



## Vivid Images, Not Opaque Words.

Daniele Cuneo

### ► To cite this version:

Daniele Cuneo. Vivid Images, Not Opaque Words.: UL Add.864, the so-called Cambridge Kalāpustaka manuscript from early modern Nepal. Vincenzo Vergiani; Daniele Cuneo; Camillo Alessio Formigatti. Indic Manuscript Cultures through the Ages. Material, Textual and Historical Investigations, De Gruyter, pp.551-586, 2017, 9783110543100. hal-03928902

**HAL Id: hal-03928902**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03928902>**

Submitted on 8 Jan 2023

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

## **Indic Manuscript Cultures through the Ages**

# **Studies in Manuscript Cultures**



Edited by  
Michael Friedrich  
Harunaga Isaacson  
Jörg B. Quenzer

## **Volume 14**

# **Indic Manuscript Cultures through the Ages**



Material, Textual, and Historical Investigations

Edited by  
Vincenzo Vergiani, Daniele Cuneo,  
Camillo Alessio Formigatti

**DE GRUYTER**

ISBN 978-3-11-054309-4  
e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-054310-0  
e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-054312-4  
ISSN 2365-9696



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 License. For details go to <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>.

**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>.

© 2017 Vincenzo Vergiani, Daniele Cuneo, Camillo Alessio Formigatti,  
published by Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston.  
The book is published with open access at [degruyter.com](http://degruyter.com).

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

[www.degruyter.com](http://www.degruyter.com)

# Contents

Vincenzo Vergiani

**Preface — IX**

## Collections

Camillo A. Formigatti

**Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Cambridge University Library: Three Centuries of History and Preservation — 3**

Nalini Balbir

**The Cambridge Jain Manuscripts: Provenances, Highlights, Colophons — 47**

Vincenzo Vergiani

**A Tentative History of the Sanskrit Grammatical Traditions in Nepal through the Manuscript Collections — 77**

Dominic Goodall

**What Information can be Gleaned from Cambodian Inscriptions about Practices Relating to the Transmission of Sanskrit Literature? — 131**

## Codicology (from Orality to Print)

Eva Wilden

**Tamil Satellite Stanzas: Genres and Distribution — 163**

Giovanni Ciotti

**Teaching and Learning Sanskrit through Tamil**

Evidence from Manuscripts of the Amarakośa with Tamil Annotations (Studies in Late Manipravalam Literature 2) — 193

Jürgen Hanneder

**Pre-modern Sanskrit Authors, Editors and Readers — 223**

Cristina Scherrer-Schaub

**The Poetic and Prosodic Aspect of the Page. Forms and Graphic Artifices of Early Indic Buddhist Manuscripts in Historical Perspective— 239**

Michela Clemente and Filippo Lunardo

**Typology of Drawn Frames in 16<sup>th</sup> Century Mang yul Gung thang Xylographs— 287**

Emmanuel Francis

**The Other Way Round: From Print to Manuscript— 319**

## Palaeography

Kengo Harimoto

**The Dating of the Cambridge *Bodhisattvabhūmi* Manuscript Add.1702— 355**

Marco Franceschini

**On Some Markers Used in a Grantha Manuscript of the *Ṛgveda Padapāṭha* Belonging to the Cambridge University Library (Or.2366) — 377**

## Textual criticism

Francesco Sferra

**A Fragment of the *Vajrāmṛtamahātantra*. A Critical Edition of the Leaves Contained in Cambridge University Library Or.158.1— 409**

Gergely Hidas

***Mahā-Daṇḍadhāraṇī-Śītavatī*: A Buddhist Apotropaic Scripture — 449**

Péter-Dániel Szántó

**Minor Vajrayāna Texts IV. A Sanskrit Fragment of the *Rigyarallitantra* — 487**

Florinda De Simini

**When Lachmann's Method Meets the Dharma of Śiva. Common Errors, Scribal Interventions, and the Transmission of the Śivadharmā Corpus — 505**

## Cultural Studies

Daniele Cuneo

### **Vivid Images, Not Opaque Words**

UL Add.864, the so-called Cambridge Kalāpustaka Manuscript from Early Modern Nepal — 551

Florinda De Simini and Nina Mirnig

### **Umā and Śiva’s Playful Talks in Detail (*Lalitavistara*): On the Production of Śaiva Works and their Manuscripts in Medieval Nepal**

Studies on the Śivadharma and the *Mahābhārata* 1 — 587

Lata Mahesh Deokar

### ***Subantarānākara*: An Unknown Text of Subhūticandra — 655**

Mahesh A. Deokar

### **The *Cāndravyākaraṇapañjikā*: An Important Tool for the Study of the *Mogga-llānavuttivivaraṇapañcikā***

A Case Study Based on a Cambridge Fragment of the *Cāndravyākaraṇapañjikā* with Special Reference to CV 2.2.1 and MV 3.11 — 695

Hugo David

### **Towards a Critical Edition of Śaṅkara’s ‘Longer’ *Aitareyopaniṣadbhāṣya*: a Preliminary Report Based on two Cambridge Manuscripts — 727**

**List of Contributors — 755**

**Indexes — 761**





Daniele Cuneo

# Vivid Images, Not Opaque Words

UL Add.864, the so-called Cambridge Kalāpustaka manuscript from early modern Nepal

**Abstract:** The article focuses on a masterfully illuminated manuscript from early 17<sup>th</sup>-century Nepal preserved in the Cambridge University Library (Add.864), which was possibly produced by a thriving atelier in Bhaktapur. This accordion book consists of one hundred and forty-four polychrome miniatures of extremely vivid grace and exuberant character, accompanied by Sanskrit captions. Among its many themes, it depicts several narratives of both sacred and secular nature —mostly taken from Brahmanical sources such as the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Vetālapañcaviṃśati*, but also including scenes from the Buddhist story of Sudhana and the Kinnarī. The article examines the iconographic programme of Add.864, suggesting that it may have been conceived as a didactic visual tool for the elites that partook in the high culture of early modern Nepal.

## 1 Introduction

Exactly half a century ago, Pratapaditya Pal, a leading scholar of Himalayan art history and former curator of South Asian art in many prominent US museums, published a brief, pioneering article entitled ‘A Kalāpustaka from Nepal’ in the *Bulletin of The American Academy of Benares*.<sup>1</sup> The important paper was dedicated to Add.864, a masterfully illuminated manuscript from early 17<sup>th</sup>-century Nepal, preserved in the Cambridge University Library, and possibly produced by a thriving atelier in Bhaktapur.<sup>2</sup> Now that Add.864 features among the almost 600 manuscripts that have been fully digitised and made freely accessible online by the efforts of the AHRC-funded

---

I am deeply grateful to Vincenzo Vergiani, Camillo A. Formigatti, Nirajan Kafle and Imma Ramos for their precious remarks and suggestions. All mistakes, of course, are mine alone.

1 Pal deals with portions of the same manuscript in two other works: *Vaiṣṇava Iconology in Nepal* (1970, 22–26; 44–46; 90; 93–99; and *passim*) and *The Arts of Nepal* (1978, 97–100; 118–119; and *passim*). The present contribution is an attempt at improving on Pal’s findings as well as a tribute to his pioneering scholarship.

2 See the Conclusions.

Sanskrit Manuscripts Project (2011–2014), the time is ripe for an updated study on this so-called Kalāpustaka manuscript and for a reassessment of its significance, paired with a hypothesis on its possible function as didactic, visual aid for the elites within the high culture of pre-modern Nepal.

Add.864 is an accordion book consisting of seventy-two handmade paper folios (7.3 cm high, 22.3 cm wide) painted on both sides, for a total of one hundred and forty-four polychrome pictures of an extremely vivid grace and an exuberant, expressionistic character. Simply put, it is an unparalleled artwork, an *objet d'art* of incalculable value.<sup>3</sup>

Beside the mainly figurative nature of this manuscript, most of the images are accompanied by one line of Sanskrit or Newari caption written in Nepālākṣara characters carefully, or sometimes less carefully, traced in golden ink.<sup>4</sup> The information the caption provides is of great help in understanding and identifying the depicted scenes, which are often linked together in longer narrative sequences spanning across several folios.

The manuscript was bought in Nepal by Daniel Wright towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Bradshaw's *Notes* on the Cambridge collections, its date of acquisition is 26 February 1873, and the University Library stamp marks the date 21 July 1873.<sup>5</sup> The physical object is in good general condition, although the drawings on some pages are slightly damaged, quite possibly from before the journey to Europe, and as a consequence some captions are not easily legible.

Its precious illuminated folios are protected by two artfully decorated wooden covers (see, for instance, the front cover in Fig. 1).

---

<sup>3</sup> For the whole digitized manuscript and a currently in-progress, image-by-image description of it, see the website of the Cambridge University Digital Library (<http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-00864/1>).

<sup>4</sup> I will just mention here the highly political nature of the very naming of the language that is now commonly known as Newari. Its earlier, official name was Nepālabhāṣā and served as the administrative language of Nepal from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Incidentally, one of the first instances of the name *nepālabhāṣā* (or *nepālavāc*) and the first uses of Newari as a literary/scholarly language can be found in an unpublished commentary by Maṇika to the *Amarakośa* preserved in the Cambridge manuscript collections (Add.1698). See Formigatti 2016, for a preliminary study of its significance and a historiographical working hypothesis of a 'Nepalese renaissance' —being both Sanskrit and Newari in nature— that would stretch from approximately the time of this *Amarakośa* manuscript up to the whole of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, thus including the so-called Cambridge Kalāpustaka as one of its highest points of visual-cum-literary as well as Sanskrit-cum-Newari achievement.

<sup>5</sup> For a short and updated history of the Sanskrit collections kept in the Cambridge University Libraries and detailed references to the numerous individuals who contributed to the formation of the collections, see the article by Formigatti in the present volume.



**Fig. 1:** Wood cover, Add.864. © All images in this article are reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

Their description by Pal is worth quoting in full for the way it highlights the connections between Nepal and Inner Asia:

The edge of each cover has painted petals of lotus; and then, within two borders in gold, a bright green dragon motif, borrowed no doubt from Chinese art through Tibet, stretches along the entire edge. In the remaining space inter-twining lotus tendrils from circular medallions, within each of which is sketched in black outline, hardly visible, a figure of a divinity. The vegetal motifs and the figures are set off against a background of light red, and the entire surface of the cover is glossed over with a lacquer slip which enhances the cover's dazzling quality (Pal 1967a, 23).<sup>6</sup>

The scenes presented in the illuminations are drawn from a variety of sources, of both a sacred and secular nature, mostly Brahmanical works such as the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*,<sup>7</sup> the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Vetālapañcaviṃśati*

<sup>6</sup> A further hint to a date oscillating between the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century is the general similarity between the wooden covers of Add.864 and the decorated cover of a *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṅgīti* dated to 1570 CE and preserved among the Oxford collections with the shelfmark Bodleian MS Sansk. d. 346(R.). One more hint towards the same date range are the Nepalese Temple Banners and a Paubhā that are described in a catalogue of the Rubin Museum of Art, New York, by Vajracharya (2016, 106–110, 139–145, and *passim*). Not only do they present similar iconographical features, but they also use the Napālākṣara captions in a comparable way for identifying the various scenes. I thank Camillo Formigatti for these precious references.

