthaṃ ca kāmaṃ ca vrīḍāharṣabhayāni ca | adhiṣṭhānāni dānānāṃ ṣaḍ etāni pracakṣate* || 4. Among these, only the 'gift based on Dharma' is the topic of the Dharmaśāstra.

'constant', such as the Vedic tradition of the oblation with fire (*agnihotra*), are therefore regarded as something non-fungible, to be performed, as the text says, 'independently of [any] purpose', an expression that in the case of the gifting rituals has been interpreted as a reference to the non-reciprocity of the gift, which is one of the main characteristics of ritual donations according to the Dharmaśāstra tradition.[87] The principle of non-reciprocity however is only to be understood on the mundane level, in the sense that recipients are not supposed to give anything in exchange for the gifts, but the donors are nonetheless rewarded with merits (*puṇya*) that allow them to receive both mundane and ultramundane benefits.[88] The practice of the 'Dharma gift' is therefore intended not only as a way to transfer property in an economy that saw a decreasing reliance on money,[89] but

**87** As observed by Brick (2014, p. 24), this is a crucial point in the understanding of the theory of the gift presented in the works of Dharmaśāstra and Purāṇas in the light of the anthropological studies devoted to the practice of gifting since the publication of Mauss's famous essay (1925). Brick has dealt extensively with the idea of the contrast that the principle of non-reciprocity establishes between the Brahmanical theory of the gift and the results of the ethnographic studies carried out in South Asia by Raheja 1988 and Parry 1994; the latter show that, in actual practice, there is more emphasis placed on the donors than the donees, based on the belief that by donating an object the donor is actually transferring his own sins to the recipients (Brick 2014, p. 26). Brick (2014, pp. 27–30) maintains, also on the basis of Geslani 2011, that a belief in sin-transfer is actually discernible in the cases of some of the gifts described in the Dharmaśāstra tradition, where it is said that the gifted object should not be kept for too long, or that the recipient becomes impure after receiving the gift. This evidence, though admittedly scanty, along with the evidence provided by the ethnographic studies, have led him to argue that the theory of the gift that forms the underpinnings of Brahmanic sources on *dāna* actually arose in contrast a competing theory that emphasized the purificatory function of the gifting through the transfer of sins from the donors to the donees. According to Raheja, whose observations are referred to by Brick (2014, p. 27), this would not necessarily contradict the centrality of Brahmins as recipients, since they might be chosen to fulfill that function due to their special ability to digest the sins transferred through gifts.

**88** Brick observes the connection between the expectation of an ultramundane reward in the performance of ritual gifting, and the Mīmāṃsā teachings on the 'unseen scope' (*adṛṣṭārtha*) of the sacrifice (Brick 2014, pp. 32–33).

**89** Donative inscriptions have been attested in India from very early times, and they often come in the form of copper plates. The earliest specimens of copper plates are those attributed to the early Pallava kings, and are dated to the fourth century (Francis 2013, p. 34). The oldest extant copper plate from the north can most likely be identified as the Kalāchalā grant of Īśvararāta, dated on palaeographic grounds to the late fourth century (see Sircar EI 33.303–6, cited in Salomon 1998, p. 114). Salomon notes that the practice of issuing donative copper plates can actually be dated significantly earlier than the extant records, since the donative cave inscriptions of Nāsik, issued by the Western Kṣatrapa and Sātavāhana kings in the first or second century, presuppose the use of original documents on portable supports, which could have been copper

