

Abstract

In this lecture I will discuss the large collection of Gandhari Buddhist manuscripts housed at the Islamabad Museum in Pakistan, which I first introduced to Japanese scholars at the 68th International Conference of Eastern Studies in Tokyo in 2024, and its relationship to other Gandhari manuscript collections.

The Islamabad Museum Collection of Gandhari manuscripts, which date from apparently the 1st century BCE to the early 3rd century CE, contains a great diversity of text types. This includes early 'canonical' texts, such as the Prātimokṣa, Itivuttaka/Itiyuktaka, and Aṭṭhakavagga/Arthapada, commentaries, a biography of the Buddha without parallel, a stotra praising the Buddha's indifference towards pain and blame and pleasure and praise in Mālinī metre, an Arapacana acrostic text in Śārdūlavikrīḍita metre, another that mentions the monk Nāgasena, though unfortunately not a Milindapañha, and a metrical text on anger, its negative effects and the positive effects of abandoning it. The collection also preserves the largest number of Mahāyāna texts in the Gandhari language, some with parallels, such as the Samādhirāja-sūtra, Pratyutpannasamṃmukhāvasthitabuddhasamādhī-sūtra, and *Sucinti-sūtra, others without parallel, such as a scholastic treatise. Interestingly, the collection contains at least two texts that concern Kushan kings who reigned during this period, namely, Vema Takhtu and Vema Kadphises, which gives some insight into the relationship between Buddhist communities in Gandhara and the major political figures of the day. Particularly noteworthy are the number of texts that lack a parallel in another language, whether they be prose or verse. Many of these appear to be local compositions, which witness the importance of textual composition to Gandharan Buddhist monastics.

In this lecture I will discuss the texts in the collection, profiling texts of particular interest, and discuss what we are to make of the collection as a whole and what these texts may tell us about the community or communities that produced these manuscripts and the ideas and practices they were favouring and developing.