<sup>7</sup> The crucial presence of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, and especially its tenth canto, quoted and depicted at both the beginning and the end of Add.864, remained only partially noticed by Pal. He does implicitly recognize the importance of Vaiṣṇava myths and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* within the pictorial project presented in the manuscript, as it is testified by the focus he puts on them

along with scenes from the Buddhist story of the prince Sudhana and the Kinnari named Manoharā. As suggested by Pal (1967a, 23), this ‘strange medley of Brahmanical and Buddhist legends in the same document is not commonly found even in Nepal, where the line of distinction between them is indeed very thin.’ However, the presence of Buddhist narratives is not as noteworthy and central as Pal seems to be assuming, since the aforementioned story of Sudhana and the Kinnari is the sole unquestionable reference to Buddhism and only occupies fifteen pages of depicted scenes, i.e., circa one tenth of the whole manuscript.<sup>8</sup>

Due to time constraints, the difficulty of deciphering and understanding some of the captions, and the shortages in knowledge of the present author, a small number of scenes still need to be properly identified and the present essay is far from being an exhaustive study of Add.864.<sup>9</sup> However, thanks to the work done during the Sanskrit Manuscripts Project, not only is it possible now to try and identify several new scenes, to correct some erroneous identifications, and to present problematic cases, but also to discuss the larger narrative sequences, and to attempt to situate the artwork within its wider cultural framework. As a preliminary warning, since I am no art historian, the present paper will not focus at all on the pictorial style of the depicted scenes, for the peculiarity of which a couple of paragraphs of the seminal article by Pal (1967a, 28) will have to suffice:

The most striking feature of the style is the manner of the delineation of the background, which is conceived as a sort of a stage back-drop, decorated with a florid pattern of scroll work. This not only adds to the exuberance of the style but also enhances its decorative quality. The design of the scroll-work shows a remarkable variation, from stylized floral

---

in his book *Vaiṣṇava Iconolgy in Nepal* (Pal 1970, 23ff and *passim*), but he probably did not identify the several verses quoted in the captions that are taken from that very text (see below).

**8** It might be argued that the figures of the Mahāsiddhas, which occupy 12 pages of the manuscript (see below), are indeed liminal figures that fall over and beyond any watertight religious division, but are mostly worshipped in Himalayan Buddhism. But even so, the total count of Buddhist and liminal depictions would occupy less than one fifth of the whole manuscript. Furthermore, I would maintain not only that Add.864 is mostly ‘Brahmanical’ in content, but also overtly Vaiṣṇava in intent, as the Viṣṇu-centred myths found both towards the beginning and the end of the manuscript seem to suggest (see previous note). The presence of Śiva at the beginning of both sides of the accordion book seems to offer evidence for the opposite, but here I do share Pal’s opinion: ‘This invocation to Śiva, at the beginning of a manuscript given largely to the illustration of Vaiṣṇava themes is not surprising in Nepal, where he is esteemed the country’s patron god’ (1967a, 24).

**9** In virtue of its sheer interest and beauty, Add.864 would certainly deserve a book-length monograph with complete high-quality reproduction of the whole manuscript in print. For the time being, such a project is bound to remain a desideratum, but the present contribution is a first step in that direction.

motifs, tracery-like light arabesques, swaying flame or cloud patterns to naturalistic lotuses, curving and voluting on slender and inter-twined tendrils. Generally, the colours employed for this ornate and delicately rendered background are red and blue, but occasionally green is also used [...]. The psychology of the style is determined as much by the dramatic content of the paintings as by the ornamental devices so effectively employed as is the background. It is essentially a linear and decorative style, acquiring its exuberant quality from the gay and vivacious delineation of the rich scroll-work. The rhythm of the scroll appears to imbue the figures with an added sense of movement and grace [...]. The purpose of the style is no doubt to achieve a picturesque and decorative effect [...]. Despite the almost frivolous and playful character of the florid scroll-work, a heroic quality is apparent in the style, evident particularly in the illuminations of the two epics.

## 2 Where to start

In order to try and unveil the rationale of the choice of scenes and their sequence, with the final aim of better understanding the purpose of the artwork as a whole, the very first task is simply to determine where the manuscript starts, and hence which side is the recto of the accordion book and which is the verso. Pal starts his study by assuming that what is now digitised as page 73 is the beginning of the artwork (see Fig. 2). He writes that ‘the illustrations begin with a hieratic representation of a multi-armed Śiva dancing on his bull and attended by two companions. The lighter figure on Śiva’s right is identified as Nandi, but the inscription below the dark and fierce-looking figure to Śiva’s left is illegible. But there is little doubt that it is Mahākālā, one of the many *pratihāras* [“guardians”] of Śiva.’



Fig. 2: Dancing Śiva with attendants, Add.864, page 73.



**Fig. 3:** The Opening Scene, Add.864, page 1.

However, I would argue that the hints given by the general structure of the narrative sequences seem to point at what is now digitised as page 1 as the actual opening scene (see Fig. 3). That is an auspicious representation of five deities with their respective consorts and mythical vehicles (*vāhanas*), seated in five niches in a sort of highly decorated arched porch, probably representing a royal palace or a royal hall within a palace. In the middle, we find Śiva with Umā, on Nāndin, here clearly represented as the main deities insofar as they are depicted in the centre and in larger scale than all the other figures in the page. To their right, Brahmā sits with his consort on the Haṃsa. Further to their right, Gaṇeśa sits on the mouse. To their left, Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī sit on Garuḍa. Further to their left, Skanda sits on the peacock. To have such a complete array of Brahmanical deities in what would otherwise just be the middle of the manuscript seems to me less likely than having the figure of the dancing Śiva with his attendants as the image for the middle of the work, contrary to what Pal seemed to have assumed.

Moreover, the pages that follow this auspicious scene in the royal porch represent well-known mythological events that refer to the beginnings of time and the previous eons, foundational myths that indeed find their ideal place at the beginning of the seemingly motley composition of different narratives that Add.864 is made of. A brief description of some of these scenes will show their ideal position as opening. The second page is actually divided in two sub-scenes, an illustrative stratagem which will be deftly used throughout the whole manuscript, sometimes with divisions in three or even four sub-scenes. In this case, to the left, we find the representation known as *paramātman*, also called *viṣṇunyagrodhaśāyin* (see Fig. 4): Viṣṇu is reclining on a Banyan tree while the seer (*ṛṣi*) Mārkaṇḍeya is represented twice, first as an emaciated sage adoring





Fig. 4: *viṣṇunyagrodhaśāyin* and *śeṣaśayana*, Add.864, page 2.

the supreme god and then jubilant in the water after discovering the whole universe in Viṣṇu's mouth. To the right, we find the representation known as *yoganidrā*, also called *śeṣaśayana*: Viṣṇu is lying on Ananta, before the manifestation of the entire cosmos, with the 'creator god' Brahmā seated on a lotus coming out of Viṣṇu's navel. Here on the second page one finds the first among the numerous captions in Nepālākṣara characters, which are more often than not drawn from the Sanskrit texts that the various scenes represent. This closely corresponds to verse 12 of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 10.87, in which both episodes are referred to.<sup>10</sup>

From the third to the sixth page, we have the first short narrative sequence,<sup>11</sup> centred on another mythical, foundational episode of origin, the churning of the

<sup>10</sup> The almost entirely legible text reads: *svasṛṣṭam idam āpiya, śayānaṃ saha śaktibhiḥ | tadante bodhayāṃ cakru, s talliṅgaiḥ śrutayaḥ* [-1-]raṃ [||]. It corresponds to 10.84.12 in the critical edition. (NB: for the transliteration of the captions, I have adopted the conventions laid down for the Sanskrit Manuscript Project and recorded in the project blog: <http://sanskrit.lib.cam.ac.uk/materials/conventions>, without however bothering to note the instances in which the images interrupt the continuity of the text). The only missing *akṣara* cannot but be the *pa* as found in *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, and the text can be rendered as 'After he has withdrawn this [universe] that had been emitted by himself, as he was lying asleep together with his powers, the Vedas awakened him at the end of that [cosmic period] by [chanting] his signs.'

<sup>11</sup> As argued by Pal (1970, 23), the previous image could also be interpreted as linked to the episode of the *samudramanthana*, as it was the sleeping Viṣṇu who, awakened by the gods, advised them to churn the ocean of milk together with the *asuras*.





Fig. 5: *samudramanthana*, Add.864, page 3.

ocean of milk on the part of *devas* ('gods') and *asuras* ('demons') and its immediate consequences. As it is clear from the caption on page five,<sup>12</sup> this could also be considered as the beginning of the scenes from the *Mahābhārata*, the longest narrative sequence in the manuscript, ending with page forty-eight of what I am considering the recto of the accordion book, and therefore practically occupying almost one third of the whole manuscript. Thus, page 3 features the *samudramanthana* proper (see Fig. 5): the mount Mandara is in the middle functioning as the churning stick, the serpent Vāsuki functions as the rope, while gods and demons are forcefully pulling on the two sides. Pages 4, 5 and 6 represent, respectively, some of the gems (*ratnas*) coming out of the milk ocean including the deadly poison being swiftly drunk by Śiva, the seizing of the *amṛta* ('the elixir of immortality') on the part of the gods thanks to the intervention of Viṣṇu disguised as the stunning Mohinī, and the final defeat of the demons.<sup>13</sup> In the following forty-two pages the whole story of the *Mahābhārata* is narrated by way of only representing some crucial events, most probably with a conscious focus

<sup>12</sup> The caption in Nepālākṣarā characters reads: ॥ *manthānaṃ mandaraṃ kṛtvā, tathā netraṃ ca vāsukiṃ, | devā mathitum ārabdhā, ḥ samudraṃ nidhim ambhasāṃ* ॥. It corresponds closely to *Mahābhārata* 1.16.12 (verse numbering always from the Critical Edition, unless differently stated). In Van Buitenen's translation (1973, 73), the verse translates as: 'Thus the Gods made Mount Mandara the churning staff; and using the Snake Vāsuki as a twirling rope, started to churn the ocean, treasury of the waters.'

