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Hartmut Buescher. *Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts: Early Acquisitions and the Nepal Collection.* Copenhagen: NIAS, 2011. xxii + 263 pp. $180.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-87-7694-077-5.

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Manuscript Treasures from Copenhagen

A descriptive catalog of a manuscript collection is an indispensable asset for any researcher working on manuscripts. I, for one, started my research on painted Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts with Cecil Bendall's *Catalogue of the Buddhist Sanskrit Manuscripts in the University Library, Cambridge* (1883). Numerous catalogs of disparate collections aided me throughout the years in locating primary research material, and the analytical descriptions of erudite authors provided foundation stones with which I can agree or disagree and build a new opinion around. That a good number of Sanskrit manuscript collections are held by libraries in the United Kingdom, such as Cambridge University Library, the British Library, Bodleian Library, the Royal Asiatic Society, and Wellcome Library, to name but a few, is perhaps not a surprise, given the British colonial enterprise in South Asia. That a number of Sanskrit manuscripts from India and Nepal found their home in Copenhagen may come as a surprise until we learn about the Danish scholars who contributed much to the study and collection of Sanskrit manuscripts, such as the comparative linguist Rasmus Rask (1787-1832) and Rask's better-known Danish contemporary, Nathaniel Wallich (1785-1854), who founded the Oriental Museum of the Asiatic Society (later the Indian Museum), in Hartmut Buescher's *Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts: Early Acquisitions and the Nepal Collection.* This book is the seventh volume of the *Catalogue of Oriental Manuscripts, Xylographs, Etc. in Danish Collections* (COMDC), a cataloguing project of the Royal Library, Copenhagen, founded by Kaare GrØnbech and edited by Stig. T. Rasmussen, the first volume of which appeared in 1980.[1] The present catalog showcases the diversity and the richness of the Danish collection of Sanskrit manuscripts in the Royal Library and puts Copenhagen firmly on the map for scholars interested in studying the manuscript culture and its history in South Asia.

As noted in the introduction, the catalogue "is not a survey of the Library's entire Sanskrit collection" but rather covers only the manuscripts belonging to three internal signatures of "Cod. San."; "Cod. Ind."; and "Nepal" (p. xv). While the manuscripts are still extremely heterogeneous, this choice limits the number of the manuscripts discussed in the catalogue to a manageable total of 208 entries. "Cod. San." refers to the collection brought to Copenhagen by Rask, who traveled to India via land route between 1816 and 1823. Perhaps reflecting his linguistic interests, Rask's collection among those presented in the catalog is most varied in terms of its linguistic and paleographic features, as it includes many specimens of palm-leaf Sanskrit manuscripts prepared in Telugu script.[2] The manuscripts collected by Nathaniel Wallich form the bulk of Cod. Ind. collection. Many of Wallich's manuscripts are hybrid objects, as he commissioned manuscripts from local (mostly Bengali) scribes using locally produced paper in large notebook format that would later be "leather-bound in European style." The bulk of the manuscripts discussed in the present catalog belong to the Nepal collection purchased in Nepal by Werner Jacobsen (1914-79), an anthropologist who spent 1957-59 in Nepal. As Buescher notes (p. xviii), it is thanks to Jacobsen's being a cultural anthropologist with an eye for curious materials for museum display that the colorfully painted manuscripts and physically idiosyncratic manuscripts from Nepal came to the Royal Library's collection. All but seven of the seventy-six figures splendidly reproduced in color belong to this "Nepal" collection. Overall, the manuscripts described in the present catalog are so physically, paleographically, and chronologically diverse that they present many more challenges than a single scholar can handle. Hartmut Buescher has done a laudable job of cataloging them into a recognizable order.

His introduction provides succinct but valuable in-

formation regarding the provenances of the collection, which will undoubtedly benefit scholars interested in other, lesser-known histories of colonial encounters and interactions, such as the Danish involvement in India and Sri Lanka. The introduction also explains the structure of the catalog entries, providing the necessary guide to navigating the catalog. Each entry begins with a description of the item's condition and characteristics, such as material, size, physical appearance, script, and other scribal features, followed by the title and authorship, if the information is available. It then provides the transliteration of the beginning and the end of each text and ends with at times uneven contextual references for further study. Buescher's emphasis on the physical characteristics of each manuscript is a welcome contribution for a student of material culture and codicology of manuscripts. The description of the material is more detailed than those found in many similar catalogs, perhaps owing to the previous work by Jesper Trier, who from 1962 through 1970, undertook "ethno-technological field work" for a study of paper production in Nepal with the sponsorship of the Royal Library. Buescher suggests Trier's *Ancient Paper of Nepal* (1972) as a companion copy to the present catalog (pp. xviii-xix), which helps our understanding of the physical aspects of a number of manuscripts described by Buescher. To Buescher's credit, his catalog also helps us understand the rather unsystematic presentation of the manuscripts in Trier's otherwise invaluable study.

