



**Imre Galambos.** *Dunhuang Manuscript Culture: End of the First Millennium.* Studies in Manuscript Cultures Series. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020. Illustrations, tables, maps. 289 pp. open access, e-book, ISBN 978-3-11-072657-2.

**Chunwen Hao.** *Dunhuang Manuscripts: An Introduction to Texts from the Silk Road.* Translated by Stephen F. Teiser. Diamond Bar: Portico Publishing, 2020. Illustrations. xiv + 332 pp. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-60633-585-7.



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## Approaching Dunhuang Manuscripts

While Chinese, European, and Japanese scholarship in Chinese Buddhist studies displayed a great interest in Dunhuang manuscripts from a very early stage, it arguably took the publication of Victor Mair's *Tun-huang Popular Narratives* in 1983 and particularly Stephen F. Teiser's *The Scripture on the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* in 1994 before a wave of English-language scholars began engaging more earnestly with Chinese manuscripts at Dunhuang.[1] Rather than simply mining this cache of over sixty thousand documents to complement, support, or correct evidence from canonically transmitted materials, these scholars not only strove to center texts unique to Dunhuang

but also began to consider the material characteristics of the manuscripts.[2]

As evidenced by the cottage industry of workshops and conferences in the previous two decades or so, the scholarly output related to Dunhuang manuscripts has experienced a marked increase, if not minor explosion, in English-language academic circles. In addition to the books under review here, a slew of articles, dissertations, and monographs centering the study of Dunhuang manuscripts have been published in the last two years alone.[3] Amid such developments, Hao Chunwen's *Dunhuang Manuscripts* and Imre Galambos's *Dunhuang Manuscript Culture* represent a pair of efforts from senior scholars seeking to achieve different goals. Hao's project, translated

by the aforementioned Teiser, functions as an expansive introduction to Dunhuang manuscripts—one ostensibly for general readers. Galambos's monograph speaks to the intersecting academic audiences of Chinese Buddhist studies and sinology, albeit from the perspective of manuscript cultures.

Split asymmetrically, Hao's *Dunhuang Manuscripts* consists of two parts, "Introduction" and "Contents and Significance of the Dunhuang Manuscripts." The first part provides an overarching view of the content, physical formats, and historical legacy of the manuscript cache in chapters 1–3. In the second half of the book, six chapters detail the various kinds of texts found among Dunhuang manuscripts. For chapters 4–8, Hao groups texts respectively according to his interpretations of religion, history and geography, social history, popular literature, and science and technology. The final chapter categorizes a miscellaneous variety of texts under the Sinitic system of the "four classes" (*sibu* 四部). Readers quickly become acquainted with the significance of this seemingly random cache of manuscripts—what Teiser refers to as the "historian's dream" (p. iii)—where one encounters not only Buddhist scriptures (which form 90 percent of the total collection) but also a dizzying range of secular texts related to economic history, education, medicine, governmental bureaucracy, and other topics.

Chapter 4 details the textual corpus of institutional religions represented at Dunhuang, namely, Buddhism, Daoism, and "Western religions"—Nestorianism, Manichaeism, and Zoroastrianism. In addition, readers get a sense of how Dunhuang manuscripts effected dramatic changes in understanding the histories of various sects and schools of these religious traditions, including Chan and the Teaching of the Three Levels (*Sanjie jiao* 三階教) in Buddhism. Presenting Tang-era bureaucratic, legal, economic, and geographical texts, chapter 5 provides insights into the day-to-day intricacies of people's lives at Dunhuang and the vast ex-

pense of local and central governmental processes. Perhaps most fascinatingly, Hao spotlights contracts struck up by self-described commoners for such matters as purchases and sales, loans, employment, rent and mortgage, proof of receiving or owing property and goods, division of property, and even divorce.[4]

Chapter 6 discusses Hao's field of expertise in social history by delving into records of clan genealogies, guides and models for writing letters, and, most pertinently for scholars of Buddhism and Chinese religions, documents related to locally based associations (*she* 社 or *sheyi* 社邑) and Buddhist temples. Ranging from accounts of sundry items and rations, reports of income, expenditure, and donations, to liturgical texts (*zhaiwen* 齋文), these documents showcase the eclectic and vibrant scope of religious activity in ninth- and tenth-century Dunhuang. Covering instances of what Hao classifies as popular or vernacular literature (*suwenxue* 俗文學), chapter 7 outlines a plethora of texts that represent an encapsulated period of artistic and linguistic innovation, particularly in the case of transformation texts and sutra lecture texts. These prosimetric literary genres soon disappeared after the tenth century but their influence would still be detected in subsequent literary developments into the Qing.

