



Fig. 1: Archaeological site in Bihar, district of Bhagalpur, which has been identified with the monastery of Vikramaśīla.



Fig. 2: Separate building at the archaeological site Vikramaśīla which is possibly the library building.

## Article

# The Library at the East Indian Buddhist Monastery of Vikramaśīla: an Attempt to Identify Its Himalayan Remains\*

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## 1. Introduction and historical overview

The celebrated East Indian<sup>1</sup> Buddhist monastery of Vikramaśīla<sup>2</sup> was founded in the early ninth century and was deserted and destroyed around 1200. This period roughly coincides with the reign of the Pāla dynasty over Eastern India. In fact, it was the third Pāla king, Devapāla (r. c. 812–850), who founded the monastery as a royal establishment.<sup>3</sup> Later, the fortunes of the dynasty were ever changing and there were times when its power extended over a significantly smaller part of the region. The Pāla kings were favourably disposed towards Buddhism, and Vikramaśīla was not the only flourishing large monastery at the time in East India. Sanderson, for instance, singles out the monasteries of Nālandā, Somapura, Trikaṭuka, Uddāṇḍapura and Jagaddala as the most eminent great monasteries of the

region and period along with Vikramaśīla.<sup>4</sup> Vikramaśīla arguably eclipsed all other important monasteries during its existence, however. There is a relatively large amount of information available about its history, especially from Tibetan sources. The *Rgya gar chos 'byung* ('History of Buddhism in India'), which was written in 1608 by the Tibetan scholar Tāranātha<sup>5</sup>, contains a wealth of information on Vikramaśīla and is generally bestowed with a high level of credibility as an account of what represents a relatively late period of Indian Buddhism.<sup>6</sup> It is extremely likely that an archaeological site excavated in recent decades near the south banks of the River Ganges holds the remains of the monastery (fig. 1).<sup>7</sup> This area now belongs to the Indian state of Bihar. However, it is close to the border with West Bengal.<sup>8</sup>

Vikramaśīla is often labelled as a 'monastic university' – a designation that certainly is not inadequate if one considers that a great number of famous teachers with a wide array of scholarly and religious interests were active there, attracting students from East India as well as from faraway regions. For our present purposes, it is important to note that there was intensive contact with Buddhists from the Kathmandu Valley<sup>9</sup> – a relatively isolated region in the Himalayas which

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<sup>1</sup> In this contribution, 'East Indian' or 'Eastern India' refers roughly to the area that is now politically divided into the present-day states of Bihar and West Bengal in the Republic of India and the independent country of Bangladesh (which corresponds to historical East Bengal).

<sup>2</sup> Generally, the monastery is designated more fully as *vikramaśīlamahāvihāra* ('The Great Monastery of Vikramaśīla') or as *vikramaśīladevamahāvihāra* ('The Great Monastery of King Vikramaśīla'). From the latter form of the name, it is clear that the monastery received its designation from the byname of a Pāla king (see Majumdar 1943, 115 and n. 1, cf. *ibid.*, 123). *Vikramaśīla* literally means 'He who has prowess as an inborn or acquired character trait'. The name of the monastery also appears in a shortened form, namely as *vikrama* (Sanderson 2009, 91). In secondary literature, the name is often spelt as *vikramaśīlā* (mentioned in *ibid.* 88, n. 156), which means 'Vikrama's rock' or 'rock of prowess'. Although the same spelling also occurs once in a Sanskrit colophon composed by a Tibetan scribe (see Yonezawa, 2014, 1236) and Tibetan legend has it that a demon called Vikrama was defeated at this place (see Niyogi 1980, 105), this certainly represents a secondary development.

<sup>3</sup> Sanderson 2009, 90f., cf. *ibid.*, 87.

<sup>4</sup> Sanderson 2009, 88. See *ibid.* for basic information about these institutions.

<sup>5</sup> English translation by Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya (1990).

<sup>6</sup> See Sanderson 2009, 89f.

<sup>7</sup> See Verma 2011 and especially Sanderson 2009, 88, n. 156.

<sup>8</sup> See Verma 2011, 1 for a more detailed localisation.

<sup>9</sup> Unlike today, the term 'Nepal' (or rather the Sanskrit word *nepāla* from which the English name is ultimately derived) previously referred almost exclusively to the Kathmandu Valley and its immediate surroundings

has belonged to the Indian cultural sphere and Sanskrit manuscript culture since antiquity – and there was also interaction with Tibetans, who were very active in absorbing Indian Buddhism during this period. A further feature of Vikramaśīla that should be highlighted here is the fact that it was a stronghold of tantric or esoteric ritualistic practice and scholarship. Other tantric forms of religion were also popular at the time, in particular among the Śaivas – adherents of the branch of so-called ‘Hinduism’ in which the God Śiva and his wife occupy a central position.<sup>10</sup>

Around the year 1200, the flourishing Eastern Buddhist activity fuelled not least by the great monastic centres mentioned above received a severe blow from which it never recovered. This happened in the course of political and military events that were finally to lead to the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in 1206. This in turn marked the beginning of long-term Muslim rule in North India. During this time, the Afghan commander Muhammad Bakhtiyar led several raids in the region of present-day Bihar and also succeeded in conquering Bengal a few years later.

It should be noted that there is some debate as to how much of the harm done to Eastern Buddhist monasteries during this period was due mainly to Muhammad Bakhtiyar – or to any other Muslim – rather than to Hindus who were hostile towards Buddhism.<sup>11</sup> In any case, not only Tibetan Buddhist historical sources, but also the principal Islamic history of the period, namely *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*, which was written circa 1260,<sup>12</sup> leave no doubt that Bakhtiyar’s military expeditions also included attacks on Buddhist monasteries.

The pertinent passage from the latter source deserves to be cited here, not only because it represents an important historical piece of evidence regarding the destruction of great monastic centres in the course of the Islamic conquest, but also since manuscripts play a major role in the text. The author names an eyewitness as his source and continues as follows:

... they reached the gateway of the fortress and began the attack ... and they captured the fortress, and acquired great booty. The greater number of the inhabitants of that place were Brahmans, and the whole of those Brahmans had their heads shaven; and they were all slain. There were a great number of books there; and, when all these books came under the observation of the Musalmāns, they summoned a number of Hindūs that they might give them information respecting the import of those books; but the whole of the Hindūs had been killed. On becoming acquainted [with the contents of those books], it was found that the whole of that fortress and city was a college, and in the Hindū tongue, they call a college ... Bihār.<sup>13</sup>

Bihār, which was subsequently applied to the whole region and is now the name of one state in the Republic of India, corresponds to the Sanskrit word *vihāra* – the common Old Indo-Aryan designation for a Buddhist monastery. The designation of this institution as a ‘college’ becomes easily understandable when one considers the important role played by the great monasteries of the time in the transmission of knowledge. The ‘Brahmans’ who ‘had their heads shaven’ is another relatively unambiguous reference to Buddhist monks, although their designation as ‘Brahmans’ is not quite correct. Various different identifications of this monastery can be found in secondary literature, but Uddanāpura, which was situated to the west of Vikramaśīla, is probably the most likely candidate.<sup>14</sup>

However, it seems that none of the great monasteries specified at the beginning of the article remained unaffected by the military and political developments of the time. A fairly early source, the biography of the Tibetan monk Chag lo tsā ba Chos rje dpal (1197–1264), written by his disciple Chos dpal dar dpyang,<sup>15</sup> mentions in the account of a journey to India which took place circa 1234–1236 that Vikramaśīla did not exist anymore since it had been completely destroyed

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Consequently, the two geographical terms have been regarded as interchangeable in this article.

<sup>10</sup> For an excellent overview of the history of Indian Tantrism, see Sanderson 2009. Sanderson argues that the development of Tantrism coincided with the rise of the Śaiva religion to dominance and that this in turn was responsible for tantric elements spreading to the other religions of India.

<sup>11</sup> See n. 16 and 18 below.

<sup>12</sup> For a brief introduction to the author and work, see Bazmee Ansari 2015.

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<sup>13</sup> Raverty 1970, vol. 1, 552. The periods of ellipsis mark my own intervention; the rest of the text is given exactly as it is printed in Raverty’s translation.

<sup>14</sup> See Wink 1997, 147, for example.

<sup>15</sup> Translation (with original Tibetan text) in Roerich 1959; critical edition in Zongtse 1981. Regarding the question of the autobiographical elements or citations of Chos rje dpal’s own words contained in the text, see de Jong 1962, 168.

by Muslim forces.<sup>16</sup> The same source reports that Nālandā was still partly functioning, however, there were few monks left who could take care of the remains of the monastery.<sup>17</sup> It is not necessary to assume that all the great monasteries were destroyed during the Muslim conquest in order to explain why they disappeared during this period; these large institutions needed royal support in order to function, and it is only natural to assume that the new rulers were not particularly interested in providing this support.<sup>18</sup>

The vast majority of the manuscripts which were stored in the libraries of the monastic universities are lost. A certain proportion of them were clearly destroyed in the course of fighting.<sup>19</sup> Others survived the attacks and remained at their original location, as suggested by the Muslim source cited

<sup>16</sup> Roerich's translation (1959, 64): 'Vikramaśīla was still existing in the time of the Elder Dharmasvāmin and the Kashmir Paṇḍita, but when the Dharmasvāmin visited the country there were no traces of it left, the Turushka [i.e. Turkic (M. D.)] soldiery having razed it to the ground, and thrown the foundation stones into the Gaṅgā.' Cf. also the original text (*ibid.*, 12; Zongtse 1981, 50/51) and the pertinent remarks in Roerich's introduction (Roerich 1959, XLIf.). Tāranātha (Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya 1990, 319) also states that Muslim forces destroyed Vikramaśīla. Verardi (2011, 36f, cf. 392f. n. 198 and 199) strongly opposes the idea that Muslim forces were responsible for the destruction of Vikramaśīla. Instead, he ascribes it to anti-Buddhist aggression on the part of the Hindus. If I understand him correctly, he even opines that the Tibetan accounts, which contradict his assumption, arise from active manipulation of the historical truth by the Indian non-Buddhists (*ibid.*, 393, n. 199).

<sup>17</sup> Roerich 1959, 90ff.

