

## First Visit of the CSMC Manuscript Lab at the EFEO Pondicherry



On 19-30 January 2015 the first mission of the Hamburg CSMC manuscript lab ([http://www.manuscript-cultures.uni-hamburg.de/lab\\_e.html](http://www.manuscript-cultures.uni-hamburg.de/lab_e.html)) took place at the Pondicherry centre of the EFEO. Claire MacDonald and Boryana Pouvkova came to operate the multispectral imaging system which could be brought to India with the kind help of the French Consulate in Pondicherry. The original goal had been to go to the U.V. Swaminathaiar Library in Chennai, one of the country's most important collections of early classical Tamil manuscripts, in order to work on damaged manuscripts from the *Caṅkam* corpus, but the permission to work there did not arrive in time. Instead the lab was installed in the EFEO. This way there was the opportunity to experiment on the in-situ collection of the institution which consists mainly of Vaiṣṇava material. A series of images were taken of manuscripts with damaged script or darkened background.

In addition the EFEO photo team had the good fortune to be allowed by the Tiruvāvaṭuṭurai Ātīṇam, Caracuvati Makāl Library and Research Centre, the Saiva mutt with one of the oldest collections still extant, to bring home manuscripts in dire need of cleaning and oiling before digitisation could be attempted. Among the first set of these were a couple of rare and problematic specimens which would not have yielded satisfactory images if taken with an ordinary digital camera. Thus the lab could help to safeguard and significantly improve the readability of TT 75, one of only three surviving manuscripts for the *Paripāṭal*, and TT 322B, one of the rare partial manuscripts of the *Cilappatikāram* with Aṭiyārkkunallār's commentary. A second mission is planned for January 2017 when hopefully the original plan of working at the UVSL can be put into action.