Buescher divides the manuscripts into seventeen categories based on their literary genres: 1. "*Mahāyāna* S*ū*tras" (fifteen entries), 2. "*Dhāraṇī* Texts" (twenty-one entries), 3. "Tantra and Yoga" (twenty-one entries), 4. "*Dharmaśāstra*" (six entries), 5. "*Vyākaraṇa*" (seven entries), 6. "Lexicography" (five entries), 7. "Philosophy" (five entries), 8. "*Kāvya* and *Chanda*s" (twelve entries), 9. "Epics and *Purāṇa*s" (nine entries), 10. "Narrative" (five entries), 11. "*Subhāṣita*s" (seven entries), 12. "*Stotra*s, *Stava*s, Songs, *Mahātmya*s and *Rāgamāla*s" (twenty-six entries), 13. "Rituals" (*Pūjā*, *Vidhi*, etc.) (twenty-three entries), 14. "Astrology and Astronomy" (twenty-three entries), 15. "Āyurveda" (nineteen entries), 16. "Miniatures and Other Paintings, Drawings, Illuminations, Etc." (sixteen entries), and 17. "Uncategorized" (three entries). While he explains in a footnote that certain texts can belong to more than one genre, it would have been beneficial to have an overview regarding his categorization of genres in the introduction.[3] For example, the Nepalese manuscripts of what is clearly the *Pañcarakṣā sūtra* (Cat. 21 Nepal 84a, Cat. 22 Nepal 84, and Cat. 23 Nepal 42a) are categorized under the genre "*Dhāraṇī* Texts," which is not necessarily erroneous as *Pañcarakṣā dhāraṇī*s appear as part of the *Dhāraṇīsaṃgraha*, a commonly used Nepalese *dhāraṇī* collection. However, this choice forsakes the manuscripts' importance in the cult of the *Pañcarakṣā* goddesses in Nepal and the five texts' claimed status as the *Mahāyāna sūtra*s, as the end colophon cited in catalogue entry 22 (Nepal 84, p. 54) clearly indicates (*etāni pañcarakṣāni sūtrāṇī*).[4]

Another curious choice of categorization is the case of two illustrated manuals of *mudrā*s (hand gestures)–Nepal 60/1-2 (Cat. 49, figures 34 and 35) and Nepal 66 (Cat. 197, figures 73 and 74)–being assigned to two different genres, the former categorized under "Tantra and Yoga" and the latter categorized under "Miniatures and Other Paintings." Both are Nepalese paper manuscripts of concertina format ("accordion book" in the author's terminology), and probably contemporary or near contemporary productions of the late sixteenth century (Nepal 66 bears the date of N.S. 692; 1572 CE), given the paleographic features and similarities in the painting style. Although the author describes them merely as handbooks demonstrating "tantric hand gestures," they are clearly of the Buddhist tradition, judging from the clear indication of the names of bodhisattvas (such as Jāliniprabhā, Candraprabhā, or Samantabhadra) and accompanying hand gestures that are shown in figures 34, 35, 73, and 74.[5] These two manuscripts may be better categorized under the "ritual manuals," as the hand gestures most likely illustrate the *mudrā*s to perform in a ritual context.[6]

Given the scope and the diversity of the material, a few errors are perhaps only to be expected. An excellent Sanskritist does not necessarily make for an expert on manuscripts prepared in various scripts and materials. An appendix or a plate with paleographic charts is sorely missed, given the vague identification of paleographic features along with a confusing understanding of certain terms. For example, the author cites the use of term *kuṭila* by Bendall, which in Bendall's usage refers to the letters with hooked or twisted bottoms in vertical strokes, or *daṇḍas*.[7] While Buescher expresses reservation regarding the use of this term (p. xx, n25), his description of a Nepalese manuscript (Nepal 113, Cat. 131, p. 161) suggests confusion regarding the term's meaning because he describes the manuscript's paleographic feature as "Bendall's 'hooked Nepalese hand'; also called *kuṭila* script by others," when the cited example in Bendall (Plate II.3, Cambridge University Library Add.1686) clearly shows what Nepalese scholars often call the *bhujimol* script with rounded tops.[8]