<sup>18</sup> It has long been known that there is also evidence of destruction carried out by anti-Buddhist Indians before and during the Muslim conquest (see Steinkellner 2004, 9, n. 18, for example). Verardi's (2011) narrative of the events is rather extreme, however, since it almost assumes the form of a conspiracy theory (cf. n. 16). According to him, anti-Buddhist Indians allied themselves with the Muslim invaders against the Buddhists. The aforementioned attack on a monastery which is narrated in the Muslim history, for instance, is seen by Verardi as the result of a 'trap prepared' by the Indian Sena king 'at the expense of the Buddhists' (*ibid.*, 362). It is true that the Muslim invaders appear to have simply mistaken the Buddhist monastery as a fortress and probably assumed that it was packed with armed soldiers (Tāranātha [Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya 1990, 318] at least relates that the monastery was fortified to a certain extent and that some soldiers were stationed there). However, I fail to understand how Verardi arrives at his bold conclusion that this misunderstanding was due to active manipulation of the Muslims by the Hindu rulers. At any rate, the matter needs no further consideration here. For the present purposes, it is not important whether the destruction of Buddhist monasteries and the loss of royal support can be attributed to Muslims and Hindus who were not well disposed or were even hostile towards Buddhism, or just to Muslims alone.

<sup>19</sup> See Steinkellner (2004, 9), for example, who refers to Nālandā, but also to the great monasteries in general. If the destruction of Vikramaśīla was as far-reaching as cited by the historical sources above and as partly corroborated by archaeological evidence which includes signs of a conflagration taking place (see Verma 2011, 10), it is likely that violent destruction was the main reason for the loss of the vast majority of these manuscripts, at least at this location.

above. However, many of the manuscripts undoubtedly fell prey to natural decay. The climate of the Indo-Gangetic Plain is not favourable to the long-term preservation of palm-leaf manuscripts. Most of the texts also got lost since there were no longer sufficient funds or individuals available to copy the old manuscripts. There is ample evidence of the fact that Buddhist practice and scholarship continued to exist in Eastern India for some centuries.<sup>20</sup> However, activities were reduced to a much smaller scale than previously before finally coming to a complete halt. Other parts of India and neighbouring countries remained unaffected by the political events mentioned above, at least for a certain length of time. Historical sources indicate that many Buddhist scholars who were active in Eastern India fled, travelled or emigrated to these regions around 1200,<sup>21</sup> and it is only natural to assume that they took manuscripts with them whenever it was possible. In a couple of cases, one can associate certain extant manuscripts from Eastern India with one of these travellers to other regions. One illuminated manuscript contains a later addition in the Tibetan language that provides a list of its successive owners. The first person mentioned is the Indian monk Śākyaśrībhadrā, while the other names are those of Tibetan scholars.<sup>22</sup> Śākyaśrībhadrā originally hailed from Kashmir, but spent a long time studying and working in East Indian monasteries. He is often designated as 'the last abbot' of Vikramaśīla. However, some of the Tibetan sources telling of his life suggest that he also had similarly strong ties with the two other great monasteries of Bihar, namely Nālandā and Uddanāpura. The Muslim raids on Bihar seemingly induced him to flee eastwards and relocate to the great monastery of Jagaddala where he is said to have stayed for three years. After that, Śākyaśrībhadrā spent a long

<sup>20</sup> This does not seem to be well known, although it is anything but a new and original insight, as can be seen by certain remarks to the same effect in Kern 1896, 134. It is not until recently that this fact has been fully acknowledged and that certain aspects of late East Indian Buddhism have been studied in some detail. In particular, attention should be drawn to a forthcoming study on three extant Eastern Indian Buddhist manuscripts from the fifteenth century (Hori, 2015). Also relevant are publications dealing with the Bengalese Buddhist pandit Vanaratna (1384–1468; see esp. Ehrhard 2002; Ehrhard 2004; Isaacson 2008) and with other late Buddhist masters from Eastern India (Shastri 2002; McKeown 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya 1990, 319; Filliozat 1981, 69–71; Steinkellner 2004, 9–11.

<sup>22</sup> Huntington and Huntington 1990, 185–189; cf. Bautze-Picron 1998, 17.

period in Tibet before returning to Kashmir.<sup>23</sup> In view of the fact that he obviously stayed at several different monastic centres, it is unclear whether he obtained the manuscript from the library of Vikramaśīla or from another East Indian monastery. The paratexts point to it being associated with Nālandā, at least as its original place of production.<sup>24</sup> Another extant manuscript seems to have belonged to Dānaśīla, the monk who accompanied Śākyaśrībhadrā on his journey from Jagaddala to Tibet.<sup>25</sup> Other manuscripts were certainly brought by travellers to regions other than their East Indian place of origin in the centuries predating this event. However, old manuscripts were only able to survive to the present day in regions with a favourable climate and a population that continued to show some interest in them. Correspondingly, almost all extant East Indian Buddhist manuscripts were found either in the Kathmandu Valley or in various places in Tibet.

After these introductory remarks on the monastery of Vikramaśīla and its broader regional and historical context, it is time to focus the discussion on the question of what is known about the monastery library or about the role played by the manuscript collections stored there. The archaeological evidence will be presented first. The scholars involved in the excavation of the site tend to the assumption that the library of Vikramaśīla was a separate building situated outside the fortified square that formed the main monastery, but connected to it by a narrow passage (fig. 2).<sup>26</sup> The reason for this assumption is the fact that the building seems to have been provided with a device for ‘forced draft ventilation’, which might have been used for better preservation of palm-leaf manuscripts, given the

climate of the Indo-Gangetic Plain.<sup>27</sup> It is very hard to find further evidence to back the library hypothesis, however, and other possible functions of the building cannot be excluded. The Somapura monastery, for example, which was founded at roughly the same time or slightly earlier than Vikramaśīla<sup>28</sup> and is built according to the same plan, contains a very similar architectural feature in the same location which excavators have interpreted as the bathing area of the monks (Dikshit 1938, 30f.). However, even if the building at Vikramaśīla has been correctly identified as the library, its remains are not likely to give us any particularly valuable clues on its contents and how it was organised beyond what has been said above.<sup>29</sup> Regarding evidence from historical textual sources, the situation seems to be even worse. As mentioned above, there are fairly good sources about the monastery as a whole, especially in the form of texts written in Tibetan. However, the present author is not aware of any pre-modern sources composed by Tibetans or others which mention a library or contain any other relevant remarks about a collection or set of manuscripts at the monastery of Vikramaśīla.

Does this imply that conducting research into the library of Vikramaśīla may be chasing a phantom? It certainly does not. Although oral text composition and transmission appear to have always been held in particularly high esteem in ancient and medieval India, there is plenty of evidence pointing to the fact that manuscripts played a crucial role even long before this period.<sup>30</sup> The great number of Buddhist monastic scholars active in Vikramaśīla – many of them also known as prolific authors of texts – is hard to explain against this background without the assumption that considerable quantities of manuscripts were produced and stored there.

<sup>23</sup> For this and further information on Śākyaśrībhadrā’s life, the reader is referred to Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya 1990, 316f., 329, 434f. and especially to Jackson 1990 and van der Kuijp 1994.

<sup>24</sup> The manuscript was originally written in the eleventh century by Ānanda, who was a resident of the monastery of Nālandā, but it was partly renewed in the twelfth century. See Huntington and Huntington 1990, 185–189; cf. also the pertinent passages in Kim 2013, which can be found by referring to *ibid.*, 368, left column s.v. MS A4. If I have correctly deciphered colophon folio 301<sup>v</sup> as given in *ibid.*, 44 (the image is very small), the passage on Ānanda (line 4) runs as follows: ‘[This manuscript] has been written by Ānanda, the preacher/reciter of Buddhist scriptures/doctrine (*dharmabhāṇaka*), a resident of glorious Nālandā’ (Sanskrit in diplomatic transcription: *śrīnālandāvasthitadharmabhāṇakānānandena likhitam iti ||*).

<sup>25</sup> See Watanabe 1998, p. III. On the folios of the manuscript, I was only able to trace the first of the marks indicating Dānaśīla’s ownership that are mentioned in Watanabe 1998, p. V, n. 11.

<sup>26</sup> See Verma 2011, 9f., 49.

<sup>27</sup> See *Indian Archaeology, A Review 1978–79*, [appeared 1981]; 43; Verma 2011, 49.

<sup>28</sup> The Somapura monastery was, according to Sanderson (2009, 90f.), probably built by Dharmapāla, who was the predecessor of the founder of Vikramaśīla (King Devapāla).

<sup>29</sup> See also *Indian Archaeology: A Review 1978–79*, [appeared 1981], 42: ‘No antiquities worth mentioning were recovered from this area, except one almost complete sprinkler and a few fragments of the same type, besides a few bases of stone pillars.’

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Steinkellner 2004, 6: ‘When Buddhism first came to Tibet in the 7th to 9th centuries, it was no longer a tradition with a primarily oral culture of transmission. Authoritative scriptures had long been developed into various canons, and writing and copying had become part of Buddhist life soon after the beginning of our era....’

There is, however, one conclusion that can be safely drawn from the dearth of archaeological and textual evidence of the vanished library of Vikramaśīla. To find out something of relevance about this topic, one must rely on the material Himalayan remains of the institution – in other words, the extant manuscripts.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, it is anything but easy to prove that a significant number of the manuscripts that have been preserved in Nepal and Tibet were actually produced or stored in this particular monastery. It is this attempt at attributing as many manuscripts as possible to Vikramaśīla to which the present article is devoted.

Most of the manuscripts dealt with in the following section were discovered in Kathmandu in modern times and are stored there either in the National Archives, Kathmandu (NAK) or in the Kaiser Library (KL). For the present purpose, digital colour photographs of the materials were available and access to the original manuscript folios was provided during research trips to Kathmandu. Other manuscripts were discovered in Tibet in the 1930s by two modern-day scholars, Rāhula Sāṅkrītyāyana and Giuseppe Tucci,<sup>32</sup> who made independent research trips to the region. There are digitised black and white photographs available which were taken during their journeys.