also as a soteriological strategy,[90] and it is in this context that the ceremony of the gift of knowledge must be placed. The correct performance of gifting was believed to increase merit, destroy the donor's sins,[91] and bestow mundane and ultramundane rewards on him. More basic features of the theory of the ritual gift according to Brahminical sources can be inferred from the simple definition that again the *Devalasmṛti* gives for ritual gifting in general, and that, in this case, is also often quoted in the beginning of the digests on *dāna*. Here the word gift is said to be 'authoritatively defined' (*abhinirdiṣṭaṃ*) as[92] 'the granting of goods, trustfully, to a proper recipient'. This plain definition contains all the chief elements of the ritual gift according to the Dharmaśāstra. In the first place, this line mentions the donee but not the donor. In this literature, the donee is the topic of paragraphs devoted to the identification of the proper recipient, the figure on which the descriptions of ritual *dharmadāna*s place all emphasis. For Dharmaśāstra and Purāṇas, when dealing with gifts, primarily reflect the needs and perspectives of the recipients—identified with virtuous Brahmin men learned in the Veda[93] — while making only general statements on the identification of the donors. The latter are solely qualified via general attributes, chiefly concerning their financial means and attitude towards the gift: the texts underscore that donors have to be able to make gifts in accordance with their material possessions (*yathāśākti*), that their moral conduct must comply with Dharma and that they must be endowed with trustworthiness (*śraddhā*), a notion also evoked in the definition of the

plates. The donative copper plate inscriptions began to rise in number from the fourth century, continuing even into the European period (Salomon 1998, p. 115). According to Sharma (1965, p. 48), the increase in the production of grants from the Gupta times onward parallels the scarcity of coins attested in the same period due to a decline in internal trade. The grants of land, observes the scholar, came to replace the religious endowments that were made in cash in the first two centuries C.E.

**90** See Brick 2014, p. 34ff. He also cites a statement by Trautmann (1981, p. 279), according to which, 'The Dharmaśāstra theory of the gift, then, is a soteriology, not a sociology of reciprocity as in Marcel Mauss's masterwork on the gift' (Brick 2014, p. 38).

**91** On the expiatory nature of the gift, see also Geslani 2011a, p. 135ff.

**92** *Dānakāṇḍa* 1.1: *arthānām udite pātre śraddhayā pratipādanam | dānam ity abhinirdiṣṭaṃ vyākhyānaṃ tasya vakṣyate* || 1.

**93** Brick 2014, pp. 41–49, examines the discussions on identifying the proper recipient of a *dharmadāna* as found in the medieval digests on gifting. As he observes, the main concern of the Dharmaśāstra texts is to identify these recipients as orthodox Brahmins, and establish a principle of 'virtuousness' that enhances the value of the gift in proportion with the worthiness of its recipient.

*Devalasmṛti*, and which is a crucial component in the performance of a proper *dharmadāna*.[94]

Donor, donee and trustworthiness are three of the so-called 'six components of the gift' singled out by the *Devalasmṛti*, the remaining ones being the appropriate object to donate (*deya*), as well as the suitable time and place for the donation:[95]

> Donor and recipient, trustworthiness and the object to be donated according to Dharma, as well as the [proper] place and time: people consider these to be the six components of gifts. (11) / One who is not afflicted by sins, who is devout to the Dharma, willing to donate, free from vices, pure, who earns his living through blameless actions: for [these] six [features] the donor is praised. (12) / A very pure Brahmin, who has little livelihood, is warmly compassionate, whose [five] organs of perception are intact, freed from sexual contaminations, [this] is taught [to be] the recipient. (13) / The joy [expressed] through a bright face and so

**94** The notion of 'trustworthiness' (*śraddhā*) has been subject to various interpretations by scholars dealing with theories of the gift in South Asia. Heim (2004, pp. 45–53) believes that *śraddhā* can be generally interpreted in at least three ways: trust in the tradition; trust in the results of ritual actions; or trust in the recipient. The latter is considered by Heim the most relevant point in the case of *dāna* rituals. She argues that 'esteem' towards the recipient is the basic feeling that is needed to make sure that the gift will be performed with the generosity and the absence of envy that are prescribed by the sources. The right attitude towards the recipients allows the donor to gift purposelessly and respectfully. Brick (2014, p. 54), on the other hand, identifies two principal meanings for the word *śraddhā*: a. trust in the efficacy of pious acts (which summarizes the first two points made by Heim); and b. spirit of generosity, for which Brick refers to the study of Köhler (Brick 2014, p. 56, referring to Köhler 1973), who maintains that trust in the efficacy of ritual donations is what prompts generosity in gifting. According to Brick, who faults Heim's translation of *śraddhā* as 'esteem' for not being sufficiently grounded in textual sources, his translation as 'spirit of generosity' would better account for the *Devalasmṛti*'s definition, and would still be connected to the definition under point a. The definition that the *Devalasmṛti* gives for *śraddhā* in *Dānakāṇḍa* 1.14 (see below) does insist on notions such as the donors' joy in gifting—a feature that also often appears in other literary works dealing with *dāna*, like the Buddhist Jātakas praising the 'perfection of gifting' (*dānapāramitā*)—and the display of facial expressions revealing the reliability of the donor. All these can be effectively expressed by translating *śraddhā* and the adverbial *śraddhayā* with 'trustworthiness' and 'trustfully', a translation that remains within the main semantic area of the words and still conveys both the sense of 'trust in the results of the ritual action' and of 'positive attitude of joyfulness and absence of envy'.

