

MANUSCRIPTS IN THE SCHØYEN COLLECTION · III

BUDDHIST MANUSCRIPTS

Volume II

MANUSCRIPTS IN THE SCHØYEN COLLECTION

JENS BRAARVIG, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



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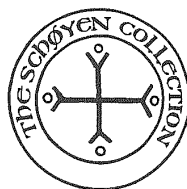
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Volume II

General Editor:
Jens Braarvig

Editorial Committee:
Jens Braarvig, Paul Harrison, Jens-Uwe Hartmann, Kazunobu Matsuda, Lore Sander

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THIS SERIES
IS DEDICATED TO

MARTIN SCHØYEN

IN RECOGNITION OF HIS TIRELESS
EFFORTS TO MAKE ANCIENT SCRIPTURAL MATERIALS
AVAILABLE TO THE SCHOLARLY WORLD

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Oslo, June 2002

THE EDITORIAL GROUP

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of the first volume in this series in 2000, Afghanistan, the source of the manuscripts which that volume presented to the scholarly public, has become the focus of world attention in ways entirely unforeseeable at the time. The events of September 11, 2001 and the ensuing war in Afghanistan—in which the last shot has not yet been fired—have made a household word of Bamiyan, a name long familiar to scholars of Buddhism but otherwise generally unknown. Indeed, earlier last year Bamiyan had already been in the news, when the Taliban demolished the giant Buddhas there despite the international outcry which the announcement of their plan to do so evoked. When one considers the grievous misery and massive loss of human life endured by the Afghani people in recent years, the destruction of archeological remains may seem far less serious, but the irreparable damage to the cultural heritage of Afghanistan wrought by the Taliban and by the subsequent struggle to remove them is still a matter of deep regret.

It is against such a backdrop of national and global political conflict that the project to edit the Buddhist manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection has continued. Indeed, it is more than a backdrop, since the political course of events itself has inevitably accelerated the arrival of these manuscripts and others on the international market. Amid the political and military turmoil in this region, not only in Afghanistan but also in Pakistan and India, new finds continue to be made and fresh manuscripts continue to arrive in the West, along with other artifacts like jars and copper-plate inscriptions. From a scientific point of view the fact that the exact find-spots of these items are unknown and that proper excavations have not been carried out is deplorable, since the artifacts are shorn of context. Even so, when we reflect on the fate of the Bamiyan Buddhas, we have to be thankful that the artifacts have survived at all, and in such numbers, with the result that within the last decade a great deal of the Buddhist heritage of the region known as Greater Gandhāra has been brought to light. Thus we have not only the Schøyen Collection, which has continued to grow since the publication of the first volume, but also the British Library collection of Kharoṣṭhī documents currently being studied in Seattle, the Hirayama Collection in Japan, the Senior Collection in the United Kingdom, and the very important Dirghāgama manuscript of which different parts are now in private ownership in the United States and in Japan.

This entire process raises complex economic and political issues, to say nothing of its moral dimensions. Indeed, since the first volume of this series appeared, the Schøyen Collection as a whole has become the focus of a certain public interest in Norway, which is only natural given the recent course of events. The collection remains in the possession of Martin Schøyen himself, having been acquired by him, but some have questioned his ownership on the grounds that the states in which the materials were originally found may have a moral if not a legal claim on such private collections as this one. These are frequently rehearsed arguments, in which the so-called Elgin Marbles remain emblematic. Our project group believes that scholars have the duty to work on and publish any such important historical materials, and that the owners, be they private persons or state institutions, should actively make these materials freely available to researchers and to the public, rather than conceal them. In this regard the handling of the Schøyen Collection has, fortunately, set a most encouraging example, and it is gratifying to note that in all the cases mentioned above—and there are more besides—the manuscripts in question have rapidly been made available to interested scholars for the purposes of conservation, study and publication.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The second volume of the Buddhist Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection presents a selection of texts from most of the genres found in Buddhist literature, viz., Āgama as well as Mahāyāna sūtras, Vinaya as well as Abhidharma works, poetical and narrative pieces, and even a non-Buddhist philosophical treatise. The Vinaya fragments suggest that the texts are affiliated with one of the Mahāsāṃghika schools, but other schools of Buddhism are also represented. Given the rather extended time span into which our manuscripts fall, from the 2nd century A.D. up to the 8th, it has not yet been possible to assign the texts as a whole to a specific school, or even institution, notwithstanding the fact that many if not most of the manuscripts may once have belonged to a single collection. To assess the historical importance of these documents, found as they are in one of the most important centres of Buddhist creativity and one of the key stations on the Silk Road linking India and China with the West, is a challenge to the participants in this volume, and to other scholars as well, whom the project group invites to contribute to further research on these manuscripts and their significance for the history of Buddhism.

The project itself has undergone certain changes since the first volume, so that the production of the second volume has been in several ways a different kind of exercise. First of all, the editorial board has been enlarged by the addition of Paul Harrison, who was in fact actively involved in producing Volume I. Secondly, the process of working on the manuscripts has itself seen some advances, especially in the use of computers and other electronic devices. Word-processing programmes, e-mail and other more traditional means of recording and shifting information have been supplemented by specialised software for producing and manipulating digital images of the texts. For help with mastering the skills involved, the project team is greatly indebted to Andrew Glass, who has guided us all as we made our first steps into this field. The use of the relevant software not only allows images of the texts to be reproduced and exchanged by scholars, but such is its power that it enables us to read the manuscripts with an accuracy and ease far exceeding that achieved with the naked eye.

As with the first volume we have done our best to conduct the project of editing the Schøyen Collection manuscripts in the spirit of international co-operation. The dedicated staff of the Centre for Advanced Study have facilitated this by providing all the services and facilities required by scholars at work, and by offering their generous help to the numerous visitors from around the world. Many of the individual papers in this volume are collaborative efforts, often produced by researchers working in countries widely distant from each other, and the volume as a whole could not have been produced without enthusiastic and committed team-work. In an age where conflict and terror loom dangerously large and so much is needlessly lost, it is a source of considerable reassurance that these literary remains of a religion devoted to peace are preserved by the efforts of people from different nations and cultures working together for a common goal.

Jens Braarvig

On behalf of the Editorial Committee

Oslo, 27 June 2002