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A Plea for an Integrated Approach towards Manuscript Cataloguing¹

REINHOLD GRÜNENDAHL

1 Both as an active participant, as well as a beneficiary of the rich harvest it is reaping, I have benefitted from the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project (NGMPP). The encounter with Nepal and her people, and with the testimonia of her culture, among which manuscripts hold a special place for me, has enriched my life and fertilized my studies in a lasting way. Some of the projects sparked off by my first-hand experience with the NGMPP actually saw the light of day, while others are in a protracted *status nascendi*.

The outstanding importance of the Nepalese manuscript tradition, and consequently of the NGMPP as a project devoted to its preservation, is so widely acknowledged that it hardly need further explanation or endorsement. Now that the practical side of preservation on microfilm has drawn to a close, efforts will concentrate all the more on providing adequate access to the NGMPP collections. The overall success of the project depends to a large extent on the functionality of the reference tools supplied for this wealth of material gathered in thirty years. The most comprehensive documentation to date is the card index filed parallel to ongoing microfilming activities. However, it cannot be made available to a wider public if only because of its size. For the same reason, conventional cataloguing of the entire collection is impractical, desirable though it may seem to adhere to, and perhaps exceed, standards set by the pioneering works of Haraprasāda Śāstrī and other recorders of Nepalese manuscript collections.²

When musing over these matters in 1987, towards the end of my term in Kathmandu, the preparation of a title-list seemed a practicable option. Thanks to the approval of Prof. Albrecht Wezler, and with financial support from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, I could take up work in the same year. It was clear from the start that in order to make such a list available as early as possible, it had to be confined to the essential manuscript data, viz. title and related personal name (author etc.), accession-number, material (palm leaf, paper etc.), number of folios, status (complete or otherwise), size, script, language(s), subject term, remarks, date of scribal note, and NGMPP reel number.

In the course of compilation, the list underwent various modifications and revisions. The extracts that were kindly made available to me in reply to various requests I addressed to the NGMPP office in Hamburg do indeed look very promising, and I trust that when the list will eventually be published it will become an indispensable reference tool, far beyond the limited circle of Indologists who have chosen manuscripts as the object of their special attention.

¹The following observations focus on the cataloguing of manuscripts in South Asian languages, particularly Sanskrit; eventual conclusions may be applicable to other contexts. With regard to the discussion of general aspects I am indebted to a book by Pat Oddy, *Future Libraries, Future Catalogues* (London: Library Association Publ., 1996). I dedicate this paper to the memory of Chandrabhal Tripathi.

²Strictly speaking, of course, the NGMPP does not deal with manuscripts, but with microfilms of manuscripts; however, in cataloguing practice this distinction is irrelevant. For catalogues of Nepalese manuscript collections see the bibliography in the introduction to my *Concordance of H. P. Śāstrī's Catalogue of the Durbar Library and the Microfilms of the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project*, *Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland [VOHD]*, Suppl. 31 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1989).

The title-list project was put on a firm basis thanks to the expertise of Prof. Ronald E. Emmerick, who devised a database programme tailored to suit the NGMPP material as closely as possible. It was only after I had left the NGMPP in 1988 to take on my present position in Göttingen that I became fully aware of the great potential the database structure of the title-list offers beyond the immediate scope of the project.

2 Computer technology has completely reshaped library organization in general and cataloguing in particular, and is finally extending its influence over manuscript cataloguing. Whether this means that the days of sumptuous catalogue volumes, ornamented with the paraphernalia of academic heraldry, will soon be over remains to be seen. But, unlike only a few years ago, today it would generally be considered a sign of exceptional shortsightedness to deny the enormous advantages of computerized cataloguing. However, its full potential cannot be brought to fruition if it is reduced to a mere word processing aid to the end of producing a printed catalogue. Using the computer simply as a kind of electronic typewriter impedes further utilization of the collected data. The inefficiency of this approach becomes all too obvious when compared with database cataloguing (which, by the way, provides a fully compatible basis for publication in print). The most important advantage of database cataloguing is its versatility, which allows constant improvement and, if need be, thorough revision of individual records, thus enhancing the retrieval quality of the catalogue as a whole. Apart from that, it overcomes the limitations of print-based reference tools by providing the option to link up several database catalogues for simultaneous retrieval. Of course, this requires some degree of coordination, all the more so since the cataloguing of manuscripts as such has hitherto not been regulated to a great extent.

