

The Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC)
announces a Lecture

by

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On Court Poets, Religious Reformation, and Paper Technology in Nepal, 14th-17th Century. A Malla Renaissance?

The importance of the Nepalese manuscripts in the Cambridge University Library collections has already been recognized by many scholars, mostly thanks to the Catalogue of the Buddhist Manuscripts published by C. Bendall in 1883 (and more recently, thanks to the Sanskrit Manuscripts Project, Cambridge). The importance of manuscript colophons for the reconstruction not only of the chronology, but also of the history of Mediaeval Nepal in general cannot be overestimated. In fact, colophons (and inscriptions) rectify the information about the dynasties and their dates as given by the other main primary source for Nepalese history, the *Vaṃśāvalī*s (“genealogical lists”), which in their simplest form merely provide the names of the rulers with the duration of their reigns in years and months. This elementary scheme is occasionally varied by the addition of dates and of short entries relating to the chief events of the reign. According to these sources, the history of Nepal can be roughly divided into four main periods:

1. Licchavi and cognate dynasties (c. 386-750 AD)
2. Transitional period and *Karṇāta*-Malla dynasty (c. 750-1482)
3. The three Malla kingdoms (1482-1768)
4. The Gorkha dynasty (after 1768).

The present paper is the first step in the a larger project —to be submitted to the AHRC, the ERC or a similar institution— in which we would like focus on the cultural history of the third period of Nepalese history, the “three Malla kingdoms” (1482- 1768). In our project we will focus on the cultural history of the third period of Nepalese history, the “three Malla kingdoms” (1482- 1768). The period we will examine slightly overlaps with the end of the second period, the transitional period and *Karṇāta*-Malla dynasty (c. 750-1482). We think it is necessary to start our study with the reign of king Jayasthitimalla (1382-1395) for two reasons: first of all, during our cataloguing work we noticed that the CUL holds unique manuscripts of unpublished Sanskrit works composed in Nepal during this period; secondly, with Jayasthitimalla a dynastic change occurs, and this fact marks also a cultural change in

terms of a strong revival of a sort of brahmanical orthodoxy. At the outset, I will briefly discuss the opportunity of using a historiographical category developed for the periodization of western cultural history in the analysis of South Asian cultural phenomena. The core of the presentation will be devoted to a discussion of Nepalese intellectual networks in the late 14th century as reconstructed from the analysis of manuscript colophons and Nepalese chronicles. The last part of the presentation will briefly deal with the preliminary hypothesis that the introduction and diffusion of paper technology in Nepal on a massive scale triggered important changes in the patterns of book production, diffusion and consumption.

Thursday, 7 April 2016 at 6 pm

Room 0001, CSMC

