

Book Reviews

Asia

From mulberry leaves to silk scrolls: New approaches to the study of Asian manuscript traditions

Edited by JUSTIN THOMAS MCDANIEL and LYNN RANSOM

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 Illustrations, Index.

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Recent years have seen a general revival of manuscript studies. This is particularly noticeable with regard to South and East Asian Studies where philological work, involving the knowledge of non-modern varieties of the relevant languages, had faced a creeping decline of interest in academic institutions during the second half of the twentieth century. Often it had to yield to sociologically — and anthropologically — oriented research approaches dealing with more recent phenomena. Now, manuscript studies are in vogue again, centred on periods, languages, areas, or religions, as exemplified by a volume on Buddhist manuscripts with a title that is echoed by the book here under discussion (*From birch bark to digital data: Recent advances in Buddhist manuscript research*, ed. Paul Harrison and J.-U. Hartmann, 2014).

The resurgence of interest to which these publications speak is not surprising. A traditional manuscript has much more information to offer than merely the text(s) it preserves. It may contain artwork like images and decorations; there are aspects of materiality, of economy, of ideology, and of social order; in short, a manuscript is intimately linked to the whole cultural background that it presupposes and expresses at the same time. This allows manifold perspectives on a manuscript, and this invites — and to a certain degree necessitates — selection. If there is a minor flaw in the present book, it is a certain arbitrariness with regard to selection. On the other hand, this highlights the extremely wide range and diversity of the field.

The book opens with an introduction by the editor, Justin Thomas McDaniel (pp. 1–12), and it is divided into three parts. The first part, ‘The Art of the Book’, begins with Hiram Woodward’s paper on ‘The characteristics of elephants: A Thai manuscript and its context’ (pp. 15–41). Woodward studies several examples of a literary genre called *Tamrā Chāng* in Thai, the ‘Characteristics of elephants’, primarily connected with the royal court; the manuscripts are always on paper, accordion pleated and lavishly illustrated. Alexandra Green’s ‘Representations of space and place in a Burmese cosmology manuscript at the British Museum’ (pp. 42–69), focuses on a single unpublished manuscript and examines the text, its wonderful illustrations and their relation to other representations of the same topics, e.g., in monastic murals, that exemplify Buddhist ideas of the world expressed in a Burmese environment. Sinéad Ward’s ‘Stories steeped in gold: Narrative scenes of

the decorative Kammavācā manuscripts of Burma' (pp. 70–103), remains in the Burmese environment, but turns to a very different genre and draws attention to a rare phenomenon. She deals with the Kammavācā manuscripts necessary for the legal procedures of the Buddhist order. Normally these manuscripts are highly ornamented, but Ward introduces examples that contain narrative scenes. Surprisingly, these scenes are not at all connected to the text, and this allows Ward to reflect on social changes in Burma and their impact on manuscript production.

The second part of the book, 'Inscribing religious practice and belief', begins with Angela S. Chu's contribution 'Drawn to an "extremely loathsome" place: The Buddha and the power of the Northern Thai landscape' (pp. 107–30). She deals with the genre of *tamnan*, a kind of chronicle that has been composed since at least the fifteenth century in northern Thailand. They document an extremely interesting phenomenon, widespread in the Buddhist world: local places are connected with a personal visit of the Buddha, and thus become empowered in a way similar to the original sites in India. Chu introduces two such texts and shows their connection with and dependence on earlier models, thereby underlining the amazing importance of place with regard to the main sacred events in Buddhism. Ori Tavor in 'Shifting modes of religiosity: Remapping early Chinese religion in light of recently excavated manuscripts' (pp. 131–50) looks at two newly discovered bamboo-strip manuscripts from the Warring States period (453–211 BCE) now in the possession of the Shanghai Museum. He demonstrates how they contribute to reconstructing the two competing modes of religiosity of that period, mainly expressed in their respective understanding of ritual. Daniel Sou in his paper of 'Living with ghosts and deities in the Qin 秦 State: Methods of exorcism from "Jie 詰" in the Shuihudi 睡虎地 Manuscript' (pp. 151–75) deals with closely related material. He studies one of the bamboo-strip manuscripts found in the seventies at Shuihudi. It lists various forms of exorcism of certain harmful ghosts and deities, and Sou shows how the text reveals something about the religious activities of that period and, at the same time, about possibilities of state control over religion.

