
A. Helman-Ważny. *The Archaeology of Tibetan Books*. Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2014. — 311 p. Brill's Tibetan Studies Library. Ed. by H. Blezer, A. McKay, Ch. Ramble. Vol. 36. ISBN: 978-90-04-27504-1; ISSN: 1568-6183.

This monograph by Dr. Agnieszka Helman-Ważny, the leading expert on the history of Tibetan paper, sums up the results of her long and successful research into various types of Tibetan books held in museums and libraries around the world, such as the British Library (London), the Berlin State Library, the Jagiellonian University Library (Krakow), the Library of Congress (Washington) and the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives (Dharamsala). Some Tibetan texts kept at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts (St. Petersburg) have also been examined by Helman-Ważny. Her research is primarily concerned with the material aspects of Tibetan books: papermaking plants, tools and technology, types of ink, formats of books, conservation issues, and so on.

The book consists of seven chapters. In Chapter 1, *Introduction*, the author explains her choice of the term *archaeology* as suitable “in the context of studying the physical make-up and production of a given volume. It comprises analyses of the structures of books and an interpretation of technological aspects” (p. 2). The term *codicology* is not appropriate since the bulk of Tibetan books do not conform to the definition of “the ‘codex’, which is a bound book” (p. 3). The author also specifies that the Tibetan language served as “the most general criterion for the selection of items” (p. 3).

Chapter 2, *Methods: An Uneasy Alliance of Science and History*, focuses mainly on the advantages that scientific methods of research can provide with regard to more correct dating of texts, determining their possible origin, etc., these issues being of major importance for scholars of Tibetan texts, which often lack any explicit information of this kind. While radiocarbon dating has some strong limitations (pp. 17–21), chemical analysis of the raw material is attested as an important

and rather convenient way to help us understand in what area of Central Asia (and, sometimes, in what period) certain texts may have been produced (p. 33).

Chapter 3, *Tibetan Books: A Craft and Artistry*, presents types of Tibetan books, starting with those of *pothi* format that is so characteristically Tibetan, and then touching upon other important types such as scrolls (p. 59fn.), concertina books (p. 60fn.), folded documents (p. 61f), several kinds of sewn books (pp. 62–73). Each type is illustrated with descriptions and pictures of the Tibetan texts analyzed by the author who comes to an important conclusion that “the documented forms of Tibetan manuscripts show a relationship between the format associated with the functions that a particular book served and the utility of these books” (p. 69).

The next two Chapters 4, *Indigo, Gold, and Human Blood: Tibetan Illuminated Manuscripts*, and 5, *Tibetan Woodblock Printing Culture*, deal with two major groups of Tibetan books: elaborately produced manuscripts of various sacred Buddhist books and their block print equivalents, respectively. But they are structured differently. Chapter 4, analyzes sequentially some formal and material aspects of the gold manuscripts, such as format and book binding style (pp. 81–85), illuminations and decorations (pp. 85–94), calligraphy (p. 95fn.), page layout (pp. 96–99), ink (pp. 99–101), writing tools (p. 101fn.) and paper (pp. 102–115). Chapter 5, starts with a general survey of the early history and the mode of production of Tibetan block prints and then examines various editions of the first part of the Tibetan Buddhist canon — early Beijing Kanjurs (Yongle, Wanli and Kangxi eds.; pp. 136–158), Mongolian Kanjurs (their inclusion is not explained) (pp. 158–162), Tibetan Kanjurs made in Eastern Tibet (the Cone and Derge eds.; pp. 163–173) and Central Tibet (the Narthang and Lhasa eds.; pp. 173–176). The Uрга edition is not mentioned.

Chapter 6, *A Survey of Tibetan Paper*, focuses on Himalayan papermaking plants (pp. 183–191) and the traditional papermaking technology developed in Tibet. Each stage of the process is described in a separate section — *Collecting and Preparing Raw Material* (p. 194), *Boiling* (pp. 194–196), *Beating* (p. 196), *Molding* (pp. 196–199), *Finishing* (p. 200).

Chapter 7, *Conservation*, discusses various internal and external factors that can cause damage to Tibetan books and some procedures of conservation treatment. This chapter can be considered a reasonable ending to the monograph, although some general conclusions might be expected as well.

The book is supplied with important appendices that contain detailed descriptions of some Tibetan volumes kept at the British Library, etc.

Without doubt, this monograph is a very important contribution to Tibetology and a pioneering work in many respects. I believe it will serve as an excellent basis for subsequent study that can be enriched with more detailed examination of the less explored but very extensive Tibetan libraries located in Russia, Mongolia and China that possess tens of thousands of Tibetan texts of various types. For example, the libraries in St. Petersburg and Ulan-Ude can boast almost limitless materials on the history of Tibetan books produced on the territory of the Russian Empire and early

USSR — they were produced there, as a rule using Russian paper, from the first half of the 18th c. to the middle of the 1930s. The regional diversities in the production of Tibetan books are sure to be one of the major aspects for future study. Grouping together all texts in Tibetan only because they use the Tibetan language can be somewhat misleading, although for a general survey this is not so important.

The book by will be of interest not only to the Tibetologists but also to the scholars who study the history of Asian paper and bookmaking, experts in religious studies and professional conservators of the Asian written heritage. The abundance of photographic illustrations can help provide an insight into the material beauty of Tibetan books.

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