The assumed demand for directive has produced a thriving committee culture. However, the focus of these activities, as well as of various sets of rules treating every aspect of manuscript cataloguing with an admirable love of detail, is exclusively on "Western" manuscripts.³

Simultaneously, we witness the launch of ambitious projects⁴ claiming to take care of everything from the definition of (yet differing?) cataloguing standards to the presentation of manuscripts in digital libraries accessible through the Internet,⁵ including the development

³See, for example, *Richtlinien Handschriftenkatalogisierung*, 5th expanded ed. (Bonn: Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, Unterausschuß für Handschriftenkatalogisierung, 1992) 9ff.; for latest developments see the committee proceedings available under www.dfg.de/foerder/handschriften/tagung.html. A companion manual to the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, 2nd Edition, Revised* (AACR2R), dealing exclusively with manuscript cataloguing, is currently in preparation (see below, fn. 6). Cf. also Otto Mazal, *The Keeper of Manuscripts: With a Chapter on Restoring the Text* (orig. publ. as *Zur Praxis des Handschriftenbearbeiters: Mit einem Kapitel zur Textherstellung*), transl. by Thomas J. Wilson & Martin McNamara, *Bibliologia—Elementa ad librorum studia pertinentia*, 11 (Turnhout: Bepols, 1992), 17ff.

⁴One example is MASTER (Manuscript Access through Standards for Electronic Records), "a European Union funded project to create a single online catalogue of medieval manuscripts in European libraries" (www.cta.dmu.ac.uk/projects/master).

⁵To suppose that presenting manuscripts, or early prints, in a kind of digital panopticum will promote or facilitate their serious study is rather far-fetched, if only in view of the simple fact that electronic documents are inappropriate for *sustained* reading (see Oddy [as in fn. 1], 15, with reference to Walt Crawford, Michael Gorman,

(proprietary?) software—which suggests that cataloguing programmes already available are considered inadequate to meet the proposed standard (if they are considered at all). In part, this kind of approach may be constrained by the eccentricity of national and international library funding policies that hold out better hopes for projects set up to reinvent the wheel than for securing assets to keep rather pedestrian pursuits on track. Depending on the individual perspective, the outcome of such aspiring ventures can be interpreted as pathbreaking innovations, or solutions in search of a problem.

3 Indologists may feel a need to contribute to these discussions,⁶ and to join in ongoing activities. As may be gathered from the title of the present paper, integration is an aspect I do attach some importance to. But I doubt that the tasks “Western” and Indological cataloguers are each faced with can easily be reduced to a common denominator.

As already noted in the context of the NGMPP, one of the determinant factors of Indological manuscript cataloguing is the sheer volume of uncatalogued material.⁷ The entire written tradition of South Asia was transmitted exclusively in manuscripts until the late 19th century, with offshoots reaching well into the 20th century. Admittedly, a large number of texts has since been published in print, but in relation to the sum total this is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. And, particularly in view of what has so far been sounded of the volume of the NGMPP material, it would clearly be a grave navigational error to assume that only the visible part is of relevance.

3.1 In order to cope with a task of such dimensions, Indological cataloguing, at least in its first stage, has to confine itself to essential categories (see above), among which title and related name (author etc.)⁸ stand out from all others because they are most important for retrieval. But even on a very basic level, cataloguing should, under all circumstances, include an element of subject classification, too, because this allows access to catalogue data through subject search. Improved subject classification, rather than extended formal description, should be in the focus of all ambitions aiming beyond basic cataloguing, because, with vast areas of South Asia’s literary tradition still uncharted, manuscript catalogues, apart from their

Future Libraires: Dreams, Madness & Reality, [Chicago / London : American Library Association, 1995], 17-25). For links to digital libraries of South Asian manuscripts see www.ucl.ac.uk/~ucgadkw/indnet-art.html.

⁶See a recent appeal by Dominik Wujastyk dispatched to the Indology discussion list on 27 January 2000 (no. 40 in the January 2000 archive [<http://listserv.liv.ac.uk/archives/indology.html>]), in which he invites comments on a draft version of rules by Gregory A. Pass: *Descriptive Cataloging of Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance, and Early-Modern Manuscripts* (available for download in various formats from <ftp://165.134.156.3/vatican>).

⁷The NGMPP alone amounts to more than 160,000 documents, the large majority of which are Sanskrit manuscripts.