**95** *Dānakāṇḍa* 1.11–14: *dātā pratigrahītā ca śraddhā deyaṃ ca dharmayuk | deśakālau ca dānānām aṅgāny etāni ṣaḍ viduḥ* || 11 *apāparogī dharmātmā ditsur avyasanaḥ śuciḥ | anindyājīvakarmā ca ṣaḍbhir dātā praśasyate* || 12 *triśuklaḥ kṛśavṛttiś ca ghṛṇāluḥ sakalendriyaḥ | vimuktoyonidoṣebhyo brāhmaṇaḥ pātram ucyate* || 13 *saumukhyādyabhisaṃprītir arthināṃ darśane sadā| satkṛtiś cānasūyā ca tadā śraddheti kīrtyate* || 14.

> on every time one sees supplicants, virtue and freedom from envy: in that case trustworthyness is celebrated. (14)

A proper Dharma gift thus consists of an unreciprocated donation of goods made by a trustful donor in favour of a virtuous Brahmin: Smṛti texts exhort the laity to piously donate to Brahmins throughout the length of their lives, offering not only material support but also devout veneration to the recipients of their gifts. In this way the Dharmaśāstra and the Purāṇas, along with the medieval digests collecting quotations from these texts (see chapter 3 for more details), participate in the competitive environment that characterized the religious scene of early and late medieval times. Different gifts, requiring different ritual routines, are classified on the basis of the different objects to be donated (*deya*). Here the *Devalasmṛti* proposes a classification based on the importance of said objects: food, milk, land, cows, and other precious items are classified as *uttama*, 'excellent' gifts; clothes and medicines are considered 'middle-range' (*madhya*); while all the rest are 'unessential' (*adhama*) gifts.[96]

It is exactly with regard to the object to donate and the way to donate it, on which the theory of the gift in the Dharmaśāstra tradition is based, that the gift of knowledge had partly been considered an exception. This opinion is voiced by Vijñāneśvara, the twelfth-century author of the famous commentary *Mitākṣarā* on the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti*. As the text he comments on does not mention the gift of knowledge, but only the 'gift of the *brahman*'—which consists in the oral recitation of the Vedic texts and is actually presented as one of the foundations of the gift of knowledge intended as a gift of manuscripts (see § 3.2)—Vijñāneśvara remarks that such a gift only creates another property, without alienating one's own.[97] For when knowledge is only transmitted orally, the ownership of the donor does not cease. Even though this is true in cases where the gift of knowledge is only intended as an oral transmission of teachings, we will nonetheless show that the material element is indeed restored by medieval Purāṇas also in the case

**96** See *Dānakāṇḍa* 1.27–31.

**97** *Mitākṣarā* ad *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* 2.212: 'And in this regard, concerning the gift of the *brahman*, the gift is solely intended as the accomplishment of the ownership of another, as it is impossible to bring one's own ownership to cessation'; *atra ca brahmadāne parasvatvāpādanamātraṃ dānaṃ svatvanivṛtteḥ kartum aśakyatvāt*. This passage will be quoted below (see § 2.1) and is also discussed in Brick 2014, p. 33, where he takes it as an example of the less inclusive Mīmāṃsā theory of the gift, as they would exclude gifts (such as the gift of knowledge) that the Dharmaśāstra tradition includes without problems. However, it seems clear to me that in this case Vijñāneśvara's objections solely concern the 'gift of the *brahman*', which represents only one aspect of the broader category of the gift of knowledge.