Chapter 8 catalogs various manuscripts carrying texts placed within the realm of science and technology, namely, medicine, astronomy and calendrical science, and computation or mathematics. Representative instances include the earliest extant Chinese catalog of constellations, the *Star Classic of the Three Schools* (*Ershiba xiu ciwei jing he sanjia xingjing* 二十八宿次位經和三家星經, Pelliot Chinois 2512); a calendar containing both astronomical and astrological observations, the *Fully Annotated Calendar with Preface for the Third Year of the Xiande Era, a Bingchen Year* (*Xiande sannian bingchengsui juzhu liri bingxu* 顯得三年丙辰歲具注曆日並序, Stein 95); and a text that identifies various systems of numerical notation, *The*

*Classic of Immediate Computations (Licheng Suanjing 立成算經*, Stein 930). Finally, chapter 9 takes readers on a whirlwind tour of texts that Hao places under the catch-all classificatory system of the “four classes”: “classics” (*jing* 經), “histories” (*shi* 史), “philosophers” or “masters” (*zi* 子), and “literary collections” (*ji* 集). Throughout the book, but especially in this chapter, Hao repeatedly demonstrates how Dunhuang variants of these texts help correct previous errors in transmitted recensions, sometimes overturning previous understandings of a specific phrase or even the entire text.

Turning to the book’s applications for teaching, the first section would be useful in upper undergraduate or graduate courses on Chinese Buddhism and history, book history, manuscript cultures, Central Asia and the Silk Roads, and even museum studies. Totalling a mere fifty pages, including Teiser’s necessary and contextualizing preface, this section will provide students with the most basic contours of Dunhuang studies from both Chinese and North American scholarly perspectives. In particular, chapter 3 works as a detailed account of how the manuscripts were first obtained—or depending on one’s perspective, stolen—and eventually deposited in libraries and museums all over the world. More significantly, as a valuable primary source, Hao’s excoriating comments represent the “position of most educated Chinese towards the invasion of their country at the end of the Qing dynasty and the carting away of cultural loot” (p. viii). Whatever the reasons, one rarely finds European or North American scholarship describing the colonial removal of Dunhuang manuscripts as “chicanery” or “plunder,” let alone ascribing the reasons for such actions as the result of “greedy eyes,” “European lust,” or even the “evil clutches” of “Western great powers” (pp. 43, 42). Indeed, Teiser should be lauded for granting nonspecialist readers mediated access to this charged perspective.[5]

For scholars of Buddhism, the only drawback to Hao’s elegantly translated and far-reaching volume lies in its treatment of Tibetan sources. The sole allusion to the tradition’s existence occurs in a brief statement about how certain Chinese Buddhist texts were locally translated from Sanskrit or Tibetan and therefore unique to the area of Dunhuang. Teiser’s translation of Hao’s book nevertheless offers an excellent example for scholars who might be considering writing a general overview of the Tibetan manuscripts. The book also ends abruptly without a conclusion, leaving the reader without resolution after a particularly dense and challenging final chapter. *Dunhuang Manuscripts* is otherwise an accessible and thorough introduction to a unique set of primary resources. While the Chinese editions were aimed at the “educated general reader” in China, the high degree of cultural specificity associated with Dunhuang manuscripts requires a more specialized audience in the United States (pp. iii, vii). Teiser’s English translation of *Dunhuang Manuscripts* thus serves as a gateway for approaching Dunhuang manuscripts, especially for sinophiles, nonspecialist academics, and early stage graduate students in sinology and Buddhist studies.[6]

Written with equal clarity and conciseness, Galambos’s *Dunhuang Manuscript Culture* offers a representative model on how to center Dunhuang manuscripts in research. Limiting his study’s scope to the Guiyijun period (851 to circa mid-eleventh century), Galambos raises methodological questions for scholars of Chinese Buddhist studies and sinology seeking to work with Dunhuang materials: How might we discuss a multicultural Dunhuang without enforcing a Sinocentric perspective? And how do we strike the right balance of engaging with both the textual content and materiality of manuscripts? Chapter 1 discusses what Galambos refers to as “physically homogenous manuscripts which include discrete texts written in succession” (p. 23). Using new book forms that appeared in Dunhuang during the ninth century as an organizing rubric, Galambos demonstrates

how these booklet-form manuscripts, mainly codices and concertinas sized below  $13 \times 8$  centimeters—some measuring a mere  $5 \times 5$  centimeters—suggest a high degree of portability and, consequently, talismanic or ritual functions. By paying close attention to both their materiality and textual content, he explores the possibility that some of these multi-text manuscripts were the product of collective merit-producing processes. Several individuals, potentially family members, would take turns to copy Buddhist scriptures on one manuscript, creating a group offering.

