

TRACES OF GANDHĀRAN BUDDHISM

An Exhibition of Ancient Buddhist Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection

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Jens Braarvig and Fredrik Liland

With contributions by:
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Contents

PREFACE

Acknowledgements	ix
Foreword, H.H. Somdet Phra Buddhacharya	x
Foreword, Jens Braarvig	xiii
Conventions and abbreviations	xv

INTRODUCTION

Gandhāra	xvii
The Origin of the Manuscripts	xviii
The Scripts	xxi
The Manuscript Project	xxiii
The Schøyen Collection in Context, Jens-Uwe Hartmann	xxvi
On the Importance of the BMSC, Kazunobu Matsuda	xxviii
An Analysis of the Scripts, Lore Sander	xxx
Kharoṣṭī Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection, Richard Salomon	xxxiii

THE MANUSCRIPTS

1. Āgama Sūtra		2
• Caṅgīsūtra		6
• Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra		10
• Andhasūtra, Sūtra on the Three Moral Defects of Devadatta, and Kauvikumārāvadāna		14
• Śikhālasūtra		
2. Mahāyāna Sūtra		18
• Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā		22
• The Mahāyāna Sūtra Manuscript		26
• Vajracchedikāprajñāpāramitā		
3. Vinaya		32
• Prātimokṣa-Vibhaṅga		38
• Karmavācanā		42
• On the Qualifications of a Vinayadharma		
4. Abhidharma		46
• Śāriputra-Abhidharma		50
• A Commentary on the Mahāsamājasūtra		52
• Fragments of an Early Commentary		
5. Avadāna		58
• The Aśoka Legend		62
• Jyotiṣkāvadāna		66
• Avadānaśataka		
6. Miscellaneous		72
• A Bactrian Buddhist Manuscript		74
• A Mīmāṃsaka Among the Buddhists		78
• Buddhastotras of Māṭrceṭa		82
• Āryaśūra's Jātakamālā		86
• An Unusual <i>ye dharmā</i> Formula		88
• A Jar with a Kharoṣṭī Inscription		90
• A Fragment of a Play		92
• A Copper Scroll Inscription		
APPENDIX		
Bibliography		100

Conventions

Description of a fragment:

recto and verso, abbreviated r and v, if a fragment is identified
A and B, if the beginning cannot be decided

Symbols:

()	restorations in a gap
[]	damaged akṣara(s)
< >	omission of (part of) an akṣara without gap in the ms.
<< >>	interlinear insertion
{ }	superfluous (part of an) akṣara
+	one destroyed akṣara
~<number>+	approximate number of lost akṣaras, e.g. ~60+
..	one illegible akṣara
.	illegible part of an akṣara
...	indefinite number of lost akṣaras
///	beginning or end of a fragment when broken
*	virāma
,	avagraha, not added in transliteration, but added without brackets in reconstruction (note, however, 'pi and pi)
ḥ	upadhmānīya
ḥ	jihvāmūlīya
✿	double circle with rosette
○	string hole

Abbreviations

AN	Ānguttara-Nikāya; Morris and Hardy (1885-1900).
BMSC	Buddhist Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection; Braarvig (Braarvig, 2000-2006).
DN	Dīgha-Nikāya; Rhys Davids and Carpenter (1890-1911).
G	Gilgit Manuscripts; Dutt (1939-54).
It-a	Itivuttaka-Āṭṭhakathā Paramatthadīpanī; Bose (1934-36).
MN	Majjhima-Nikāya; Trenckner and Chalmers (1888-99).
Q	Peking (Qianlong) version of the Tibetan bKa' 'gyur; Suzuki (1957).
T	Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō 大正新修大藏經; Takakusu and Watanabe (1924-34).

Images of Gandhāran art

National Museums in Berlin

Prussian Cultural Foundation

Asian Art Museum, Art Collections of South, South East and Central Asian Art

-Large Buddha head (p.1), No. 43180; photography by Roman März.

-Standing Bodhisattva (p.17), No. 42119; photography by Iris Papadopoulos.

-Buddha Preaching (p.31), No. 42103; photography by Georg Niedermeiser.

-Meditating Monk (p.45), No. 40222; unknown photographer.

-Animals asking the Wise about what they fear most in life (p.57), No. 24453; photography by Iris Papadopoulos.

-Buddhist reliquary (p.71), No. 29738; unknown photographer.

