

FOREWORD

Ever since their discovery from a stupa in 1931, the Gilgit manuscripts have awaited for a thousand full moons to find a dedicated personality of the wisdom and stature of Soka Gakkai International (SGI) President Daisaku Ikeda to be reproduced with all their patina of centuries and in all the natural charm of the birch-bark on which they are written. These manuscripts are the offspring of untrammelled inspiration, luminous calligraphy, and lively symbols of the piety of royal patrons. They were edification of life in the stillness of the written logos, commissioned as pious works to bring merit to both the donor and the scribe. As acts of worship, they made the beauty of the mind and the dynamics of action in the world of experience a radiant manifestation.

The Lotus Sutra celebrates the vision that springs from within, and one of the Gilgit manuscripts of the Lotus Sutra has been dedicated to all beings to attain supreme knowledge and merit, i.e., to fulfill the two sambhāras (*jñāna-sambhāra* and *puṇya-sambhāra*). The names of the donors are both in Sanskrit and in Central Asian languages. Some names end in *pharna* which is the Avesta *hvareno* or Persian *farnah*, the indwelling light from which issues a radiance so brilliant as to dazzle humans. *Farnah* refers to “royal glory” and the Gilgit manuscripts are the glowing splendour of Buddhist sutras.

These codices of the Lotus Sutra are the depth of the inner space that makes us pilgrim beings in the majestic syllables of time. President Daisaku Ikeda gives a new life to them and enriches the academic quest with an important source for comprehending the dynamic flow of the text of the Sutra. This *de luxe* facsimile edition will invite inquisitive minds to study the psycho-active sub-texts and to find the lost links in the development of ideas. It will echo a toiling, thinking mind in the silence of words.

These manuscripts were written during the Paṭola Śāhi dynasty of Gilgit. The names of the kings of this dynasty are mentioned in the colophons; e.g., Surendra-vikramāditya-nandi in the colophon of Ratnaketu-parivarta. His father Vikramāditya-nandi and his mother Surendramālā are also named along with him. On the basis of the Hatūn and Danyor inscriptions, T’ang Annals, bronze statue no. 31, colophons of the Gilgit manuscripts and palaeography, Oskar von Hinüber has drawn up a list of the Paṭola Śāhi kings of Gilgit before 630, after 630, and after 725. The T’ang Annals speak of the King of Gilgit who sent embassies to the Chinese Court in 696 and 713. He must have been Nandi-vikramāditya-nandi, the donor of bronze no. 31. The T’ang court recognized Su-fu-shê-li-chih-li-ni 蘇弗舍利支離泥 in 717. The last king

recognized by the T'ang Court, Surendrāditya, ruled between 720 and 725. The Danyor inscription of King Jaya-maṅgala-vikramāditya-nandi has been dated to 730.

These manuscripts were commissioned for the stabilization of the dynasty. The Mahāmāyūrī and mantras written on small scrolls of birch-bark are dedicated to protect King Śrī Navasurendra. Hinüber dates the Saṁghāṭa-sūtra to 627/8 on palaeographic grounds. The Gilgit manuscripts can be dated to the seventh century in general (Oskar von Hinüber, *The Paṭola Śāhīs of Gilgit—A Forgotten Dynasty*, typescript with L. Chandra).

The Gilgit manuscripts of the Lotus Sutra have been classified into three groups by Shōkō Watanabe: groups A, B, C. They can be detailed as follows:

- Group A: 8 lines per folio
National Archives, serial no. 45
RV/LC nos.2813-3052
Watanabe 1. 1-173 (facsimiles)
2. pp. 3-178 (romanized text)
3. 351-355 (facsimiles, epilogue giving names of donors)
4. pp. 293-294 (romanized text, epilogue)
- Group B: mostly 9lines per folio
National Archives, serial nos. 44, 47, 49, etc.
RV/LC nos. 3217-3220
Watanabe 1. 247-350 (facsimiles, mostly 9 lines, but including 8, 10, 11 lines per folio)
2. pp. 181-292 (romanized text)
Toda p. 249, N.B.: “right parts of 2785-86 and 2801-02”
pp. 300-303 (10 lines per folio)
pp. 303-304 (Bapat, 10 lines)
- Group B has mostly 9 lines per folio, so the folios and fragments with 10 lines can represent another group.
- Group C: 11 lines per folio
(i) British Library Lévi in JA. 220
Watanabe 1. Ia-VIIIb (facsimiles)
2. 297-307 (romanized text)
KN 251-257, 272-275, 436-439, 443-445,

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| | | 481-487 |
| (ii) | RV/LC | nos. 3121-3216 (48 folios) |
| | Toda | pp. 249-300 |
| KN | | 28-32, 46-49, 51-53, 55-57, 59-61, 63-70, 71-85, 87, 88, 90, 91, 93, 192, 233-235, 237, 243-244, 280, 282-284, 286-292, 294-297, 304-317, 321-323, 331-337, 342-348, 352-355, 358-365, 373-376, 378-382 |

Group K: 8 lines per folio (can belong to Group A)
 Sir Pratap Singh Museum, Srinagar
 Edited by Oskar von Hinüber, *A New Fragmentary manuscript of the Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*, Tokyo 1982

The Gilgit manuscripts can be arranged according to the number of lines per folio, after taking into account the ductus of writing and other factors. While nos. 44 and 49 with 10 lines can belong to Group B which has the same number of lines, no. 47 may constitute a new group D with 9 lines.