of the so-called 'gift of the Veda' (see §3.2). The gifts that do not envisage the cessation of the donor's property fall into a specific category called *utsarga*, 'relinquishment', which also includes, for instance, works of public utility.[98]

Ritualized gifts cannot exclusively be regarded as means to secure royal patronage, nor as measures of economic welfare, although they undoubtedly fulfilled both functions. Nevertheless, they imply an ultramundane, salvific perspective, while at the same time having become one of the main fields of expression for medieval kingship. This is especially true in the case of those donations in which the donors can patently only be identified with monarchs, due to the sumptuosity and high cost of the ceremonies required for the performance, as well as their public nature. Examples of these public royal donations are the so-called 'great gifts' (*mahādāna*), which are the first category of ritual donations to be examined in the medieval treatises on *dāna*.[99] The practice of the 'great gifts', which count sixteen ectypes according to a frequently quoted section of the *Matsyapurāṇa*,[100] has been interpreted as one of the chief rituals of power legitimation for medieval Indian kingdoms: mentioned in epigraphs since the eighth century[101] but described in earlier literature, these ritual donations sponsored by

**98** See Brick 2014, p. 34.

**99** Note that authoritative texts also prescribe other expensive donations, such as the 'mountain gifts' (*acala°* or *parvatadāna*), dealt with in *Matsyapurāṇa* 83–92. As for the identification of the donors of *mahādāna*s and similar ritual donations with kings or with very wealthy people, Brick (2014, p. 51) observes that Govindānanda Kavikaṅkanācārya, author of the *Dānakriyākaumudī*, declares that he has excluded from his treatise topics such as the *mahādāna*s and similar donations 'to be performed by the great kings and the like (*mahārājetarasādhyāni*),' which are dealt with in a ritual manual called *Mahādānapaddhati* (see *Dānakriyākaumudī* p. 86).

**100** The great gifts described by *Matsyapurāṇa* 274–289 are the 'gift of the man on the scales' (*tulāpuruṣadāna*); the 'gift of the golden embryo' (*hiraṇyagarbhadāna*); the 'gift of the Brahma-egg' (*brahmāṇḍadāna*); the 'gift of the wish-granting tree' (*kalpapādapadāna*); the 'gift of a thousand cows' (*gosahasradāna*); the 'gift of the wish-granting cow' (*kāmadhenudāna*); the 'gift of the golden horse' (*hiraṇyāśvadāna*); the 'gift of the horse carriage' (*aśvarathadāna*); the 'gift of the golden elephant chariot' (*hemahastirathadāna*); the 'gift of the five ploughshares' (*pañcalāṅgaladāna*); the 'gift of the earth' (*pṛthvīdāna*); the 'gift of the universal wheel' (*viśvacakradāna*); the 'gift of the wish-granting vines' (*kalpalatādāna*); the 'gift of the seven seas' (*saptasāgaradāna*); the 'gift of the jewel-cow' (*ratnadhenudāna*); the 'gift of the pot of elements' (*mahābhūtaghaṭadāna*).

**101** The earliest epigraphic attestation of the performance of the Purāṇic great gifts can be dated to the seventh century, as its mention occurs in an epigraph of king Pāṇḍya Cendan, who claims to have castigated the Kali age by celebrating three *mahādāna*s, namely the 'gift of the golden embryo', the 'gift of a thousand cows' and the 'gift of the man on the scales' (Schmiedchen 2006, p. 173). Another early record is the gift of a golden embryo that is attested in 753 CE under the reign of Dantidurga, the first imperial ruler of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty, who intended to mark

kings might have fulfilled, as has been argued, the same legitimizing function that Vedic literature attributed to bloodier rituals like the horse sacrifice.[102]