Chapter 2 offers a glimpse into the early lives and literary training of Dunhuang elites by inspecting manuscripts with colophons written by students schooled at local monasteries. Galambos gathers evidence from a wide range of primary sources, including the main texts appearing on these manuscripts, paleographic details, and a host of paratextual information, such as colophons, scribbles on the back of manuscripts, and even short poetry recorded on the margins or versos. In terms of the main content, students copied a limited range of didactic texts, such as the *Lunyu* 論語, *Xiaojing* 孝經, and the *Qianziwen* 千字文, but also poems from the celebrated Wang Fanzhi 王梵志, the *Qin fu yin* 秦婦吟, and the *Yanzi fu* 燕子賦. Excavating fascinating sociological details about these students, Galambos reveals that they were not all children and that the manuscripts they copied—akin to some multi-text manuscripts—were potentially sites of collaboration: after one student had copied a main text on the front, another would come along later and scribble writings on the verso.

Chapter 3, the only previously unpublished chapter in the monograph, responds to one of the book's central aims to better acknowledge the mixed cultural heritage of Dunhuang and its residents. Focusing on the uncommon left-to-right writing direction of Chinese characters in manuscripts and cartouches on votive paintings and cave murals, Galambos claims that this phenomenon oc-

curred only during the Guiyijun period.[7] Evidence presented includes horizontally written Chinese characters popping up in varying types of manuscripts and texts; vertical columns of Chinese script found among mandalas and amulets, miscellaneous materials written on the margins and versos (overlapping with student-copied manuscripts); and cartouches and donor inscriptions from votive paintings. Positing that such left-to-right writing of Chinese characters could have been due to Uighur, Sogdian, or even an admixture of the two influences, Galambos further asserts that with the collapse of the Tibetan empire—albeit a political reality that did not immediately erase its cultural and linguistic presence—Guiyijun Dunhuang developed a new form of culture with prominent Central Asian features. The local community, he argues, might have written in Chinese, but they were certainly not culturally “Chinese” like their counterparts in the central plains.

Chapter 4 overlaps considerably with previous chapters and functions as a culminating and synthesizing piece. Galambos explores manuscripts with circulars issued by lay Buddhist associations, some of which are fragmentary instances copied by students and written from left to right. Frequently featuring lists of people's names from the association, these circulars contain what might be the “largest body of onomastic data available from a single place and period in pre-modern China” (p. 21). First laying out the social importance of these lay associations and then meticulously parsing the textual structure and physical characteristics of circulars, Galambos uses this databank of surnames to undertake a deft analysis of the cultural and linguistic background of Dunhuang residents. The Sinitic, Tibetan, and Sogdian names written in Chinese script across these circulars reveal a strong degree of non-Chinese naming practices, whether in terms of theophoric and apotropaic features or the high incidence of shared given names.

*Dunhuang Manuscript Culture* operates, as if by design, as the next accessible stop after Hao's *Dunhuang Manuscripts* for anyone hoping to dive deeper into the world of Dunhuang manuscripts in English. The book's structure of four case studies allows Galambos to cast a wide net in terms of tackling various problems presented by Dunhuang manuscripts, from broader themes like scribal activities, religious practices, and social phenomena, to no less important details, such as codicological minutiae, idiosyncratic paleography, and orthographic variants.