More problematic is the dating of a few Nepalese

manuscripts. As Slusser's magnum opus on Nepalese history and culture has demonstrated, scholars have based themselves on a document dated to N.S. 321 kārtika (October, 1200 CE) bearing the name of a new king, Arimalla, to calculate a Common Era equivalent for the Nepal Era (Nepal Samvat, N.S.) date that began the Malla dynasty period. The Nepal Era universally used throughout Nepalese history until the end of the Malla period, therefore began in October 879 CE.[9]

So for instance, the catalog discusses the two dates found on a single palm-leaf manuscript of the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*, first *khaṇḍa*, in Nepal 81 (Cat. 4, pp. 17-19): one is *samvat* 263 (written in letter numerals of ācu 3 or 263) and the other is *samvat* 546. Buescher concludes that the earlier *samvat* 263 must be a Malla period date, adding 1200 to 263 to calculate it as 1463 CE. He is arguing against an earlier reading of the date as *nepāla samvat* (N.S.) 263 or 1143 CE,[10] while counting the latter *samvat* as N.S. 546, thus reading it as 1426 CE (546 plus 880 CE, the beginning of N.S.).

This is erroneous and shows of the author's lack understanding of the Nepalese manuscript culture and the history of Nepal in general. I am not aware of any evidence that suggests a Malla era that began in 1200 CE. While I cannot be certain without consulting the actual manuscript, my previous experience dealing with Nepalese Sanskrit manuscripts suggests that it is likely that the manuscript was originally prepared in the twelfth century and refurbished or repaired in the fifteenth century during Jyotirmala's reign (1409-28 CE), as indicated by the post colophon cited by Buescher. The size of the manuscript, 55.5 x 5.5 cm, also suggests that this huge palm-leaf manuscript in 741 folios must have been originally prepared in the twelfth century, as the size of palm-leaf manuscripts gradually shrank from the twelfth century onwards to measure about 35- 40 cm in average width.[11]

The same can be said of the three subsequent manuscripts of the three subsequent *khaṇḍas* of the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*, Nepal 175 B (Cat. 5), Nepal 175C (Cat. 6), and Nepal 175 A (Cat. 7), all of which Buescher dates to the fifteenth century, miscalculating the *samvat*-era dates as fictional Malla period dates. Nepal 175A in particular seems to be clearly of twelfth-century production judging from the paleographic features seen in the reproduction of the folio 814 verso in Trier's plate 111, and also because, in the published plate, the colophon clearly dates it to *samvat* 265 (1145 CE) during the reign of King Narendradeva (r. 1140-46) ("*śrīmannarendradevasyavijayarajye*"), and the donor and the date colophon's formulas follow the eleventh/twelfth-century convention, while Buescher cites only the colophon passage dating to N.S. 548 (1428CE).[12] Perhaps some of the more obvious mistakes would have been prevented had the author had a collaborator with a specialized knowledge of the Nepalese material.[13]

These oversights aside, this catalog is a treasure for scholars interested in Sanskrit manuscripts and their art, especially given the superior quality of color reproductions of painted pages from various manuscripts. Although it is clear that iconography is not the strongest area for the author, his commitment to attracting scholars interested in art and iconography through the inclusion of a great selection of painted manuscripts is much appreciated.[14] The stunning painted pages from what is an arguably twelfth-century eastern Indian palm-leaf manuscript of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* (Nepal 173, Cat. 2) surpass the pages from similar manuscripts from the famed Nālandā monastery, such as the prized possession in the Bodleian Library (MS Sansk. A. 7[R]), in their beauty, fine execution, and unique iconographic features.[15] The dated paper manuscript of the *Pañcarakṣā sūtra* (Nepal 84a, Cat. 21, dated. N.S. 741:1621CE) can help us date and contextualize the painted folios in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (M. 84.171.4a-I), given the extreme similarity in paleographic features, pictorial style, and iconography.[16] A set of painted book covers binding a palm-leaf manuscript prepared in Telugu script showcases a rare example of miniature paintings from South India, possibly of the Nayaka period. Also noticeable are various Nepalese painted "accordion books," such as one illustrating the subtle body of a *yoga-puruṣa* (Nepal 02, Cat. 190) and another illustrating the full sequence of the ascent of *kuṇḍalinī* (Nepal 38, Cat. 191), along with a unique hybrid object acquired in 1969 (now classified under Cod. San. [Cod.San. Add.3, OS-1971-95, Cat. 168]): a leather-bound, painted book of horoscopes prepared for a Scottish man, one Dr. Downie, by pandits to Maharaja of Alwar (Jai Singh) in Rajasthan. With the publication of this catalog, one only hopes more scholars working on South Asia will make the Royal Library in Copenhagen their research destination. Thanks to Buescher's laborious effort we certainly have the best of guidebooks to locate these treasures.

