

Sanskrit Manuscripts in Tibet 11th Gonda Lecture by E. Steinkellner

Agenda >

Central Asia

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With the spread of Buddhism in Tibet, from the seventh to the fourteenth centuries AD, numerous Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts on palm leaves and, later, on paper were brought to Tibet and subsequently translated. After their translation, these Sanskrit manuscripts were only rarely used for study and as a rule carefully kept in special chapels. In this way, they survived until the twentieth century, when the Cultural

Revolution destroyed an unknown but substantial number of these manuscripts. Interestingly, a great number still survived, mainly due to their protection by the army of the PR China.

These original Sanskrit manuscripts rank among the world's greatest cultural treasures. Their preservation with the best available techniques and providing their accessibility to the scholarly community are of utmost importance and would constitute an invaluable contribution to international cooperation in the area of the humanities. Many of these manuscripts contain texts from the Indian Buddhist tradition that until today have only been known in their Tibetan translations or not

known at all. The enormous value of these texts in the history of pre-modern ideas for the world community of scholars, for those Asian societies whose populations are still predominantly Buddhist, and indeed for all mankind goes without say.

For many years, various individual scholars and academic institutions attempted to make the responsible institutions in Beijing and Lhasa aware of the need of making these treasures available to scholarship. Ernst Steinkellner will present a general survey of the history these manuscripts, their origins and present state, and of their possible future return to the world of knowledge. ◀