Introduction

The Schøyen Collection in Context

Jens-Uwe Hartmann, Ludwig Maximilian University

Compared to other classical cultures like Egypt or China, India was very late in creating its own writing system. Prior to the monumental rock inscriptions of king Aśoka in the middle of the third century B.C. there are no reliable indications for the existence of an indigenous script. All the major Indian religions originated considerably earlier, and thus they had to depend on an exclusively oral transmission for their continuously growing corpus of religious lore. Oral transmission facilitates the exclusion of those who are seen unfit for or unworthy of participation in the tradition, and in the case of the Vedic religion this led to an ongoing orality of the transmission. Contrary to that, the Buddha made a strong point of the exoteric nature of his teachings and their accessibility for everybody, independent of gender and social status, and it is quite likely that his followers were the first to recognize the many advantages of the art of writing. According to an historical tradition, the Buddhists in Sri Lanka started to write down their canonical texts in the first century B.C. when various calamities like war and famine threatened the continuity of the oral transmission.

This information from the southern edge of the Buddhist world is now corroborated by the new manuscript finds in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent. According to a radiocarbon dating of the latest finds, at least one manuscript may originate from the first century B.C. This makes it not only the oldest Buddhist, but by far also the oldest Indian manuscript presently known, and this is one of the many reasons why the recent finds from Pakistan and Afghanistan are considered so sensational. Taken all together they allow us to reconstruct some



A pile of inscribed birch bark fragments, illustrating the state in which some of the manuscripts were first presented to the project work group.

of the major developments of Buddhism in the area from the beginning of the Common Era up to the eighth or even the early ninth centuries.

Three times during the last hundred years our knowledge and our understanding of the early history of Buddhism has been decisively advanced by large manuscript finds. The first occurred in the beginning of the last century. When rumours of lost Buddhist cultures in Central Asia reached the West, explorers from several European countries went to the Tarim basin. They followed the ancient Silk Road, and in the ruins of long deserted monasteries and stupas they found an incredible amount of Buddhist cultural relics. Among them were ten thousands of Buddhist manuscripts written in a number of scripts and languages, but mostly reduced to mere fragments. The following decades saw scholars working hard, trying to decipher the fragments and to reconstruct the texts they contained. A comparatively high number of Sanskrit manuscripts proved that the original texts of several forms of Indian Buddhism were held in high esteem and continued to be used for various purposes, although the local scribes and owners spoke quite different languages. The earliest manuscripts were imports from India written on palm leaf in the second or third centuries A.D. All the others are local products written on paper and ranging from the 4th to probably the 10th or 11th centuries. Those found in the cave monasteries at the northern branch of the Silk Road mostly preserve literature of the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda school, both canonical and non-canonical, while those coming from the southern branch contain Mahāyāna sūtras. The overwhelming majority of all those manuscripts from Central Asia contain texts the Sanskrit original of which had been lost in India. They are now kept in various collections in Berlin, London, Paris and St. Petersburg.

In the thirties of the last century another sensational manuscript treasure came to light. It was found in a ruined building near Gilgit in Northern Pakistan, and it consisted of several dozens of Sanskrit manuscripts, a few complete, but again many of them in a more or less fragmentary condition. Yet, their state of preservation was much better than that of the Central Asian manuscripts, and this facilitated research and publication. While many of the fragments from the Silk Road still await to be studied and published, nearly all of the so-called Gilgit texts have been made accessible through scholarly editions. They convey an interesting picture of the form of Buddhism practiced in the area between the fifth and the seventh centuries: Regarding the vinaya, it was the version of the Mūlasarvāstivādins that was followed by the local monastics, and a number of manuscripts preserve Jātaka stories that belong to the narrative lore of the same school. On the other hand, there is a fairly high number of manuscripts containing Mahāyāna sūtras, some of them clearly used for apotropaic purposes. It has to be assumed, then, that the local Buddhist community drew on various traditions for specific purposes and that their monks combined the monastic code of a school of earlier Buddhism with the views and the dogmatics of the Mahāyāna in a fashion very similar to the practice followed by the monks and nuns in Tibet up to the present day.

The third great find is the recent one of manuscripts from Afghanistan and Pakistan. In all three cases, the finds were unexpected since they happened in areas nowadays dominated by Islamic cultures. They brought to light a very vivid Buddhist past of those areas, and a Buddhist past that was, although outside India proper, fully Indian with regard to its literary traditions. All the finds are sensational, and all provided us with the Indian originals of texts so far known only from translations into Chinese or Tibetan. At the same time, they brought us large numbers of texts that were previously unknown, and this yields at least a vague impression of the tremendous amount and richness of the Buddhist literature that once existed in India. Apparently, most of it has been lost, and all the finds, especially the recent ones, suggest that what we have now is, despite the sheer amount of new material, still the tip of the iceberg.