The gift of knowledge is explicitly called a *mahādāna* in the very beginning of the second chapter of the *Śivadharmottara*, the most important literary source on the topic of manuscript rituals in medieval India, which proclaims,[103] 'The gift of this [knowledge] is a great gift (*mahādāna*), the most excellent among all gifts'. In no place, however, does the text show awareness of the classification of the 16 great gifts of the Purāṇic tradition, and this definition of the *Śivadharmottara* remains an isolated case, since medieval digest-authors from the twelfth century onward (see chapter 3), all relying on the testimony of the *Matsyapurāṇa* for the treatment of the great gifts, not only do not consider the gift of knowledge a *mahādāna,* but also do not insert the gift of knowledge within a specific gift category. One exception is Hemādri, digest-writer of the thirteenth century, who inserts the gift of knowledge into a heterogeneous class called the 'excellent gifts' (*atidāna*), a choice that is replicated in the fifteenth century by Madanasiṃhadeva. These are said to correspond, according to a verse attributed to the *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa*,[104] to (the gift of) 'cows, earth, and knowledge'. Chapter 7 of the

with this ceremony his victory on the periphery over the Cāḷukya (Inden 2000, p. 247). For a history of the epigraphical attestations (from the seventh to the sixteenth century) of the gift of the man on the scale, during which the donor was supposed to donate the equivalent of his weight in gold, see Schmiedchen 2006.

**102** Inden (2006, pp. 91–92) argues that the rituals of the great gifts originated in the context of Buddhist imperial power as a reaction to the Vedic 'great sacrifices' (*mahāyajñas*), and were then subsumed by non-Buddhist state formations in medieval times. Inden identifies the main textual evidence for the opposition between the great gifts and the Vedic sacrifice in the *Kūṭadantasutta* of the *Dīghanikāya* (= Sutta No. 5), where the practice of donation is suggested as means to achieve the appeasement of the kingdom (par. 135), and the ritual is listed as superior to the *mahāyajña*. The gift this text refers to is called *niccadāna* (par. 144), Pāli for *nityadāna,* 'constant gift'. The *niccadāna* is explicitly taught by this text as more important than the *mahāyañña* (*mahāyajña*); more important than the *niccadāna* is said to be the *vihāradāna* (par. 145), the 'gift of a monastery'. The acceptance of the Buddhist teachings and the arising of the knowledge on the destruction of the *āsava* are eventually deemed superior to these material donations (par. 147).

**103** *Śivadharmottara* 2.1cd: *tasya dānam mahādānaṃ sarvadānottamottamam* || 1.

**104** *Dānakhaṇḍa*, p. 397: '[Teachers] say that there are three excellent gifts: [the gift of] cows, earth [and] knowledge. Through the [activities] of reciting, sowing, and milking [these gifts] actually save from hell'; *trīṇy āhur atidānāni gāvaḥ pṛthvī sarasvatī | narakād uddharanty eva japavāpanadohanaiḥ* ||. This verse is very close to *Mahābhārata* 13.68.4, which Hemādri and his predecessors Lakṣmīdhara and Ballālasena quote on the topic of the gift of knowledge (see § 3.2), and to *Agnipurāṇa* 2.211.51. It establishes an equivalence among the gifts of cattle, earth, and Sarasvatī, the goddess of music and learning that is used here (as in other places) as a synonym

*Dānakhaṇḍa* of Hemādri is thus entirely devoted to detailing the gift of several kinds of cows and bulls, followed by the gift of land (*bhūmidāna*), while the final part of the chapter, starting at p. 511, is focused on the 'excellent gift that is called the gift of knowledge' (*vidyādānākhyam atidānam*). His predecessors had dealt with all these donations, but without considering them as part of a distinct category, whose ritual patterns seem to share no particular feature.

