

CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS



---

The Tibetan Dunhuang Manuscripts in China

Author(s): Sam van Schaik

Source: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (2002), pp. 129-139

Published by: [Cambridge University Press](#) on behalf of [School of Oriental and African Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4145904>

Accessed: 10/02/2011 11:47

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=cup>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



Cambridge University Press and School of Oriental and African Studies are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

# The Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts in China

SAM VAN SCHAİK  
The British Library

At the beginning of the twentieth century a huge cache of ancient manuscripts was discovered in a Buddhist cave complex near the desert town of Dunhuang in China. Famously, the monk who guarded the caves, Wang Yuanlu, was persuaded by the archaeological explorers Aurel Stein and Paul Pelliot to sell them a large portion of the manuscripts so that they could be acquired by the British and French governments. The manuscripts, which were in a variety of languages, most commonly Chinese and Tibetan, are now held at the Bibliothèque nationale and the British Library, and it is the Tibetan group that form the focus of this article.

The age of the Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts, which are estimated to date from the eighth and ninth centuries C.E., makes the Paris and London collections particularly valuable to historians studying this significant period of Tibetan history—when the Tibetan kings extended the borders of their country far into Central Asia—to scholars studying the origins of Tibetan Buddhism, and to linguists studying the early development of the Tibetan language. There have been accounts of another large group of Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts, perhaps rivalling the Paris and London collections in size, which never left the area of Dunhuang. The most detailed such account first appeared in a Chinese work by Jiang Liangfu, and was later reproduced in English in Akira Fujieda's important 1966 article on the Dunhuang manuscripts.<sup>1</sup> Fujieda wrote:

At last, in 1919, the provincial government of Kansu, having heard that a traveller had bought many Buddhist scriptures in Tibetan, sent an inspector to examine the situation on the spot. In a Buddhist cave to the south side of the second floor of the three-storied building, the inspector found 94 bundles of scrolls in Tibetan weighing 405 *chin* and 11 stacks of sheets between wooden boards weighing 1744 *chin*. He left 90 bundles and moved three bundles of scrolls and ten stacks of sheets to a school in Tunhuang, carrying away one bundle and one stack of scriptures to Lanchow, where they were placed in the provincial library. It is not superfluous to emphasise that the weight of the scrolls remaining at Tunhuang was probably more than one ton, no doubt exceeding that of any other collection.<sup>2</sup>

Jiang did not make any reference to the source for this report, and Fujieda could add nothing further to this information. The location of these manuscripts was then, and is still, generally unknown to scholars outside of China. As I will show below, most of these manuscripts can now be located, and the texts they contain identified.

## 1. *The original number of Tibetan manuscripts in the library cave*

Marc Aurel Stein (1862–1943) came across the cave in Dunhuang which held the manuscripts, generally known as the 'library cave', in 1907. Although Wang Yuanlu had given some manuscripts to local officials by the time Stein arrived, the majority of the cache was still in place. Stein's report of what he found on first being allowed to see the cave is the closest we can come to ascertaining its

<sup>1</sup> Fujieda, 1966, 13–14.

<sup>2</sup> Fujieda, 1966, 15–16.

original contents.<sup>3</sup> Stein estimated that there were 230 bundles of Chinese, and 80 bundles of Tibetan scrolls, each bundle containing over a dozen scrolls. He also saw eleven large volumes of Tibetan *pothī* (their size was two foot five inches by eight inches and ‘nearly one and a half feet’ high). Stein also found several bundles of miscellaneous material on top of the other manuscripts and, after the other manuscripts had been moved, several more at the very bottom of the pile. These bundles (there is no indication of how many there were) contained, among other material, more Tibetan *pothī* pages, mostly smaller than those in the eleven large volumes, as well as material in other Central Asian languages.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. What Stein and Pelliot took from the cave

Stein wrote of his Tibetan acquisitions that he took ‘over thirty compact bundles [of scrolls], besides many packets of Pothīs found in miscellaneous bundles and generally mixed up in utter confusion’.<sup>5</sup> He seems to have decided not to take any of the large volumes of Tibetan *pothī* pages. An explanation may be found in his report, where he writes that he had suspected all of the ‘large sheets’ to contain numerous copies of one or two *sūtras*. Stein’s intention was to acquire as varied a selection as possible. Ultimately, he did take home some large *pothī* pages (of the same type as those in the eleven volumes), from the miscellaneous bundles in which they were too closely tied up with other manuscripts to be removed. When he examined them later Stein found that these pages contained ‘mainly endless *Prajñāpāramitā* copies’, which must have confirmed his suspicions about the eleven volumes he had left behind.

