

## Transmission of Texts and Editorial Practices

Whatever they may do, authors do not write books. Books are not written at all. They are manufactured by scribes and other artisans, by mechanics and other engineers, and by printing presses and other machines.

STODDARD 1987: 4



When one considers the manuscripts and printed editions of an ancient work, one becomes acutely aware of the truth of this statement, that is, of the imponderability of the distance between what, for example, Manorathanandin or Dharmakīrti composed and what at present circulates in the book market under their names.

In our texts as it is often the case with classical Sanskrit literature in South Asia, explicit statements about their transmission or the editorial methods applied to them are either brief or wholly lacking. Some preliminary considerations will help to put the examination of the witnesses of Manorathanandin's *Vṛtti* and its related texts in a wider historical context. Given the paucity of archival documents or descriptive sources concerning the reproduction of texts, investigations are not easy to carry on.<sup>1</sup> Books, however, may contain relevant clues and so themselves constitute a precious source of information in this regard. A comparison between a sample text of a printed edition and that of a manuscript used to prepare it can provide important data for a reconstruction of the procedures applied by the editor when constituting the text.

### Editorial Practices as Displayed in Manuscripts and Printed Books

Even if various agents who cooperate in making a book may along the way introduce elements (such as paratexts) that inevitably have an influence on the reading of a text, both handwritten and printed books are first and foremost the result of specific editorial practices of various types and serving various goals all independent of the technology applied in book production.

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<sup>1</sup> This is true for premodern, but also modern, South Asia. See, for example, Stark 2007: 27.

Except in the case of autographs, a manuscript may contain the version of a text as elaborated by an editor, or it may be a mere copy produced by a professional copyist, who only unintentionally deviates from his exemplar. Similarly, editors of printed books may prepare the text to be sent to press by working on it at a semantic level; otherwise they may simply reproduce the text as contained in a previous printed edition, merely correcting obvious misprints or slips of the pen. In the latter case, they can be equated with professional copyists. Within the larger context of book production within which both operate, they perform their function according to the specific diasystems that they establish,<sup>2</sup> as manifested especially in orthographic aspects of the text (often reflecting phonetic features of the copyist's or editor's language). As history of textual reproduction shows, this conservative mode of editorial activity coexisted with another mode characterized by intentional intervention in the text, which could be performed in different ways and at various degrees of intensity, from redacting the text to blending one of its versions with others. The development of the interventionist mode entails in turn a distinction between critical and non-critical editorial practices.

### *Critical and Non-Critical Editions*

In 16th century Europe, a new editorial attitude towards texts arose as a result of speculations about the problems posed in the attempt to establish "correct" readings within the texts.<sup>3</sup> This attitude slowly developed into a distinct mode of editorial practice, and has become the specific methodology for editing texts nowadays called 'critical', since it is characterized by intentional acts of *krineîn*, 'choosing'. Editors of critical editions judge, based on specific criteria, how the text—composed usually (if not necessarily) by one specific author at a specific time and place—may have read, what may be its oldest reconstructable form (possibly the archetype), or what the version of a text that circulated at a certain point in time may have looked like.<sup>4</sup> No matter what the ideal outcome of editorial activity is, the application of a critical method in the constitution of a text implies comparing the different extant versions of a text and noting the variant readings in a critical apparatus, the place where editors record attested variations in the reading of the text that is being constituted.

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<sup>2</sup> See Segre 1979: 53–64.

<sup>3</sup> See Timpanaro 2005, Chapter 1, "*Emendatio ope codicum* from the Humanists to Bentley".

<sup>4</sup> In using terms such as 'author' and 'text', I am aware of the significant development of their meaning after Roland Barthes's and Michel Foucault's reflections at the end of the 1960s—reflections that have imposed new constraints upon textual criticism.