<sup>13</sup> For a more detailed description of these and all the other pages, see the online description of the manuscript.

on the figure of Bhīma, whose massive, red figure features prominently in many action-packed and often gruesome events.<sup>14</sup>

Before describing the general composition of the various narrative and non-narrative sequences in the manuscript and thus devoting some more space to the storyline of the Great War, let's briefly rehash and conclude my argument regarding the identification of the actual beginning of the manuscript. I am well aware that the presence of the five main 'Hindu' deities with their consorts and vehicles, followed by foundational mythological scenes such as Viṣṇu sleeping on Ananta and the churning of the milk ocean, are no knockout argument for the identification of the recto. However, the hints for this side being the initial page outweigh those for the other side, i.e. the dancing Śiva and the presence of Gaṇeśa, 'god of beginnings', in the following image.<sup>15</sup>

### 3 Outline of the manuscript contents: the recto

Now that the issue of the beginning has been tackled, at least tentatively, it is possible to give a general but accurate overview of the content of the manuscript, along which I will focus on some images, chosen for their beauty, interest or problematic nature. After the opening page (1) and the initial scenes on various foundational myths (2–6),<sup>16</sup> we have forty-two pages (7–48) dedicated to the main storyline of the *Mahābhārata*.

---

**14** It is relatively safe to postulate, or at least hypothesize, a connection between the prominence of Bhīma in the *Mahābhārata* as depicted in this manuscript and the centrality of the cult of Bhīmasena as a form of Bhairava from the second half of the second millennium in Nepal (see, for instance, Bühnemann 2013).

**15** Moreover, after these two clearly introductory folios, the second longest narrative sequence of the manuscript starts (thirty pages of length), the *Rāmāyaṇa*, for which the narration commences *in medias res* with the sad (and possibly inauspicious) scene of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa bidding farewell to their parents, Daśaratha and Kaikeyī. In my opinion, this would be no ideal moment to be represented as the hypothetical first narrative snippet of the manuscript, as Pal assumed in his article.

**16** As the captions for pages 5 and 6 are already quotations from the *Mahābhārata*, one might include the *samudramanthana* sequence already within the larger narrative sequence of the *Mahābhārata*. However, the rest of the pages dedicated to the epic are clearly focused on the adventures of the Pāṇḍava brothers and do not depict any of the numerous digressions and subplots contained within the larger narrative. Therefore, it also makes sense to divide the structure of the manuscript as I have just proposed, with a small section on foundational myths and then a larger one on the story of the Great Battle. In any case, the general analysis is not impeached by this interpretive choice.



Fig. 6: The 'second Hiḍimba-episode', Add.864, page 21.



Fig. 7: The encounter with Hiḍimbā and Hiḍimba, Add.864, page 9.

By relying on the evidence of both the depictions and the Nepālākṣara captions, the images can be subdivided according to the books of the *Mahābhārata* from which the scenes are drawn. Thus, pages 7 to 16 depict episodes from the first book, starting with the snake sacrifice by Janamejaya narrated in the framework narrative of the epic (7), and ending with the depiction of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa helping the fire god to destroy the Khāṇḍava forest (16).<sup>17</sup> Pages 17 to 20 depict four

<sup>17</sup> The other episodes are the conflagration of the lacquer house (8); the encounter with the Rākṣasas Hiḍimba and Hiḍimbā, the defeat of Hiḍimba, the union of Bhīma and Hiḍimbā and the salutation of their son, Ghaṭotkaca (9–10); the defeat of the Rākṣasa Baka by the hand of Bhīma (11); the episode of the Gandharva chieftain Citraratha (12); the *lakṣyabheda* scene at

among the most dramatic and crucial episodes from the second book: the killing of Jarāsandha (17) torn apart by Bhīma, the killing of Śiśupāla (18) beheaded by Kṛṣṇa's discus, the fateful game of dice that sets the whole nefarious plot in motion (19), and the scathing humiliation of Draupadī on Duṣṣāsana's part (20).

Page 21 is extremely anomalous (see Fig. 6). The painting is divided in three sub-scenes. To the left, the powerful and menacing forest-dweller Hiḍimba faces the five Pāṇḍava brothers and Draupadī; in the centre, Bhīma fights with him; to the right, Bhīma finally subdues and chokes Hiḍimba. What is utterly surprising about this folio is that this scene seems to be nothing but a repetition of what has already been portrayed in a different fashion between the right subdivision of page 9 (see Fig. 7), in which we see Bhīma wrestling with Hiḍimba, and the left subdivision of page 10 (see Fig. 8), in which we see Hiḍimba subdued by Bhīma. The episode is thus out of sequence here, as the killing of Hiḍimba occurs in the first book and here the story has moved to the second book. The identification of the depicted Rākṣasa as Hiḍimba seems to be safe, as it is based on the Nepālākṣara caption, which closely corresponds to *Mahābhārata* 1.142.31<sup>18</sup> and mentions the joy of the



Fig. 8: Hiḍimba defeated and Bhīma's family, Add.864, page 10.

Draupadī's *svayaṃvara* when Arjuna hits the target with his arrow (13); the battle of the Pāṇḍavas against the other princes at the end of the *svayaṃvara* (14); and the meeting with the Fire god that preludes the destruction of the Khāṇḍava forest (15).

**18** It reads *hiḍimbaṃ nihitaṃ dṛṣṭvā, saṃhṛṣtās te tarasvinaḥ | apūjayan naravyāghraṃ, bhīmasenam arindamaṃ ||*. Van Buitenen (1973, 299) translates 'When they saw Hiḍimba dead, they were wildly excited and complimented the tigerlike, enemy-taming Bhīma.' Moreover, the

Pāṇḍava brothers at the sight of Hiḍimba's death. Therefore, the simplest interpretation of the conundrum is that the misplaced scene is nothing but a mere mistake on the part of the artist.

However, a bolder interpretation for this interesting anomaly might prove more interesting: it is perfectly possible that the artist and the scribe were two different people who carried out their respective tasks one after the other, first the depiction of the scene and then the writing of the caption. It is, therefore, also possible that the artist intended to represent in this page the ill-fated encounter with the Rākṣasa Kirmīra —the brother of Baka whom Bhīma killed on page 11— occurring at the beginning of the third book (*Mahābhārata* 3.12). According to this alternative interpretation I am proposing, we have the Pāṇḍava brothers and Draupadī facing Kirmīra on the left of the page. In the middle, it is then Kirmīra that Bhīma is fighting. To the right, Bhīma subdues and finally kills Kirmīra. In this way, the depicted episode is in the right sequence with the preceding images, with a distinct implicit connection with the killing of Baka that is the reason of Kirmīra's furious rage, and also with the following pages of the manuscript that describe events happening in the third book. Therefore, the mistake is not to be attributed to the artist in the depiction of the events, but only to the scribe who mistook the scene for the fight between Bhīma and Hiḍimba and accordingly chose a Sanskrit *śloka* from that episode. Obviously, this interpretation remains speculative, but it does seem more plausible than a simple but unlikely case of extreme forgetfulness on the part of an artist who had the full and exclusive responsibility of each and every aspect of the production of this astonishing manuscript.<sup>19</sup>

Pages 22 to 31 depict episodes from the third book, starting with the killing of the Daitya Mūka (22), who had assumed the form of a boar and is simultaneously hit by the arrows of Arjuna and the Kirāta (Śiva in disguise), and ending with the episode of Karṇa warned by his father, the Sun God, not to give away his magic earrings and armour, but convinced by Indra to finally do so in exchange of a

---

verse that precedes this one, that is, *Mahābhārata* 1.142.30, is the one quoted as caption for page 10: *ī bāhubhyām yokramitvā(!) taṃ,, valavān\_ pāṇḍunandanah / madhye bhaṅktvā mahābāhu,,r harṣayām āsa pāṇḍavān\_ ||*. Van Buitenen (1973, 299) translates 'The powerful son of Pāṇḍu racked the body on his knee and bent it till the spine broke, to the delight of the Pāṇḍavas.'

<sup>19</sup> Excluding this very anomaly that I am tentatively trying to explain here and a later anomaly (page 45) that I even find less troubling, Pal's statement regarding the lack of sequentiality in the episodes of the *Mahābhārata* is indeed inaccurate. ('Unlike the representations of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, where a sequence of events is followed, the artist does not seem to have cared to observe any such order in illustrating the *Mahābhārata*.' Pal 1967a, 25).





Fig. 9: The *viśvarūpadarśana*, Add.864, page 35.

never-failing weapon that he intends to use on Arjuna.<sup>20</sup> Pages 32 to 34 depict episodes from the fourth book, the killing of Kīcaka, Virāṭa's lustful marshal, whose very extremities get literally pushed into his trunk by the mighty Bhīma (32); Arjuna is ready to fight and retrieve the cattle that had been raided by the Kauravas (33); and the Pāṇḍava brothers give up their disguise and identify themselves to king Virāṭa (34). Pages 35 and 36 depict episodes from the sixth book: the *viśvarūpadarśana*, the crucial episode of the *Bhagavadgītā* (see Fig. 9),<sup>21</sup> and

**20** The other depicted episodes are the fight between Arjuna and the Kirāta ending with the subdued Arjuna who recognizes and venerates Śiva in disguise (23); Draupadī carried by Ghaṭotkaca to the next hermitage, followed by the Pāṇḍava brothers, in their tour of sacred fords (24); Bhīma trying to lift the tail of Hanumān who has the form of a small monkey (25); Karṇa fighting against Citrasena and his army of Gandharvas (26); the breaking of Karṇa's chariot and the capture of Duryodhana by the Gandharvas (27); the captured Duryodhana set free and put to shame by the Pāṇḍava brothers (28); the lustful Jayadratha of Sindhu abducts Draupadī, but is followed by the ṛṣi Dhaumya (29); and, finally, the Pāṇḍavas reach Jayadratha who gets thrashed by Bhīma, so that Draupadī is rescued (30).

**21** Pal has a very suggestive description of the scene that is worth quoting in full: 'The battlefield is indicated by the confronted chariots of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa on the one side and of the Kauravas on the other. The dark central figure with many arms and legs, multiple heads and faces, some of them awesome and painted even on his belly and chest, represents the universal manifestation. On the chariot to the left, the bewildered and frightened Arjuna shrinks away from the manifestation with enjoined palms. The human Kṛṣṇa is seated in front of the chariot, assuring Arjuna with his right hand, and holding the reins of the horses with the left. The insignia on the Pāṇḍava standard behind Kṛṣṇa is a monkey in a flying posture. This is no doubt Hanumān who, on an earlier occasion, had told Bhīma that he would be present at the battle of Kurukṣetra. On the other side of the manifestation are the Kauravas, led by Duryodhana, and they also seem

the battle that ensues after Kṛṣṇa finally convinces Arjuna to fight and annihilate his enemies. Pages 37 to 39 depict episodes from the seventh book: the fight between Arjuna and the king Bhagadatta (37), whose great elephant has just trampled upon the mighty Bhīma; the killing of Ghaṭotkaca (38); and the treacherous beheading of Droṇa on Dṛṣṭadyumna's part (39).<sup>22</sup> Pages 40 and 41 depict episodes from the eighth book, the fight between Bhīma and Duḥśāsana (40) that famously ends with the former drinking the latter's blood, and the final duel between Arjuna and Karna, who is killed while trying to set free the wheel of his chariot that was stuck in the ground (41).