Although Stein’s instincts regarding these volumes were correct, he did not avoid repetition entirely: the great majority of the scrolls from the 30 bundles which he brought back with him carry the repeated text of one short *sūtra*, the *Aparimitāyur-nāma sūtra*.<sup>6</sup>

When Paul Pelliot first saw the contents of the library cave a year later in 1908, he was, by contrast, particularly impressed by the large Tibetan *pothī* volumes. He guessed that they might be an early edition of a *bKa’ gyur*, a Tibetan canonical collection, and that their contents would, unlike the other *pothī* pages, be in perfect order.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, he was wrong on both counts. Pelliot wanted to take all eleven volumes, but Wang Yuanlu would not allow this. In the end, he took three volumes, as an endnote to his report states:

Suivant des informations que nous avons reçues postérieurement à cette lettre, M. Pelliot a pu acquérir définitivement tous les documents chinois, brahmī, ouïgours, tibétains dont il y est parlé, à l’exception des *kia-pan* du Kandjur, dont il rapporte cependant trois volumes.<sup>8</sup>

Fujieda argues that the ‘volumes’ mentioned in the passage above were

<sup>3</sup> We cannot know, however, whether the Daoist monk Wang Yuanlu who discovered the cave had removed manuscripts before Stein arrived.

<sup>4</sup> Stein, 1921, vol. II, 822–3.

<sup>5</sup> Stein, 1921, vol. II, 919. It is worth noting that the Stein collection also includes many Tibetan manuscripts from other locations in Central Asia (in particular, the sites of Miran and Mazar-Tagh) which Stein acquired during his excavations. Some of these, especially those which Stein acquired during his second expedition, are of equal antiquity to the Dunhuang library cave collection. These have recently been catalogued by Tsuguhito Takeuchi (1997–2000).

<sup>6</sup> Stein, 1921, vol. II, 919.

<sup>7</sup> Pelliot, 1908, 507–8. A photograph, much reprinted, shows Pelliot at work studying the scrolls by candlelight in the library cave. The photograph appears to show one of the large *pothī* volumes at the bottom of the pile of scrolls in the background. However, there does not seem to be a cover on top of the pages, and because one cannot see the bottom of the volume it is difficult to estimate the dimensions of the volume. I have not seen any other photographs showing the *pothī* volumes *in situ*.

<sup>8</sup> Pelliot, 1908, 529 n.1

merely a portion of the contents of a single large volume. His reasoning is based on Jiang's account of the official's visit in 1919, which states that eleven volumes were found by the official.<sup>9</sup> However, as I will show below, there is reason to doubt this account and to believe that Pelliot did indeed come away with three of the original eleven volumes.

Pelliot's volume, like the large pages from the miscellaneous bundles acquired by Stein, turned out to contain only numerous copies of *sūtras* from the *Prajñāpāramitā* group, especially the largest, the *Śatasāhasrikā*. Along with these volumes Pelliot took many more bundles of Tibetan scrolls, the majority of which, like the scrolls taken by Stein, contained the repeated text of the *Aparimitāyur-nāma sūtra*. He also took most of the remaining miscellaneous manuscript bundles, many of which contained Tibetan *pothī* pages, and about one-third of the remaining bundles of scrolls.<sup>10</sup> Pelliot also discovered more Tibetan manuscripts, which he guessed were from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in two caves in the northern part of the Dunhuang cave complex decorated with Tibetan style murals with tantric subject matter.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. What was taken afterwards

In 1909 Pelliot held an exhibition in Beijing of a selection of the Dunhuang manuscripts. The Chinese authorities, spurred into action, issued an order that all of the Chinese manuscripts in the library cave be brought to Beijing. This was carried out with only partial success; many Chinese scrolls remained behind and, because only the manuscripts in Chinese were requested, most, if not all, of the Tibetan manuscripts were left in Dunhuang.<sup>12</sup> In 1911 two Japanese explorers sent to Central Asia by Count Otani, a Japanese Central Asia enthusiast, obtained several hundred scrolls from Dunhuang, both Chinese and Tibetan. These are now dispersed among numerous institutions in Japan as well as Korea, and the National Library of China.<sup>13</sup> Then, in March 1914, Aurel Stein returned to Dunhuang during the third expedition and met Wang Yuanlu who, having lost most of his cache, was now willing to sell Stein what he (Wang) insisted were all that remained: 570 Chinese scrolls. Stein wrote of his doubts about whether Wang really was showing him everything that remained at the caves, and it seems that he was right; there was certainly still a great deal of Tibetan material in the area.<sup>14</sup>

In August of the same year, the Russian archaeologist Sergei Oldenburg arrived

<sup>9</sup> Fujieda, 1961, part 1, 14, n.42.