Although the mention of the great gift made by the *Śivadharmottara* with reference to the gift of knowledge might simply fulfill a eulogistic purpose, one must observe that the performance of a gift of knowledge in general, and the one described by the *Śivadharmottara* in particular, shares at least two of the key features of the definition of 'great gifts'. The first and most obvious is the identity of the donor who, in the *Śivadharmottara*—and, as regards the literary sources on the gift of knowledge, only in the *Śivadharmottara* (see § 1.3 and chapter 2 for more details)—is unmistakably recognized as a king. The ceremony described in this text includes a series of public rituals that require the involvement of the inhabitants of the town and the kingdom, and some of these are to be performed by the king in person, or are said to be sponsored by him (see § 2.1). He is eventually the one who leads a procession carrying the manuscript to the Śaiva hermitage for it to be donated. The connection between the ritual use of the manuscripts and monarchical figures, already established in some of the Mahāyāna Sūtras, is thus noted as an essential element of the gift of knowledge by the *Śivadharmottara*.[105] The second crucial element that qualifies the gift of knowledge as a great gift in the Purāṇic sense is probably less patent, but is still directly connected with the figure of the monarch. This aspect corresponds to the performance of the 'great appeasement' rite (*mahāśānti*) for the king and his kingdom immediately following the donation of the manuscript, almost in order to seal the

for knowledge. The equivalence among three gifts that seem so different from each other refers to a tradition according to which the Sanskrit word for cow, *go*, can actually at the same time mean cow, land, and speech.

**105** Note that there are also later examples of Pali texts identifying the king's devotion to a manuscript. The *Mahāvaṃsa* (for which see Veidlinger 2006), a composite Sinhalese chronicle that was very important for the history of Theravāda Buddhism, includes noteworthy accounts of the tenth-century king Kassapa V venerating a golden copy of the *Abhidhamma* that was kept in a temple and retrieved for civic festivals (see *Mahāvaṃsa* 52.49–56). This passage belongs to a section of the *Mahāvaṃsa*, extending up to chapter 79, that was probably composed in the thirteenth century; this is followed by a section composed in the fourteenth or fifteenth century, while the final chapters were written in the eighteenth century (Veidlinger 2006, p. 417). The same text features an account of the eleventh-century king Vijayabāhu I, who had manuscripts of scriptures copied and donated to a temple (*Mahāvaṃsa* 99.28–25).

series of ritual activities that had formed the structure of the gift of knowledge. This is an aspect that features not only in the version of the ritual described by the *Śivadharmottara*, but it is shared by all the major literary sources on the gift of knowledge. 'Appeasement' (*śānti*), when intended as a ritual category, is an umbrella term that includes different kinds of apotropaic rites whose function was that of reversing omens and personal misfortunes (*adbhuta* or *nimitta*). As shown by Geslani, among others, in his studies on the topic,[106] the development of specific ritualistic patterns labelled as *śānti* and focused on the appeasement of omens are especially connected with the literature of the school of the Atharvaveda from the first millennium BCE to the Middle Ages.[107] These rituals kept evolving and were consistently attested in medieval literature that was no longer connected to the Atharvaveda school, such as the Purāṇas or the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*; in these works, Geslani observes that the patterns of *śānti* rituals also tend to be subsumed under two important categories of kingship rituals, namely the royal consecrations (*rājyābhiṣeka*) and the great gifts.[108]

Reconstructing the century-long history of the appeasement rites, Geslani identifies specific hallmarks that, emerging with the *Śāntikalpa*, tend to remain constant throughout later attestations, and whose presence is actually required for some procedures to qualify as a *mahāśānti*; some of these traits can also be recognized in the *Śivadharmottara*'s terse description of the appeasement rite celebrated when the gift of knowledge reaches its climax. In the general paradigm of *śānti* rites, a central role is attributed both to the act of sprinkling the sponsor, or the object to be appeased, with specially empowered waters called 'waters of

**106** See Geslani 2011, 2011a and 2012. The following considerations on the rituals of appeasement are based mostly on these essays.

