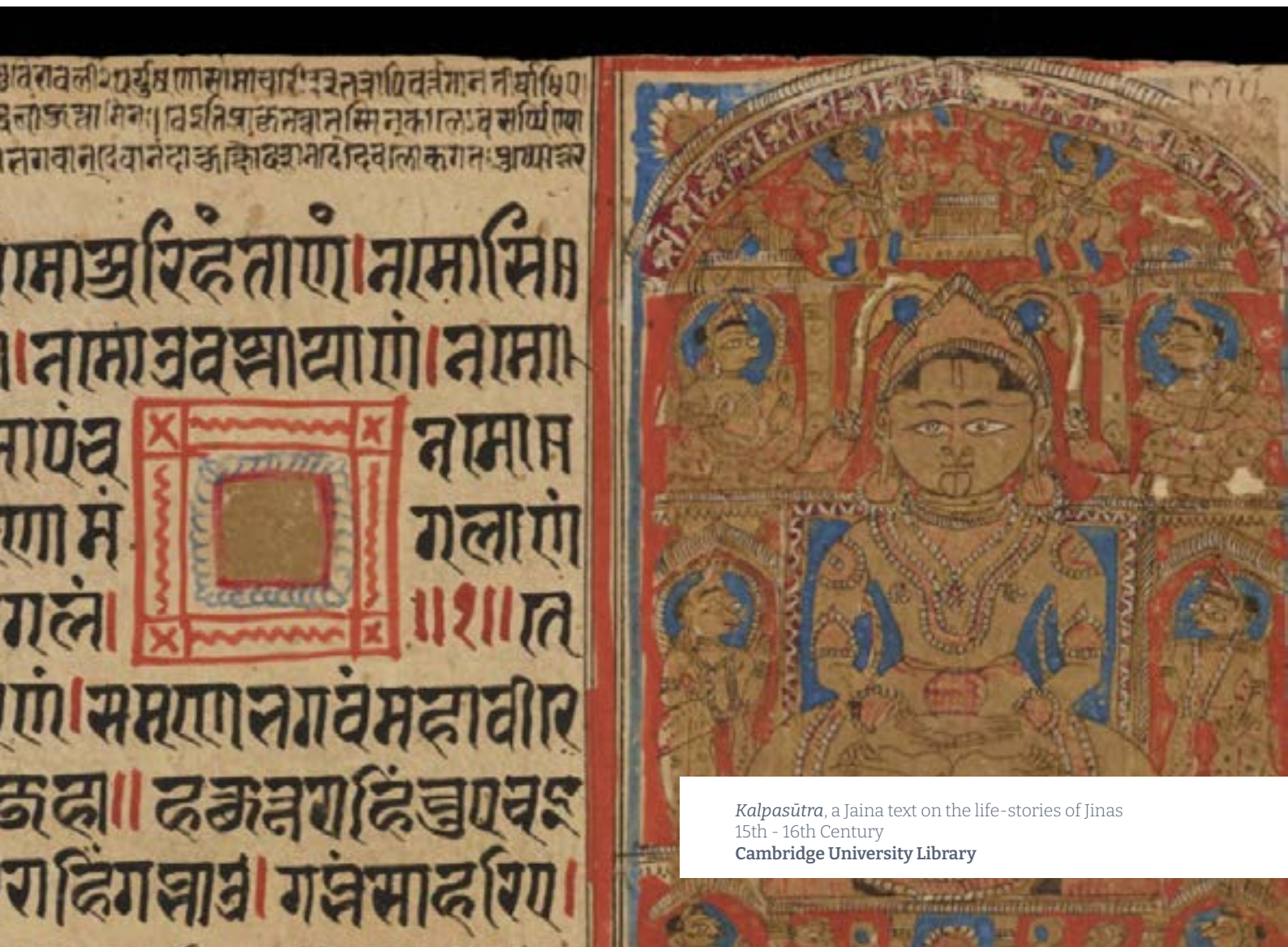


## Securing South Asian Studies at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies

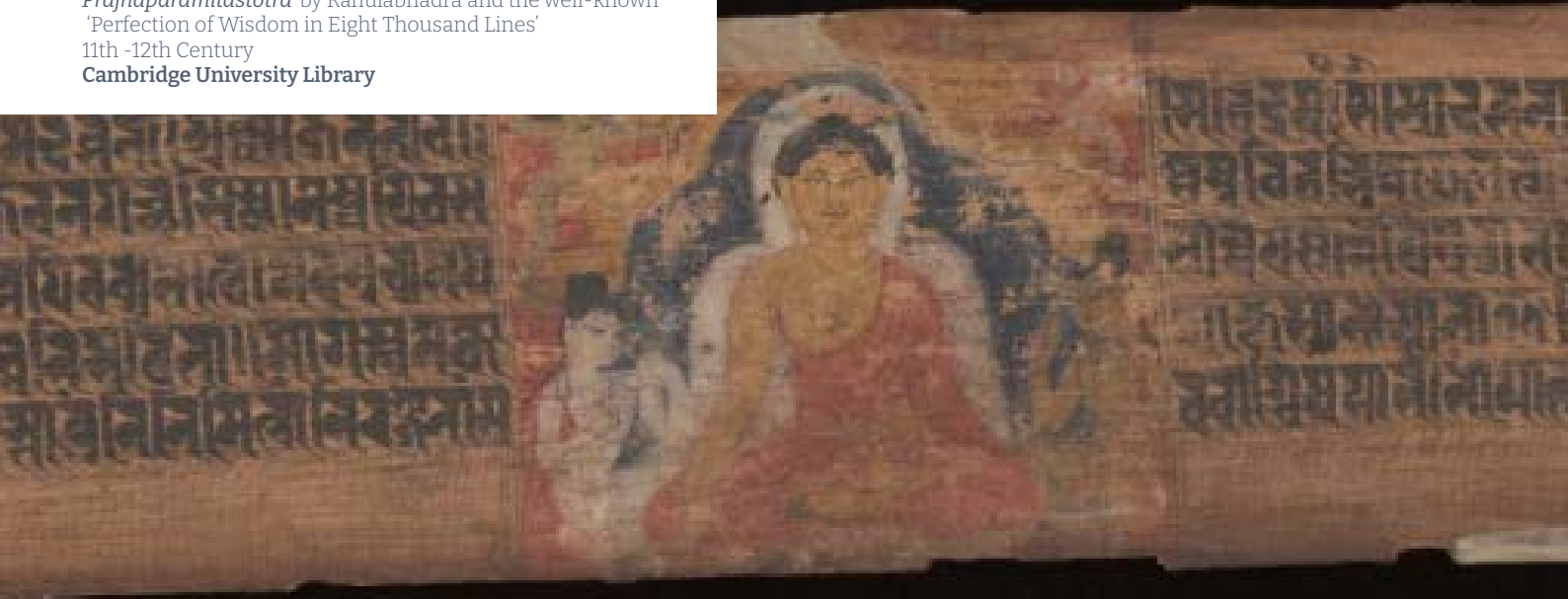
Case for Support

September 2025



*Kalpasūtra*, a Jaina text on the life-stories of Jinās  
15th - 16th Century  
Cambridge University Library

*Prajñāpāramitāstotra* by Rāhulabhadra and the well-known  
'Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines'  
11th -12th Century  
Cambridge University Library



The Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (FAMES) at the University of Cambridge is seeking support to endow two posts in South Asian Studies: a Professor of Sanskrit and a Professor of Pre-Modern Indian Literatures and Cultures with a focus on the Indo-Persianate world.

## *Introduction to FAMES*

The Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at Cambridge combines world-class scholarship with a great teaching and learning environment for undergraduate and post-graduate students. Our researchers are engaged in internationally recognised work in the history, literature, linguistics, social anthropology, sociology, politics and contemporary culture of the Middle East, North Africa, China, Japan and the two Koreas. The work of several staff crosses traditional geographic and subject boundaries, and all our work is firmly grounded in primary source research.


The research excellence of FAMES's academic staff is world-renowned and this excellence is carried into our teaching. Our students gain in-depth knowledge of historical and contemporary cultures of the region of their choice, based on acquiring fluency in one or several relevant languages. This allows them access to sources in the primary languages and immersion in the countries they study. Our alumni are much in demand, bringing their specific expertise, but also expanded horizons and ability to think in new and exciting ways through real-world engagement. FAMES leads in developing Global Humanities and in contributing to the awareness of cultural world heritage.