<sup>10</sup> This information is provided in Stein, 1921, vol. II, 823, n.3. Stein estimated that there were 1,130 bundles of all types in the cave in the first place, and 860 remaining after he had left. Pelliot estimated that he had then taken about one-third of what remained, which would leave over 500 bundles in the cave after Pelliot's departure (Stein, 1921, vol. II, 827).

<sup>11</sup> Pelliot, 1908, 529, n.1. Alongside Tibetan the manuscripts contained Chinese, Mongolian, Uighur, and a few in *brāhmī* script. There was also some Tangut printed matter. Pelliot numbered the northern caves he explored 181 and 182. His description of these caves (though not of the manuscripts he found in them) are found in *Grottes de Touen-houang, carnet de notes de Paul Pelliot*, Centre de Recherche sur l'Asie centrale et la Haute Asie, 1992, vol. XI.6, 32–9.

<sup>12</sup> Some Tibetan manuscripts may have been taken as well. This was the opinion of the curators at the National Library of China, who stated that their collection of Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts was acquired at this time. The government's acquisition of the scrolls was not wholly successful; many were stolen shortly after their arrival in Beijing in 1910. The theft of many Chinese scrolls from the Ministry of Education in Beijing is discussed in Rong, 2002. It was previously thought that all of these scrolls had been stolen *en route* to Beijing.

<sup>13</sup> In Japan there are 16 institutions known to hold Dunhuang or other Central Asian manuscripts, mainly from the Otani collection and other private collections. Some of these institutions certainly hold Tibetan items. (Fujieda, 1966, part 1, 9–11; Whitfield, 1998a and b.)

<sup>14</sup> Stein, 1928, 355, 357–8. At this time Stein also bought a number of scrolls from traders in Dunhuang city. Their presence in the hands of these traders was taken by Stein as evidence of the carelessness of those who carried out the order of the Chinese government to transfer the scrolls to Beijing. A number of these third expedition scrolls have recently been identified as forgeries.

at Dunhuang. Although his interest was primarily in the cave murals, he also obtained many scrolls in Chinese and Tibetan.<sup>15</sup> The scrolls are now kept at the Institute of Oriental Studies, in the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg.

#### 4. *The Dunhuang Tibetan manuscripts which remained in Gansu*

Even after Oldenburg's visit to Dunhuang, a large number of Tibetan scrolls and most of the large Tibetan *pothī* volumes remained in the area. As we have seen, in 1919, some four years after Oldenburg left Dunhuang, the provincial government of Gansu sent an official to investigate the remaining manuscripts. According to his report, quoted above, the official found ninety-four bundles of scrolls and eleven *pothī* volumes with wooden boards; he moved ten of the volumes and three scroll bundles to a school in Dunhuang, and one volume and one scroll bundle to Lanzhou.<sup>16</sup> The numbers of the volumes and bundles given in this report conflict with Stein's and Pelliot's accounts. As we have seen, Stein counted eighty bundles of Tibetan scrolls and eleven Tibetan volumes when he arrived. Many scroll bundles were taken by Stein and Pelliot, and three *pothī* volumes were taken by Pelliot. I will return to this inconsistency below.

In 1928, all of the Tibetan manuscripts remaining in Dunhuang were moved to the local cultural institute, where they remained until the Communist revolution of 1949. After the revolution, some manuscripts were brought to the newly-founded Dunhuang Academy (*Dunhuangwenwu Yangjiusuo*),<sup>17</sup> an organization established to conserve the caves and foster research on their contents, while a few others were sent to provincial museums in Gansu. The great majority of the Tibetan manuscripts, a collection still comparable in size to those of Paris and London, was placed in the new provincial museum for the town of Dunhuang, the Dunhuang Museum (*Dunhuangxian Wenhuaquan*).<sup>18</sup>

#### 5. *The Gansu collections*

In 1978, Huang Wenhuan published the results of an investigation of the collections of Dunhuang Tibetan manuscripts in Gansu province. His findings are given in Table 1.

TABLE 1. *Huang Wenhuan's findings on the Dunhuang Tibetan manuscripts in Gansu province.*

	<i>Pothī</i> leaves	Scrolls
Dunhuang Museum ( <i>Dunhuangxian Wenhuaquan</i> )	8,780	224
Dunhuang Academy ( <i>Dunhuangwenwu Yangjiusuo</i> )	42	43
Jiuquan Museum ( <i>Jiuquanxian Wenhuaquan</i> )	0	19
Zhangye Museum ( <i>Zhangyexian Wenhuaquan</i> )	0	1
Wuwei Museum <sup>19</sup> ( <i>Wuweixian Wenguanhui</i> )	7	0
Lanzhou Library <sup>20</sup> ( <i>Lanzhou Tushuguan</i> )	1,117	30

<sup>15</sup> He seems not to have taken these from the library cave itself, but they almost certainly originated there (see the article by Fang Guangchang in Whitfield, 2002). There seem to be 366 Chinese scrolls, and an unknown number of Tibetan scrolls containing 212 texts (see section 7).

