

## Review

*A Sanskrit Treasury: A Compendium of Literature from the Clay Sanskrit Library*, edited by Camillo A. Formigatti. Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2019. Foreword by Amartya Sen, preface by Richard Ovenden. xviii + 270 pp., £50. ISBN 9781851245314 (hb).

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**Keywords:** *kāvya*; literature; Sanskrit.

This massive book—1.8 kg—is a celebration of Sanskrit literature, and of the art of the book in India. It also celebrates the Oxford University library holdings of Indian manuscripts and related materials, especially in Sanskrit and Prakrit, and the Clay Sanskrit Library, founded by John Clay (1924–2013), an Oxford Sanskrit graduate of American origin, who started this publishing venture after a successful career in finance. The Clay Sanskrit Library is a series of bilingual books, modelled on the Loeb Classical Library of ancient Greek and Latin literature, presenting romanized Sanskrit texts and specially commissioned translations on facing pages. The present book includes samples of those translations, with the originals not in romanization but in elegant Devanāgarī. These are interspersed with reproductions of manuscripts exemplifying the various forms of Indic script, pictures from illuminated manuscripts, pictures of writing materials, the outsides of books, and early printed editions of Sanskrit texts, early photographs and watercolours of places where Sanskrit literary culture has spread, and more, all from the Oxford University library collections. The book is intended as a ‘gentle guide’ to introduce readers to the ‘monument of human ingenuity’ that is *kāvya* (p. 21). As such, it does not try to teach us how to read and appreciate Sanskrit literature, but only to show some samples, with examples of the visual culture in which it is set. This is a coffee-table book, not an academic one; it does not raise uncomfortable matters such as the male gaze, or how wealth came to be concentrated in royal courts, or how these treasures ended up in a library thousands of miles away.

Camillo Formigatti, the John Clay Sanskrit Librarian at the Bodleian, who assembled the samples, contributes an introduction that rambles happily through topics such as literacy and orality, writing materials and their manufacture, poetic conventions, and a brief history of the Bodleian’s collection

of Sanskrit and Prakrit manuscripts, the largest outside South Asia (p. 24); a more structured essay would have avoided making the same point twice (pp. 5, 16). The concentration on *kāvya* in this introduction is balanced by Amartya Sen in his foreword, reminding us of the contributions in Sanskrit to philosophy, mathematics, linguistics and phonetics.

The wealth of material is arranged geographically: not only by regions of South Asia, illustrating the different climates and scripts in which Sanskrit literature has been cultivated, but also by regions to the north, east and west, with some account of how Sanskrit culture was carried there. This enables us to see part of the Malay *Hikayat Seri Rama* (in Arabic script), samples of Tibetan, Mongolian and Chinese calligraphy, illustrated pages from the Arabic *Kalilah wa-Dimnah* (derived from the *Pañcatantra*), an illustrated fifteenth-century printed *Directorium Humanae Vitae* (derived from the Arabic version), and an illustrated Latin manuscript about the strange beasts and golden mountains of India.

This anthology is itself a monument of book production, with opulent colour printing, decorative endpapers, robust binding, head and tail bands, and two ribbon bookmarks.