**107** The main texts singled out by Geslani in studying the early stages of the development of appeasement rites (2011, pp. 4–6) are, in chronological order: the *Kauśikasūtra*, which describes the entire system of Atharvanic domestic rituals and refers to apotropaic rites at various points (in particular, see its 13th book); the *Śāntikalpa*, which still dates before the turn of the first millennium, is the first work entirely devoted to the topic, more precisely to the subject of *mahāśānti* and its variations; and the *Atharvavedapariśiṣṭa*s, dealing with the ritual schedule of the king that has to be administered by an Atharvanic royal chaplain (*purohita*), among whose main duties is the performance of *śānti*s and *mahāśānti*s. The *Atharvavedapariśiṣṭa*s are the latest texts on the subject from the perspective of the Atharvanic school; for considerations on their dating, see Geslani 2012, pp. 178–82, and below fn. 115.

**108** These are treated in Geslani 2012 and 2011a, respectively. That of *śānti* is a pervasive topic in the ancient and medieval Indian literature dealing with ritual. The *śānti* is mentioned as the prerogative of the royal chaplain by a number of early Dharma texts such as the *Gautamadharmasūtra*, the *Manusmṛti*, the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti*, and the *Arthaśāstra* (see Geslani 2011, p. 82). In order to have an idea of the vastness of the subject, I refer the reader to Kane 1962, vol. 5.2, pp. 719–814.

appeasement' (*śāntyudaka*), as well as to the recitation of Vedic *mantra*s—which can be replaced by non-Vedic ones in Purāṇic literature—collectively called *śāntigaṇa*s.[109] The *Śivadharmottara* prescribes sprinkling the 'water of appeasement' (*śāntitoya*, 2.63) on the king's forehead, and then on the people attending the ceremony. As for the chanting of Vedic *mantra*s, the text makes no mention of this, but it proclaims instead that 'for the sake of appeasement' (*śāntyarthaṃ*, *Śivadharmottara* 2.61) a reciter has to read one chapter, which most likely corresponds to the sixth chapter of the *Śivadharmaśāstra*, the work to which the *Śivadharmottara* was connected (see § 1.3) and whose central chapter contains a long appeasement *mantra* (see §§ 2.1 and 2.5). That this chapter had actually been used in a liturgical function is confirmed both by its manuscript transmission and by historical records (see §§ 2.1 and 2.4). The practice of omen-reversal for the protection of the state, which in medieval religion had become one of the crucial elements of kingship—and, again, had also entered the realm of the main rituals of royalty—is thus also strictly connected with the rituals of manuscripts.

A key role in promoting the practice of appeasement rituals as one of the main services offered to the king was played by the 'Appendices to the Atharvaveda' (*Atharvavedapariśiṣṭa*s), early medieval texts that also intimate knowledge of some of the Purāṇic great gifts, though not presenting a complete taxonomy.[110] As is well known, these late Atharvanic works claim that the full monopoly over appeasement rites, seen as a key factor for the successful administration of the state, was held solely by the Atharvan priests, for whom promotion to the rank of royal chaplain (*rājapurohita*) was exclusively reserved.[111] The

**109** See e.g. Geslani 2011, p. 25ff., p. 82, or 2012, pp. 334–36. There are also other features that Geslani identifies as attributes proper of the *mahāśānti* paradigm, such as the main ritual frame corresponding to the *iṣṭi* fire ritual, or the use of the remnants of clarified butter (*saṃpāta*) to be mixed with the waters of appeasement. The description of the appeasement rite made by the *Śivadharmottara* is, however, very basic, so it is not possible to read the application of the whole paradigm of the *mahāśānti* here.

**110** The *Atharvavedapariśiṣta*s 9 to 16 account for only seven of the great gifts, namely the gift of the sesame-cow, the gift of land, the gift of the man on the scales, the gift of the golden embryo, the gift of the elephants' chariot, the gift of the horse chariot, the gift of a thousand cows (see Geslani 2011a, p. 150, fn. 38; he also adds the 'gift of the sun-cake', *ādityamaṇḍaka*, which is not included in the 16 great gifts of the *Matsyapurāṇa*). According to Geslani 2011a, the *Atharvavedapariśiṣta*'s accounts of the *mahādāna*s are earlier in comparison to the one of the *Matsyapurāṇa*, which presupposes the Atharvanic source (Geslani 2011a, p. 178).