<sup>31</sup> The situation is similar regarding the other monasteries of Eastern India, except perhaps in the case of Nālandā. This institution is said to have had three large library buildings (references to this fact are virtually omnipresent in secondary literature). They seem to be attested quite early in Tibetan sources (see Steinkellner 2004, 9, n. 18). I am not aware of any corroborating evidence of their existence from archaeological excavations or from Chinese texts. However, the latter sources inform us at least about the large number of Sanskrit manuscripts brought back from India by Chinese pilgrims. The case of Xuanzang (602–664) is especially interesting in this regard. He is said to have managed to bring 520 manuscripts from India to China; 50 more items got lost while he was crossing the Indus (Beal 1914, 214, 192). Furthermore, a classification of the 520 manuscripts according to their contents has been preserved. Unfortunately, the manuscripts are no longer extant, and the above-mentioned list does not contain the individual text titles. However, 75 of the texts are available in Xuanzang's own Chinese translation (ibid., 214; Mayer 1992, 119f. and 279, n. 613). One can be fairly certain that most of the manuscripts he took with him, if not all of them, were copies made at the monastery of Nālandā. Regarding other monasteries of Eastern India, the following fact also deserves to be mentioned at this point: an anthology of Sanskrit poetry that can be assumed to have been written at the monastery of Jagaddala sometimes contains shelf numbers as a reference to the sources used by the compilers, as has been pointed out by the editors of the text (Kosambi and Gokhale 1957, XXVIII).

<sup>32</sup> See Sāṅkrītyāyana 1935, 1937 and 1938 and Sferra 2009 for catalogues of these materials. In the table appended to this article, the manuscripts from Tibet are referred to by these catalogue entries, whereas shelf numbers are provided for the materials stored in the two Nepalese institutions.

## 2. Extant manuscripts from Vikramaśīla

All manuscripts dealt with in this section have certain common features which are typical of manuscripts from Eastern India and Nepal produced in this period. As a general background for the following discussion, it may be useful to mention some of these features at this point. All of the manuscripts were written on palm leaves using black ink, with the lines of text running in *scriptio continua* from left to right and parallel to the oblong sides of the writing supports. The text is set apart from the edges of the leaves by margins on all four sides. This central text block is interrupted by either one or two holes (the number of holes depends on the length of the leaves) which serve the purpose of tying the loose pages together using string. The size of the cleared space around the holes varies from one manuscript to the next and is consequently an important feature of the layout.<sup>33</sup>

The easiest way by far to identify the exact place of origin of Sanskrit manuscripts found in modern times in the Kathmandu Valley or in Tibet is to find explicit remarks in the paratexts, especially in the scribal colophons. Unfortunately, scribes were sporadic in taking the trouble to provide this kind of information. Only five manuscripts could be identified as products of Vikramaśīla this way.<sup>34</sup> A sixth manuscript (stored in the Cleveland Museum of Art [1938.301]) contains paratexts which also refer to a monastery called Vikramaśīla,<sup>35</sup> but the fact that it is dated according to the Nepalese era seems to indicate that it is more likely to have been produced in another ancient monastery which bore the same name and still exists in Kathmandu.<sup>36</sup> It has been suggested that the manuscript was indeed produced in Nepal, but then brought to the Indian Vikramaśīla monastery and dedicated there as a religious gift.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> For an illustration of this short description, the reader is referred to fig. 3 of this article.

<sup>34</sup> See table 1, I.1–5 (henceforth, references to items in this table will be made by giving the numbers in parentheses in the main text). In the case of the *Pañcarakṣā* MS (I.2), only a catalogue entry was available (Luo 1985, pp. 61–65, no. 28; I am indebted to Professor Kazuo Kano for drawing my attention to this entry). The pertinent part of the colophon appears in a somewhat corrupted form.

<sup>35</sup> See Hollis 1939.

<sup>36</sup> See below for a more detailed discussion of the Nepalese Vikramaśīla monastery.

<sup>37</sup> Pal and Meech-Pekarik 1988, 34. See also Melzer and Allinger 2012, 264 (under the heading N8) for further references to literature on this manuscript.

Each of the five manuscripts exhibits one or more peculiarities which sets it apart from the others. For the present purposes, it is not necessary to study them in great detail. However, some of their features will be highlighted as an illustration of the varied nature of manuscript production at the monastery of Vikramaśīla. The British Library manuscript Or. 6902 (I.1) is the only one that is illustrated. It is also worth noting that the manuscript is dated. The date given is the fifteenth year of King Gopāla (i.e. circa 1145).<sup>38</sup> The colophon<sup>39</sup> states the ‘Glorious Great Monastery of the King Vikramaśīla’ (*śrīmadvikramaśīladevamahāvihāra*) as the place of production. The manuscript is designated as a religious gift (*deyadharmā*), which means that the donor, an elder monk called Sumatīśrīmitra, hoped to obtain religious merit by funding its production or by donating it to the monastery. It contains the text of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, an important scripture in Mahāyāna Buddhism. The textual content is quite typical of manuscripts produced primarily for the sake of religious merit and enriched with miniature paintings. The script has recently been labelled as a calligraphic standard script, which was widely used in these artefacts.<sup>40</sup> Another manuscript (I.2) contains a fixed set of five texts that are likewise considered as Buddha’s words. Besides the fact that the production and worship of this type of manuscript was thought to be meritorious, it was also believed to have an apotropaic function, as is indicated by the name given to the set of texts (‘The five kinds of protection’). The manuscript of the *Vinayasūtra* by Guṇaprabha (I.3) was intended to fulfil

functions of an entirely different nature: it was primarily meant to be studied or consulted with regard to matters pertaining to the field of monastic law and is written in Tibetan rather than Indian script, which strongly suggests that it was copied by one of the many Tibetan visitors to Vikramaśīla.<sup>41</sup> Another manuscript (I.4) is more or less comparable in the way it was intended to be used, but completely different as regards its textual content. It contains a very important and influential exegetical text from tantric or esoteric Buddhism, namely the *Hevajratantrapiṇḍārthaṭīkā* (also known as *Ṣaṭsāhasrikā*) composed in approximately 1000 CE by an author who claimed to be the celestial *bodhisattva* Vajragarbhā. The colophon states that ‘Viśuddhirakṣita has commissioned the copying [of this manuscript] at the Glorious Great Monastery of Vikramaśīla for his own welfare and for the welfare of others’. Around two syllables of this sentence are lost; they might have specified Viśuddhirakṣita as being a *bhikṣu* (‘monk’).<sup>42</sup>

The last of the five manuscripts (I.5) is very similar in some aspects, including the subject matter and the fact that it mentions a commissioner, but different in terms of the size of the leaves and the layout. More importantly, the colophon and codicological features of this manuscript serve as an excellent starting point for the further identification of Vikramaśīla manuscripts. The colophon runs as follows: ‘The scholar-monk<sup>43</sup> Jinaśrīmitra has commissioned this manuscript to be written for his own sake and for the sake of other [sentient beings], and it has been written while staying in the monastery of Vikramaśīla by [the scribe] called Mahīdhara’.<sup>44</sup> There are four further extant manuscripts that do not contain

<sup>38</sup> Losty 1982, 32; cf. Weissenborn 2012, 292. For further secondary literature on this manuscript, see the references in Melzer and Allinger 2012, 262–263, to which Kim 2013 should now be added (see *ibid.* 368, left column s.v. C4 for references to the pertinent passages of her book).

<sup>39</sup> Citations of parts of the colophon can be found in Barnett 1910, 151 and Kim 2013, 315, n. 22. I also had occasion to study the colophon folio myself.

<sup>40</sup> According to Weissenborn (2012, 278f.), not only the British Library manuscript, but all but three other East Indian illuminated manuscripts which she lists are written in this calligraphic standard script, which was also used in Nepal. Furthermore, she points to the deplorable, but not untypical fact for Indian palaeography that there is no agreement about what the script should be called. Among the different alternative designations, she also mentions ‘Proto-Bengali’. However, the script of the illuminated manuscript British Library Or. 6902 is clearly completely different to the script generally referred to as ‘Proto-Bengali’. To the best of my knowledge, the same is true for many other East Indian illuminated manuscripts (if not the majority of them, as suggested by Weissenborn’s aforementioned claim that there is an almost omnipresent standard script). The British Library manuscript Or. 14203 (discussed in Losty 1989, 140–142), however, (which is not listed in Weissenborn 2012) can be regarded as written in Proto-Bengali script. See also n. 48 for details on the script designation ‘Proto-Bengali’.

<sup>41</sup> The colophon is cited and translated in Yonezawa 2014, 1236. For more on this manuscript, see also the pertinent remarks in the discussion of group II below.

<sup>42</sup> *śrīmadvikramaśīlamahāvihāre likhāpitam ++ ++ viśuddhirakṣitena svārtham parārtham ca || cha ||*

<sup>43</sup> Or rather, ‘the monk who holds the title of *paṇḍita*’. The Tibetan historian Tāranātha repeatedly mentions the fact that the kings officially conferred the academic degree of a *paṇḍita* upon inhabitants and students of Vikramaśīla (Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya 1990, 292, 304, 308).

<sup>44</sup> Folio 5<sup>r</sup>, line 7: *likhāpitā pustikeyam paṇḍitabhikṣujinaśrīmitreṇa svaparārthahetor iti || ✽ || likhitā ca vikramaśīlavihārāva{sthāva}sthāne mahīdharanāmneti || ✽ || ✽ ||* (✽ symbolises an ornamental sign; the braces enclose superfluous text that has already been deleted in the manuscript). In colophons, the participle *avasthita* often seems to be used in the sense of ‘residing in’ (though perhaps not always). However, I see no reason at present to believe that the substantive *avasthāna* has similar connotations. I assume that Mahīdhara was a layman, as will be seen below.

a paratextual reference to a place or scribe, but mention the same commissioner, namely the scholar-monk Jinaśrīmitra<sup>45</sup> (I.6–9).<sup>46</sup>

Apart from these manuscript colophons, the historical sources seem to be almost completely silent about a monk named Jinaśrīmitra. The only possible exception is the seal of someone called ‘Janaśrīmitra’, which was found at the excavated ruins of the monastery of Nālandā. Shastri conjectures a misspelling of ‘Jinaśrīmitra’ here.<sup>47</sup> Since this religious Buddhist name follows a very conventional pattern (one of the common epithets of the Buddha, namely ‘victor’ [*jina*], is combined with the equally common component *śrīmitra*), it is unclear – provided that Shastri’s conjecture is correct – whether we are dealing here with our scholar-monk Jinaśrīmitra or simply with another monk bearing the same name. The colophon cited above does not explicitly state that the scholar-monk Jinaśrīmitra belonged to the monastery of Vikramaśīla. However, as a commissioner of that particular manuscript (I.5), he seems to be linked to the place quite clearly. This does not, of course, exclude the possibility that the same Jinaśrīmitra also travelled from Vikramaśīla to Nālandā. At any rate, as will be seen below, the five manuscripts in the set (I.5–9) are closely linked by a great number of other common features, making it highly improbable that there were several different monk-scholars called Jinaśrīmitra involved in the production of the five manuscripts. The only possibility that cannot be ruled out completely is that one and the same Jinaśrīmitra was active as a commissioner of manuscripts at both places. However, in the absence of any further evidence and in view of the many similarities referred to above, it seems to be far more probable that the whole set of manuscripts was produced at Vikramaśīla. We know from historical sources that both monasteries entertained close relations. However, they were situated relatively far away from each other, and one would expect that this distance would have left at least some trace in the form of a distinctive feature on the material artefacts. Moreover, all of the manuscripts deal with esoteric Buddhist subject matter, and as we know from historical sources,

<sup>45</sup> In some manuscripts the name appears as Jinaśrīmitra, which merely results from a common variant spelling.