## *Why endow positions in South Asian Studies at FAMES?*

Endowing classical South Asian Studies in Cambridge has become an urgent matter in order to safeguard the University's teaching and research in pre-modern South Asian Studies. The field is currently in jeopardy in UK Higher Education Institutions, with the single exception of Oxford. Cambridge proposes to depart from what is done at Oxford by embedding its two South Asian Studies posts within Middle Eastern Studies. This new exciting focus will open up collaborations with colleagues who are working on Persian, early and medieval West Asian history, and Islamic Studies. The "westbound" orientation of this reimagined South Asian Studies unit will give it a unique profile with hardly any parallels worldwide. And it is an exciting prospect to offer our Cambridge students the opportunity to engage with the millennia of West Asian-Persian-Indian dialogue in an integrated way.

has never been an endowed Chair of Sanskrit (like the Boden Chair in Oxford), the post of Sanskrit Professor has been held by many prominent scholars such as the renowned Buddhologist Cecil Bendall, who personally collected many of the Sanskrit manuscripts held by Cambridge's University Library, and the epigraphist Edward J. Rapson, whose generous bequest is still used to fund graduate scholarships.

Sanskrit has a long and prestigious history in Cambridge dating back to 1867, when Edward B. Cowell became the first professor of the language at Cambridge. While there



A scene of the famous Hindu myth of the "Churning of the ocean of milk" from a late 16th - early 17th century illuminated manuscript.  
Cambridge University Library

# *The South Asian collections within the Cambridge University Library*

The presence of scholars in Sanskrit Literature and Culture and the Pre-Modern Indo-Persian world is fundamental in order to continue and further foster research on the Cambridge University Library collections. The Library hosts a rich fund of manuscripts in Sanskrit and other South Asian languages, which is virtually still unstudied. The collection has now been catalogued and partially digitised thanks to a project led by the present post-holder of Sanskrit.