<sup>16</sup> Fujieda, 1966, 13–14.

<sup>17</sup> The English name of the institute has recently been changed from the more literal Dunhuang Research Institute to Dunhuang Academy.

<sup>18</sup> The manuscripts sent to the other provincial museums were token objects which were considered less important, or less likely to be genuine Dunhuang library cave manuscripts. This paragraph is a personal communication from Luo Huaqing, director of the Dunhuang Academy Exhibition Centre.

<sup>19</sup> According to the article, this institution also holds six Tibetan woodslips. These would almost certainly not be from the library cave, or even Dunhuang, but from another Silk Road site.

<sup>20</sup> Also known as Gansu Provincial Library (*Gansu Sheng Tushuguan*).

According to Huang, the great majority of these manuscripts contained the *Śatasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā sūtra* and the *Aparimitāyur-nāma sūtra*. In addition, he mentions the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*, *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, and *Sañcayagāthā*.

In July 2000 I travelled to Dunhuang, with the support of the British Academy, to examine the Tibetan manuscripts held there. I was able to check all of the Tibetan manuscripts held by the Dunhuang Academy, which are now stored in the recently constructed Exhibition Centre.<sup>21</sup> There are in fact 47 scrolls here (a few more than the 43 reported by Huang), all of which, with one exception, contained the *Aparimitāyur-nāma sūtra*.<sup>22</sup> There were 87 large *pothī* leaves (many more than the 42 reported by Huang), all containing the *Śatasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*; some of these pages were in order but most were not in sequence. In the following list the manuscripts are categorized by text. The only exception to the two most common texts is a single *Heart Sutra*. The catalogue numbers are those of the Dunhuang Academy:

*Śatasāhasrikā-prajñāramitā*

Large *pothī* leaves with two holes for string; page numbers in margin.

0014: 12 folios, chapter 30.

0015: 2 folios, chapter 13.

0672: 30 folios, chapters 22, 23, 43.

0750: 43 folios, chapters 17, 18, 19.

*Aparimitāyur-nāma sūtra*

Scrolls, from 1 to around 30 panels each: 0119, 0120, 0122–0126, 0144–0147, 0644–0646, 0672, 0677–0689, 0691–0693, 0729–0743, 0745, 0747, 0749, 0750. Newly catalogued: W.1, W.2, W.3, W.4. On exhibition: 0016, 0018.

The following scrolls have Chinese text on the verso: 0144–0147, 0692.

*Prajñāpāramitā-hrdaya sūtra*

Scroll, 1 panel: 00121.

Later Tibetan manuscripts:

0001–0005, 0013, 0646, 0677, 0689, 0745, 0747, 0749, W.5.

In addition to the above, the Academy holds at least 700 more Tibetan *pothī* leaves, and numerous fragments, none apparently older than the Yuan period (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries) and some certainly more recent than that. Some of these may have come from the northern caves, where Pelliot found Tibetan manuscripts dating from a later period than those from the library cave.

In the Dunhuang Museum I was only able to see a selection of the manuscripts. The scrolls which I examined all contained the text of the *Aparimitāyur-nāma sūtra*. The *pothī* leaves were all of the large-format variety, with the text of the *Śatasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā sūtra*. Tibetan page numbers and letters indicating the original volumes to which the pages belonged were written in the margins of the *pothī* leaves. Those I examined were all from volumes *ka* and *kha*, but the individual pages were not in a continuous sequence. According

<sup>21</sup> Thanks to the generosity of Luo Huaqing, Director of the Dunhuang Academy Exhibition Centre.

