

Sub-project C01

A Twelfth-Century East Indian Monastic Library and its Fate

Prof. Dr. Harunaga Isaacson

Dr. Martin Delhey

Description of the project

Celebrated though the large Buddhist monasteries of Eastern India, which received rich patronage under kings of the Pāla dynasty (8th to 12th century CE), are as centres of learning, little is known at present about the manuscripts produced at them, or about their libraries, and the organisation of those libraries.

This project will study a corpus of manuscripts of Buddhist (mainly esoteric, tantric) works identified recently as having been copied at Vikramaśīla in the latter half of the twelfth century (shortly before the destruction of the monastery, probably by Turkic Muslim forces). These manuscripts will be studied from multiple perspectives: their codicological (including palaeographical) features, the textual and paratextual evidence within the manuscripts themselves, and external evidence, including that of information from Tibetan sources on Vikramaśīla and its history.



Ruins of the Vikramaśīla monastery (Antichak, Bhagalpur District, Bihar)

Objectives

With a multi-pronged approach which takes into account evidence of different types, this project aims at uncovering the practices of the scriptorium and library of Vikramaśīla, one of the largest and intellectually most influential of the Eastern Indian Buddhist monastic establishments. As a second, subsidiary, goal, the fate of the manuscripts of this corpus, which were dispersed to Nepal and Tibet, will be investigated, taking into account also the evidence provided by apographs, of which the earliest dates to the thirteenth century.

Cooperation with other subprojects

Working together closely with other subprojects in General Area C, a comprehensive and multifaceted picture of the ways in which collections function within manuscript cultures will be built up. Since visual organization and, above all, paratexts play an important role in establishing the manuscripts of the corpus as having a single provenance, the subproject will also both benefit from and contribute to the work of General Areas A and B.



fol. 23r of Kaiser Library, MS 231 (Kamalanātha's commentary on the Hevajratantra), with colophon mentioning a Paṇḍitabhikṣu Jinaśrīmitra as having had the manuscript copied.