Guardian of the Flame
Sri Lanka Manuscripts
Collection

Robert Spindler
University Archivist
Archives and Special Collections
Guardian of the Flame

- ASU received 390 manuscripts 2004-2006
  - Largest collection of Sinhalese mss in Western Hemisphere
    - Harvard/Peabody Museum (14)
    - Smithsonian Institution (2)
    - Field Museum (2)
  - British Library holds 4,000
  - Some ASU texts not available in Sri Lanka
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- Mostly Theravada Buddhist Texts
  - Texts from as early as 3rd century
  - These copies written 18th-19th centuries
  - Several Languages and Scripts:
    - Sinhalese
    - Sanskrit
    - Pali – Traditional language and script of Theravada
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Progress to date:
Identification, Cataloging and Rehousing

- November 2004-present (185 hours)
- Wijitha Bandara, University of Virginia
- Stephen Berkwitz, SW Missouri State University
- Translating and recording titles and descriptive information in MS Access database
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>MSS #</strong></th>
<th>177c</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accession #</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Author</strong></td>
<td>Mayurapada Buddhapatra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title (Pali)</strong></td>
<td>Pujāvalī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title (Roman)</strong></td>
<td>Pujavaliya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title (English)</strong></td>
<td>Garland of Offerings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Languages</strong></td>
<td>Sinhala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong># Pages/Leaves</strong></td>
<td>501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LxWxH in mm</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date Original Text</strong></td>
<td>13th c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date Transcribed</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Taxonomy</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Berkwitz</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bandara</strong></td>
<td>Sinhala literary work. This is read by students in current Buddhist colleges to gain knowledge of ancient Sinhalese literary work. A blank leaf. Decorated wooden covers. Paintings of the Buddha, stupas and cobras are on one side of the covers. Leaves damaged by insects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conservation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four digit manuscript number from cover of manuscript
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Progress to date:
Identification, Cataloging and Rehousing

- 355 of 390 mss have some description
- 191 mss have identifiable titles
- 53 have identifiable authors of original texts
- 116 custom-built pH-neutral boxes constructed
- Preliminary catalog completed
Progress to Date - Events

- Lecture: ”Buddhist Histories and the Power of the Past in Sri Lanka” Prof. Stephen Berkowitz, Southwest Missouri State University April 7, 2005

- Lecture: “Problems of Heritage Management in South Asia”, Prof. Sudharshan Seneviratne, University of Peradeniya, April 24, 2006

- Scholar’s Consultation Buddhist Objects, Knowledge, Ritual and Art, Arizona State University, October 6-7, 2006
  
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Archival Issues:

- Provenance undocumented:
  - Appears to be “artificial” collection
  - Identity of transcribers and monasteries unknown
  - Dates of transcription mostly established through handwriting

- Order of many manuscripts is disturbed:
  - Chunks of text out of order/placed at random
  - Can or should we attempt to restore order?
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Archival Issues: Preservation

- Covers and leaves require different conservators
- Some covers degrading – object vs. content
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- Library Issues:
  - Relation to other ASU Libraries collections
    - Secondary sources of Sri Lanka, South Asia
    - Secondary and primary sources of SE Asia, e.g. Laos
    - Collect other primary sources of South Asia?
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University Issues:

- Relation to ASU curriculum in several disciplines
- Opportunity for collaboration with South Asian universities and institutions
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Near Term Work Plan

(NEH Preservation and Access Proposal, July 2008)

- Enhance cataloging by visiting scholars
- Conserve and rehouse original manuscripts
- Convert Access database descriptions to EAD/XML finding aid for Web presentation
- Return or exchange digital images w/ major Sri Lankan institution
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- Longer Term Work Plan
  - Selectively digitize and translate
  - Link from EAD finding aid to digital surrogates and translations
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Thanks to our Partners:

- Herberger College of Fine Arts
  - Claudia Brown, Professor
  - Sherry Montgomery, Academic Advisor

- Department of Religious Studies
  - Joel Gereboff, Chair
  - Juliane Schober, Associate Professor

- University Libraries
  - David Moore and staff, Preservation
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