INTERNATIONAL DUNHUANG PROJECT
The Silk Road Online

From Khotan to Kharakhoto: Manuscript Cultures In Interaction
从于阗到黑水城 - 写本文化的相互影响

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The science of palaeography has been essential to our understanding of European history and culture. Palaeography has played little part, however, in the study of Asian manuscripts, where form and style have usually been acknowledged only as an obstacle to interpreting the text. This has led to a lack of understanding of the social conditions under which manuscripts were produced, and of resources to assign dates and geographic locations, all detrimental to the study of Asian history. This project proposes to apply palaeographic and codicological techniques to perhaps the most significant Asian manuscript collection: the Dunhuang manuscripts.

The three IDP researchers involved are Susan Whitfield and Imre Galambos (Chinese manuscripts) and Sam van Schaik (Tibetan manuscripts). Marta Matko is acting as research assistant on the Tibetan side. Our research may be categorized under three interrelated topics: (i) typologies of the scripts, (ii) codicology of the manuscripts and (iii) socio-historical context of the manuscripts.

(ii) Analysis of writing styles cannot be separated from the forms of the manuscripts themselves. The codicological data will include panel size, measurements of laid and chain lines, and the results of scientific analysis of paper, dye, pigments and ink. The IDP database is now capable of recording many kinds of palaeographical and codicological data.

(iii) We will collate and analyse all the socio-historical information in the texts, including the names of scribes, patrons and monastic centres. These data will be displayed as a spatial and temporal map. In addition, we will apply the techniques of forensic handwriting analysis to identify individual scribes. This aspect of the research has already been tested by van Schaik in a pilot project with forensic handwriting expert Dr Tom Davis, of Birmingham University.

As part of the project we are also developing tools for others to use in similar research and tutorials for teaching. The tools are being made available on the IDP technical resources page.

Bibliography

When we study the texts found in Dunhuang and other Central Asian sites, we often encounter them in translation or transliteration on the printed page, or computer screen. This can obscure an important fact: that the people who created and read these texts always encountered them as manuscripts. In a manuscript culture, the form that the manuscript takes (scroll, codex and so on) is inseparable from its content. And the handwriting style of the manuscript is not just something to be decoded and forgotten once transliteration has taken place. Palaeographic features of a manuscript are also linked with, and sometimes determine, the manuscript’s content.

This resource is an introduction to the variety of writing styles and palaeographic features found in the Tibetan and Chinese manuscripts from Central Asia. Each page introduces the features and dating of particular styles or aspects of writing, and contains an transcription exercise allowing anyone to test their ability to read a particular style. Gaining a familiarity with the different styles found in the manuscripts makes it possible to read a greater variety of manuscripts. Even more importantly, it allows us to understand that, in a manuscript culture, book form and writing style are an intrinsic part of the text, and should always be taken into account when reading a manuscript.
A Chronology of Tibetan Bookbinding
Agnieszka Helman-Wazny

As part of the Tibetan strand of the Palaeographical and Codicological Project, IDP invited Agnieszka Helman-Wazny to spend time at the British Library looking at a group of Tibetan manuscripts. Agnieszka also kindly agreed to tutor a workshop on ‘Fibre Identification’ at the Seventh IDP Conservation Conference and to present a paper as a result of her research on the ‘Chronology of Tibetan Bookbinding’. Following is a short summary of her research:

'The character of Tibetan books is unique, and is closely related to Tibetan Buddhist culture and the history of the book in Inner Asia. In this study, the technical aspects of book making have been tracked historically. Different types of Tibetan bookbinding were sought and chosen for the study from the collections of the British Library in London, the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, the Tibetan Museum in Lhasa, and the Asia and Pacific Museum in Warsaw. Unfortunately, this study could not cover the complete span of book history because many of the books studied were undated. Objects described below mainly date from the 8th–12th and the 17th centuries, and come from different regions. The pothi style of book, consisting of loose leaves in cloth covers with wooden boards, is the most representative of Tibetan books, independently of time period, but many other forms and binding styles exist.

The scrolls, concertina, and many other styles of sewn bindings in different formats and on different materials were identified and described. Books and documents exist on many types of paper, as well as on birch bark, silk, wooden slips, metal tablets and combinations of materials. Different methods of binding were studied from both historical and artistic viewpoints. Differences in mounting, sewing and the function of books were emphasized and will be presented as examples during the conference. The possible origin of binding techniques and terminology for them is also discussed. In many cases the form of the book seems to be influenced by its region of origin, but the materials used for the book are related to its nature or function, and not to the location in which it was created.
IDP: fibre analysis

Institute: British Library
Site: (Ch.82.XVI)
Form: pothi
Materials: Ink on paper
Size (h x w) cm: 8 x 30

LVP_1962a: 194
Section: 1
‘phags pa dgongs pa nges par ‘grei pa zhes bya ba ‘i theg pa chen po’i mdo/
Ārya - Saṃdhi - nirmocana - nāma - mahāyāna - sūtra
Ch. 82. XVI, Pothi; 30 c. x 8...

show full entry
IDP: paper morphology

Institute: British Library
Site: (Ch.74.II.19)
Form: scroll
Materials: ink on paper
Size (h x w) cm: 25.9 x 667.3

1st century BC to early 4th century AD
第1个BC世纪-第4个世纪
British Library: Or.8211/1613
Site: Nīya (N.xv.164)
Language(s)/Script(s): Gandhari, Kharosthi
Materials: ink on leather

British Library: Or.8211/1616
Site: Nīya (N.xv.168)
Language(s)/Script(s): Gandhari, Kharosthi
Materials: ink on paper

British Library: Or.8211/1626
Site: Nīya (N.xv.182)
Language(s)/Script(s): Gandhari, Kharosthi
Materials: ink on leather

British Library: Or.8211/1632(B)
Site: Nīya (N.xv.197)
Language(s)/Script(s): Gandhari, Kharosthi
Materials: ink on leather

British Library: Or.8211/1634
Site: Nīya (N.xv.201)
Language(s)/Script(s): Gandhari, Kharosthi
Materials: ink on leather

British Library: Or.8211/1641
Site: Nīya (N.xv.304)
Language(s)/Script(s): Gandhari, Kharosthi
Materials: ink on wood

British Library: Or.8211/1642
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Language(s)/Script(s): Gandhari, Kharosthi
Materials: ink on wood
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4th century to early 8th century AD
第4个世纪-第8个世纪
LEAVES FROM A BIRCH-BARK MANUSCRIPT FOUND IN AN UNDERGROUND ANCIENT CITY NEAR KUCHAR, EASTERN TURKESTAN.
Cat 134: Indian pothi

This leaf and the rest of this copy of the Praiñāpāramitāsūtra were brought from India
late 8th-12th century
第8个世纪-第12个世纪
Some characteristics of the Dunhuang booklets:

- Butterfly binding
- Wrapped-back binding
- Whirlwind binding
- Stitched binding
- Pothi
- Concertina binding

Bibliography
是故众生常
应心念若有女
拜供养观世音
供设欲未男礼
力多所除益
是等大威神
音菩萨有如
无量意观世
便得聋疾
菩萨便生福德
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