

Foreword

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ON this occasion I have the good fortune to announce the publication of the “Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscripts from the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences (SI P/5, etc.), Facsimile Edition” as number 13 in the Soka Gakkai Lotus Sutra Manuscript Series. For this fact we have to thank the sincere efforts of Prof. Dr. Irina F. Popova, Director of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IOM RAS), Dr. Margarita I. Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya, and the other members of their institute. My heartfelt congratulations go out to them all.

I also wish to extend my most sincere thanks to Prof. emer. Dr. Oskar von Hinüber of the University of Freiburg for his fine introductory article, deep in understanding and forcibly written, regarding the colophons attached to SI P/5 (new call number: SI 1925/1927), which is commonly called the Petrovsky Manuscript or the Kashgar Manuscript.

Previous to this, in 1977 the Russian Academy of Sciences, then U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences, had kindly presented to us a photographic reproduction of two folios containing a beginning portion of the “Bestowal of Prophecy” chapter (6th chapter) of the Petrovsky Manuscript, and in 1995, two folios from the chapter “The Life Span of the Thus Come One (16th chapter) and “The Parable of the Phantom City” (7th chapter), as well as the earliest edition of the Sanskrit Lotus Sutra, *Bibliotheca Buddhica 10: Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, commonly called the Kern-Nanjio edition (1908–1912), fascicle 4, St. Petersburg. All are treasures of humankind, and we keep them with deep appreciation.

I visited the beautiful city of St. Petersburg, which was then called Leningrad, for the first time on September 13th of 1974, when the Cold War between the West and the Soviet Bloc was still in force. As I walked along the Neva River, imagining what the city must have been like in the fabled days of Peter the Great, the lively scenes that appeared before my eyes even now remain vivid in my memory.

During the Second World War, the Nazi armies of Germany surrounded Leningrad for a period of 900 days, cutting off supplies of food

and fuel. It is said that with the intense bombardment, and the starvation and bitter cold that prevailed, as many as a million persons lost their lives as a result.

Dr. Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya spoke to me of the situation as we chatted when we met in February of 1996. “During those 900 days,” she said, “two people—a man and a woman—guarded the manuscripts of our institute with all the might they could muster. In order that no harm should come to the manuscripts, stored as they were in the basement of our building, they from time to time opened the boxes and aired them, and looked after them with infinite patience. The fact that these texts of the Lotus Sutra remained unharmed was due mainly to the efforts of these two!”

On November 29th of 1996, when Prof. Dr. Yuri A. Petrosyan (1930–2011), then Director of the then St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IOS RAS), arrived in Tokyo, he said to me, “You must arrange an exhibition on the Lotus Sutra in Tokyo! All our people have put themselves to the limit to preserve these precious materials pertaining to the Lotus Sutra. You must arrange for the members of the Soka Gakkai to have an opportunity to view them, cherishing as they do the spirit of the sutra in the practice of their daily lives. And you must do it for all the other people of Japan as well!”

With that thought in mind, the members of the St. Petersburg Branch, and those of us in Japan who are associated with the Institute of Oriental Philosophy, joined in efforts to plan for an exhibition to be entitled “The Lotus Sutra and Its World: Buddhist Manuscripts of the Great Silk Road.” After two years of preparation, in November of 1998, the exhibition opened in Tokyo, containing a vast collection of rare examples, including 47 items of precious copies of Buddhist materials and block prints.

In an interview at the opening ceremony, Dr. Hirofumi Toda (1936–2003), a world-renowned authority on Sanskrit Lotus Sutra manuscripts, remarked as he viewed the actual copy of the Petrovsky Manuscript, “How lucky I am to have lived to see this day! This manuscript, the envy of the scholars of the world,—for a period of 90 years it has been preserved in the archives of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IOS RAS), never once leaving its portals!”

On the day before the opening of the exhibition, I, along with the St. Petersburg IOS RAS Director, Prof. Dr. Evgeny I. Kychanov, who had come to Japan, the former director, Professor Petrosyan and Dr.

Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya, gathered to watch as the Petrovsky Manuscript and other materials were for the first time revealed to the eyes of the waiting and expectant world. On a time span of a thousand years, a living artifact that had defied the threats of the Nazi troopers, saved through the care and dedication of these persons and others like them, this priceless treasure was unfolded to the world—I was stirred to the depths of my being.

This same exhibition, “The Lotus Sutra and Its World: Buddhist Manuscripts of the Great Silk Road,” in 2000 opened in Vienna, Austria, and Wolfenbüttel, Germany, receiving an enthusiastic reception. And then, under a new name, “The Lotus Sutra—A Message of Peace and Harmonious Coexistence,” in an even more impressive content, went on to open first in Hong Kong and then in Macao, India, Spain, Nepal, Brazil, Sri Lanka, England, Japan, and Taiwan, a total of 10 countries and territories in all.

This, the Petrovsky Manuscript, being as it is of such superior worth, had been of use in collating the Kern-Nanjio edition of the Lotus Sutra, and has been reproduced in a color facsimile edition that is as fine in quality as is the original, an event that is greatly to be applauded. I know now that the study of the Lotus Sutra will surely advance in ways we can hardly imagine.

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