Notes

[1]. C. E. Godakumbura, *Catalogue of Ceylonese Manuscripts* (Copenhagen: Royal Library, 1980).

[2]. Out of thirty-seven palm-leaf manuscripts in-

cluded in the catalogue, fourteen manuscripts belong to the Cod. San. collection, and according to the author of the catalogue, all of them are Sanskrit manuscripts incised in Telugu script. Sinhalese manuscripts collected by Rask are also excluded in this catalogue as they were previously introduced in the first volume of the COMDC catalogue.

[3]. For example, see Sachindra Nath Siddhanta, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Varendra Research Museum Library,* vol. 1 (Rajshahi, Bangladesh: Varendra Research Museum, 1972), xiii-xxiv.

[4]. For the cultic importance of the *Pañcarakṣā* manuscripts, see Jinah Kim, "A Book of Buddhist Goddesses: Illustrated Manuscripts of the *Pañcarakṣā sūtra* and Their Ritual Use," *Artibus Asiae* 70, no. 2 (2010): 259-329. For the *Pañcaraḳā sūtra*'s importance in Newar Buddhism, see Todd T. Lewis, *Popular Buddhist Texts from Nepal: Narratives and Rituals of Newar Buddhism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), 119-164.

[5]. Some of them can be matched to the *mudrā*s and attributes held in the hands of bodhisattvas and other offering deities in the murals and the clay sculptures in Himalayan monastic complexes like the main assembly hall of Tabo Monastery. See Christian Luczanits, *Buddhist sculpture in Clay: Early Western Himalayan Art, Late 10th to Early 13th Centuries* (Chicago: Serindia, 2004), 43-56.

[6]. I had a chance to witness and record such a performance during my field research in the Kathmandu area in 2004. Two *Vajrācārya*-s (Newari Buddhist priest), Ratnaraj Vajracharya and Hemratna Vajracharya (both members of the Kwā Bāhā guthi in Patan) performed various *mudrā*s similar to the ones represented in the illustrated manuscripts as part of an empowerment ritual at the end of a Pañcarakṣā *pūjā*.

[7]. Cecil Bendall, *Catalogue of the Buddhist Sanskrit Manuscripts in the University Library, Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1883), xxiv.

[8]. Hemrāj Śākya, *Nepāla Lipi-Prakāśa* (Kathmandu: National Archive, 1973), 45-48.

[9]. Mary Slusser, *Nepal Maṇḍala: A Cultural Study of the Kathmandu Valley*, vol.1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 52-53, 389-391.

[10]. Jesper Trier, *Ancient Paper of Nepal,* Jutland Archaeological Society Publications, vol. 10, (Copenhagen: Gyldendal sponsored by the Royal Library, Copenhagen, 1972), 228. As Buescher suggests, Trier's reading may have been based on the understanding from readings of similar dates in Hemraj Sakya, *Medieval Nepal (Colophons and Inscriptions)* (Kathmandu: Chamunda Press, 1970), 3.

[11]. Jinah Kim, *Receptacle of the Sacred: Illustrated Manuscripts and the Buddhist Book Cult in South Asia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013), 187, n54.

[12]. Trier, *Ancient Paper of Nepal.* It is difficult to ascertain this point without having examined the actual manuscript.

[13]. I notice some readings from Nepalese manuscripts as published in transliteration are incorrect, but perhaps this is also due to typographical errors.

[14]. For example, Figure 5 (Nepal 173) represents Amitābha, not Gautama Buddha. Figure 8 (Nepal 173) depicts the story of the monkey's offering of honey bowl by showing the monkey four times, three times as a monkey in different moments and once as a *deva*, and it is not "two monkeys offering a bowl to the Buddha." Figure 36 (Nepal 153) shows a dark blue *devī* with eighteen arms, not sixteen arms.

[15]. See Kim, *Receptacle of the Sacred*, 140-146. Also see W. Zwalf, ed., *Buddhism: Art and Faith* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company for The British Museum and the British Library Board, 1985), cat. 156; 106 and 116.

[16]. One should note that figure 27b (Nepal 84a) is Ratnasambhava, not Amoghasiddhi.

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