Pages 42 to 46 depict events from the ninth and tenth book, starting with Duryodhana hidden in a tank after the battle, while his allies urge him to return to fight (42). Then, on page 43, Duryodhana's hideaway is discovered by Bhīma who drags him out, forces him into a fight, and finally defeats him by treacherously smashing his thighs. Page 44 depicts Aśvatthaman, Kṛtavarman and Kṛpa sitting by a banyan tree and observing a ghastly scene: a nocturnal bird of prey is swooping on sleeping crows and slaughtering them in their slumber (Fig. 10).<sup>23</sup>

---

wonder-struck, although only Arjuna was supposed to have beheld the manifestation. The insignia on their standard appears to be a lion' (Pal 1970, 97–98). The barely legible caption in Nepālākṣarā characters reads: [ॠ anekabāhūdarava]ktranetraṃ paśyāmi tvāṃ sarvato nantarūpaṃ | [nāntaṃ na ma]dhyam na puna[s tavā]diṃ paśyā[mī vi]śveśvara viśvarūpaṃ ||. It corresponds to *Bhagavadgītā* 11.16, which in the recent translation by Flood and Martin (Flood 2015, 57) is rendered as 'I see your many arms, your bellies, faces; / I see you everywhere, whose form is boundless, / endless, with no beginning and no middle, / Lord of the Universe, whose form your own is.'

**22** The caption reads: *dṛṣṭadyumno vadhīd dronāṃ rathatalpe naraṣabha | śonitena pariklinno rathād bhumim arindamaḥ || lohitāṃga ivādityo, durdarśaḥ pratyapadyata ||*. It closely corresponds to *Mahābhārata* 7.165.52cd and 7.165.53. It can be rendered as 'O foremost of men, Dṛṣṭadyuma slew Droṇa on the deck of his chariot. [Then] the tamer of enemies jumped down from the chariot on the earth, as he was drenched in blood, hard to look at, like the red sun.'

**23** Pal's identification of the episode as 'the end of the battle, when the ravens and the vultures sweep down on the battlefield as Yudhiṣṭhira and others mourn the death and destruction around them (Pal 1967a, 25)' cannot be right, as shown by the caption that starts in the preceding page and reads: *saṃnipatya tu śākhāyām, nyagrodhasya vihaṃgamaḥ | suptāṃ jaghāna subahū, n vāyasān vāyasāntakaḥ || upadeśaḥ kṛto nena, pakṣiṇā mama saṃyuge | śatrūnām kṣapane yukta, ḥ prāptaḥ kālāś ca me mataḥ ||*. It closely corresponds to *Mahābhārata* 10.1.39 and 10.1.44, which Crosby (2009, 13) renders as: 'Now that rider of the sky, falling upon the banyan bough, killed many a crow in slumber, bringing the crows their end.' and 'This winged bird has given me a lesson in the art of war tailored to my enemies and I deem the time has come.'



Fig. 10: The owl and the crows, Add.864, page 44.

The episode gives Aśvatthaman the idea of stealthily attacking the Pāṇḍava camp during the night, in order to avenge the unjust murder of his father Droṇa and the death of the hundreds of warriors who were fighting on the Kaurava side. The following page (45) presents one more problematic issue regarding the sequentiality of the events: Aśvatthaman, Kṛtavarma and Kṛpa converse with the dying Duryodhana, while he is surrounded by crows, vultures and scavengers, ravenously waiting for his death. The caption<sup>24</sup> seems to indicate that this is the episode taking place at the end of the ninth book, and therefore before the massacre of the crows at the banyan trees depicted in the previous page and narrated at the beginning of the tenth book. To resolve the conundrum, one might argue that the close succession of the two events prevents any illogicality in the admittedly inverted narrative as presented in the manuscript. Thus, unlike the more troublesome case of the ‘second Hiḍimba-episode’ (see above), no particular reason needs to be postulated to account for this small anomaly, but a small oversight on the part of the artist, which in any case does not disrupt the intelligibility of the storyline. Alternatively, one might argue that this scene actually represents the second meeting between the three Kaurava warriors and the dying Duryodhana, the one occurring in the tenth book after the night massacre in the Pāṇḍava camp. Accordingly, only the caption would be misplaced, just as in the case of the second interpretation for the ‘second Hiḍimba-episode.’ Furthermore,

<sup>24</sup> The caption reads: *ṛvṛttaṃ bhūtagaṇair ghoraiḥ kravyādaiś ca samantataḥ | yathā dhanam lipsamanai, r bhṛtyair nṛpatisattamaḥ ||*. It closely corresponds to *Mahābhārata* 9.64.7, which Meiland (2007, 391) renders as ‘[the long-armed hero] was surrounded on all sides by terrifying hordes of spirits who feed on flesh—just as an eminent king is surrounded by dependents who covet wealth.’



verse 9.4 in the tenth book somewhat mirrors the *śloka* from the ninth book quoted as caption here.<sup>25</sup> The two verses might have easily been swapped willingly or just used interchangeably in the version of the *Mahābhārata* that the scribe was using. In page 46, as retold in *Mahābhārata* 10.6, Aśvatthaman, Kṛtavarman and Kṛpa try and fight against a huge, monstrous incarnation of the God Śiva, here represented as Mahākāla or Bhairava, before they manage to propitiate the great God, and then enter the enemy camp and slaughter the Pāṇḍava army in their sleep, as graphically depicted in the right portion of the image.

Page 47 represents the *śaraśayana* episode from the twelfth book: Bhīṣma is lying on his deathbed of arrows and is intent on instructing Yudhiṣṭhira and the other Pāṇḍavas about the subtleties of *dharma*. Nevertheless, the caption quotes a passage from the sixth book,<sup>26</sup> illustrating the very moment that Bhīṣma, pierced by a shower of arrows, falls on the ground and is defeated, although thanks to a boon (the *svecchāmṛtyu*) bestowed by his own father he can choose the moment of his death and so decides to postpone it until after the fateful end of the Great War. Unlike the misplaced and unduly repeated episode/caption of Hiḍimba that is found on page 21 or the somewhat problematic case of page 45, this alleged case of apparent misplacement undoubtedly refers only to the caption and can be satisfactorily explained by assuming the intention to choose a Sanskrit passage laden with pathos over and above any of the numerous prosaic, didactic passages that could have been gleaned from the twelfth book. Therefore, in my opinion, there is no need to hypothesize any complicated scenario as it was proposed for the two previous cases.

Page 48 carries the last depiction from the storyline of the *Mahābhārata*: the royal ablution of Yudhiṣṭhira after the victory of the Great War. However, the caption is drawn from the tenth chapter of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, which in a way encapsulates the narrative of the *Mahābhārata* by being cited both at the beginning

<sup>25</sup> The verse reads: *vṛtaṃ samantād bahubhiḥ śvāpadair ghoradarśanaiḥ | śālāvṛkagaṇaiś caiva bhakṣyayiṣyadbhir antikāt ||*. Crosby (2009, 99) translates it as ‘He was circled on all sides by a great gathering of gruesome wild beasts, with packs of jackals and wolves closing in, in anticipation of their approaching meal.’

<sup>26</sup> It reads: *śarasamghakṣataṃ viraṃ, sāśrukaṇṭhas tato vṛṣaḥ | bhīṣma bhīṣma mahābāho,, ity uvāca mahādhyutiḥ ||*. It corresponds closely to *Mahābhārata* 6.117.4. It can be rendered as ‘[When he saw] that hero pierced by a shower of arrows, the immensely glorious Vṛṣa with tears flowing down to his neck said “Oh Bhīṣma, great-armed Bhīṣma.”’ It is the touching moment when Karna realizes that Bhīṣma is doomed.

and at the end of the storyline, possibly adding a further religious layer of interpretation to the already Viṣṇu-focused narrative of the Sanskrit epic.<sup>27</sup>

After the long pictorial sequence centred on the *Mahābhārata*, two other narrative sequences occupy the rest of the recto of the Kalāpustaka manuscript: the Buddhist story of the prince Sudhana of Hastināpura and the Kinnarī named Manoharā (49–64)<sup>28</sup> and the *Vetālapañcaviṃśati* (65–72). I will postpone the treatment of these two narratives to a forthcoming dedicated study, as both stories exist in a plurality of recensions<sup>29</sup> — even in multiple languages as far as the Buddhist story is concerned — and therefore present a different and more complex set of problems for the identification of the scenes and the study of the connections between the depictions, their textual sources and the ingenuity of the artist in selecting and representing the episodes.<sup>30</sup> Let's move then to the verso of the accordion book.

## 4 Outline of the manuscript contents: the verso

As already discussed and argued for above, the verso starts with pages 73 and 74, introductory images depicting a dancing Śiva with his attendants (73) and a multi-armed Gaṇeśa (74) accompanied by female attendants and a male figure

<sup>27</sup> The caption reads: ॠ rājasūyāvabhṛthena, snāto rājā yudhiṣṭhiraḥ | brahmacakṣatṛivīṣaṃ madhye,, śuśubhe surarāḍ iva ||, which can be translated as 'Bathed through the ablution of the royal consecration, the king Yudhiṣṭhira shone among Brahmins, Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas as if he were the king of the gods'. It closely corresponds to *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 10.74.51.

<sup>28</sup> Pal (1967a, 27) already identifies a few episodes of the story. In particular, page 57 represents Sudhana scaling mountains and facing dangers in search of Kinnarapura, where his beloved Manoharā lives; page 63 represents Sudhana finally reunited with Manoharā and back in his kingdom. Page 64 represents, on the left, the ascension to heaven of Sudhana and Manoharā, while on the right it represents the court of king Vikramāditya, as an introduction to the following pages where scenes from the *Vetālapañcaviṃśati* are illustrated.

<sup>29</sup> Pal (1967a, 27) traces some similitudes between the story of Sudhana and Manoharā as depicted in our manuscript and the version narrated in the *Mahāvastu*, although he postulates that we are probably faced with a version specifically elaborated in Nepal. For a short but comprehensive review of the different versions of the story of Sudhana and the Kinnarī as transmitted both in texts and artistic representations, see Straube (2006, 3–7). For a brief and updated survey of the different versions of the *Vetālapañcaviṃśati*, see Sathaye (2011).