<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately, no photographs of one of these manuscripts (I.9) were available to us. We therefore had to rely completely on a catalogue entry in this case (Sāṅkṛtyāyana 1937, no. 303).

<sup>47</sup> Shastri 1942, 60.

Vikramaśīla was especially famous for its speciality in tantric practice and scholarly theory.

We have already pointed to two similarities in the manuscripts, namely the identity of the commissioner and the common subject matter. Let us now turn our attention to further shared features. The palm leaves are all of roughly uniform size, namely c. 56 × 5.5 cm. Each page contains exactly seven lines of script. They are interrupted by the space cleared for two binding holes, which divides the breadth of the leaves into three approximately equal parts. In each case, the space cleared for the holes interrupts the running text of the third to fifth lines only, and the breadth of the empty space is equal to around five to six letters of text (see fig. 3).

The script used for writing the texts is Proto-Bengali, which was widely used in East India around the twelfth century.<sup>48</sup> As its name indicates, this script already exhibits some features that later became the typical distinctive marks of the regional script of Bengal (and closely related scripts) as it is still used today, while other features have not developed yet. The Proto-Bengali script in itself was not standardised. Therefore, depending on the exact time and place of its use – and perhaps the predilections of individual scribes – many letters assumed distinctly different shapes. What is noteworthy about our five manuscripts is the fact that there are hardly any differences in the way that the letters are written. The size and width of the letters sometimes varies,

<sup>48</sup> Here, I adopt the designation of the script as already used by Bühler (1896, §26). In addition to the characteristic features mentioned by Bühler, one should perhaps also regard the way in which the medial vowels *e* and *o* are written. From the script tables, table VI, column X fits especially well to the Proto-Bengali manuscripts we are dealing with in this article. The letters are derived from the manuscript known as Cambridge Add.1699, dated 1198–1200. See also the specimen from this manuscript given in Bendall 1883, plate II.4, and the electronic tool *IndoSkrīpt: Eine elektronische Indische Paläographie* (downloadable from the website: <http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~falk/index.htm>, last date of access January 16, 2015). Bühler’s designation is still widely used, most notably by Dimitrov (2002), who recently published a palaeographical study of the next stage in script development, namely ‘Old Bengali’. Sāṅkṛtyāyana (1935, 1937, 1938) seems to use the designation ‘Māgadhī’ fairly consistently in the sense of ‘Proto-Bengali’, as becomes clear in the case of the manuscripts discussed in the present article (cf. Bandurski 1994, 19). Other common designations include ‘Gauḍī’ and ‘Proto-Bengali-cum-Proto-Maithilī’. Although the terminological differences are in some cases combined with conflicting views of script development and periodisation, all designations mentioned above share the common feature that they all refer to Eastern India by their very names and that they are inspired by the similarities to modern scripts from this region. Unfortunately, the confusion of terms is often much greater. The designation ‘Newari’ (a Nepalese script), for instance, is very misleading with regard to these Eastern Indian manuscripts (for examples, see Bandurski 1994, 19). One may suspect that this confusion is partly due to the fact that manuscripts were sometimes written in Nepal in a Proto-Bengali hand or at least in a hand exhibiting some of its features.

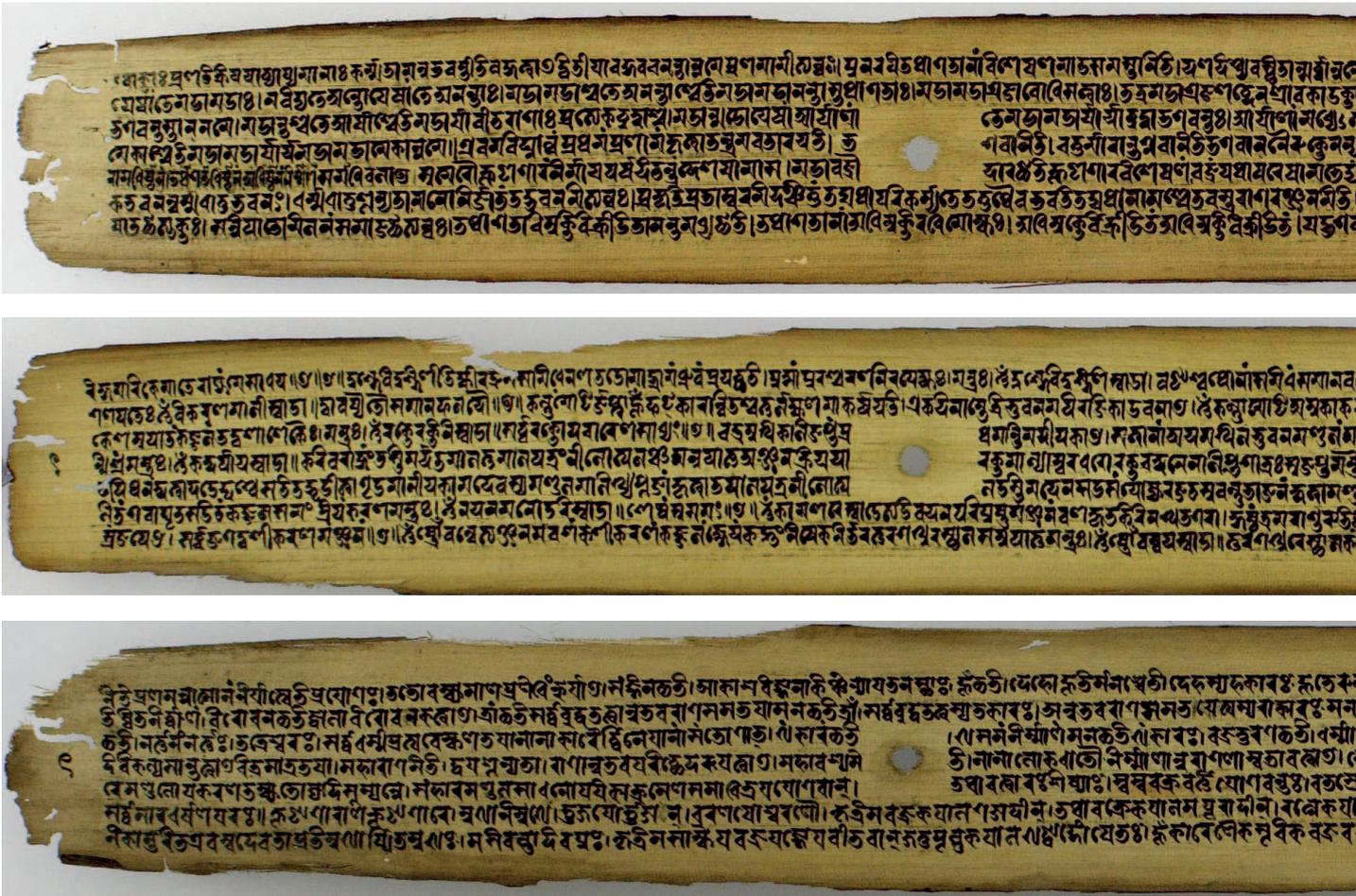
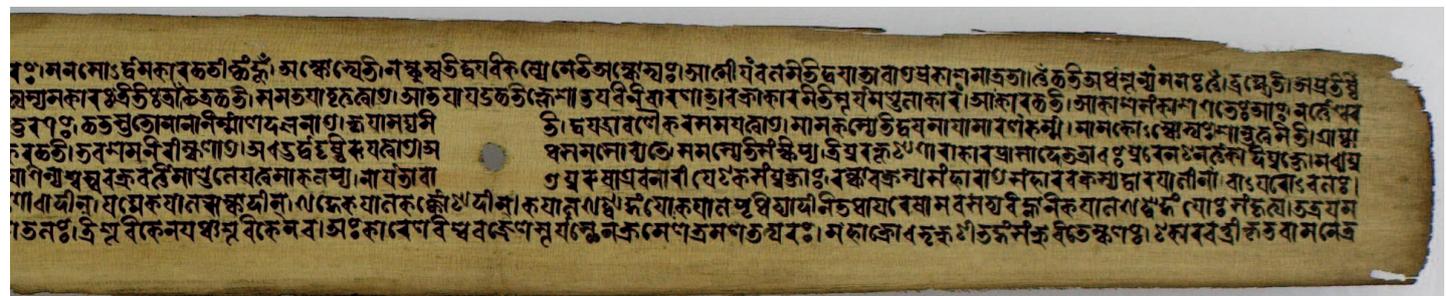
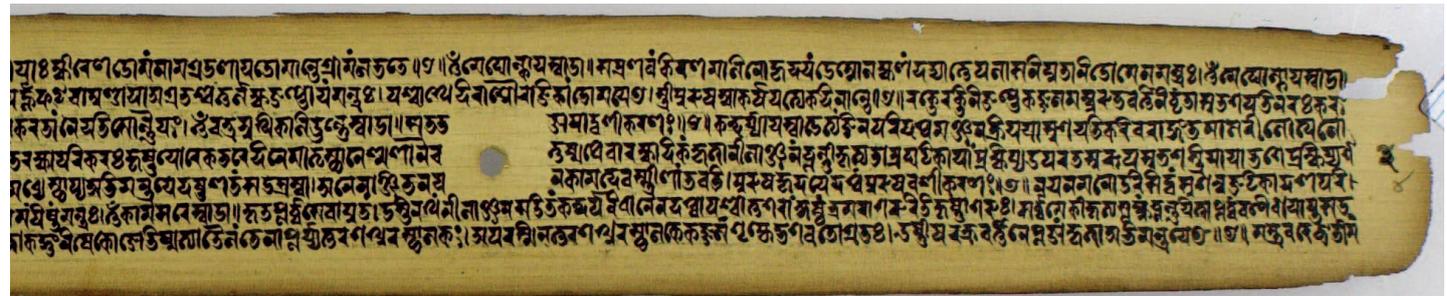
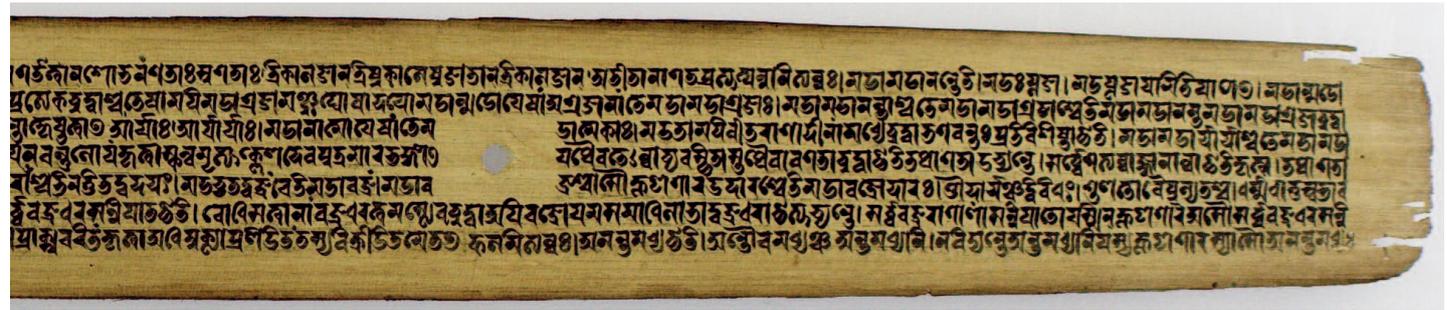