**111** As pointed out by Sanderson (2004, p. 239), ritual duties of the Atharvan *purohita* were: rituals of proctection (*śāntikaṃ karma*) for the king and his kingdom; rituals to restore his health (*pauṣṭikaṃ karma*); rituals to harm his enemies (*ābhicārikaṃ karma*); regular and occasional

relationship between the monarch and the religious officiants envisaged here is thus one of mutual exchange: the priests, who claimed for themselves the magic power to ward off all dangers to the kingdom by means of specific rituals, were necessary for the king just like the latter in his turn was necessary to them, due to his military and political power, as their sponsor and protector. Given the harsh rivalry for royal patronage that characterized medieval India, and the solid connection that the literature of the Atharvaveda had established between the practice of certain rites and the function of the royal chaplains, it is precisely in this arena that the Atharvans' main competitors, the Śaivas, fought their battle by claiming the practice of those rituals of state protection for their officiants.[112] Moreover, the incorporation of aspects of pre-tantric Śaivism[113] into the *Atharvavedapariśiṣta*s has been interpreted as a hint that the authors of these texts reacted by trying to adapt their practice to that of their rivals in order to make it more appealing for prospective sponsors.[114] Based on the *Atharvavedapariśiṣta*s, the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* of Varāhamihira (early sixth century), and Purāṇic sources

rituals (*nityaṃ* and *naimittikaṃ karma*); reparatory rites (*prāyaścittīyaṃ karma*); and post-mortuary rites (*aurdhvadehikaṃ karma*). See *Atharvavedapariśiṣṭa* 3.1.10: *yasyānyakulopayuktaḥ purodhāḥ śāntikapauṣṭikaprāyaścittīyābhicārikanaimittikaurdhvadehikāny atharvavihitāni karmāṇi kuryāt*. The power of their rituals lies in the power of their *mantra*s, as the *Atharvavedapariśiṣta*s emphasize. A famous passage from *Atharvavedapariśiṣṭa* 2 reads (2.2.3–5): 'The knower of the *Brahmaveda* [=Atharvaveda] is the appeaser (*śamayitṛ*) of all the omens of the sky, atmosphere, and earth, in many ways. Therefore, Bhṛgu is the protector. (3) / The *brahman* [=the Atharvaveda officiant] will appease, not the *adhvaryu* [=the Yajurveda officiant], nor the *chandoga* [=the Sāmaveda officiant], nor the *bahvṛca* [=the Ṛgveda officiant]. / The brahman protects from demons, therefore the knower of the Atharvaveda is the *brahman*. (4) / For this reason, in order to protect the army, for the increase of his own kingdom and for the purpose of appeasement (*śānti*), a sovereign has to select a teacher belonging to Bhṛgu [= i.e. an Atharvan]. (5)'; *divyāntarikṣabhaumānām utpātānām anekadhā | śamayitā brahmavedajñas tasmād rakṣitā bhṛguḥ || 3 brahmā śamayen nādhvaryur na chandogo na bahvṛcaḥ | rakṣāṃsi rakṣati brahmā brahmā tasmād atharvavit || 4 senāyā rakṣaṇe tasmāt svarāṣṭraparivṛddhaye | śāntyarthaṃ ca mahīpālo vṛṇuyād bhārgavaṃ gurum || 5*. On the topic of the specialization of the Atharvan officiant in matters of rituals of kingship according to the *Atharvavedapariśiṣta*s, see Geslani 2011, p. 78ff. and Geslani 2011a, pp. 142–50.

**112** The rivalry between the Atharvanic and Śaiva officiants is documented in Sanderson 2004 and 2007.

**113** See Bisschop and Griffiths 2003, where they edit and translate, with an introduction, the *pariśiṣṭa* 40, on the 'Pāśupata observance' (*pāśupatavrata*).

**114** See Sanderson 2007, p. 196. Here Sanderson also introduces a second corpus of Atharvanic scriptures, preserved in the *Āṅgirasakalpa* manuscripts of the Paippalādins from Orissa and consisting of instructions in the procedures of hostile ritual through the propitiation of post-Vedic deities and following tantric liturgical models.