<sup>30</sup> An additional difficulty in analyzing this portion of the manuscript is the Newari language that is found in most of its captions. Furthermore, the rationale behind the linguistic choice of Newari over Sanskrit also deserves a concerted reflection on multilingualism in early 17<sup>th</sup>-century Nepal that cannot be pursued in the present study.

who might be a Gaṇa as suggested by Pal (1967a, 24), or possibly a Rākṣasa, if one compares the depiction of his face with the other Rākṣasas portrayed in the *Rāmāyaṇa* storyline. And after these two initial images, one finds precisely the beginning of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the second longest narrative sequence of the manuscript, starting with page 75 and ending with page 104, for a total of thirty pages, more than one fifth of the whole accordion book.<sup>31</sup> The crucial importance of the two epics in the artist's pictorial project appears evident by the brute fact that together they occupy practically half of the pages of the entire manuscript.

Just as in the case of the *Mahābhārata* storyline, it is convenient to organize the scenes according to the books of the epic they are drawn from. The story starts *in medias res* with page 75 that marks the passage from the second to the third book, from the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* to the *Āraṇyakāṇḍa*: to the left, the farewell of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to Daśaratha and Kaikeyī; in the centre, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa proceeding to the forest together with Sītā; and, to the right, the forest has been reached and Rāma and Sītā are seating on a lotus-throne, in what seems to be a cave (Fig. 11). The third book is then represented by two extremely theatrical scenes: the episode of the golden deer — already described in detail in Pal (1967a, 24) — that lures away Rāma and then Lakṣmaṇa, so that Rāvaṇa in the guise of an ascetic can approach Sītā (page 76); the episode of Jaṭāyu, a demi-god who has the form of a giant bird of prey and who tried to save the kidnapped Sītā from Rāvaṇa's clutches (page 77). For its intense vividness, the scene deserves to be shown here (Fig. 12): on the left, holding Sītā with one of his arms, Rāvaṇa on his flying chariot is battling against Jaṭāyu, who is represented twice, once flying high in the heat of the fight and then falling down mortally wounded by Rāvaṇa; in the centre, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa are talking to the dying Jaṭāyu; to the left, a scene probably representing the desperation of Rāma over the kidnapping of Sītā: he is standing with an arm raised to the sky and a languid expression on his face, while Lakṣmaṇa kneels down in front of him with the hands in an *añjali*.<sup>32</sup>

31 I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to Mary and John Brockington who helped a great deal in the identification and analysis of the scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* storyline.

32 The caption reads: [sa] bhinnapakṣaḥ sahasā rākṣasā bhīmakarmaṇā | nī[papāta] hato | gr̥dhro dharanyām alpajīvitaḥ ||. This closely corresponds to *Rāmāyaṇa* 3.49.37, which is translated by Pollock (1984, 195) as 'The moment the savage rākṣasa cut off his wings, the vulture fell stricken to the ground, barely alive'. The caption then continues: *evam uktvā citāṃ dīptā, m āropya pat-ageśvaram | dadāha rāmo dha[r̥mā]tmā, patatrīm[draṃ jaṭāyu]ṣaṃ ||*. This closely corresponds to *Rāmāyaṇa* 3.64.31. On the basis of Pollock (1984, 229), it can be translated as 'So righteous Rāma spoke, and placing the lord of birds upon the pyre, he lit it and cremated Jaṭāyus, the king among flying creatures.'



Fig. 11: *Rāmāyaṇa*'s opening scene, Add.864, page 75.



Fig. 12: The episode of Jaṭāyu, Add.864, page 77.

Only page 78 is dedicated to the fourth book, the *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, to its most central and dramatic events: the alliance between Rāma and Sugrīva sealed by Hanumān; and the duel between Sugrīva and his elder brother Bali, won by the former only thanks to the help of Rāma who deceitfully shoots Bali with his arrow while he is wrestling with his younger brother (Fig. 13).<sup>33</sup> Pages 79 to 83 depict

<sup>33</sup> The caption reads: *sugrīvo rāghavaś caiva, vayasatvam upāgato prahr̥ṣṭamanasau virau tāv ubhau naravānarau || tataḥ śareṇābhīhato, rāmenākṣṭamanā | papāta sahasā bhūmau [ni]kṛta iva pādapaḥ ||*. The first part corresponds to *Rāmāyaṇa* 4.5.16cd–17ab. It can be translated, on the basis of Lefebvre (1984, 64), as ‘Then Sugrīva and Rāghava entered into an alliance, delighted at heart, both Hari and the monkey’. The second śloka closely corresponds to *Rāmāyaṇa* 4.17.1.



Fig. 13: The killing of Bali, Add.864, page 78.

episodes from the fifth book, the *Sundarakāṇḍa*. The sequence starts with Hanumān's heroic leap across the ocean, depicted in the moment preceding it, as he is surrounded by other monkeys (79), and it ends with Hanumān's fiery havoc in Laṅka and his return back to Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and the camp of the monkeys in Kiṣkindhā (83).<sup>34</sup>

All image from page 84 up to and including page 104 are dedicated to episodes from the sixth book, the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*. Therefore, way more than half of the pages dedicated to the *Rāmāyaṇa* describe events narrating the final conflict between Rāma and Rāvaṇa, a clear choice on the part of the artist who presumably wanted to represent the culminating moments of the narrative and chose many of them among the pathos-laden scenes narrated in the prolonged war among Rāma's and Rāvaṇa's armies. As stated by Goldman (Goldman et al. 2009, 3), the Battle Book represents 'the guts, as it were, of the poem' and 'nearly twice the length of the next-longest *kāṇḍa*, concerns itself with what, from an important perspective, may be considered the real business of the *Rāmāvatāra*', i.e. the *dharmic* elimination of the world-threatening Rāvaṇa.

---

It can be translated, on the basis of Lefebvre (1984, 87), as 'Then struck by the arrow, his heart taken away by Rāma, he fell suddenly on the ground like a tree cut down.'

<sup>34</sup> The other depicted episodes are Sitā tormented by Rāvaṇa while Hanumān is spying on them; Rāvaṇa is then summoned away (or maybe held back) by two Rākṣasas (or, possibly, he is quarreling with Vibhiṣaṇa, represented twice), and Sitā is consoled by a woman, presumably Trijaṭā or Saramā (80); Rāvaṇa menacing Sitā again, Hanumān's encounter with Sitā, and Hanumān smashing the ladies' grove (81); Hanumān defeats a Rākṣasa (possibly, Akṣa), but is defeated by Indrajit, who captures him and takes him in front of Rāvaṇa (82).



Fig. 14: Illusionary Hero and Heroine, Add.864, page 88.

The first page of this long sequence (84) represents the well-known episode of the *setubandha*, the construction of the bridge that joins Bhārata to Laṅkā: Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Vibhīṣaṇa and the monkey army are about to cross the ocean, while Rāvaṇa is represented flying in his *vimāna* on the other side of the body of water that is being bridged by the causeway (84). The page that closes the story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (104) depicts Rāma's lavish royal consecration ceremony in Ayodhyā. Two Brahmins (one of them should be the great ṛṣi Vasiṣṭha) are pouring water over Rāma and Sītā, while Lakṣmaṇa, Hanumān and other monkeys surround them.<sup>35</sup>

Among the many remaining images,<sup>36</sup> I will focus on two more episodes, one for its intrinsic interest, and the other one for correcting a misidentification on

35 The caption reads: *rāmaṃ ratnamaye pīṭhe, prāṇmukhaṃ saha sītayā | upaviṣṭa(!) mahātmānaṃ, maharṣir abhyaṣecayat ||*. It could be rendered as 'The great sage was consecrating Rāma, the great-souled one, as he was sitting with Sītā on a gemmed throne with his head leaning forward.' The verse vaguely resembles *Rāmāyaṇa* 6.116.54 and is anyway a summary of the main theme of *sarga* 116, which closes the sixth book of the epic.

36 The other depicted episodes are: Aṅgada delivers Rāma's message of war to Rāvaṇa in his court (85); the Rākṣasas fail at capturing Aṅgada, then he is back in the monkeys' camp in front of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa (86); the killing of Kumbhakarna, Rāvaṇa's gargantuan brother (87); the severed head of the fake Rāma and the illusory Sītā being slain (88, see below for a discussion of it); the illusions are revealed: Sītā shows the illusory severed head of Rāma to Hanumān, and then Hanumān shows Rāma's illusory head in front of Rāma and his allies while the body of the illusory Sītā (?), slain, still lies on the ground (89); Lakṣmaṇa and the monkeys attack Indrajit and disrupt his magical rite (90); the death of Indrajit (91); Rāvaṇa is informed of the death of his son Indrajit and decides to enter the battlefield (92); Rāvaṇa fights against Lakṣmaṇa (93, see below for a discussion of it); Lakṣmaṇa, unconscious after the fight with Rāvaṇa, lies on the lap

Pal's part. After the frantic battle scene depicting Kumbhakarṇa's death (87), page 88 represents a change in Rāvaṇa's strategy to win the war against Rāma and the monkey army (Fig. 14). The image is divided in two sub-scenes: on the left, the magician Vidyujjihva presents an illusory severed head of Rāma to Sītā, in order to break her resolve, while Hanumān is watching the scene hidden above in a tree; on the right, a flying, green demon is cutting the throat of an illusory Sītā (*māyāsītā*), in front of a distressed party that includes Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Vibhīṣaṇa, Hanumān (?), Aṅgada and two other monkeys. The events continue on page 89 (Fig. 15), where Rāvaṇa's illusions are dissolved: on the left, Sītā (or possibly Saramā) shows the illusory severed head of Rāma to Hanumān; on the right, Hanumān has taken the fictitious head in front of Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Vibhīṣaṇa and the monkeys, all struck with utter amazement, while what is possibly the body of the illusory Sītā, slain, still lies on the ground. What is peculiar about these two pages is how the artist is heavily reinterpreting the story as retold in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, or how he might be following a different (possibly Nepalese) version I have not been able to track down yet.<sup>37</sup> In the *Rāmāyaṇa* as critically edited, the episode of the illusory severed head of Rāma occurs way before the killing of Kumbhakarṇa, towards the beginning of the book. And it is not some

---

of Vibhīṣaṇa, while the monkeys inform Rāma about his brother's defeat (94); a broken-hearted Rāma seats with the wounded Lakṣmaṇa on his lap (95); Hanumān flies back, carrying the mountain Gandhamādana, seat of magical medicinal herbs. Then, still on Rāma's lap, Lakṣmaṇa is restored to life by the elixir (96); Lakṣmaṇa is restored to life and is warmly greeted by Rāma (97); Rāvaṇa's great sacrifice is disrupted (98); the final duel between Rāma and Rāvaṇa (99); Sītā's repudiation and ordeal by fire (100); Rāma and Sītā are happily re-united (101); Vibhīṣaṇa is consecrated king of Laṅkā (102) and the return journey to Ayodhyā (103).