⁸In Sanskrit literature this category is of secondary importance because of the large number of “anonymous” texts.

conventional functions, also serve as a surrogate for, and preceding stage of, a comprehensive literary history.⁹

3.2 The functionality of the three primary access points (title, name and subject classification) depends on the exactness with which they respond to the search terms employed by the user of the catalogue. The response rate is considerably enhanced by vocabulary control, namely rigid standardization of titles, names and subject terms, augmented by authority records uniting all known forms of names (and titles) under one standardized heading.

3.2.1 In order to illustrate the demand for vocabulary control, I have chosen as an example an incomplete Sanskrit manuscript deposited in the Göttingen library.¹⁰ The recently published catalogue¹¹ gives the title, *Samkṣepaśamkarajaya* (“Brief Exposition of Śaṅkara’s Victory”), as it is found in the manuscript itself. There seems to be an alternative form, viz., *Samkṣiptaśamkaravijaya* (“Abridged Exposition of Śaṅkara’s Conquest”),¹² and the text is also known—and has in fact been published¹³—under the title *Śamkaradigvijaya* (“Śaṅkara’s Conquest of the World”),¹⁴ which it shares with another text, the *Śamkaradigvijaya* by one Anantānadagiri (see next section).¹⁵ There are no less than four other texts bearing variations of the title *Śamkara(dig)vijaya*.

⁹That some recently published catalogues contribute virtually nothing in this respect is the direct consequence of a fatal tendency to reduce cataloguing to an undiscerning, formalistic volume production governed by the stopwatch of a timekeeper, whose *alter ego*, ironically, may lament over the stupefying influence of computer technology.

¹⁰Göttingen call number: COD MS SANSKR MADH 141. For documentation of the following example see www.sub.uni-goettingen.de/ebene_1/fiindolo/hsskat.htm.

¹¹Gerhard Ehlers, *Indische Handschriften, Teil 12: Die Sammlung der Niedersächsischen Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen*, Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland, II,12 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1995), 164, no. 4599. The catalogue entry is confined to a formal description, brief passages taken from the beginning and end of the manuscript (*incipit* and *explicit*), and references to descriptions of two other manuscripts (catalogued as (1.) no. 386 in vol. II,1 of the VOHD, and (2.) no. 12174 of the *Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Madras*, [vols. 20-21, Kāvya, Madras 1918]).

¹²See M. Krishnamachariar, *History of Classical Sanskrit Literature* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1974 [reprint]), 322, note.

¹³(1.) *Śrī-Vidyāranya-viracitaḥ Śrīmac-Chamkaradigvijayaḥ*, [ed.] Babasastrī Phadake, Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series, 22, (Poona: 1891); (2.) *Srimad Sankara Digvijaya* / by Vidyaranya, Engl. transl. by K. Padmanaban. 2 vols. (Madras / Silver Spring (MD): Padmanaban, 1985, 2 vols. (As a rule, the VOHD volumes relating to South Asian manuscripts do not mention printed editions of texts.)

¹⁴This title seems to have been derived from that of a commentary (not contained in the Göttingen MS.) written by Dhanapatisūri in 1799, which is sometimes given as *Samkara-* [or *Saṅkara-*] *digvijayadīndima*; see, for example, *Catalogue of the India Office Library*, Vol. II,1, *Sanskrit Books*, pt. IV (London: HM Stationery Office 1957), 2308f.

¹⁵*The Sankara-Vijaya, or the Life and Polemics of Sankara Acharyya = Śamkaravijayaḥ* / Anandagiri, edited by Jayanarayana Tarkapanchanana, Bibliotheca Indica, 46 (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, [1864-] 1868).

No doubt, the cataloguer's preference for *Samkṣepaśamkarajaya* is fully justified in view of the evidence provided by the manuscript in question. Nevertheless, a reference to the alternative title under which the text is published would not have been out of place. Instead, he offers an uncommented reference to the description of a manuscript of a different text, viz. Anantānanda's *Śamkaradigvijaya* (VOHD II,1, no. 386), thus complicating things further and exposing unprepared users to a confusing assortment of data few of them will be able to disentangle without the help of tools that are by no means widely available (see section 4.2).