<sup>22</sup> The total number of panels of all scrolls taken together was about 300. A few of the scrolls contained Chinese text on the verso side. The only exception is a single panel of the *Hrdaya sūtra*.

to the museum's curators, all of the other leaves, which they confirmed were over 8,000 in number, were of the same format.<sup>23</sup>

#### 6. Dunhuang Tibetan manuscripts elsewhere in China

In order to judge how much of the original Tibetan manuscript cache from the library cave can now be accounted for, it is necessary to review what we know of other collections of Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts in China. None of these are as large as the Gansu collections. The most substantial collection is that of the National Library of China in Beijing. There is no published catalogue, nor any prospect of one, since there is currently no post for a curator of Tibetan at the Library.<sup>24</sup> According to the curatorial staff in the Special Collections department, there are between 200 and 300 Tibetan Dunhuang items in the Library, in both scroll and *pothī* form.<sup>25</sup>

Certain other institutions in China hold a few Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts. They are the Beijing University Library, Shanghai Library, Shanghai Museum, and Tianjin Arts Museum. The catalogue numbers of the Tibetan manuscripts, taken from the facsimile editions published by these institutions, are as follows:

Beijing University Library:

D045: a fragment of a scroll; text seems to be tantric.

D055: a fragment of a scroll; a *sūtra*.

D113: a few lines at the end of a Chinese scroll.

D152: a fragment of a scroll.

D212: a fragment of a scroll with *Aparimitāyur-nāma sūtra*, and six lines of text on the verso.

C62, C63, C64: small fragments.

Shanghai Library:

059: an *Aparimitāyur-nāma sūtra* scroll.

139: a *pothī* leaf with the *Prajñāpāramitā-hṛdaya sūtra*.

156, 157: *pothī* leaves with the *Śatasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā sūtra*.

Shanghai Museum:

38: an *Aparimitāyur-nāma sūtra* scroll.

Tianjin Arts Museum:

006, 093, 094, 095, 096, 097: all relatively large *Aparimitāyur-nāma sūtra* scrolls.

Finally, in Taiwan, the National Central Library of Taipei has four Tibetan Dunhuang Buddhist scrolls, all containing the *Aparimitāyur-nāma sūtra*.<sup>26</sup> The Beijing University Library acquired most of its Tibetan manuscripts in the

<sup>23</sup> An exception to this format (the only one, according to the curators) is to be seen in the museum's exhibition halls: two *pothī* leaves somewhat smaller than the large ones which form the bulk of the collection, but still containing a *Prajñāpāramitā* text, and one small *pothī* leaf, apparently containing a tantric commentary. These certainly have the appearance of manuscripts from the library cave.

<sup>24</sup> Apparently there are unpublished handlists.

<sup>25</sup> I am told that the Tibetan scrolls were acquired along with the Chinese ones in 1910; however, some or all of them may have been acquired when a portion of the Otani collection came to the Library (Whitfield, 1998b). The Library is in the course of publishing all of its Dunhuang manuscripts in volumes of photographic reproductions, but as yet only a fraction of the collection has been published in this way. In the volumes that have appeared, there are two Tibetan manuscripts, one of which is another large-format *pothī* containing a *Prajñāpāramitā* (BD00001).

<sup>26</sup> Wu Chi-yu, 'A study of four Tibetan sūtras of Tun-Huang conserved in the National Central Library of Taipei', in *Studies on Tun-Huang*, vol. II, Hong Kong, 1975, 56–69.

1950s from collectors, and this is also likely to be the case with the other institutions listed above.<sup>27</sup>

### 7. *The fate of the original contents of the library cave*

This information means that the majority of the Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts, as first examined by Aurel Stein, can now be accounted for. However, the picture is not completely clear. As we have seen, there are conflicting reports of the Tibetan scrolls and the *pothī* volumes. Stein counted eleven volumes, as did Paul Pelliot, who then took away three of them. However, a Chinese official is said to have found eleven volumes in Dunhuang, long after Pelliot's visit. Fujieda, accepting the official's report, argued that Pelliot had not taken three of the eleven volumes, but only three sections of one volume.

The Pelliot tibétain collection contains over 3,800 large-format leaves of the *Satasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā sūtra* (excluding leaves in fragmentary form). When held compressed together, there are about eighty leaves of this kind of Dunhuang *pothī* to an inch and, according to Stein, the original volumes were just under one-and-a-half feet (18 inches) high. So the most we might expect each volume to have contained is 1,440 leaves. If we estimate that the wooden cover-boards were each an inch in depth, then the number would be closer to 1,280. Therefore, the number of pages in the Paris collection is exactly what we would expect if Pelliot did take three whole volumes.

Furthermore, we can reasonably assume that the 1,117 leaves at Lanzhou are indeed the single volume which was said to have been taken there, lacking a hundred or so pages which may be those in the Dunhuang Academy. The 8,780 leaves in the Dunhuang Museum look very much like seven volumes. Thus it seems most likely that of the original eleven volumes, three went to Paris, one to Lanzhou, and the remaining seven to the Dunhuang Museum. This, of course, contradicts the version of the report we have from the official who visited Dunhuang in 1919. If our version is correct, it means that all eleven volumes are accounted for, and accessible to scholars.