37 In a personal communication, Mary Brockington confirmed the as-yet untraceable nature of the original traits of the storyline as represented in these two pages. Moreover, she suggested that the female body to be seen on page 89 could originally derive from a motif found in Rājaśekhara's *Bālarāmāyaṇa*: Rāvaṇa attempts to demoralise Rāma and prevent him building and crossing the causeway by throwing to the northern shore the severed head of a counterfeit Sītā. A much-developed and narratively different version of the same motif is found in the eighteenth-century Thai *Ramakien* and in other Southeast Asian versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, in which the female corpse is impersonated by Vibhīṣaṇa's daughter or some other character. For a discussion of this specific motif and some crucial methodological remarks on 'visual texts' and 'verbal texts' in the historical reconstruction of narrative motifs, see Brockington 2012.





Fig. 15: Illusions revealed, Add.864, page 89.

green demon, but Indrajit himself who conjures up the illusory Sītā and slaughters her in front of his enemies. Furthermore, what is crucially missing in the version of the critical edition is the connection between the two episodes based on the double-edged power of *māyā*. By juxtaposing the two episodes, the artist (or the version he follows) manages to have the magic power of the Rākṣasas defeat itself in a cunning twist in the plot: it is by the very illusory head of Rāma, brought to his attention by Hanumān, that Rāma realizes the trick, overcomes his dependency and is now ready to fight again.

Let's move on to the other episode I wish to focus on. Page 93 (Fig. 16) represents a furious multi-headed and multi-armed black Rākṣasa flying on a *vimāna* and on the verge of attacking Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and the other monkeys. Pal (1967a, 24) identifies this scene as the famous struggle between Indrajit and Lakṣmaṇa, 'one of the most dramatic and poignant incidents relating to the great battle. Hidden in the clouds, Indrajit (or Meghanāda) fatally strikes Lakṣmaṇa with the divine weapon *śaktiśel* [sic!].' However, the series of events narrated in the previous images clearly shows that the flying multi-headed Rākṣasa must be Rāvaṇa himself, who indeed strikes down Lakṣmaṇa with his mighty javelin in the 88 *sarga* of the sixth book.<sup>38</sup> In fact, page 91 depicts the killing of Indrajit and page 92 sees Rāvaṇa receive the terrible news and rush into battle.

<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the caption that starts on page 92 and also occupies the first part of page 93 corresponds to *Rāmāyaṇa* 6.88.35 and reads: *tato rāvaṇavegena, sudīram avagādhayā, śa[page-break]ktyā nirbhinnahṛdayaḥ papāta bhuvi lakṣmaṇaḥ ||*. Together with Goldman et al. (2009, 414), it can be rendered as 'Then Lakṣmaṇa, his heart pierced by that javelin, so deeply embedded through Rāvaṇa's strength, fell to the ground.'





Fig. 16: *Rāvaṇa* strikes back, Add. 864, page 93.

It is interesting to remark that, after the long sequence of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the remaining forty or so pages of the accordion book are occupied by a plurality of other themes in which the sequential order of the scenes seems to lose the centrality that it had in the four narrative pieces that occupy the first hundred pages of the manuscript. No general, explicit pronouncement can be made at this stage of the research on the significance of this overall organization. For the time being, before trying to draw some tentative general conclusions, a sheer description of the remaining pages will have to suffice.

The following six pages (from page 105 to 110) are devoted to the representation of twenty-one among the eighty-four Mahāsiddhas, semi-historical figures of Buddhist tantric masters venerated in North India, Nepal and Tibet, usually cutting across sectarian divides and worshiped also within Hindu traditions.<sup>39</sup> As in the rest of the manuscript, the Nepālākṣara captions and the iconographic representations are of great but not always definitive help in identifying the various depicted characters. The first page of the sequence (105) represents Ādinātha and Pārvati seated on Nandi and ensconced in a cave; Macchendranātha, one of the patron saints of Nepal ('first seen appearing from a fish with his arms raised. Then he is seated with a *yogapaṭṭa* tied around his knees, and surrounded by four fishes. He is also given the horizontal third-eye.' Pal 1967a, 26); and Cauraṅgī, seated on a tiger skin. The last page of the sequence (110) shows Camāripā killing

<sup>39</sup> The most well known book on the tradition of the Mahāsiddhas is Dowman (1989). For the detailed descriptions of some of the depicted Mahāsiddhas, see Pal (1967a, 26–27), from which the final sentence is worth quoting here: '[...] the majority of the *siddhas* portrayed here are accompanied by females carrying skull-cups in their hands, in keeping with the legends associated with these sages, who invariably took a female partner before attaining *siddhi*.'



Fig. 17: Four Mahāsiddhas, Add. 864, page 110.

a boar, accompanied by a female partner; Kukkuripā carrying a dog, accompanied by a female attendant; Ghaṇṭāpā dancing with a female partner; and Godhiyāpā with birds and a female partner (Fig. 17).<sup>40</sup> It remains a desideratum to understand the significance of the choice of these particular twenty-one Mahāsiddhas out of the normal list of eighty-four, and to connect — beyond any reasonable, scholarly doubt — their iconographic representations with their names and life stories.

After the pages dedicated to the Mahāsiddhas, a single image, page 111, is devoted to Sūrya: the sun god is represented on his flying chariot drawn by seven horses and depicted within a circular golden frame; he is accompanied by two

<sup>40</sup> The other pages can be sketchily described as follows: page 106 depicts Vṃsāpā, playing the flute; Gorakṣanātha, seated on a bull and overpowering another; Lūyipā (commonly known as Luipa) eating entrails of fish in front of Dānirāja, king of Orissa; and Indrabhūti with an elaborate crown, accompanied by a female partner. Page 107 represents Virūpā carrying a skull in his right hand and pointing at the sun and the moon with his left, accompanied by a female partner whose caption seems to read Śaunḍinī; Vyākipā (probably the character usually known as Vyālipā) with a female partner; and Nāgārjuna seating on a serpent, whose hoods form a canopy over his head, as he is being addressed by a disciple. On page 108 the first Mahāsiddha is seated on a *nāga* and accompanied by a female partner, but his caption is illegible; the second one is feeding a monkey and accompanied by a female partner, but also his caption is damaged and illegible; the third Mahāsiddha represented is identified by the caption as Gorakṣanātha (he is seated on a bull and overpowering another, accompanied by a female partner). However, the same Mahāsiddha was already represented on page 106. Page 109 depicts Jñānākrapā, with a bull and a female partner; Kāmālipā working metal with a female partner; Karṇapā with two attendants; and Bhānrepā Bahuli (uncertain reading and identification) while beating a female character.



Fig. 18: Random Horses, Add. 864, page 125.

attendants who are throwing arrows at Rākṣasas on the background of a lush forest. The image bears no caption. After the representation of Sūrya, fifteen pages (from 112 to 126) are dedicated to horses of different kinds, often accompanied by captions with their names (see, for instance, Fig. 18, bearing as caption for the three horses the terms ‘*kaṃcukidoṣa*’ ‘*uturum*’ and ‘*manahi*’, the second one being uncertain as it is hard to read, and all preceded by the *siddhi* sign). Pal (1967a, 25) connects this section of the manuscript with the *Āśvaśāstra*, a veterinarian text, and refers: ‘There is a whole manuscript illuminating this text and rendered in the same style in the Palace Museum at Bhaktapur in Nepal. The horses are often labelled in this Cambridge manuscript as in the folios illustrated here [...]’ Nevertheless, I have not been able to locate this manuscript yet. Moreover, the rationale behind the choice of the various horses, their outlines, colours and postures as well as the significance of the names in the captions exceeds the knowledge of the present author. This portion of the manuscript deserves a separate study by an expert of horse husbandry in premodern and early-modern South Asia and Nepal.

The following four pages (from 127 up to 130) are illuminated with what seem to be scenes of hunting, sports of animals, and flocks of birds. Pal (1967a, 30 and *passim*) briefly lingers on these scenes in describing the pictorial features of the composition, and he also proposes a possible narrative reading of the last image (Fig. 19): ‘The scenes with the birds appear to represent some sort of tale, probably from the *Hitopadeśa*. Along the left we see a man discoursing with two birds, one of them white (a dove?) and the other a raven. To the right the white bird with



Fig. 19: Mysterious Birds, Add. 864, page 130.

a raven biting its neck arrives before the same man, and again he appears to be instructing them.’ As these images have no caption, I have no further evidence to either support or counter his interpretation.

The following nine pages of the accordion book (from 131 to 139) are dedicated to Vaiṣṇava legends, drawn from the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and mostly connected with the figure of Kṛṣṇa. The series starts with the famous episode known as *gajendramokṣa*: on the left, the king of elephants, Gajendra, and several other elephants are sporting on a river bank, while a crocodile, or some aquatic monster, is approaching from below. On the right, Viṣṇu appears in the skies riding Garuḍa and rushes to save his devotee, Gajendra, as the crocodile has caught its foot (Fig. 20).<sup>41</sup> The last image dedicated to Vaiṣṇava legends depicts the *kuvalayāpīḍavadha*<sup>42</sup> and the defeat of Kāṁsa, Kṛṣṇa’s evil uncle: on the left, Kṛṣṇa

<sup>41</sup> The caption reads: *so ntaḥsarasy uruvaśena gr̥hīta ārtto dṛṣṭvā garutmati hari[ṇ] kha upāttacakraṇ | utkṣīpya sāṇvujakaraṇ śirasātikṛcchrāt nārāyaṇākhilaguro bhagavan namas te*. It closely resembles *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 8.3.32. Together with Tagare (1976, 1113), it can be rendered as ‘Beholding in the sky Lord Hari, seated on Garuḍa and with his discus upraised (in his hand), the elephant, though greatly distressed, as he was seized with great strength [by a crocodile] inside the lake, lifted up his trunk holding a lotus (as an offering) and uttered with great difficulty the words: “Oh glorious Nārāyaṇa, preceptor of the whole universe, I bow to you.”’

<sup>42</sup> As indeed signaled by the caption: *kuvalayāpīḍavadhaḥ ||*.





Fig. 20: *gajendramokṣa*, Add. 864, page 131.

defeats the gigantic elephant Kuvalayapīḍa; on the right, while a number of wrestlers (?) are engaged in an acrobatic feat, Kṛṣṇa defeats, and dances over, his evil uncle Kaṁsa,<sup>43</sup> in front of his warriors and, probably, his wife.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> The rest of the caption reads: *pragrhya keśeṣu caratkirīṭam, nipātya raṁgopari tuṁga-mamcāt | tasyopariṣṭāt svayam abjanābhah, papāta viśvāśraya ātmatantraḥ ||*. It closely corresponds to *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 10.44.37. Together with Tagare (1978, 1523), it can be rendered as ‘Toppling down his crown and catching Kaṁsa by his hair, the Lord hurled him down from the high dais to the groundfloor of the arena. And on him jumped the absolute willed, (the weighty) support of the (heaviest of the heavy) universe, the veritable Lord Viṣṇu (the lotus-navelled God) himself.’