3.2.2 As in the title of the work, the cataloguer follows the manuscript in giving the author's name as "Mādhava," without further comment. Having, with any luck, picked Mādhavācārya Vidyāraṇya (14th cent.) of Śrīngeri, an eminent exponent of the Advaita branch of Vedānta philosophy, as the obvious candidate among the legion of Mādhavas that made a name in Sanskrit literature, users may easily have second thoughts if they follow the reference to VOHD II,1, no. 386, an entry describing a manuscript of the *Śamkaradigvijaya* by one Anantānandagiri, who claims to be a direct disciple of Śamkara (8th to 9th cent.), although internal evidence seems to suggest that the text was written several centuries later.¹⁶ According to the notes to entry no. 386, the author's name is also given as Ānandatīrtha, Ānandajñāna, Ānandajñānagiri, Jñānānanda, Jñānānandagiri, Madhva, and—Mādhava. The most reasonable explanation for this omnium-gatherum of names seems to me that the last component of Anantānandagiri's name, -ānandagiri, led to the identification with the Advaita author Ānandagiri (13th cent.), also known as Ānandajñāna, Ānandajñānagiri etc., a prolific sub-commentator of Śamkara's commentaries. As far as I know, however, there is no evidence that he is identical with Anantānandagiri, the author of the *Śamkaradigvijaya*. This supposed identification then led to the not infrequent confusion of "Ānandagiri" with "Ānandatīrtha", an epithet of Madhva (1238-1317), founder of the Dvaita branch of Vedānta philosophy, and thus a most unlikely candidate for authorship of the Advaita text in question. Then the notes place Madhva side by side with Mādhava as the author of the *Śamkaradigvijaya*, giving *Samkṣepaśamkarajaya* as an alternative title,¹⁷ and, as the crowning touch, hint at other works with similar titles, among them a "Śamkaradigvijaya by Vidyāraṇya"¹⁸—which brings the user full circle back to the Göttingen manuscript, though not the wiser.

3.2.3 Contrary to the description of the Göttingen manuscript in VOHD II,12, the systematic arrangement of entries according to subjects in VOHD II,1 gives a clue as to the contents of the manuscript¹⁹: Anantānandagiri's *Śamkaravijaya*, classified under "Biography," is a panegyric poem in praise of the Vedānta philosopher Śamkara. Actually, no less than ten

¹⁶See K. T. Telang, "The Śamkaravijaya of Ānandagiri", *Indian Antiquary* 5 (1876): 287ff.

¹⁷With reference to the *Catalogue of the India Office Library* (see fn. 14).

¹⁸There is not a hint of the fact that "Vidyāraṇya" is an epithet of Mādhava.

¹⁹Since the systematic arrangement is given up in VOHD II,12, the only way to find out the subject would be to search the entire subject index (pp. 235-237) for the entry number of the manuscript (#4599). On this shortcoming cf. my review, *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 93 (1998): 235-241.

titles of such legendary biographies eulogizing Śaṃkara by as many authors are known,²⁰ and evidently the text of the Göttingen manuscript also belongs to this category.

3.3 The above example shows that cataloguing of manuscripts is no exception to cataloguing in general in that it requires rigid vocabulary control, especially with regard to the two most important access points, title and name. In a printed catalogue like the *VOHD* this would involve a considerable amount of cross-referencing within each individual volume as well as within the catalogue as a whole—and is therefore seldom realized.²¹

And the demand for integration goes far beyond the scope of ongoing projects. Contemporary manuscript cataloguing always has to be seen in a continuum. For example, *VOHD*, vol. II,12, describing hitherto uncatalogued parts of the Göttingen manuscript collection, is embedded in the context of various earlier catalogues describing other parts of that collection (published between 1894 and 1930), and of a random selection of descriptions scattered over *VOHD*, vols. II,1, 2, 4—9.²² However, this aspect of integration is usually neglected, much to the disadvantage of the respective catalogue, of the collection as a whole, and particularly of its users, who all too often are kept in the dark about the wider context.²³

On the level of the individual library, the vocabulary applied in manuscript cataloguing has to be harmonized with that used in the cataloguing of other types of documents, in order to secure a standardized access to *all* catalogue records of that library relating to a given item, such as a text, be it in the physical form of a manuscript, a printed edition, a digital text file, a study of the text and perhaps even an audio-book, or a video cassette of a dramatic performance. On the next level, vocabulary control should be extended to union catalogues comprising several libraries.²⁴

4 In order to achieve these objectives, several preconditions have to be met. Considering the task outlined above, and considering also that manuscript cataloguing is a dynamic, cumulative process, it should be quite clear that storing catalogue records in a database open to future refinement is a far more adequate approach than enshrining them in a printed

²⁰See Krishnamachariar, loc. cit. (as in fn. 12); as the example of “Guruvijaya” by “Anantānandagiri” suggests (‘Guru-’ clearly standing for ‘Śaṃkara-’), some of these titles and names may just be alternative forms of those listed above.