Fig. 3: Comparison of *Trisamayārājātikā*, f. 2<sup>a</sup> (I.6), *Kalyāṇakāmadhenuvivarāṇa*, f. 4<sup>a</sup> (I.5) and *Dākinīvajrapāṇījarapāṇīkā*, f. 4<sup>a</sup> (II.1); all folios are preserved under the shelf number NAK 5-20.

of course, but there are no obvious differences in the way in which the different parts of a letter are positioned in relation to one other or regarding the presence or absence of certain letter elements. The possibility that the manuscripts were all written by one and the same scribe, in other words, by Mahīdhara, who is mentioned in one of the colophons (I.5), cannot be totally excluded. If they were written by several scribes, all of the men must have belonged to the same scriptorium or have undergone the same training. Another interesting common feature is that all the manuscripts – as far as we could examine them by means of material analysis – were written with a carbon-based ink containing some admixture of mercury. The latter element is not unknown in ancient Indian scribal practice, but was certainly not an omnipresent feature and probably not even particularly widespread.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that the five manuscripts in the set (I.5–9) were discovered in two different places, namely in Kathmandu and in Zha lu (also spelt Zhwa lu) in Tibet. Almost all extant East Indian manuscripts have been found either in the Kathmandu Valley or in Tibet, since these were the only places that provided the cultural environment (Buddhists who held the late Indian varieties of their religion in high esteem) and climatic environment necessary for their preservation over such a long period of time. As will become clear later in the article, however, it is not unimportant to note that despite the relatively numerous potential storing places for Sanskrit manuscripts in Tibet, this part of the collection (I.6–9) ended up in only one place (Zha lu). One very important factor concerning the Jinaśrīmitra manuscripts is the fact that – unlike the case of the first four manuscripts from Vikramaśīla (I.1–4) – we are dealing here with a set of closely related standardised manuscripts produced by one specific group of people who were active at that particular monastery.

<sup>49</sup> See Delhey, Kindzorra, Hahn, and Rabin (2013-2014 [2015]).



There is another reason why the Jinaśrīmitra manuscripts are crucial in the attempt to identify as many extant manuscripts as possible from the library of Vikramaśīla. Up to now, 18 other manuscripts have been identified that share many but not all of the similarities that link the five Jinaśrīmitra manuscripts. Unlike the latter materials, however, they do not contain a reference to the place of their production or to Jinaśrīmitra (or to any other person involved in the production of the manuscript) in their colophons (or in any other paratexts), or else the colophon folios have simply not been preserved. As a result, the attempt to identify the provenance of manuscripts will rely almost entirely on non-textual evidence from now on and consequently assume a much more hypothetical form.<sup>50</sup> This approach is almost entirely original in the study of Eastern Buddhist manuscripts that are not illuminated, as is

the case for all of the manuscripts discussed on the following pages. There are therefore hardly any similar studies available which might provide worthwhile methodological guidance or additional corroborating evidence.<sup>51</sup>

All 18 manuscripts (II.1–18) have the same size of palm leaves and layout as the Jinaśrīmitra manuscripts (see fig. 3). This combination of two features was the decisive criterion for including the manuscripts in the present considerations. It should be noted, however, that four of them (II.15–18)

<sup>50</sup> For this reason, I differentiate between the Vikramaśīla manuscripts dealt with above and the other 18 manuscripts by assigning them to two different groups, namely group I and group II.

<sup>51</sup> Among the discussions about the provenance of illuminated manuscripts, an article by Losty (1989) can be singled out. In spite of the fact that relatively much of the evidence is based on a comparison of artistic painting styles, many of the problems he was faced with in his undertaking are quite similar to those encountered in the present discussion. Moreover, it is interesting in the present context that Losty assigns two illuminated manuscripts to the monastery of Vikramaśīla on account of the stylistic similarities of their miniatures to the British Library manuscript Or. 6902, in other words, to our manuscript I.1 (ibid., 95). For references to other (predominantly art-historical) discussions regarding Eastern Indian and Nepalese Buddhist illuminated manuscripts, many of which also address the problem of provenance, the reader is referred to Weissenborn 2012, and Melzer and Allinger 2012.



Fig. 4: Examples of differences between the Jinaśrīmitra manuscripts I.5–9 (left) and all the Proto-Bengali manuscripts in group II (right): *pha* (top), *ku* (bottom).

sometimes show deviations regarding the layout, whereas all of the other manuscripts seem to adhere strictly to the standard. In spite of these common features, it is not very likely that all – or even some – of these 18 manuscripts were commissioned by Jinaśrīmitra. To begin with, it has already been mentioned that the manuscripts in which the colophon is preserved do not mention his name. However, this does not by any means exclude the possibility that Jinaśrīmitra was involved in their production. What is more important is the fact that even the manuscripts which are written in typical Proto-Bengali script (II.1–14)<sup>52</sup> do not show as many similarities to the set of five Jinaśrīmitra manuscripts in terms of palaeographical features as the latter show to each other (see fig. 4). If the above mentioned alternative hypothesis (p. 11f.) should turn out to be true, namely that all five manuscripts were written by one and the same scribe rather than by different scribes, the features specific to the set of five may be explained as individual traits which were not shared by other scribes working for Jinaśrīmitra. Consequently, the only possibility that can currently be excluded outright is that the identity of the scribes who wrote one or more items in the set of five manuscripts and one or more of the 18 manuscripts is the same.

In any case, it is relatively unlikely that the similarity between all of these manuscripts is a mere coincidence. For the time being, we can formulate the working hypothesis that the combination of roughly identical palm-leaf sizes with a more or less standardised layout as described above is a feature peculiar to manuscripts produced at Vikramaśīla.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> I exclude manuscript II.15 here since it exhibits many features that set it apart from all of the other Proto-Bengali manuscripts. It should also be noted that two hands can be differentiated in manuscript II.3, one of which shows similar deviations to II.15.

<sup>53</sup> This does not, of course, exclude the possibility that manuscripts with different features were also produced there. This is obvious from the heterogeneous manuscripts I.1–4, which are also from Vikramaśīla.

This would imply that not only the Jinaśrīmitra manuscripts (I.5–9) are products of this monastery, but also all 18 manuscripts in group II.

A somewhat more probable modification of this working hypothesis could be formulated as follows: all manuscripts of this size that also *strictly* adhere to the features of the standardised layout are products of Vikramaśīla, while occasional deviations point to the assumption that we are dealing with imitations of the Vikramaśīla style. This would imply that the last four manuscripts (II.15–18) have a *different* origin. Remarkably, these four manuscripts also deviate from all the others in palaeographical terms, though not all to the same extent. Regarding one of them (II.15), it has already been mentioned above that there are certain idiosyncrasies which set it apart from the other Proto-Bengali manuscripts in our corpus.<sup>54</sup> Another of the manuscripts (II.16) combines the use of typical Proto-Bengali features with additional pronounced hooks at the top of the letters, which is the main characteristic of Nepalese hooked script. This script became a very common feature of Nepalese manuscripts for some centuries.<sup>55</sup> It is perhaps mistaken to assume that it was never used by Indians,<sup>56</sup> but it is somewhat more probable that a Nepalese scribe was at work here.<sup>57</sup> Finally, the last two manuscripts (II.17 and 18) are clearly written in Old

<sup>54</sup> See n. 52.

<sup>55</sup> See Bendall 1883, XXIII.

<sup>56</sup> Bühler 1896, 59 (§26) already ascribed the origin of the Nepalese hooks to Eastern Indian influence. However, this does not necessarily imply that this feature was already fully developed in Eastern India.

<sup>57</sup> Proto-Bengali features in Nepalese manuscripts are relatively common, as will be discussed below. To the best of my knowledge, the same cannot be said at present about the use of the hooked script in Eastern India. Therefore, I am now somewhat more sceptical about the possibility that this manuscript originates from Eastern India and that there was no Nepalese hand involved than I was in Delhey et al. (2014).



Fig. 5: Examples of differences between the Jinaśrīmitra manuscripts (I.5–9) and manuscripts II.1–16 (on the left) and manuscripts II.17–18 (on the right): the medial vowel 'o' (top) and the vowel 'i' in initial position (bottom).