The third part, 'Technologies of writing', begins with Kim Plofker's paper on 'Spoken text and written symbol: The use of layout and notation in Sanskrit scientific manuscripts' (pp. 179–92). She discusses the use of certain visual elements inserted in manuscripts that belong to a cultural environment where written texts have always been considered less valuable than the oral intellectual tradition. Sergei Tourkin's contribution is the only one dealing with the Near East: 'Abbreviations in Medieval astronomical and astrological manuscripts written in Arabic script' (pp. 193–206). Based on four medieval manuscripts in Persian, Tourkin demonstrates the various forms of abbreviations applied in these manuscripts. In her richly illustrated contribution 'Creating a codicology of Central Asian manuscripts' (pp. 207–30), Susan Whitfield presents an overview of the manifold manuscript traditions that developed in the first millennium along the ancient Silk Road in the Tarim basin and then focuses on the materiality of these manuscripts. Finally, Peter M. Scharf introduces the Sanskrit Library in his paper 'Providing access to manuscripts in the digital age' (pp. 231–71). This is an impressive tool for digitising and cataloguing the text and the images of a Sanskrit manuscript together with all the accompanying data that a scholar would wish to know and, probably no less important, be able to search for.

A list of contributors and an index conclude the book. There are a number of mistakes and some inconsistencies with regard to the spelling of Pali and Sanskrit words: read *Nilakaṇṭha* instead of *Nilakaṇha* (p. 37, n. 8), *paṇidhāna* instead of *panidhana* (44), *Yāma* instead of *Yāmā* (46), *gandhabbas* instead of *gandabas* (50), *bhūmisparśa-mudrā* instead of *bhumisparśa mudra* (56f.), *Vidhūrapaṇḍita* instead of *Vidhūrapandita* (78), *Chunqiu* instead of *Chuqiu* (158), *do ut des* instead of *du et des* (170); a plural form like *Mahājanapadās* (53ff.) is awkward. Apart from such very minor mistakes, it is a fine book, beautifully illustrated and easy to read. The contributions cover a wide variety of topics, and most of them, although dealing in one way or another with manuscripts, also reveal much about their cultural settings, especially about the religious ideas and social beliefs expressed in the texts. In short, the book serves as an inviting and rewarding introduction to the field of Eastern manuscript cultures.

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The fifth column in World War II: Suspected subversives in the Pacific War and Australia

By ROBERT LOEFFEL

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Since antiquity, political leaders and military commanders have used informants, deployed covert operatives, and cultivated turncoats to further their tactical, operational, strategic, and political objectives in war. Biblical sources point to a local prostitute aiding the Israelites' capture of the city of Jericho. At Troy, the Greeks used a wooden horse filled with soldiers to infiltrate and help capture the fortified city. On the Indian subcontinent, the military general Mir Jafar turned against the Nawab of Bengal and helped the British triumph at the decisive battle of Plassey. States at war or confronting the prospect of war have accordingly found it prudent — even necessary — to guard against subterfuge. They have also actively attempted to weed out quislings and informers who might compromise their defences and security.

Robert Loeffel examines the subject in this study of the Australian experience with enemy agents during the Second World War. The book brings to light the Australian authorities' concerns and operations against alleged fifth columnists. It offers insight into how the fears and hostilities toward certain groups of people were generated. It further addresses the issue of domestic repression and the prevailing prejudices that members of the Australian elite and public harboured toward aborigines, new immigrants, and religious minorities — predispositions brought sharply to the surface by the threat of war.

Loeffel argues that the Australian anxieties in the Second World War were more often the products of cultural prejudice, racism, and xenophobia rather than prudent