The contents of these eleven volumes seem to be an early proto-canonical collection of *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*. Unfortunately, contrary to Pelliot's hopes, they are not in sequential order; the pages in the two largest collections, the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Dunhuang Museum, are very disordered. Many of the pages carry page numbers and letters indicating the original volumes to which they belonged, and these are often non-sequential. Furthermore, there is repetition of volume and page numbers on different pages containing different text. This suggests the presence of more than one *sūtra* collection, or multiple drafts of a single collection. Many of the pages in the Bibliothèque Nationale are extensively corrected, and Marcelle Lalou believed that these were draft versions which formed the basis for the later, corrected pages which are found in the same collection.<sup>28</sup>

The reports of Stein, Pelliot and the Chinese official also conflict regarding the scrolls, and it is more difficult to arrive at a conclusion in this case. The Paris and London collections contain by far the largest number of scrolls known to us. The majority of the scrolls contain the *Aparimitāyur-nāma sūtra*; these are of various lengths because the text of this short *sūtra* may be repeated

<sup>27</sup> Personal communication with the curator of the manuscript collections at the Beijing University Library. This fact is also stated in Rong, 2000. Rong adds that the manuscripts were purchased by Professor Xiang Da, the then Director of the Library.

<sup>28</sup> See, for instance, her catalogue entries for Pelliot tibétain 1336–1343 (Lalou, 1961).

many times on the same scroll. The Paris collection and London collections hold about 950 such scrolls each. The scrolls containing *Prajñāpāramitā* texts are generally incomplete and thus also vary greatly in size. There are about 600 of these scrolls in the Paris collection, and far fewer, around 100, in the London collection. The Paris and London collections also hold a number of Tibetan scrolls containing other material of both Buddhist and secular character.<sup>29</sup> There are 212 Tibetan scrolls in from Dunhuang in St. Petersburg, 202 of which are the *Aparimitāyur-nāma*, and the other 10 the *Prajñāpāramitā-hrdaya*.<sup>30</sup>

The scrolls were originally packed in bundles. Stein counted eighty bundles of Tibetan scrolls, and took thirty away with him. Pelliot took around one-third of what was left, and Oldenburg took several more. Yet the Chinese official is said to have found ninety-four bundles of scrolls. It certainly seems, judging by the number of scrolls which are known to us, that Stein underestimated the number of Tibetan bundles. If the official's report, as we have it, was correct, then, at around a dozen scrolls per bundle (Stein's estimate), there should be over 1,100 scrolls still in China. However, our numbers so far give us just over 300. Even if the Beijing National Library contains another 300 scrolls, this is still only half of the number one would expect. One possibility is that these last ninety-four bundles were smaller, or had already been diminished by the theft of individual scrolls from bundles. A second is that most of the ninety bundles which the official is said to have left in the cave were stolen, and if still in existence, might be in various private collections. A third is that the version of the official's report which we have may be incorrect in its enumeration of scroll bundles as well as *pothī* volumes.

### 8. *Shachu*: a centre for the copying of sūtras

As we have seen, the majority of the manuscripts in the Gansu collections contain only two Buddhist texts, both of them *sūtras*. The first is the *Śatasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*, the 'Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in 100,000 verses'. This text, the longest in the Perfection of Wisdom corpus, remained popular in Tibet. The popularity of the second *sūtra*, the *Aparimitāyur-nāma* was, on the other hand, restricted to Central Asia; it exists in Khotanese and Sanskrit versions as well as the Tibetan version.<sup>31</sup>

The existence of so many copies of these *sūtras* suggests a great deal of scribal activity in some kind of monastic institution, as well as the existence of lay patrons to provide funds. This picture is confirmed by three manuscripts from Dunhuang, two in London which have been translated by F. W. Thomas, and one in Paris which has been translated by Marcelle Lalou.<sup>32</sup> All three texts deal with the copying of *sūtras*. The Paris text concerns a donation by the Tibetan king Khri tsub lde btsan, better known as Ral pa can (reigned 815 to

<sup>29</sup> Most of the *Aparimitāyur-nāma sūtra* scrolls in the British Library are catalogued under the number 310 in de la Vallée Poussin's catalogue (now IOL Tib J 310). Most of the *Prajñāpāramitā* scrolls are under number 109 (now IOL Tib J 109). At some point all of the scroll panels were separated and rebound as booklets, but the original number of scrolls can be reconstructed. There is currently no printed catalogue of the *Aparimitāyur-nāma sūtra* scrolls in the Bibliothèque nationale, which occupy the catalogue numbers Pelliot tibétain 2500–4450. This sequence includes fragments as well as complete scrolls, especially from Pelliot tibétain 4100 to 4450. There are also many incomplete *Prajñāpāramitā* scrolls in the Pelliot collection, which in Lalou's catalogue occupy the numbers Pelliot tibétain 1495 to 2105. Both the Paris and London collections also contain miscellaneous scrolls scattered throughout their catalogues.