Newari script, which seems to prove that Nepalese hands were active in this case. The many differences to the Proto-Bengali script of our corpus are easily recognisable. The different shape of the medial vowels may be singled out here. In particular, the letters 'e' and 'o' are written in a way that is still characteristic of the Newari script today, just as the different way of writing the same letters in our other manuscripts is characteristic of the Bengali script (see fig. 5).<sup>58</sup>

Regardless of whether one adopts the unmodified hypothesis or the modified one as outlined above, one may object that the assumption of a common place of origin is rather arbitrary. The Buddhist monasteries did not work in isolation from each other, but, as historical sources show, had regular contact not only in the form of travelling students and scholars, but also as regards the circulation of manuscripts. Therefore, there seems to be no *a priori* reason not to consider the possibility that the Jinaśrīmitra standard was commonly used in other centres of Buddhist manuscript culture as equally likely. The mere absence of positive evidence for its use in another monastery can hardly be taken as a strong argument if one considers that it was generally not very common to mention the place of production in the paratexts of the manuscript. The hypothesis formulated above therefore clearly needs further corroboration, which will be provided below. First, however, it is necessary to dwell a while on two fundamental problems of provenance, one of which is relevant not only for manuscripts from Vikramaśīla, but also for Eastern Indian manuscripts in general.

<sup>58</sup> Sāṅkṛtyāyana labels the script here *kuṭilā*. In all other manuscripts in groups I and II catalogued by him, he uses the designation *māgadhī*, which he seems to understand as being similar to the term 'Proto-Bengali' (cf. n. 48). He therefore agrees with me at least in the dividing line he draws between the two scripts.

The fact that most of the manuscripts are written in Proto-Bengali script leaves room for the possibility that they could have been written anywhere in Eastern India, since to my knowledge the script was used throughout the region. A particularly intricate problem is the fact that from the second half of the twelfth century onwards, a minority of extant manuscripts can be shown to have been written in Nepal (based on the names of Nepalese kings mentioned in the colophon or due to the fact that the year of copying is given in terms of the Nepal *saṃvat* era, which was only used in Nepal), although in terms of palaeography they exhibit some or even all of the characteristic features of the Proto-Bengali script.<sup>59</sup> This might be due either to the fact that some Nepalese scribes were influenced by East Indian ways of writing or that the manuscripts were written by immigrants from Eastern India.

Yet another problem should be mentioned in this context since it also concerns manuscripts which, according to their colophons, were written at Vikramaśīla, such as the Jinaśrīmitra manuscripts. There is an ancient monastery in Kathmandu which also sometimes goes by the name of Vikramaśīla (*mahāvihāra*) (fig. 6).<sup>60</sup> However, we can be very confident that at least the Jinaśrīmitra manuscripts were written in the Indian monastery of the same name.<sup>61</sup> For a start, religious names ending in *-mitra*, especially in *-śrīmitra*, seem to be virtually omnipresent in East Indian Buddhist monasticism, and there is no evidence I am aware of to suggest that there was also a strong predilection in the Kathmandu Valley for giving similar names upon ordination.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, it has already been mentioned that the designation of Jinaśrīmitra as *paṇḍitabhikṣu* (scholar monk) probably alludes to the academic title of *paṇḍita*, which was conferred

<sup>59</sup> The phenomenon of these Bengalisms was already observed by Bendall (1883, XXII).

<sup>60</sup> For information on this monastery and many other references, see Stearns 1996, 137 n. 37.

<sup>61</sup> In the case of the British Library manuscript (I.1), the East Indian origin is proven beyond reasonable doubt since it is dated according to the reign of a Pāla ruler.

<sup>62</sup> Dikshit (1938, 74) observes that groups of monks with identical endings to their names sometimes occur in the case of the Somapura monastery. One of the examples he mentions is the name component *-śrīmitra*. He interprets the phenomenon as being indicative of a succession or lineage of monks. More concretely, we are probably dealing here with an ordination lineage where the master who instructs an adept on monastic law (*vinaya*) and ordains him also chooses a religious name for him which is partly identical to his own name (see Jiang and Tomabechi 1996, XV n. 18, for example).

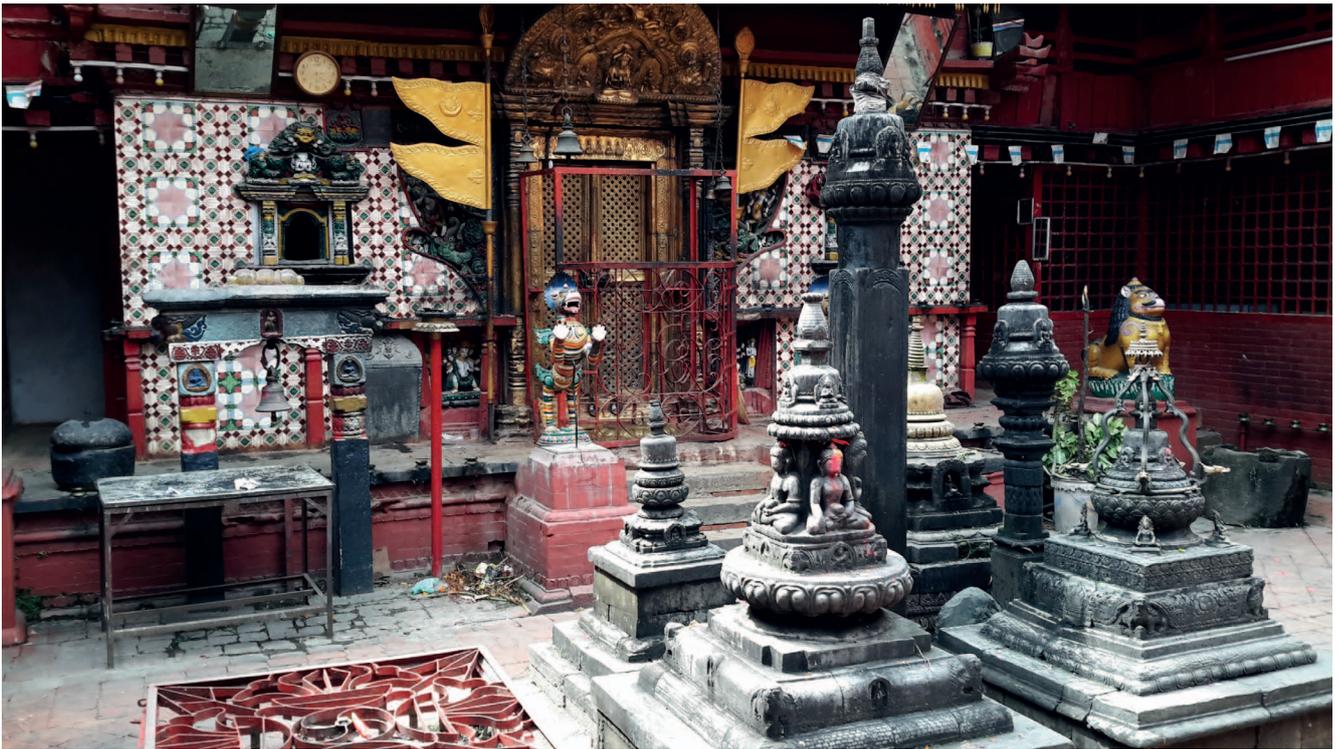


Fig. 6: Vikramaśīla monastery at Kathmandu, Nepal.

upon students of the Indian Vikramaśīla by the local kings.<sup>63</sup> One can hardly imagine that he received this title as an inhabitant of the Nepalese monastery, since the Kathmandu Valley had its own rulers. He must therefore have come to Nepal after the title was conferred upon him in Vikramaśīla. The question then arises as to the identity and home town of his scribe, Mahīdhara. His scribe bears a name that is typical for devotees of the gods Śiva or Viṣṇu rather than for Buddhists, and it is likely that he was simply a layman who came to Vikramaśīla in order to copy manuscripts for payment. Either Jinaśrīmitra would have taken him all the way to Nepal, which is a rather unlikely assumption, or he would have hired him in Nepal. The alternative that Mahīdhara was a local scribe cannot be excluded, but presupposes that he was able to write the manuscript in Proto-Bengali characters, although this was a skill much more typical of Eastern Indian scribes than natives of the Kathmandu Valley. Finally, it is known that palm-leaf manuscripts of such a large size became increasingly rare in Nepal after c. 1100.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> See n. 43.

<sup>64</sup> Trier (1972, 136) pointed out that the length of the manuscripts in Nepal greatly decreased throughout the centuries. His observation, which was based on a rather small number of manuscripts, can be easily verified and refined if one compares the length of the many dated Nepalese palm-leaf manuscripts that are contained in the title list of the *Nepal-German*

It is very likely that there were historical ties between the East Indian monastery and its Nepalese counterpart. It is hard to imagine that the very distinctive name of the Indian monastery was adopted by the monks of the Nepalese monastery by mere coincidence.<sup>65</sup> As a matter of fact, traditional accounts have it that Atiśa, who was a famous master at the Indian Vikramaśīla monastery and a key figure in the spreading of Buddhism to Tibet, founded the Nepalese counterpart when he crossed the Kathmandu Valley on his way to Tibet in the eleventh century. However, it seems very unlikely that both monasteries became so similar and closely intertwined in terms of organisation, manuscript production and actors involved in the process that the arguments against a Nepalese provenance of the Jinaśrīmitra manuscripts lose their validity. In my view, such a close resemblance would also imply that we should regard the relationship between the Indian monastery and its Nepalese namesake as being like that of an organisation's headquarters to its branch office. Even if this were the case, the present considerations regarding

*Manuscript Preservation Project* (<http://mycms3.rz.uni-hamburg.de/sfb950/content/NGMCP/ngmcp.xml>; last date of access September 22, 2015). How the similar sizes of manuscripts II.17 and 18 can be interpreted will be clarified below.

<sup>65</sup> See n. 2 above on the origin of this name.

identification of the provenance of manuscripts would not be rendered pointless; they would simply have to be modified to refer to Vikramaśīla in the sense of a single institution located in two different places rather than in the sense of a specific monastic complex situated in Eastern India.