²¹How far this requirement is met by the *VOHD*, vol. II, can easily be found out by looking up the alternative titles and names given above in the indices of the respective volumes, and in the *Generalregister*, *VOHD* II,10-11. The question takes on an altogether different complexion if we include other cataloguing projects within the *VOHD* dealing with Sanskrit manuscripts.

²²For a list of partial catalogues already published, and of the still uncatalogued parts of the Göttingen collection see www.sub.uni-goettingen.de/ebene_1/finidolo/indhss_.htm.

²³*VOHD*, vol. II,12, does not even mention earlier catalogues (see my review [as in fn. 19], 239, n. 7).

²⁴This may be an actual union catalogue such as that of the Gemeinsamer Bibliotheks-Verbund (GBV; see www.gbv.de), a Göttingen-based library network incorporating the catalogues of seven German federal states, or a virtual union catalogue like the Karlsruher Virtueller Katalog (KVK; see www.ubka.uni-karlsruhe.de/kvk.html), which temporarily connects a wide range of actual union catalogues for a simultaneous search. (One may, for instance, search the KVK for the alternative titles and names treated in the previous section.)

volume. Database cataloguing warrants a maximum of internal consistency with a minimum of effort for all sides concerned.

4.1 Technical requirements of basic manuscript cataloguing on a database platform are met by readily available cataloguing software,²⁵ as an ongoing project shows, in which all manuscripts in South Asian languages deposited in the Göttingen library are being integrated into the general retrieval system.²⁶ Apart from categories of formal description, such as material, number of folios, size and script, the project includes vocabulary-controlled recording of titles and names as well as subject classification.

For instance, the database record of the above-mentioned manuscript²⁷ has *Samkṣepaśamkarajaya* as the uniform title applying to all related items, but it also allows retrieval under the alternative title used in the printed editions, *Śamkaradigvijaya*, and vice versa.²⁸ Likewise, all alternative forms of the author's name, documented in any bibliographic unit (manuscript, printed edition, secondary literature etc.), or likely to be helpful in retrieval, are pulled together under the standardized heading of an authority record. The authority record uniting 'Mādhava ācārya', 'Mādhavācārya', 'Madhavacharya', 'Mādhava Vidyāraṇya', 'Vidyāraṇya' etc. under the heading 'Mādhava', links all catalogue entries relating to works of Mādhava. No matter which of these alternative names is entered as a search string, the Online Public-Access Catalogue (OPAC) will retrieve all catalogue records linked up with this authority record, among them the one describing the manuscript of the *Samkṣepaśamkarajaya*. Furthermore, the catalogue record includes four vocabulary-controlled elements of subject classification,²⁹ and four corresponding elements of (local) systematic subject classification,³⁰ all of which are fully retrievable.³¹

In accordance with my above proposal, the manuscript descriptions integrated into the Göttingen OPAC are confined to essentials, although, technically, they can be extended to embrace all aspects of printed manuscript catalogues, including *incipit* and *explicit*, scribal remarks etc. In fact, the technical possibilities of database cataloguing go far beyond that. As can be seen in the online display of the above catalogue record, they include the

²⁵In fact, any general purpose database software, or the database module of a word processing programme, is suitable for structured cataloguing, and allows future upgrading and export of data to other structures.

²⁶For a progress report see www.sub.uni-goettingen.de/ebene_1/fiindolo/indhss_.htm.

²⁷For a hyperlink to the catalogue record of the *Samkṣepaśamkarajaya* see www.sub.uni-goettingen.de/ebene_1/fiindolo/hsskat.htm.

²⁸Alternatively, vocabulary control may be established by means of authority records for titles; see below for names.

²⁹Viz., 'Hindu philosophy' / 'Advaita-Vedānta' / 'Śamkara' / 'hagiography'.

³⁰For information on the Göttingen Online-Klassifikation (GOK) see www.sub.uni-goettingen.de/ebene_1/fiindolo/indgok_.htm.