<sup>30</sup> There are two other Tibetan items (nos 213 and 214 in Savitsky's catalogue), which contain a transcription of a Chinese text, and a fragment of an unidentified Tibetan text.

<sup>31</sup> These are discussed in Konow (1916).

<sup>32</sup> Lalou (1940) and Thomas (1951: 73–84).

836) to fund the copying of 136 Chinese and 480 Tibetan scrolls containing the *Aparimitāyur-nāma sūtra*.<sup>33</sup> One of the London texts mentions the production of three copies of the Chinese and eight of the Tibetan versions of the *Śatasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*.<sup>34</sup> The other London text also mentions the *Śatasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*, and refers to the funding for the production of these having been donated by the king (*lha sras*).<sup>35</sup> The last text, which has more recently been translated by Tsuguhito Takeuchi, describes the way scribes were supervised and punished if they stole the paper intended for *sūtras*. Most of the scribes seem to have been Chinese rather than Tibetan.<sup>36</sup>

All three texts refer to the place in which the *sūtras* were copied as Shachu (*sha cu*). This is a Tibetan transcription of the Chinese name Shazhou, ‘City of the Sands’, which was the preferred name for Dunhuang during the Tang period. Furthermore, the Paris manuscript refers to the place of deposit for the scrolls, the store or library of a temple called *lung hung si*.<sup>37</sup> Whether this is the same store as the library cave, or a similar one, the text confirms that Dunhuang was, during the period of Tibetan occupation, a centre for the copying and storage of scriptures, particularly the two *sūtras* which make up the majority of the Gansu collections.

### 9. *The significance of the Gansu collections*

The collection of Tibetan manuscripts in the Dunhuang Museum, along with the significant smaller stores at the Dunhuang Academy and Lanzhou Library, rivals those of Paris and London. However, the manuscripts in the Gansu collections are much less varied in subject-matter. Aurel Stein and Paul Pelliot took away with them the most varied, and in certain respects the most interesting, sets of manuscripts, leaving behind only those regular groups stored together in scroll bundles and *pothī* volumes. The textual contents of the latter are, as Stein suspected, largely repetitive.

There are a few exceptions to the rule of repetitive texts, written on the verso of scrolls or in the margins of *pothīs*, that only a detailed study of these collections can reveal. Thus far, as I have mentioned, I have only been able to do this with one of the smaller collections, that of the Dunhuang Academy, where there were no surprises to be found. However, Huang Wenhuan reported that short Tibetan poems were written on the verso of some of the scrolls in the Dunhuang Museum’s collection, one of which, a love poem, he has translated into Chinese.<sup>38</sup>

The importance of the proto-canonical material itself should not be underestimated, for it is still of great value to the study of early Tibetan Buddhism. There has been little research carried out on the three volumes of pages accessible in the Bibliothèque nationale, but if the manuscripts from Dunhuang Museum, Lanzhou Library and the Bibliothèque nationale do, as I have suggested, comprise the complete eleven volumes seen in the library cave by Stein and Pelliot, then one day this *sūtra* collection (or group of collections), still the earliest known to us, may be put in order and studied in its entirety. As Peter Skilling has noted, our knowledge of this earliest period of the

<sup>33</sup> The catalogue number of this text is Pelliot tibétain 999.

<sup>34</sup> The location of this text is vol. 56, 73–4.

<sup>35</sup> The location of this text is vol. 69, ff. 53–6.

<sup>36</sup> Takeuchi (1995: 53–5). Takeuchi (1994: 849–50, 857 n.8).

<sup>37</sup> Identified by Lalou with the Chinese name Longxingsi.

<sup>38</sup> Huang (1978: 12).

formation of Tibetan canonical traditions is very limited; the ways in which *sūtras* were arranged in the earliest collections, as well as the details of how they were written down, have not as yet been studied in depth.<sup>39</sup> Even the Tibetan scholars of previous centuries who compiled and commented upon Buddhist canons had to do without the original manuscripts from this early period. Though this is a formidable task, it is clearly a very important one, since it is unlikely that another Tibetan proto-canonical collection of equal or greater antiquity will be discovered.