<sup>44</sup> As shown by their respective captions, the other seven pages depict various scenes drawn from the myths narrated in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*: the episode of the dwarf-*avatāra* Vāmana and his Viṣṇu Trivikrama form (132); Kaṁsa and his attempts to avert the prophecy that a son of his sister’s daughter would kill him: on the right, he first tries to kill his own sister’s daughter Devaki. Then dissuaded by her husband, he accepts to just kill all her sons (the scene in the middle). But, as he is about to smash the last baby on a stone altar (scene on the right), the goddess Māyā appears in the sky and reveals that the child is just a substitute and that the real son is safe and sound (133); the episode known as *putanāvadha*: Kṛṣṇa jumps out of Yaśodā’s arms and suckles the murderous demoness Putanā, and thus kills her (134); the episode known as *kāliyadamana*: by dancing on his flaming hoods, Kṛṣṇa subdues the *nāga* Kāliya, who had poisoned the river Yamunā (135); the episode known as *vastrāharaṇa*: the naughty young Kṛṣṇa playfully steals the clothes of the bathing cowgirls (136); and a two-page-wide *maṇḍala*-like representation of the episode known as *rāsaliḷā*, the joyful dance and amorous sport among Kṛṣṇa and the Gopīs on the night of the full moon in the month of Kārttika (137–138).

As a further proof of the work-in-progress nature of the present article, the last five pages of the manuscript (140–144) remain as yet only partially identified. As suggested by the hardly legible *śloka* in Sanskrit<sup>45</sup> in the caption, the left section of the first image (page 140) represents the episode narrated at the beginning of the *Mahābhārata*, in which Takṣaka, the lord of snakes, bites and kills Parikṣit, the grandson of Arjuna and the father of Janamejaya, whose failed attempt at vengeance towards all snakes (the *sarpasattra*) is depicted on page 7 of Add.864. The other subsections of page 140 and the remaining four images seem to be connected as a continuous story, in which significant roles are played by a king,<sup>46</sup> a minister and a lion on whose back the ocean is crossed, as well as dancers, white elephants, a deer that is being hunted and a cobra that is killed by the minister.<sup>47</sup> A full understanding of the sequence will have to wait for a future in-depth study.<sup>48</sup>

As a last general remark before moving to some tentative conclusions and pointers to avenues of further research, I would like to draw attention to the ways in which the blended assortment of Brahmanical and Buddhist stories and characters that the Add.864 contains presupposes the existence of a class of intellectuals who were conversant with both religious and narrative cultures in early modern Nepal, something that was long lost in the Indian subcontinent during the same period.

---

45 The Sanskrit verse reads: [ve]ṣṭayitvā tu bhogena, vinadya ca mahāsvanam | adaṃśata prthivī[śvara]ṃ takṣakah pannageśvaraḥ ||. It is a verse expunged from the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata*, marked as 411\* and to be found after *Mahābhārata* 1.39.33. It can be rendered as ‘Subduing him with his coils and uttering a great noise, Takṣaka, the lord of snakes bit the lord of the earth.’

46 In the first caption of page 143, the word *hāla* that follows the terms *rāja* and *śrī* might be a proper name and thus a reference to well-known Śatavāhana king. This might be connected with the story of the romance between king Hāla and the queen Līlāvatī of Siṃhaladvīpa, or with one of the many other stories narrated about this celebrated monarch. But it is also possible that *hāla* is no proper name, but it only stands for a Newari word also spelled as *hāra* or *hare* and meaning ‘to shout’, and hence ‘to order’.

47 The remaining captions are in Newari language. I thank Bal Gopal Shrestha and Nirajan Kafle for helping me with a preliminary understanding of the captions (see, for instance, the previous note).

48 The last folio is damaged in a peculiar way: a one-centimeter band at the bottom of the page looks as if it had been torn away. It is possible that the damaged portion contained a further (possibly final) caption, particularly on the left side of the page where the yellow frame seems to be conceived to be encapsulating a piece of writing.

## 5 Conclusions: cultural rationale, doubts, and avenues of further research

As stated at the very beginning of this article, Add.864 is in many ways unique, a masterpiece of pictorial technique and dramatic pathos, exceptional in the composite choice of narratives as different and varied as the two Sanskrit epics, a Buddhist story, the Vaiṣṇava myths from the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, and so forth. Nevertheless, its date has been established by Pal precisely by considering other Nepalese manuscripts (and artworks) that do share some pictorial traits with Add.864, but are more or less safely dated on account of their colophons around the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Here follows a list of these other manuscripts, three already mentioned by Pal, and one added here by the present author: 1) a *Hitopadeśa* manuscript (an accordion book) kept in the Bir Library of Kathmandu (Reel No. A 1169-7) and dated 1594 CE, the closest one to the Cambridge Kalāpustaka in its exuberant style and expressionistic flair, although the Sanskrit text occupies most of the manuscript, and the actual illuminations are in a relatively small number;<sup>49</sup> 2) a *Pañcatantra* manuscript kept in the J.P. Goenka Collection and also dated by Pal around 1600;<sup>50</sup> 3) the *Aśvaśāstra* manuscript mentioned by Pal (1967a, 25) and probably painted for the king of Bhaktapur, which I have not been able to locate yet;<sup>51</sup> 4) a *Devimāhātmya* palm-leaf manuscript (Or.14325) preserved in the British Library, dated 1549 CE and coming from Bhaktapur, also illuminated in a strikingly similar style.<sup>52</sup> The manuscript is currently on display in a BL exhibition, and an example of its stunning drawings can be seen online on the British Library website.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>49</sup> For a black-and white image, see Pal (1978, figure 176). For a colour reproduction of the same pages, see Kramrish 1964, 96.

<sup>50</sup> For a black-and-white image, see Pal (1978, figure 177). For a colour reproduction of a different page, see Goswamy (1999, 197), a prestigious catalogue of the paintings in the Goenka Collection, in which the manuscript is — mistakenly, I think — attributed to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. A close examination of this manuscript is a desideratum, especially because the few published pages seem to attest that this is the only other specimen that shares with the Cambridge Kalāpustaka the absolute predominance of the images over the textual portion of the manuscript.

<sup>51</sup> There are relatively few candidates for its identification to be found in the NGMCP website, but their analysis will have to wait for the expert of horse husbandry I evoked earlier on.

<sup>52</sup> I heartily thank Camillo A. Formigatti for recognizing the importance of this manuscript for my present research and inspecting the text, the images and the colophon.

<sup>53</sup> [http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/sacredtexts/devimahatmya\\_lg.html](http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/sacredtexts/devimahatmya_lg.html), last accessed 31/01/2017.

Moreover, Pal (1967b) investigates three long scrolls of Buddhist tales belonging to the early seventeenth century (dated 1610, 1617 and 1619 CE), which are also in a remarkably similar pictorial style. Accordingly, the article dedicates several pages (13–17) to identify and describe the principal characteristics of the style that unites these scrolls, the *Hitopadeśa* manuscript and the Cambridge Kalāpustaka.<sup>54</sup> To conclude this list, Pal (1967a, 32) mentions murals that ‘were also executed at about the same time and in the same style’ in the palace of Bhaktapur. Therefore, considering also the additional evidence offered by the BL manuscript, Pal’s speculation (1967b, 13) that ‘all these paintings were done by the artists belonging to the same atelier, probably in Bhaktapur’ seems now a quite likely conclusion.

As to its origin and social function, Pal (1967a, 32) draws assumptions that go beyond the mere date of the manuscript around the very beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. He convincingly argues that given ‘the richness and superb qualities’ of its paintings, it is likely that this manuscript had ‘been a royal commission’, especially considering the artistic and technical capabilities necessary for its production, not to speak of the economic capital needed for commissioning an atelier<sup>55</sup> to create an object for which the demand would have necessarily been extremely low, if not unprecedented. In this regard, I would tentatively argue that it is possible to build upon this conclusion by moving past his interpretation that Add.864 is ‘an anthology of pictures’ and that the aim of the artist was merely ‘to achieve prettiness in decoration as well as pictorial vividness in narration.’ Pal’s clue is his statement (1967a, 23) that Add.864 was ‘made both for the *edification*

---

**54** As the present article does not focus on the pictorial aspects of the Cambridge manuscript, I will just summarize and appropriate here Pal’s characterizations of the commonalities in style within what we might call the ‘early modern school of Nepalese painting’, or ‘early modern school of Bhaktapur. painting’ if the hypothesis about the identification and location of the atelier is accepted. He lists ten characteristics: 1) continuous narration divided by trees, architectural motives, etc. (‘comic strip’ effect); 2) functional importance of central figures shown by their larger size and central placement; 3) presence of a decorative stage back-drop; 4) floral scroll in shades of red as background; 5) thick and broad proportions of the figures, and especially large faces (unlike in the earlier styles found in Nepal); 6) heavy and vivacious drawing style; 7) rhythmic animation and graceful mobility in the theatrically depicted narrations; 8) lack of verisimilitude in natural elements (trees, rocks, ocean, etc.) in favour of an expressionistic application of joyous colours and the delineation of imaginative geometrical shapes; 9) remarkable variety of dress and textile designs; and 10) free and expressive style of gestures, facial complexion and physiognomy to convey emotional moods. The continuities of this style with the previous narrative paintings from Nepal are dealt with by Pal (1978, 97–100; and *passim*).

**55** I do not think that the legitimate question as to whether Add.864 is the work of a single artist or a group of painters can be satisfactorily answered at the present state of research.



and the delectation of the patron (emphasis mine)'. In his book on *The Arts of Nepal*, Pal briefly deals with the use of depicted scrolls in Ancient India and their very remote origin in time, and he also relates how these sorts of portable drawings were called *caraṇacitras* or *yamapaṭas* and 'were used by bards and storytellers who went about from village to village recounting their tales and sagas of ancient lore and mythology as well as of life in the realm of Yama, the king of death (Pal 1978, 96).' Along these lines, I would like to propose an interpretation of the function of Add.864 as going beyond the mere aesthetic value, on which so much focus has been laid. As a royal commission, its main purpose might well have been that of an aide-mémoire and the most appealing visual aid for the royal preceptors of the young aristocracy. These royal pundits would have to educate and *edify* the often very young princes and noblemen, precisely by narrating the stories of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the Buddhist story of Sudhana and Manoharā as well as the Vaiṣṇava legends and the like. I am postulating for the Cambridge Kalāpustaka the role of a sort of 'mirror for princes' not in opaque words but in vivid and colourful images. The pictures would then not only encompass the most crucial narratives widespread in early modern Nepal but also, and most importantly, aim at visually conveying their core values with regard to ethical conduct, knowledge and behaviour,<sup>56</sup> such as the eventually unwavering martial heroism of Arjuna, the unmistakably *dharmic* conduct of Rāma, the utter devotion towards Kṛṣṇa, etc. A further, general clue to its connection with the royal durbar and its educative function is precisely the crucial importance that the two epics and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* play in the manuscript, likely to be seen as apt reflections of the well-known identification of the Nepalese monarchs with Viṣṇu and his incarnations.