To return to the question as to whether there is any corroboration for the hypothesis of a common place of origin shared by the Jinaśrīmitra manuscripts (I.5–9) and all or most of the 18 manuscripts in group II, let us start by examining the *\*Lakṣaṇaṭīkā* manuscript (II.14) more closely. This manuscript is unique in the present group since it is the only one for which there is relatively clear indirect evidence that it was produced in Vikramaśīla. This item belongs to a whole set of manuscripts, the main peculiarity of which is that the Sanskrit texts are written in Tibetan *dbu med* rather than in an Indian script. Another item in this set (I.3) has already been briefly mentioned above as one of the manuscripts which contain an explicit reference to Vikramaśīla in their colophons. The scribe refers to himself by a Sanskrit name, namely Dharmakīrti, but in view of the script used, he must have been a Tibetan. Yonezawa identifies him as the translator Chos grags, who is known to have collaborated with the famous master Abhayākaragupta of Vikramaśīla (active c. 1100).<sup>66</sup> The manuscript is written on palm leaves of the same dimensions as the Jinaśrīmitra manuscripts and the 18 items in group II. The first folio pages of the *\*Lakṣaṇaṭīkā* manuscript (II.14) are written in Proto-Bengali, and only then does the script change to Tibetan. Strikingly, the layout familiar from the Jinaśrīmitra manuscripts is observed as long as the script remains Indian. This particular manuscript does not mention the name of the scribe or the place of origin in the colophons. However, apart from the evidence of the aforementioned Vikramaśīla manuscript (I.3), yet another manuscript in the set contains at least a reference to the same scribe, Dharmakīrti (= Chos grags). Under these circumstances, it is certainly not implausible to assume that the parts of the *\*Lakṣaṇaṭīkā* manuscript (II.14) which are written in Tibetan script can also be ascribed to the same copyist. As a matter of fact, Yonezawa<sup>67</sup> seems to be fairly convinced that all Tibetan *dbu med* text in these manuscripts is written in the same hand. If this is true, then it is very likely that Chos grags copied all of these manuscripts and hence

also the *Lakṣaṇaṭīkā* manuscript (II.14) at Vikramaśīla. The Proto-Bengali part was probably copied by an Indian master or scribe from Vikramaśīla rather than by Chos grags. It is fairly certain in the present case that the place of copying really was the Indian monastery of Vikramaśīla and not the Nepalese monastery of the same name. The Eastern Buddhist monastery is well known for the fact that it was frequented by a great number of Tibetan students and scholars.<sup>68</sup> There is also evidence that a significant amount of Indian works were translated into Tibetan on site.<sup>69</sup> Most importantly, Abhayākaragupta, with whom Chos grags collaborated, resided at the Indian Vikramaśīla monastery. The fact that the Proto-Bengali sections observe the same layout as Jinaśrīmitra's manuscripts shows that this set of five is not the only instance of this feature occurring in Vikramaśīla.

A number of further arguments can be put forward in support of the association of several of the 18 manuscripts with Vikramaśīla. Taken alone, none of them can give us any certainty about Vikramaśīla as their place of origin, but taken together, they are certainly liable to corroborate our hypothesis. To begin with, it is remarkable that all five manuscripts found in modern times in Tibet rather than in Kathmandu have been deposited in the same Tibetan monastery, namely in Zha lu (II.9, 12–14, 18), as was the case with the Jinaśrīmitra manuscripts that were found in Tibet.<sup>70</sup> Regarding the type of texts copied, nearly half of the 18 manuscripts perfectly match the Jinaśrīmitra corpus and the character of Vikramaśīla as a stronghold of tantric practice and scholarship. In favour of the assumption that the two manuscripts from group II which deal with monastic law (II.12 and 13) may hail from Vikramaśīla, one can adduce that quite a few masters of Vikramaśīla were adherents of the school from which the texts contained in these manuscripts originate,<sup>71</sup> at least according to the

<sup>68</sup> Dutt 1962, 362.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> I touch here upon the question of how the fate of the manuscripts after they were taken from their East Indian origin may be used to corroborate our hypothesis on their relationship, but cite only the most simple argument one can adduce, since many more features of the manuscripts would have to be discussed at length in order to get the whole picture. This particular problem will be dealt with in much more detail in another publication which is currently in preparation.

<sup>71</sup> See Roth 1970, XVf., where the evidence is presented. At another place in the same work (ibid. XXV), Roth himself suggests the possibility that the manuscripts may have been written at the monastery of Vikramaśīla. However, he does not completely rule out the possibility that their place

<sup>66</sup> Yonezawa 2014:1236f. Dharmakīrti is the literal Sanskrit equivalent of the Tibetan name Chos grags.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

Tibetan historian Tāranātha. Another possible link between our manuscripts and Vikramaśīla is the fact that many of the non-anonymous texts are known to have been composed by learned inhabitants of the monastery, namely by Bhavabhaṭṭa (II.3), Abhayākaragupta (II.4), Ratnākaraśānti (II.5, 17, 18) and Jñānaśrīmitra (II.9). In the case of the manuscript which contains a text written by Abhayākaragupta (II.4), it is noteworthy that the manuscript belongs to the twelfth century CE based on its script and that Abhayākaragupta was active around 1100. In this context, one may also refer to the above-mentioned observation that his Tibetan collaborator Chos grags seemingly used and produced very similar manuscripts while at Vikramaśīla. However, one should also consider the fact that the fame of the Indian teachers mentioned above spread far beyond their own monastery. One can hardly imagine that manuscripts containing their texts were only produced at Vikramaśīla. Finally, it is worth noting that *all* of the manuscripts examined using material analysis methods (I.4, the Jinaśrīmitra manuscripts I.5, 6 and 7, and II.1, 3, 4, 8, 15, 16 and 17) are characterised by the fact that the palm leaves seem to have been treated with arsenic before the writing process started and that mercury was added to the ink used for the primary text.<sup>72</sup> While the first practice was very common in South Asia (though not necessarily in the case of East Indian palm-leaf manuscripts), the admixture of mercury was, as mentioned above, relatively rare and may therefore be a further hint to the common origin of the manuscripts.

The question of whether the last four manuscripts in the second group (II.15–18) were produced at locations other than Vikramaśīla (which would be in accordance with the modified working hypothesis) remains complicated. Their different palaeographical features and the deviations regarding the layout may suggest they were. In the case of the last two manuscripts (II.17–18), which are characterised by being penned in a typical Nepalese script from the period under consideration – and perhaps also in the case of the manuscript which exhibits mixed palaeographical features (II.16) – this different location would probably have been the Kathmandu Valley. The fact that such large palm leaves became increasingly rare in

Nepal from c. 1100 onwards (see above) may indicate that the blank palm leaves were brought to Nepal. Likewise, the admixture of mercury might imply that someone with a thorough knowledge of the material aspects of manuscript production at Vikramaśīla was involved in the preparation of the manuscripts, provided that the presence of mercury is not a mere coincidence. It is even possible that all three manuscripts (II.16–18) really were produced at the Nepalese Vikramaśīla monastery, perhaps after monks fled there in the course of the destruction<sup>73</sup> of the great monasteries of Eastern India around 1200.<sup>74</sup> Since one of these three manuscripts was found again in modern times in Zha lu, one can imagine that the Indian Vikramaśīla manuscripts were brought to the same place in the Kathmandu Valley and that part of the collection was brought to Tibet after the additional manuscript (II.18) had been produced. If one wants to identify all four deviating manuscripts (II.15–18) as original products of the Indian Vikramaśīla monastery, one has to presume that at least numbers II.17 and 18 were written by a visitor from Nepal (or, perhaps less likely, by a long-time resident of the monastery who hailed from Nepal). Similarly, some manuscripts were written in Tibetan script by a Tibetan visitor staying at Vikramaśīla (see above). The manuscript which exhibits strong traits of the hooked script (II.16) can also be interpreted as having been written by a Nepalese staying in Vikramaśīla (or perhaps by a person who hailed from another part of East India). At any rate, the assumption that this markedly different script was common among the people living in the area seems to be relatively unlikely. In the case of the

<sup>73</sup> Provided that the monks had enough time before the attack on their monastery and that blank palm leaves were available, it is only natural that, as active scholars, they would have tried to take not only important manuscripts with them on a long journey, but also some further writing materials.

<sup>74</sup> The example of the monk Vibhūticandra is interesting in this regard: he spent a certain period of time at the Indian monastery of Vikramaśīla in the late twelfth century before subsequently going eastwards to the monastery of Jagaddala in Bengal. He then travelled to Tibet (together with Śākyaśrībhadrā and Dānaśīla who were mentioned in the first part of this article), where he stayed for many years before settling down in Nepal. Finally, he became the abbot of the Nepalese monastery of Vikramaśīla (Steinkellner 2004, 9–12; Stearns 1996). There is no positive evidence to support his involvement in the production of our set of manuscripts, however. In Tibet, he wrote on the local writing material (which was paper) rather than on palm leaves, the material used in East India (see Steinkellner 2004, 12). It therefore seems highly improbable that he brought empty leaves to the Kathmandu Valley unless he brought them there on his way to Tibet (according to Steinkellner [2004, 10], he travelled to Tibet via Nepal, which was indeed the usual route, at least from locations in Bihar).

of origin is Nepal, since texts from this school of monastic law also played a certain role in Nepal and the use of Proto-Bengali does not necessarily render a Nepalese origin impossible.

<sup>72</sup> For a detailed discussion of these features, see Delhey, Kindzorra, Hahn, and Rabin (2013-2014 [2015]).

first of the four manuscripts (II.15), the latter alternative is certainly somewhat more probable.

### 3. Conclusion

It has long been known that ancient Indian Buddhist monastic universities such as Vikramaśīla were important centres of philosophical and religious scholarship and literary culture. Consequently, texts composed at these places have received a great deal of attention in text-based studies of ancient Indian culture and continue to do so.

However, acknowledging the importance of the material aspects of textual transmission in the form of manuscripts and the ways in which knowledge was physically organised in libraries and collections is a more recent trend. In the case of the library at Vikramaśīla, there is a deplorable dearth of archaeological evidence and historical information. It is therefore desirable to try and identify as many manuscripts of Vikramaśīla as possible among the Himalayan remains of these Eastern Indian and Nepalese collections – a study of the surviving manuscripts will help researchers gain an insight into the library practice. On the preceding pages, a first attempt has been made to proceed with this identification process.

It has been shown that in addition to the few and very different manuscripts with explicit colophons (I.1–5), a coherent set of five standardised manuscripts can be identified which were produced under the leadership of the scholar-monk Jinaśrīmitra (I.5–9). Moreover, a working hypothesis has been formulated suggesting that the first 14 items of another set (or perhaps even the whole set) of 18 manuscripts (group II), which follows similar standards to the aforementioned set, can likewise be attributed to the local manuscript culture of Vikramaśīla. Facts that seem to corroborate this hypothesis have also been discussed.

