The Saṅgītaśiromaṇī, "Crest-jewel of Music", written in 1428 A.D., was, as its title suggests, designed as a standard-work on music. The fact that this large Sanskrit text could be composed under Muslim rule not only stands proof for the tolerance and liberality of the foreign invaders towards the Indian arts and letters, but also shows that in those days musicology was still an important aspect of traditional Indian learning and scholarship.

Sultan Malika Šāhi, a Muslim convert, who after the invasion by Ibrahim (probably King Ibrahim of the Sharqi dynasty who ruled from 1401 to 1440 in Jaunpur) governed the districts situated West of the present city of Allahabad instead of his father Bahādura Mali­ka, invested a lot of money and effort in organizing a musicological congress. He invited scholars from all regions to his capital Kaḍa (50 km to the West of the present Allahabad) and ordered them to write a large textbook on music, to which purpose he had collected a considerable number of older musicological works in Sanskrit. Most of these treatises can be identified and some of them are still in existence. In this way the Saṅgītaśiromaṇī became one of the largest and most important late-medieval works on music. Soon it became a classic by itself, quoted by important contemporary musicologists such as King Kumbhā (1433-1468), the author of the Saṅgītarāja. Although the Saṅgītaśiromaṇī can be classified as a compilation of medieval Indian musicology, its merit is that it does not merely quote from various sources, but also explains theoretical problems which are elsewhere – for example in the well-known thirteenth century treatise Saṅgītaratnākara of Šāṅgagadeva – described in a short and cryptic way. Therefore we may regard the Saṅgītaśiromaṇī as a valuable North Indian summary of medieval Indian musicology. Unfortunately, the chapters on musical instruments and dancing have not yet come down to us.

We have decided to publish the Sanskrit text and the English translation of the available fourteen chapters, because they are complete in themselves, dealing with all the aspects of the traditional Indian theory of music. Since this book is primarily intended for musicologists and students of Indian music, it is provided with a long
introduction to make the reader acquainted with the technical terms as well as the problems of their interpretation. For the same reason the Sanskrit text is presented in transliteration.

This first edition of the Saṅgītaśiromani is not a critical edition. The present writer has faithfully tried to prepare a correct version with as little changes as possible. The reader will not be annoyed with massive notes referring to all the minor errors of a scribe, such as omission of visarga (h) and anusvāra (m), sandhi errors, inversion of syllables and other inaccuracies which do not entail a change of the meaning. Hopefully, in future there will be an opportunity to publish a critical edition in Devanāgarī script. For the moment this provisional edition in transcription will suffice to go with the English translation.

The present edition of this Sanskrit text is mainly based on a large manuscript preserved in the Rajastan Oriental Research Institute at Jodhpur (ms. no. 16785, Paper, Devanāgarī script, 188 folios, missing folios: 1-13, 163b, 164 and 165a; scribe Veglāya Kāyastha; date August 23rd 1487 A.D.), which almost covers the whole text of the available fourteen chapters. Some gaps (for ex. ch. 6, verse 1-19) and some corrupt readings in the first seven chapters could be restored and corrected with the help of a small manuscript from the collection of the Asiatic Society of Bengal at Calcutta (ms. no. 1713, Paper, Devanāgarī script, fol. 2-26). This manuscript may go back to the same source as the Jodhpur manuscript, to which it often runs parallel. A manuscript belonging to the Anup Sanskrit Library at Bikaner (ms. no. 28.186, Paper, Devanāgarī script, 38 folios, dated by the copyist Samvat 1730 = 1673 A.D.) proved to be useful to restore some missing lines in ch. 13, although one cannot deny that its reading is rather unclear and corrupt. The only manuscript which contains the initial twelve verses of the introductory chapter (synopsis), that are missing in all the other manuscripts, is the one that was formerly kept in the Sarasvatī Bhavan Library at Vārāṇasi (private microfilm collection Alain Daniélou, no. 134, 64 pages, original ms. on paper, Devanāgarī script). This is an important, independent manuscript which has some variant readings. Unfortunately it is not complete, as it stops at the beginning of the large Rāga chapter (ch. 11, v. 31).

I am greatly indebted to Alain Daniélou, whom I met twenty years ago at Berlin in the Institute for Comparative Music Studies. It was his idea that I should continue the work started by Mathura
Datt Pant from Almora (India), who under his supervision had made a provisional translation of the first ten chapters of the Saṅgītaśiromaṇi on the basis of the incomplete Calcutta and Vārāṇasī manuscripts. After I had waisted a long time in studying the difficult Prabandha chapter in the corrupt version of the Bikaner manuscript, I already thought I would never be able to publish a more or less complete and correct text, when I suddenly came across the large and very old Jodhpur manuscript, which offered an almost complete text of the first fourteen chapters in an excellent reading. At that moment (1978) I decided to start the work all over again and to prepare an edition and full English translation of the text mainly based on the Jodhpur manuscript.

Without the constant encouragement and advice of my respected teacher Jan Gonda – in good and bad times – I would never have been able to finish this project.

To my son Diederik Wiersma I am very grateful for his initiative to develop a computer program for the diacritical marks in the transliteration of the Sanskrit.

Naarden 1990,

E. te Nijenhuis.