What better instrument to shape and regiment the young minds and bodies of the future rulers into the moral dispositions and the cultural *habitus*<sup>57</sup> of early modern Nepalese courtly life? According to the lines sketched in this hypothesis, Add.864 should be studied at the vibrant intersection of ethics and aesthetics as a piece of courtly cultural technology geared at the preservation, reinforcement

---

<sup>56</sup> For such an interpretive proposal to make sense, one should entertain a Foucauldian 'expansive sense of ethics as a practice of remaking oneself as a moral being, reaching far beyond the domain of moral rules and abstract judgments (Pandian and Ali 2010, 5).'

<sup>57</sup> For the concept of *habitus* in this wide cultural and social sense, see Bourdieu (1990, 53): the *habitus* is composed of 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures pre-disposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.'

and reproduction of social norms, political conventions and cultural values.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, for the contemporary scholar, the so-called Cambridge Kalāpustaka represents a most privileged window on the courtly culture and ethical life of early 17<sup>th</sup>-century Nepal along with its explicit and implicit disciplinary ideals of social normativity and worthy kingship. Although this hypothesis of the Cambridge Kalāpustaka as an ideally didactic instrument of visual culture for the Nepalese elites cannot be proved *per se*, the same goes with the hypothesis of its being simply an *objet d'art*, whose only purpose was aesthetic appreciation on the part of the high-status courtiers. For the corroboration of this second hypothesis, one would need a thorough understanding of the ideas of aesthetic fruition and sensibility of Nepalese courtly culture that is simply beyond our reach given the current state of research. Some light on this currently hazardous functional hypothesis might well be shed by further exploration into the understudied sections of the manuscript (for instance, the depictions of horses, an animal often connected with nobility and rank, and the partially identified final pages that again have clear regal resonances) and a thorough investigation into the few similar manuscripts that have been identified so far (the BL *Devīmāhātmya*, for instance). It is worth noticing that the *Hitopadeśa* and the *Pañcatantra* contained in the other two illuminated manuscripts that pictorially resemble Add.864 can by and large be included within the genre of *nīti*, 'political policy' or the 'prudent and wise behavior in the context of public life' (Ali 2010, 24). It is a kind of didactic literature customarily aimed at the education of the elites and the development of their ethical sensibility and character in pre-modern South Asia, the very same function that I am proposing for the Cambridge Kalāpustaka.

To conclude in a more concrete fashion, I would like to rehash some of the possible avenues of further research I have partly hinted in the paper. The various narrative and non-narrative sections of the manuscript deserve separate in-depth studies, especially the Buddhist story of Sudhana and Manoharā and the *Vetālapañcaviṃśati*, to which even Pal dedicated very little attention. The longer sections of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* are better analysed now, especially thanks to the full, in-progress transcription of all the captions and the identifications of all the various episodes. In this connection, more than half of the captions have already been identified as identical or slightly modified verses

---

58 The close imbrication between moral practices and aesthetic notions (the 'cross-pollination of beauty and virtue' Ali 2010, 25) as one of the most distinctive characteristics of the courtly culture and political life in Medieval South Asia is the object of the ground-breaking book by Ali (2004), which directly inspired some of the reflections voiced in the present paper.

from the critical editions of the two epics. Moreover, a preliminary cursory perusal of the critical apparatuses has shown that it is possible to further identify the Sanskrit captions as coming from different manuscript recensions, both at the level of whole verses expunged from the critical editions and at the level of word-long variants relegated to the apparatus. For instance, numerous verses quoted in the captions dedicated to the episodes of the fifth book of the *Rāmāyaṇa* correspond very closely to variants found in the Nepalese manuscripts dubbed as Ñ1 and Ñ2, to the Northern recension and, more specifically, to the Northeastern recension.<sup>59</sup> A very promising avenue of research would therefore be the attempt at identifying the manuscripts, the groups of manuscripts, or the manuscript recensions of both the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* that are closer to the verses found in the captions of Add.864.<sup>60</sup> Understandably and interestingly, this initial cursory investigation points at what might be considered Nepalese recensions of the two epics.

<sup>59</sup> Ñ1 is the oldest manuscript used for the critical edition, dated 1020 CE. Ñ2 is a recent paper manuscript dated 1675 CE. For detailed information on these and the other manuscripts whose sigla will be mentioned later, see the Introduction to the Critical Edition of the *Sundarakāṇḍa*. For an impressionistic example of the pattern to be investigated, the *ślokas* quoted as captions for pages 79 and 80 appear in the following form: *sa sāgaram anādhṛṣyaṃ, vikramya haripuṅgavaḥ | citrakūṭataṭe laṃkāṃ, sthitaḥ svastho niraikṣataḥ || kapir mandodarīm tatra,, śayānaṃ śayane śubhe* [start of page 80] *dadarśa nilajalade, jvalantīm iva vidyutaṃ || jagāma madanonmatto, daśagrīvo mahābalaḥ | kāmcanī dḍīpikās citrā, jagṛhus tatra yoṣitaḥ ||*. The first verse loosely corresponds to *Rāmāyaṇa* 5.2.1, but the reading *haripuṅgavaḥ* is attested in manuscripts Ś1, Ñ1, Ñ2, D1.2.4.10.11, the reading *citrakūṭataṭe* is only attested in Ñ2. The first part of the second verse loosely corresponds to *Rāmāyaṇa* 5.8.48cd, but the reading *śayane śubhe* is specifically attested in Ñ1 and D11. The second part of the second verse is a half verse expunged by the edition (marked as 283\*) that is attested in this precise form in Ñ1, D1 and D4. The first part of the third *śloka* is an expunged half verse (marked as 465\*) that is attested after verse 5.16.10 in Ñ, V2, B, D2.3.6, while the second part of the *śloka* corresponds *Rāmāyaṇa* 5.16.11ab, particularly in the form attested in Ś1, Ñ, V2, B, D2-4.6.10.11. Obviously, no definitive conclusion can be drawn from this restricted set of data, but they do represent a promising avenue of further research.

<sup>60</sup> I wish to express my sincerest thanks to John Brockington, who agreed to help me to pursue this line of research and identify the other captions within the manuscript transmission of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The results will be included in the online description of Add.864.

## 6 Appendix: Table summary of the manuscript contents

<b>Recto</b>	
Opening Scene	1
Foundational Mythological Scenes	2–6
<i>Mahābhārata</i>	7–48
Story of Sudhana and Manoharā	49–63
<i>Vetālapañcaviṃśati</i>	63–72
<b>Verso</b>	
Dancing deities	73–74
<i>Rāmāyaṇa</i>	75–104
21 Mahāsiddhas	105–110
Sūrya on his Chariot	111
Horses (from the <i>Aśvaśāstra</i> ?)	112–127
Hunting Scenes (fables?)	128–130
Scenes from the <i>Bhāgavatapurāṇa</i>	131–139
Partially Identified Scenes	140–144

## References

- Ali, Daud (2004), *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ali, Daud (2010), 'The Subhāṣita as an Artifact of Ethical Life in Medieval India', in Anand Pandian and Daud Ali (eds), *Ethical Life in South Asia*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 21–42.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990), *The Logic of Practice*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bradshaw, H. (1870–80), *Notes on the collections of Oriental, Tibetan and 'Additional' manuscripts* [unpublished manuscript] Cambridge.
- Brockington, M. (2012), 'The Ladies' Monkey: Hanumān in Boston', in *Journal Asiatique* 300.1: 199–214.
- van Buitenen, A.B. (1973), *The Mahābhārata. 1. The Book of the Beginning*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bühnemann, G. (2013), 'Bhimasena as Bhairava in Nepal', in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 163(2): 455–476.
- Crosby, K. (2009), *Mahabharata. Book Ten. Dead of Night & Book Eleven. The Women*, The Clay Sanskrit Library. New York: New York University Press.
- Dowman, K. (1989), *Masters of Enchantment : The Lives and Legends of the Mahasiddhas*, London: Arkana.

- Flood, G. (ed.) (2015), *The Bhagavad Gita*, New York–London: Norton & Company.
- Formigatti, Camillo A. (2016), 'Towards a Cultural History of Nepal, 14th-17th Century. A Nepalese Renaissance?', in *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 89: 51–66.
- Goldman, R.P.; Goldman, S.J.S.; van Nooten, B.A. (2009), *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki. An Epic of Ancient India. Volume VI: Yuddhakāṇḍa*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Goswamy, B.N. (1999), *Painted Visions. The Goenka Collection of Indian Paintings*, New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, Rabindra Bhavan.
- Kramrisch, S. (1964), *The Art of Nepal*, New York: The Asia Society.
- Lefebvre, R. (1984), *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki. An Epic of Ancient India. Volume IV: Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Meiland, J. (2007), *Mahabharata. Book Nine. Shalya. Volume Two*, The Clay Sanskrit Library. New York: New York University Press.
- Pal, Pratapaditya (1967a), 'A Kalāpustaka from Nepal', in *Bulletin of the American Academy of Benares* 1: 23–34.
- Pal, Pratapaditya (1967b), 'Paintings from Nepal in the Prince of Wales Museum', in *Bulletin of the Prince of Wales Museum of Western India* 10, 1–26.
- Pal, Pratapaditya (1970), *Vaiṣṇava Iconology in Nepal: A Study in Art and Religion*, Calcutta: Asiatic Society.
- Pal, Pratapaditya (1978), *The Arts of Nepal*, Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Pandian, Anand. and Daud Ali (2010), 'Introduction' in Anand Pandian and Daud Ali (eds), *Ethical Life in South Asia*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010, 1–18.
- Pollock, S. (1984), *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki. An Epic of Ancient India. Volume II: Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Sathaye, Adheesh (2011), 'Vetālapañcaviṃśatika,' *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*. Band 14. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 178–183.
- Shastri, H.G.; Shelat, B.; Shastree, K.K. (eds) (1996–2002), *The Bhagavata: Critical Edition*, Ahmedabad: B.J. Institute of Learning and Research.
- Straube, M. (2006), *Prinz Sudhana und die Kinnarī. Eine buddhistische Liebesgeschichte von Kṣemendra. Texte, Übersetzung, Studie*, Marburg: Indica et Tibetica Verlag.
- Tagare, G.V. (1976), *The Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Part III*, Delhi – Varanasi – Patna: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Tagare, G.V. (1978), *The Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Part IV*, Delhi – Varanasi – Patna: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Vajracharya, Gautama V. (2016), *Nepalese Seasons: Rain and Ritual*, New York: Rubin Museum of Art.