While the entire monograph would be a great addition to any seminar on Dunhuang studies, courses with a wider scope (e.g., in Buddhist studies, manuscript studies, or Chinese history) would benefit most from engaging with the impressively comprehensive chapter 1. This chapter is a significantly expanded reworking of a 2019 article that adroitly weaves together technical details and larger issues to make careful arguments about the cultural background, production, circulation, and varied purposes of manuscripts from the Guiyijun period. This chapter also includes a methodological and pedagogical highlight that promises to become the go-to guide in English for the new book forms and binding that appeared in Dunhuang during the ninth century, namely, the *pothi*, concertina, and codex. Galambos uses this brief overview to prepare readers for the chapter's ensuing discussions. At another point, he opens a window into the codicologist's process by inserting a delightful research note that exemplifies the inherent difficulties of analyzing Dunhuang manuscripts. Initially identifying a series of scriptural titles on the back cover of a booklet-form manuscript as some type of table of contents recorded by the original copyist, he updates this reading after comparing the handwriting from titles written on other manuscripts and recognizing the hand of British explorer Aurel Stein's Chinese secretary Chiang Ssu-Yeh 蔣師爺. Lastly, the chapter deftly illustrates the importance of considering both the textual content and material dimensions

of manuscripts for understanding the Buddhist merit-making practice of copying scriptures.

Nonspecialists will find Hao's and Galambos's offerings, especially the former, to be approachable treatments of Dunhuang manuscripts and history. Replete with numerous reproductions of manuscripts and other related images, Hao's *Dunhuang Manuscripts* features a whopping 149 color figures, while *Dunhuang Manuscript Culture* boasts eighty-six color figures, tables, and maps. The publishers, Portico Publishing Company and De Gruyter's series Studies in Manuscript Cultures, should be praised for accommodating such critical visual data.

Featuring economical printing and hardcover bookbinding, Portico's *Dunhuang Manuscripts* is reasonably priced at \$39.95. Adding up to 332 pages, the book also includes bibliographies of Chinese- and Western-language secondary scholarship, a comprehensive index, and another index for cited manuscripts.[8] Readers familiar with Chinese secondary scholarship will know that quoted premodern sources are rarely translated into modern Chinese and this is no different for the Chinese iterations of *Dunhuang Manuscripts*. Teiser's role as translator, therefore, fulfills two demands: the translation of Hao's erudite prose from modern Chinese to English with sufficient cultural nuance for a potentially new audience and the arduous task of deciphering and translating an incredibly diverse set of primary materials that alternate between the arcane, obscure, and sometimes impenetrable.[9] Beginning with the book's second part, readers are met with a steady stream of translations, of either excerpted or even entire texts. Lengthy examples include a household registration document, bylaws for a women's association, and excerpts from the *Food Therapy and Materia Medica* (*Shiliao bencao* 食療本草, Stein 76).

Priced prohibitively at \$118.99, the hardcover version of *Dunhuang Manuscript Culture* nonetheless justifies its cost with high-quality printing and

generously dedicated space for images. Readers will be rightfully pleased to know that an open access version is also available.[10] The book sometimes sets aside half or whole pages for images, tables, or maps, and in other instances, particular segments of a manuscript or painting are enlarged to support Galambos's exacting analyses of orthographic, paleographic, and codicological elements. In turn, Galambos takes full advantage of the relative lack of typesetting constraints by adding simple but efficient visual markers, such as white arrows, to point out specific details in manuscripts. Other examples of such confident arrangement and manipulation of visual data include tables comparing variant character forms and demonstrating orthographic issues and perhaps the cleanest illustration to date of the hypothesized construction of a bifolia for a codex-form manuscript.

With Hao's *Dunhuang Manuscripts*, Portico Publishing Company appears to have published its first significant book pertaining to Chinese cultural and social history. Galambos's *Dunhuang Manuscript Culture*, on the other hand, represents the twenty-second volume—and also the author's third entry—in the Studies in Manuscript Cultures series. These two books represent accessible, affordable, and vital contributions to Dunhuang studies, manuscript cultures, and, by extension, Chinese Buddhist studies. As a consequence, readers will no doubt look forward to more of the same from the authors, contributors, and publishers.

#### Notes

[1]. Like the titles under review, I restrict my comments here to the Chinese source materials at Dunhuang. Important works on the Tibetan sources include Cathy Cantwell and Robert Mayer, *Early Tibetan Documents on Phur Pa from Dunhuang* (Vienna: Verlag Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2008); Jacob Dalton and Sam van Schaik, *Tibetan Tantric Manuscripts from Dunhuang: A Descriptive Catalogue of the Stein*

*Collection at the British Library* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); and Matthew Kapstein and Sam van Schaik, eds., *Esoteric Buddhism at Dunhuang: Rites and Teachings for This Life and Beyond* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

[2]. I must reiterate that there are long-standing scholarly traditions of Dunhuang and manuscript studies in languages outside of English. For an overview of such scholarship, see Rong Xinjiang, "Lecture 7: Dunhuang Studies and Oriental Studies in the West" and "Lecture 8: Dunhuang Studies in China and Japan," in *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, trans. Imre Galambos (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 205–66.