## REFERENCES

- Centre de recherche sur l'Asie centrale et la Haute Asie: 1992. *Grottes de Touen-houang carnet de notes de Paul Pelliot*. Paris: Collège de France.
- Fujieda, Akira. 1966, 1969. 'The Tunhuang manuscripts: a general description', *Zinbun* ix, 1–32, *Zinbun* x, 17–39.
- Jiang Liangfu. 1956. *Dunhuang—weida de wenhua baozang*. Shanghai: Shanghai gudian wenxue chubanshe.
- Konow, Sten. 1916. 'The Aparimitāyuh Sūtra', in Rudolf Hoernle (ed.), *Manuscript remains of Buddhist literature found in Eastern Turkestan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Huang Wen-huang. 1978. 'He xi tu fan wen shu jian shu' (A brief description of Tibetan documents in the Hexi corridor), *Wen Wu* xii, 59–63.
- Lalou, Marcelle. 1939, 1950, 1961. *Inventaire des Manuscrits tibétains de Touen-houang conservés à la Bibliothèque nationale (Fonds Pelliot tibétain)*. (3 vols.) Paris: Bibliothèque nationale.
- Lalou, Marcelle. 1940. 'Tun-Huang Tibetan documents on a Dharmadāna', *Indian Historical Quarterly* xvi.2, 293–8.
- Pelliot, Paul. 1908. 'Une bibliothèque médiévale retrouvée au Kan-sou', *Bulletin de l'École Française D'Extreme Orient* viii, 510–29.
- Rong, Xinjiang. 2002. 'The Li Shengduo Collection: original or forged manuscripts?' in Whitfield, 2002.
- Savitsky, Lev S. 1984. 'Tunhuang Tibetan manuscripts in the Collection of the Leningrad Institute of Oriental Studies', in Louis Ligeti (ed.), *Tibetan and Buddhist studies commemorating the 200th anniversary of the birth of Alexander Csoma de Kőrös*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.
- Savitsky, Lev S. 1991. *Opisanie tibetiskikh svitkov iz dunkhuana v sobranii instituta vostokovedeniia an SSSR*. Moscow: Nauka, Glavnaia redatskaia vostochnoi literaturii.
- Skilling, Peter. 1997. 'From bKa' bstan bcos to bKa' 'gyur and bsTan 'gyur', in Ernst Steinkellner (ed.), *Tibetan studies: Proceedings of the 7th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Graz, 1995*. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- Stein, M. Aurel. 1921. *Serindia: detailed report of explorations in Central Asia and westernmost China*. (5 vols.) Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Stein, M. Aurel. 1928. *Innermost Asia: detailed report of explorations in Central Asia, Kansu and Eastern Iran*. (4 vols.) Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Takeuchi, Tsuguhito. 1994. 'Tshan: subordinate administrative units of the thousand-districts in the Tibetan empire', in Per Kvaerne (ed.), *Tibetan studies: proceedings of the 6th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Fagernes, 1992*. Oslo: The Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture.
- Takeuchi, Tsuguhito. 1995. *Old Tibetan contracts from Central Asia*. Tokyo: Daizo Shuppan.
- Takeuchi, Tsuguhito. 1997–2000. *Old Tibetan manuscripts from East Turkestan in the Stein Collection of the British Library*. (3 vols.) London: The British Library.
- Thomas, F. W. 1951. *Tibetan literary texts and documents from Chinese Turkestan. Part II: Documents*. London: Royal Asiatic Society.
- de la Vallée Poussin, Louis. 1962. *Catalogue of the Tibetan manuscripts from Tun-Huang in the India Office Library*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Whitfield, Susan. 1998a. 'Japanese collections of Dunhuang and Silk Road manuscripts'. *IDP News* 10 (Spring 1998), 2–5.

<sup>39</sup> Skilling (1997: 93): 'As far as I know no manuscripts from Central Tibet of the early period are at present available, and we therefore know nothing about the physical form, the shape or size or foliation, of the *śna dar* manuscripts. We do not know how the longer texts were distributed across the volumes, or how shorter texts were treated: whether they were transmitted in single manuscripts or joined with others—and in the latter case, according to what principles.' He adds in a note: 'There is much to be learned from the Tun huang manuscripts, but they have yet to be systematically studied in this light'.

- Whitfield, Susan. 1998b. 'Count Otani's Central Asian expeditions', *IDP News* 10 (Spring 1992), 1–2.
- Whitfield, Susan (ed.). 2002 (forthcoming). *Dunhuang manuscript forgeries*. (The British Library Studies in Conservation Science 3.) London: British Library Press.
- Wu Chi-yu. 1975. 'A study of four Tibetan sūtras of Tun-Huang conserved in the National Central Library of Taipei', *Studies in Tun-Huang*, vol. II. Hong Kong, 56–59.