³¹On the administrative level the system also provides a fully integrated (local) ordering system; cf. also the experimental ordering system of the Wellcome Institute collection of South Asian manuscripts: www.ucl.ac.uk/~ucgawk/wihm-vol1.html

integration of specimina (e.g. facsimiles of the first and last folio of a manuscript) by adding a hyperlink from the catalogue record to electronic image files.³²

4.2 As for other requirements, it should be noted that all contemporary manuscript cataloguing relies heavily on the achievements of an impressive line of printed catalogues published since the second half of the 19th century. Especially the multi-volume catalogues of the major Indian collections, rivalled by none outside the subcontinent, are of invaluable help in determining standard titles and names, and perhaps even more so in disclosing the contents of the manuscript / text in hand.³³

4.2.1 The practical problem facing both cataloguers and users is to keep track of the large number of individual catalogues. Theodor Aufrecht was the first to realize the need of a comprehensive reference tool. In order to facilitate access to the wealth of information scattered over a multitude of catalogues, he single-handedly compiled the tripartite *Catalogus Catalogorum*,³⁴ a combined list of Sanskrit³⁵ titles and names recording all entries pertinent to a given text in all catalogues available to him. In view of the central importance of such a reference tool, which can also make a vital contribution to vocabulary-controlled name and title access, it is all the more deplorable that the publication of its projected successor, the *New Catalogus Catalogorum*,³⁶ seems to have come to an untimely halt.³⁷

4.2.2 A perhaps even more serious problem is that many of the older catalogues are long out of print and generally unavailable for consultation, except in a very few libraries. Thus, the individual library aiming at integrated manuscript cataloguing has the choice between either converting all data from the printed catalogues describing (parts of) its collection to database records, or else providing other means of access to these data for both local and external users. Retrospective manuscript cataloguing in Göttingen combines these two approaches: as described above, the essential data are being converted from printed catalogue to database

³²These electronic facsimiles are mainly intended to facilitate orientation for users; a digital manuscript library, although technically possible, is not intended (see fn. 5).

³³For instance, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Madras*, vols. 1-34 (Madras: Government Press, 1901-1961), and *A Triennial Catalogue of Manuscripts . . . for the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Madras*, vols. 1-13 in 46 parts (Madras: Government Press, 1913-1961), to name but two catalogues of outstanding importance, without which modern catalogues like the *VOHD* are virtually unthinkable.

³⁴Theodor Aufrecht: *Catalogus Catalogorum: An Alphabetical Register of Sanskrit Works and Authors* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1891-1903 [reprint: Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1962]).

³⁵Unfortunately there is no such tool available for manuscripts in other South Asian languages.

³⁶V. Raghavan [et al.], *New Catalogus Catalogorum: An Alphabetical Register of Sanskrit and Allied Works and Authors* (Madras: University of Madras, 1949/1966-) (13 volumes so far).

³⁷Calculated on the basis of Aufrecht's tripartite *Catalogus Catalogorum*, the *New Catalogus Catalogorum* has covered around 43 per cent of its ground in the 34 years since the publication of vol. 2 in 1966 (not taking into account the first edition of vol. 1 in 1949, replaced by a 2nd ed. in 1969). If it is continued at the same speed, it could take another 45 years until at least some of us would see its completion, but considering that the last volume was published in 1991, this seems a very optimistic estimate. Whatever the reason for this delay, the project deserves all the attention and help needed to overcome it.

(including a reference to the printed description), and, in addition, the older catalogues are made available on the Internet in digital facsimiles.³⁸

I would consider it a substantial improvement for everyone occupied with manuscripts if the data of the major manuscript collections could be made available in a manner suitable to the above requirements. This would not only facilitate access to vital information, but also stimulate interest in the rich tradition of South Asian manuscripts.

5 The NGMPP has a substantial contribution to make in all respects. The awaited publication of the title-list will give a comprehensive impression of the wealth of the collection as a whole—something an OPAC cannot adequately convey within the confines of one screenful of information at a time.³⁹ What an electronic catalogue can provide, much better than any other medium, is multidimensional access to an abundance of catalogue data for both local and external users—and other cataloguers. It holds out the further prospect of linking the NGMPP data with other databases in a virtual union catalogue of South Asian manuscripts that should be open to contributions from all sides.

The example of the NGMPP shows that the preservation of South Asia's manuscript tradition as an important pillar of cultural identity is most effective when undertaken in a coordinated effort. I hope the NGMPP will be a lasting inspiration for further efforts in this direction.

³⁸Digital facsimiles of the older Göttingen catalogues can be accessed from www.sub.uni-goettingen.de/ebene_1/fiindolo/indhss_.htm.

³⁹Oddy (as in fn. 1), 34-36.