[3]. A selection of these recent publications include Christoph Anderl and Christian Wittern, eds., *Chán Buddhism in Dūnhuáng and Beyond: A Study of Manuscripts, Texts, and Contexts in Memory of John R. McRae* (Leiden: Brill, 2020); Ruifeng Chen, "The Relationship between Three Short Indigenous Chinese Buddhist Scriptures and the Textual Practices Found in Their Dunhuang Manuscript Colophons," *T'oung Pao* 106, nos. 5–6 (2020): 552–601; Yi Ding, "Ornamenting Liturgies—Scripts for a *Zhai* Feast and Their Liturgical Context (6th–10th Centuries)," *T'ang Studies* 39 (2021): 41–67; April D. Hughes, *Worldly Saviors and Imperial Authority in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2021); Cuilan Liu, "Legally Buddhist: Monks, Nuns, and Legal Texts in Dunhuang," *Studies in Chinese Religions* 6, no. 4 (2020): 407–42; and Chung-hui Tsui, *Chinese Calligraphy and Early Buddhist Manuscripts* (Oxford, NZ: Indica et Buddhica, 2020). For Tibetan Buddhism at Dunhuang, some recent entries include Rae Dachille, "Inscribing the Corpus: Scribal and Ritual Practice in the Material Culture of Dunhuang," *Numen* 67, nos. 2–3 (2020): 113–37; and Sam Van Schaik, *Buddhist Magic: Divination, Healing, and Enchantment through the Ages* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2020). Finally, for studies that consider Dunhuang manuscripts and related sources from a range of languages on

the eastern Silk Roads, see Brandon Dotson, Constance A. Cook, and Lu Zhao, *Dice and Gods on the Silk Road: Chinese Buddhist Dice Divination in Transcultural Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2021); and Xin Wen, *The King's Road: Diplomacy and the Re-making of the Silk Road* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023).

[4]. Although referring to themselves as *baixing* 百姓 in land contracts and/or other documents, such people were often literate and landowners. As a result, they might more appropriately be analyzed as what Galambos refers to as “local elites” in his book.

[5]. In his preface, Teiser briefly explains the decision to “let Hao’s words speak for themselves” (viii–ix). For a study that offers a multidimensional view of the history behind the loss of China’s cultural artifacts, see Justin Jacobs, *The Compensations of Plunder: How China Lost Its Treasures* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020).

[6]. As Teiser alludes to in the book’s preface, the English translation of Rong’s *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang* remains the more comprehensive and robust guide to Dunhuang studies, including a chapter on cave art and architecture, among a variety of topics.

[7]. As Galambos points out in detailed fashion at the outset of the chapter, premodern Chinese script was primarily written from right to left in vertical columns prior to the twentieth century.

[8]. For this review, I only had access to the 2016 Chinese edition. As would be expected for a trade book, this edition only features a short bibliography of secondary scholarship. The English translation, therefore, significantly expands on the back matter by updating and expanding the Chinese bibliography and adding a bibliography of Western-language studies and two indices. There are, however, some noticeable omissions from the bibliography on Western-language studies of Dunhuang, such as Paul F. Copp, *The Body Incantatory: Spells and the Ritual Imagination in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (New York: Columbia Univer-

sity Press, 2014); Jacob P. Dalton, *The Taming of the Demons: Violence and Liberation in Tibetan Buddhism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011); and Brandon Dotson and Helman-Ważny, *Codicology, Paleography, and Orthography of Early Tibetan Documents: Methods and a Case Study* (Vienna: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien Universität Wien, 2016).

[9]. In his translator’s preface for an upcoming—and open access—volume consisting of selected works from Jao Tsung-I’s research on Dunhuang, David Lebovitz ruminates on the inherent difficulties of translating these unique materials (and of course, Jao’s interpretations of the materials too). See David Lebovitz, ed. and trans., *Treasured Oases: A Selection of Jao Tsung-I’s Dunhuang Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

[10]. In fact, most of the volumes from De Gruyter’s Studies in Manuscript Cultures have generously been made open access. Unlike the open access version of Chung-hui Tsui’s *Chinese Calligraphy and Early Buddhist Manuscripts*, which was also published in 2020, the pdf is also unlocked and fully searchable.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-buddhism>

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