It is true to say that, except perhaps in the case of one of these 14 to 18 manuscripts, we are dealing with varying degrees of probability rather than with certainty when we allocate them to the monastery of Vikramaśīla. However, even if one adopts a very sceptical approach and postulates an unknown place of origin for many or even most of the manuscripts, the assemblage and study of this corpus of manuscripts is far from being a pointless undertaking. Since the similarities between these manuscripts and the ones produced at Vikramaśīla under the leadership of Jinaśrīmitra can hardly be the result of mere coincidence, we are at least dealing here with a certain standard of

manuscript production which was adopted in several monasteries, including Vikramaśīla. The study of these materials remains instructive for our understanding of the role played by certain collections or sets of manuscripts in the regional Buddhist manuscript culture of Eastern India.

Comprehensive documentation and analysis of the palaeography, paratexts (such as the marginal remarks and corrections) and other codicological features of the whole corpus of manuscripts is nearing completion and will be presented in forthcoming publications. These contributions will be useful for further determination of the chronological and geographical relationship of our manuscripts and of their place in Sanskrit Buddhist manuscript culture. It is hoped that this research project will trigger not only additional palaeographical research, but also further similar studies of manuscript sets and local centres of manuscript culture. In view of the wealth of Himalayan remains of medieval Eastern Indian and Nepalese manuscript culture and the unsatisfactory state of research to date, this is certainly a desideratum.

Table 1: Manuscripts that can be shown to originate from the monastery of Vikramaśīla (group I) or can be hypothetically ascribed to Vikramaśīla (group II)

List no.	(Main) textual content	Subject matter	Shelf nos. or important catalogue entries	State of preservation	No. of (ex-tant) folios
I.1	<i>Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā</i>	Mahāyāna scripture	British Library, London, Or. 6902	Complete?	337
I.2	<i>Pañcarakṣā</i>	Proto-Tantric scripture(s)	Luo 1985, pp. 61–65, no. 28	Incomplete	134
I.3	<i>Vinayasūtra</i> by Guṇaprabha	Monastic law	Sāṅkrtyāyana 1937, no. 243; Bandurski 1994, no. 62 (a)	Complete	62
I.4	<i>Hevajratantrapīṇḍārthaṭīkā</i> (aka <i>Ṣaṭśāhasrikā</i> ) by an author who claims to be the bodhisattva Vajragarbha	Commentary on a tantra (esoteric scripture)	KL 128	Incomplete	33
I.5	<i>Kalyāṇakāmadhenuvivarāṇa</i> ascribed to Nāgārjuna	Commentary on a tantra	Sāṅkrtyāyana 1937, no. 304; Sferra 2009, 45 no. 31; folio 4 preserved in NAK 5-20	Complete	5
I.6	<i>Trisamayarājaṭīkā</i> by an unknown author	Commentary on a tantra	NAK 5-20; folio 4 in Sāṅkrtyāyana 1937, no. 304; Sferra 2009, 45 no. 31	Incomplete	15
I.7	<i>Ratnāvalī Hevajrapañjikā</i> by Kamalanātha (aka Mañjuśrī)	Commentary on a tantra	KL 231	Complete	23
I.8	<i>Samājamaṅḍalopayikā</i> or <i>Viṃśatividhi</i> by Nāgabuddhi (aka Nāgabodhi)	Brief compendium of tantric ritual	Sāṅkrtyāyana 1937, no. 302; Sferra 2009, 45, no. 33	Complete	7
I.9	<i>Vajrāmṛta(tantra)pañjikā</i> by Vimalabhadra	Commentary on a tantra	Sāṅkrtyāyana 1937, no. 303	Complete	7
II.1	<i>Ḍākinivajrapañjarapañjikā Tattvaviśadā</i> by Mahāmatideva	Commentary on a tantra	NAK 5-20, NAK 5-23, KL 134	Complete	16
II.2	<i>Ḍākinivajrapañjarapañjikā</i> by an unknown author	Commentary on a tantra	KL 230	Complete	8
II.3	<i>Catuspīṭhanibandha</i> by Bhavabhaṭṭa	Commentary on a tantra	KL 134, KL 231	Incomplete	46
II.4	<i>Buddhakapālamahātantraṭīkā Abhayapaddhati</i> by Abhayākaragupta	Commentary on a tantra	NAK 5-21, KL 134	Incomplete	23

List no.	(Approximate) size of the leaves (cm)	Layout	Script	Place of copying / donor (d.) or commissioner (c.) / scribe (acc. to the colophons)
I.1	6.8 × 41	6 lines, 2 string holes; space cleared for them extends over all lines	'Calligraphic standard script'	Vikramaśīla / Sumatīśrimitra (d.) / —
I.2	31.7 × 5.1	5 lines (no further information available)	?	Vikramaśīla / ? / —
I.3	56 × 5.5	5-6 lines, 2 string holes; space cleared for them interrupts line 3	Tibetan dbu med	Vikramaśīla / — / Dharmakīrti
I.4	29 × 5	6 lines, 1 string hole; space cleared for it extends over lines 3–4	Proto-Bengali	Vikramaśīla / Viśuddhirakṣita (c.) / —
I.5	56 × 5.5	7 lines; 2 string holes; space cleared for them interrupts lines 3–5 and corresponds in breadth to c. 5–6 letters	Proto-Bengali	Vikramaśīla / Jinaśrimitra (c.) / Mahīdhara
I.6	56 × 5.5	Same as above	Proto-Bengali	— / Jinaśrimitra (c.) / —
I.7	56 × 5.5	Same as above	Proto-Bengali	— / Jinaśrimitra (c.) / —
I.8	56 × 5.5	Same as above	Proto-Bengali	— / Jinaśrimitra (c.) / —
I.9	56 × 5.5	(Probably) same as above	Proto-Bengali	— / Jinaśrimitra (c.) / —
II.1	56 × 5.5	Same as above	Proto-Bengali	— / — / —
II.2	56 × 5.5	Same as above	Proto-Bengali	— / — / —
II.3	56 × 5.5	Same as above	Proto-Bengali	— / — / —
II.4	56 × 5.5	Same as above	Proto-Bengali	— / — / —

List no.	(Main) textual content	Subject matter	Shelf nos. or important catalogue entries	State of preservation	No. of (ex-tant) folios
II.5	<i>Guṇavati Mahāmāyāṭikā</i> by Ratnākaraśānti	Commentary on a tantra	KL 226	Complete	10
II.6	<i>Sampuṭatantraṭikā</i> ( <i>Prakaraṇārthanirṇaya</i> ) by an unknown author	Commentary on a tantra	KL 228	Incomplete	11
II.7	<i>Katipayākṣarā Pañjikā</i> on the <i>Herukābhuyudayamahāyoginītantra</i> by Kumāracandra	Commentary on a tantra	KL 229	Complete	10
II.8	<i>Laghutantraṭikā</i> by an author who claims to be the bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi	Commentary on a tantra	KL 225 (and KL 134, which contains an earlier copy of one of the folios; see Almqvist et al. [2014]; section 4.5)	Incomplete	29 (+1)
II.9	12 works of Jñānaśrīmitra	Treatises on Yogācāra philosophy and on logic and epistemology	Sāṅkṛtyāyana 1938, no. 337–349; Bandurski 1994, no. 24; Sferra 2009, 46, no. 40	Complete	208
II.10	<i>Pāramitāsamāsa</i> ascribed to Āryaśūra	Treatise on the traditional Mahāyāna way to salvation	NAK 5-145	Complete	10
II.11	<i>Abhidharmakośavyākhyā</i> (6th chapter) by Yaśomitra	Commentary on a summa of scholastic philosophy	NAK 5-145	Incomplete	1
II.12	<i>Bhikṣuṇīvinaya</i> (Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādin recension)	Canonical monastic law as valid for nuns	Sāṅkṛtyāyana 1935, no. 12; Bandurski 1994, no. 55 (a); Sferra 2009, 46, no. 39	Complete	80
II.13	<i>Abhisamācārikā Dharmāḥ</i> (Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādin)	Rules of conduct for monks	Sāṅkṛtyāyana 1935, no. 12; Bandurski 1994, no. 55 (b); Sferra 2009, 47, no. 43	Complete	50
II.14	* <i>Lakṣaṇaṭikā</i>	Commentary notes on treatises of Madhyamaka philosophy	Sāṅkṛtyāyana 1937, no. 245–247 (cf. Study Group 2001, 26f.)	Incomplete	15
II.15	<i>Cakrasaṃvarābhīsamayapañjikā</i> by Prajñārakṣita	Commentary on a tantric text	NAK 5-20	Incomplete	5
II.16	<i>Abhisamayālaṃkāraloka</i> by Haribhadra	Commentary on a non-tantric Mahāyāna treatise	NAK 3-738	Incomplete	162
II.17	<i>Khasamā Ṭikā</i> by Ratnākaraśānti	Commentary on a tantra	KL 227	Complete	10
II.18	<i>Rahaḥpradīpa</i> ( <i>Sarvarahasyanibandha</i> ) by Ratnākaraśānti	Commentary on a tantra	Sāṅkṛtyāyana 1937, no. 299; Sferra 2009, 45, no. 32	Complete	14

List no.	(Approximate) size of the leaves (cm)	Layout	Script	Place of copying / donor (d.) or commissioner (c.) / scribe (acc. to the colophons)
II.5	56 × 5.5	Same as above	Proto-Bengali	— / — / —
II.6	56 × 5.5	Same as above	Proto-Bengali	— / — / —
II.7	56 × 5.5	Same as above	Proto-Bengali	— / — / —
II.8	56 × 5.5	Same as above	Proto-Bengali	— / — / —
II.9	56 × 5.5	Same as above	Proto-Bengali	— / — / —
II.10	56 × 5.5	Same as above	Proto-Bengali	— / — / —
II.11	56 × 5.5	Same as above	Proto-Bengali	— / — / —
II.12	56 × 5.5	Same as above	Proto-Bengali	— / — / —
II.13	56 × 5.5	Same as above	Proto-Bengali	— / — / —
II.14	56 × 5.5	Same as above (on the pages written in Proto-Bengali script)	Proto-Bengali / Tibetan dbu med	— / — / —
II.15	56 × 5.5	Predominantly as above, but deviations on two pages	Proto-Bengali	— / — / —
II.16	Slightly broader than usual	Predominantly as above, but deviations on some pages	Nepalese hooked script with Proto-Bengali features	— / — / —
II.17	56 × 5.5	As above in some cases, but deviations on many pages	Old Newari	— / — / —
II.18	56 × 5.5	As above in some cases, but deviations on many pages	Old Newari	— / — / —

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