

Material Texts in Post-Print South Asia: Approaches to “History of the Book”

A Symposium for the 49th Annual Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin-Madison
October 21, 2021, 8:30 am–5:30 pm CST

Organizers:

Megan Robb and Pranav Prakash

Symposium Website: www.book-cultures.com

Registration Page: <https://southasiainconference.wisc.edu/>

While scholarship has established that material cultures of texts in South Asia were radically altered by the rise of European-styled printing presses in South Asia, there has been less attention given to the interplay between manuscript and printing press text production. To the extent that the impact of print has been studied in South Asia, there has been a tendency to study it synchronically, resulting in studies that look at manuscript cultures and printing cultures separately. This workshop aims to approach the history of material texts diachronically, paying attention not only to the irruptive impact of typeset and lithographic print technologies, but also to the possible overlaps between print technologies and manuscript cultures of textual production.

The advent of the printing press to the subcontinent is of crucial importance to the workshop, forming as it did a key fulcrum in transformations in knowledge transmission and material text production. This workshop has purposefully left the time period for the workshop open, allowing for studies focusing on the contemporary period as well as historical contexts. Conversations in traditional “history of the book” have tended to prioritize chronologies, in which the decline of manuscript production technologies give way to European-styled printing presses. Focusing on periodization implies clear beginnings and endings, whereas in South Asia multiple technologies of textual production existed simultaneously, rather than one set of technologies giving way to another set. In lieu of papers that adopt a narrative of straightforward transition from stone slabs to paper, we welcome papers that reflect on how textual production technologies simultaneously circulated and informed each other after the emergence of the printing press. By exploring how textual technologies confound traditional chronological accounts of the “arrival” of print to South Asia, we will redirect attention to the complicated paths of material texts themselves.

Participants

John E. Cort (Denison University) :: *To Print or Not to Print? Jain Debates on the Ethics of Printing in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*

Charlotte Giles (Library of Congress) :: *Textiles as Texts: Chikankari Karigars in Lucknow*

Amy Holmes-Tagchungdarpa (Occidental College) :: *Working Texts: Agency and Materiality in Buddhist Book Ritual Traditions in the Himalayas*

Yasmeen Khan (Library of Congress) :: *From the Cover Inwards: A Conservator’s Approach to Reading Bound Manuscripts*

Christine Marrewa-Karwoski (Columbia University) :: *Illuminating the Tradition: Notes on Wellcome Library’s Hindi Ms 371*

Rebecca Manring (Indiana University) :: *Does Critically Editing Really Help?*

Pranav Prakash (University of Oxford) :: *Colophons and Scribal Communities in South Asia: The Case of a 19th century scribe copying panegyric poems dedicated to Mughal elites*

Ronit Ricci (Hebrew University; Australian National University) :: *Sharing a Space: Malay Manuscripts, Books and Newspapers in Colonial Ceylon*

Megan Robb (University of Pennsylvania) :: *Writing with Feeling: Emotions and Approaches to Material Texts in South Asia*

Nur Sobers-Khan (Massachusetts Institute of Technology Libraries) :: *Mass-Producing the Cosmos: Visuality and divination from Manuscript to Lithograph in 19th century South Asia*

A. R. Venkatachalapathy (University of Madras) :: *From Manuscript to Print Culture in Colonial Tamilnadu: The editorial Lives of C. W. Damodaran Pillai and U. V. Swaminatha Iyer*