

## *Introduction*

The essays presented in this volume constitute a progression from general considerations related to the 'ethic' (in the geertzian sense of the word) approach to South Asian cultural productions, to peculiar and detailed investigations of them. Such a sequence is meant to develop a renovated and systemic approach, through which these specific cultural materials should be interpreted: materials not to be read in isolation, nor with an overemphasised concern for cultural relativity. Rather, they should be viewed as meaningful examples of sophisticated intellectual and cultural procedures to be included into a broader comparative discussion, also in order to increase the quality and the depth of such debate. The following studies are therefore arranged to display the above mentioned possibility, fitting specific materials into larger analytical frameworks.

Let me now mention some of the technicalities concerning the essays: since the materials here collected are the products of a long term research period, there are some divergences related to editorial criteria. I apologize for any inconveniences this may cause to the readers. Also, I have to state that previous versions of the chapters of this volume came out in print: Chapter 1 initially appeared as F. Squarcini, *India and Europe: At the Dawn of a New Hermeneutic Era*, in K. Preisendanz (ed.), *Expanding and Merging Horizons. Contributions to*

*South Asian and Cross-Cultural Studies in Commemoration of Wilhelm Halbfass*, Österreichische Akademie Der Wissenschaften, Wien 2007, pp. 3-21; Chapter 2 as F. Squarcini, *Traditions against Tradition. Criticism, Dissent and the Struggle for the Semiotic Primacy of Veridiction*, in F. Squarcini (ed.), *Boundaries, Dynamics and Construction of Traditions in South Asia*, Firenze University Press - Munshiram Manoharlal, Firenze - Delhi 2005, pp. 437-484; Chapter 4 as F. Squarcini, *na mlecchabhāṣāṃ śikṣeta. On the authority of speech and the modes of social distinction through the medium of language in classical India*, in C. Galewicz (ed.), *Texts of power, the power of the text. Readings in textual authority across history and cultures*, Wydawnictwo Homini, Krakow 2006, pp. 165-179.

I would also like to inform the reader that all the references to the *Mānavadharmasāstra* are taken from the critical edition of Patrick Olivelle (2005), whom I would like to thank for having given me the opportunity to consult and use it before its publication.

Finally, various persons needs to be mentioned here, since their help and guidance has been decisive for the accomplishment of this work: Piero Capelli, Cristiano Grottanelli, Alessandro Graheli, Steven Lindquist, Karin Preisendanz, Antonella Rondinone, Marina Rustow, Francesco Sferra, Lara Tavarnesi, Davide Tomba, Vincenzo Vergiani.

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