The facsimiles in Raghu Vira/Lokesh Chandra's *Gilgit Buddhist Manuscripts*, parts 9 and 10 can be arranged as follows:

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|------------|----------|-----------------|-------------|
| 2813-3052 | 8 lines | Archives no. 45 | Group A |
| 3053-3120* | 9 lines | Archives no. 47 | Group B |
| 2785-2812 | 10 lines | Archives no. 44 | Group B (?) |
| 3217-3220 | 10 lines | Archives no. 49 | Group B |
| 3121-3216 | 11 lines | Archives no. 48 | Group C |

The manuscripts will have to be transcribed to get a correct picture of the text. The romanized text of Watanabe does not reflect the Gilgit readings and is misleading for any textual criticism. The diplomatic transcription of Hirofumi Toda of 48 folios of Group C (RV/LC nos. 3121-3216) provides a model for the precise transliteration of the extant portions.

The Gilgit manuscripts have preserved more ancient readings than the Nepalese vulgate. Some readings of the Group C manuscript are cited from the transcription of Toda:

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|------------------------------------|--|
| RV/LC. 3121 | KN 28.2-29.5 |
| <i>abhūvan</i> | <i>babhūva</i> |
| <i>kauśalyu</i> (gāthā form) | <i>kauśalya</i> (classical form) |
| <i>vyuttiṣṭhata</i> | <i>vyutthito</i> |
| <i>hetoḥ bahu-buddha-śata-saha</i> | <i>hetoḥ / bahu-buddha-koṭī-nayuta-śata-sahasra</i> (<i>koṭī-nayuta</i> is a later addition) |
| RV/LC 3122 | KN 29.6-30.10 |
| <i>śāradvatīputra</i> | <i>śāriputra</i> |

The aforesaid clearly shows that the readings in the Gilgit manuscripts preserve gāthā forms, lower numbers which have been enhanced later like the addition of *koṭī-nayuta*, the use of the original form Śāradvatīputra instead of Śāriputa in KN, and so on. A critical edition with meticulous recording of variant readings is an urgent need to follow the textual vicissitudes of the Sutra.

The Gilgit manuscripts were deposited within the vault of the third of the four stupas. The third stupa had a double basement: the lower measured 22 x 22 feet, with the upper receding 2 feet on all four sides. In the centre of the chamber there were five wooden boxes, the fifth was emboxed within the other four and the manuscripts were deposited in it.

Some colophons name royal personages as donors. This act of piety is in accord with the 28th chapter of the Lotus Sutra where Samantabhadra says: “[those] who seek out, accept, uphold, read, recite, and transcribe this Lotus Sutra ... should do so diligently and with a single mind.... And because he has acquired these spells, no nonhuman being will be able to injure him.... I too will personally guard him at all times.... If they do no more than copy the Sutra, when their lives come to an end they will be reborn in the Trayastrimśa heaven.” (*The Lotus Sutra*, translated by Burton Watson pp. 321-322). Samantabhadra goes on to exhort devotees to copy the Sutra themselves, recite it, and to guard it in all ways, as he employs his transcendental powers to protect this Sutra.

The Lotus Sutra from the Gilgit stupa is the adamantine essence of logos, the transcendence of Bodhi in the words of the Guhyasamāja (*Bodhi-nairātmyam vākya-vajra-samāvaham*).

The Great Teacher, Daisensei President Daisaku Ikeda, brings to us this second most ancient codex of the Lotus Sutra, to bless our daily lives with the eyes of the spirit, to enliven our daily toils with the nobility of Dharma. This facsimile edition is a drop from the heavenly heart of the Daisensei. In the words of Prājña 般若 in his

Zōtōemmyōkudokukyō 造塔延命功德經 (Taishō 1026), compassion for all beings is the guiding principle, and the thought of obtaining Bodhi is the base of practical and ethical activity. In the midst of centuries lives this birch-bark Lotus Sutra to spread its glow once again by the perfection of Japanese technology, merging in the endless solemnity of life. It greets us with expressions that are more ancient than the vulgate version as they implant in us the essence of a throbbing new.

President Ikeda is the culmination of the trinity of the Lotus Sutra, his two predecessors being Kumārajīva and Nichiren Daishonin. He impresses our times with its novelty and freshness. Like a landscape painter who uses a large canvas but fine brushes, filling the canvas with gentle and well-defined strokes that result in a nuanced and multiple-layered picture, he gives a subtle but clear analysis of the Sutra as the astonishing catalyst of life in the reflexivity of ideas. His vast oeuvre gives us the meaning of the Sutra as action in the simplest of chores as well as the fusion of horizons. He endows us with vivid perception in objective standards and makes the lives of millions a gratifying experience of joy. The Sutra too has had a dynamic blossoming in the long transmission of its text, as shown by the codices from Kashgar (better Khotan) and Gilgit. This crystalline reproduction of the Gilgit manuscripts of the Sutra makes us realize the grandeur of human involvement, so that we become “protagonists of a ‘story’ of inner victory forged in the depth of [our] lives”,[†] in the words of Daisensei Ikeda in his Peace Proposals of 2010. The Sutra is awareness, the Daisensei is the dynamic enlightenment of life, and we are the fields of action. Here are the wondrous birch-bark folios sparkling like jewels of the human mind.

Lokesh Chandra

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