The University Library also holds a rich collection of Indo-Persian manuscripts which would constitute material and visual cultural aspects of the teaching and research position in the Pre-Modern Indian Literature and Culture.



## *Our vision*

We hope to guarantee the continuation of Sanskrit Studies at Cambridge (beyond September 2026, when the current post holder retires), and to build a viable undergraduate pathway in ancient and modern South Asian Studies within our department of Middle Eastern Studies. Such a pathway would be based on a robust knowledge of two of the main languages of the region (Sanskrit, Hindi, Urdu, Persian), enabling students to use sources written in these languages, rather than translations.

This linguistic fluency would be used in “content papers”, such as literature in the given language, medieval and modern history or contemporary sociology or anthropology, all based on sources in that language. Currently, the faculty offers two levels of Hindi as optional papers within an Arabic, Persian or Hebrew pathway.

An Elementary Sanskrit paper is also available as an option. By endowing the two planned positions, undergraduate students would be able to choose to study South Asian Studies in the same way that they currently can take Arabic or Japanese Studies, for example. We would also be able to offer joint degrees in Indian and Middle Eastern Studies, for example at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In addition, a specific MPhil in South Asian Studies would be created, with the Department's specific "West-bound" orientation.

Although Cambridge boasts several departments that research different areas of Indian Studies (History, Divinity, POLIS, Geography, Classics, Archaeology) and a thriving Centre for South Asian Studies (with a focus on the modern period), the university currently does not offer a BA degree in the pre-modern languages, history, and culture of the subcontinent. FAMES aims to establish the scholarly recognition of the unique contribution of the subcontinent to global civilisation from the Antiquity onward, thereby enhancing, complementing and becoming a focal point for the related teaching and research undertaken across Cambridge. Another benefit of having this talent in Cambridge is that the academics will attract global experts, meaningful conversations, and impactful collaborations that will benefit the wider Cambridge community as well as the world.



## Costing information

One of the following posts will be established at Chair level at £4.6m and the other established at Professor level at £4.4m. The two posts are:

- **Named Professor of Sanskrit**  
A teaching and research position based in FAMES to be endowed and named in perpetuity
- **Named Professor of South Asian Studies**  
A teaching and research position based in FAMES to be endowed and named in perpetuity

With the two academic posts secured, other accompanying projects and collaborations are planned, namely:

**3-year named Postdoctoral Research positions** to further catalogue and digitise the Sanskrit manuscripts collection of the University Library, or to research other areas of Sanskrit or Indian Literatures and Cultures, to bring to fruition our collections' rich potential. Each Postdoctoral Research post requires £300k for the three years.

**Collaborative research and outreach programmes;** costs will vary based on the project. One example might be the creation of a book series featuring annotated translations of the great texts of spiritual/contemplative traditions of Asia. The books would include the text of the primary source (Sanskrit to begin with, and other languages would gradually be included) along with a readable translation accompanied with notes to explain the content to lay audiences. No such book series exist. Similar book series (focused on particular areas) like the Clay Sanskrit Library and Shambhala Publications could be used as a model.

## Why donate to Cambridge?

As one of the most prestigious and respected universities for the study of the humanities, Cambridge offers an unparalleled breadth of research excellence. The mission of the University of Cambridge is to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence. With more than 20,000 students from all walks of life and all corners of the world, over 12,000 staff, 31 Colleges and 150 Departments, Faculties, Schools and other institutions, Cambridge offers a dynamic and vibrant ecosystem from which meaningful teaching and research is shared with the world.

Philanthropic giving is indispensable in safeguarding the University's commitment to excellence in research and teaching, educating the most able regardless of need, raising the aspirations of young people, and ensuring access for the wider world to our great resources, ideas and knowledge.

## *Stewardship and recognition*

By donating to the University of Cambridge, you will be joining an elite network of donors, dedicated to making a real impact on the University and on the wider world. Donors receive annual reports on the distribution of their gifts and have the opportunity to participate in the intellectual life both of the faculty and of the University, meeting like-minded individuals and world-leading academics at specific events. The University of Cambridge is committed to fully recognising the generosity of its supporters and welcomes donors' involvement in relevant Programmes.

A gift at £1m or more qualifies donors for membership of the University's Guild of Benefactors – the highest level of recognition of a select group of donors whose philanthropy has played a key role in supporting the University of Cambridge, and which includes some of the leading business people and philanthropists in the world. As a member, and with the donor's permission, their name will be recorded on the Benefactors' Staircase in the Old Schools, the historic heart of the University and they will receive an invitation from the Vice Chancellor to attend the annual Guild of Benefactors Ceremony and Dinner each year.

We are hugely grateful for your vision and interest in supporting South Asian Studies at Cambridge and would welcome the chance to discuss it further with you.





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The proposals set out in this document are indicative only and they are not intended to form the basis of a legally binding contract.