CHAPTER 8

Printing versus Manuscript: History or Rhetoric?
A Short Note Inspired by Pelliot’s DIC

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1 Historiography and Materiality

Techniques and mechanical arts, such as writing or printing, share similar features: they move in space and time, and they are diffused (and hence exchanged) in sequential stages.¹ Their applicability is determined by contingent factors. The historical interpretation of these factors is in turn dependent on relevant archival records, as well as prevailing modes of interpreting the social and intellectual history of mankind.

Kurtis Schaeffer’s The Culture of the Book in Tibet finely analyses the economic and social issues generated by the process of writing and printing in Tibet, and gives a comprehensive view of the problematic, including the reciprocal interplay generated by the encounter of Tibetan and Indian traditions, the editing of the Tibetan canons, and the role played by the various political, religious, and cultural actors. Relevant to our concerns here is the accuracy in locating Tibetan sources on the various techniques of writing and printing.²

Ideas gleaned beyond Tibet and in different contexts may equally be of interest in reflecting on the general problematic. Shortly before passing away in 1925, Thomas Francis Carter (1882–1925) published The Invention of Printing in China and its Spread Westward. Carter himself averred that it needed to be improved and complemented. Paul Pelliot, who had contributed to the revision of Carter’s manuscript, was asked by the editors to revise the first edition of Carter’s book which was sold successfully immediately. Thus it was that

¹ This is the model that we have adopted in our essay on the introduction of writing to Tibet, presented at the 10th Seminar of the IATS (Oxford, 2003) and published with the title “Tibet: an Archaeology of the Written” (Scherrer-Schaub 2012, 217).

² Various topics have been treated in detail by several authors, among others Rémi Chaix, Michela Clemente, Christoph Cüppers, Hildegard Diemberger, Franz-Karl Ehrhard, Helmut Eimer, David Jackson, Andrew Quintman, Marta Sernesi and Leonard van der Kuijp, and some of these contributions appeared long ago. Particularly precious are the essays that make use of the work done by contemporary Tibetan scholars (cf. Chaix 2010, 85–113).
Pelliot, in the years 1928–1929, devoted his research and lectures at the Collège de France to the history of printing in China, exploring a large number of texts on the subject. Pelliot, ‘devoured by the demon of research,’ was not worried by the tyranny of writing all that passes through one’s brain (or repeating what is already known . . .). The material that he left was published posthumously by Paul Demiéville in 1953 with the title *Les débuts de l’imprimerie en Chine* (*DIC*), complemented with Demiéville’s “Notes additionnelles sur les éditions imprimées du canon bouddhique.”

Jacques Gernet who recently revisited the subject, in emphasizing Pelliot’s acumen notes that he was

\[ l’égal des plus grands érudits chinois des XVIIIe et XIXe siècles et de ceux qu’il a connus en Chine au début du XXe. Sa science sans égale explique son horreur des à-peu-près et le fait qu’une partie de ses œuvres consiste en notes parfois étendues où il s’attache à corriger les approximations et les erreurs de ses devanciers ou de ses contemporains. Attentif au moindres indices qui permettent de fixer l’origine, les auteurs, la date des ouvrages, poussant ses recherches aussi loin qu’il le pouvait, il apporte, grâce à sa connaissance exceptionnelle de la bibliographie chinoise, une abondance de précisions qu’on ne trouve nulle part ailleurs. (...) Ce soin extrême explique que, sauf découverte plus récente, ses conclusions n’ont rien perdu de leur valeur.\]

In *DIC*, Pelliot carefully analyses Carter’s position, addressing the problematic aspects of his work, placing the issues on solid evidential ground, and commenting extensively on various episodes, *e.g.* the note of Yijing on the diffusion of paper, that we find in his report on Buddhist practices in India and ‘Insulinde’ (Sumatra, Java, Bali, etc.). Yijing sent this note to China in 692, while still in Palembang (Sumatra). The text contains the famous passage on the small clay *caitya*, the ancestors of the Tibetan *tsha tshas*: “[Dans l’Inde] on fait des *caitya* d’argile et on moule par pression des images d’argile; ou encore on [les] imprime sur de la gaze de soie ou sur du papier, et on leur fait des offrandes là où on se trouve (*DIC*: 15).” Of interest to us is the fact that the record of the Chinese pilgrim tallies quite nicely with the Chinese sources,

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3 Oeuvres posthumes de Paul Pelliot IV, Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 1953.
4 Gernet 2013, 553–567.
5 Cf. Kunsang Namgyal Lama 2013.
stating that paper was introduced from China to India between 650 and 670.\textsuperscript{6} Even more important to us is the fact that among the Gilgit manuscripts there is what seems to be a very rudimentary example of paper.\textsuperscript{7} This tends to confirm that the period of introduction of paper indicated by Chinese scholars seems to be practically confirmed.\textsuperscript{8}

2 Seals and Engraved Stones

Carter and Laufer made a number of suggestions concerning the factors that influenced the development of printing technology. Pelliot questions the terminology, and notes the ambiguity that may be seen in various languages using the same term for two or more different procedures of reproducing images or scripts.\textsuperscript{9} Carter was convinced that he would find the ancestor of printing in the seal (\textit{DIC}: 15–16) while Pelliot, more cautiously, reckons the seal among one of the elements that suggested the idea of printing, and distinguishes seals from engraved/carved stones.

[D]ès les Han tout au moins, ils [\textit{i.e.} the seals] étaient gravés en caractères inversés, qui apparaissaient en sens direct quand on les appliquait. Les stèles sur pierre au contraire, telles que celles des classiques gravés au 11\textsuperscript{e} siècle de notre ère, donnaient bien des ouvrages entiers, mais étaient gravées en sens direct; elles ne pouvaient servir qu’à la copie, et plus tard à l’estampage.

\textsuperscript{6} Ji 1954, 25–52; Huang 1980, 113–133; see Drège 1986, 19–39.
\textsuperscript{7} On the name of paper in India, and the paper MSS of Gilgit and Bāmiyān, cf. Scherrer-Schaub 1999, 3–36, n. 5, n. 9.
\textsuperscript{8} See Kishore 1963/64, 1–3. Cf. also infra pp. 9–10 and n. 24.
\textsuperscript{9} A good example is furnished by the translation of the Tibetan term zhu chen, the term used to refer to the person in charge of emending and correcting (zhu dag byed pa) the final version of the translated text. According to the Tibetan, this term should be translated as ‘Great reviser/revisor’ (zhu dag mkhan, zhu chen), cf. Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo, s. v. zhu dag. It is however often translated as ‘Editor’ possibly in close connection with the contemporary practice of editing texts, but much less with the complex organisation of revising the copies of the sDe dge Canon for instance, cf. the study of Rémi Chaix cited supra n. 2. On the process of editing in the 8–9th c., cf. Scherrer-Schaub 2010, 314–318, 314/317, on the distinction between the ‘internal’ and ‘external’ editing process.
Xylographic Print and Stamping (French: Estampage)

The oldest specimen of a dated xylographic print seems to be an exemplar of the *Vajracchedikā*, dated to 868, kept at the British Museum, London, and probably imported in Dunhuang from Sichuan (DIC: 47–48), as Drège notes “[Le] pays où l'imprimerie xylographique semble avoir eu dès le IXe siècle son plus grand essor.”10 Pelliot, after Carter, reads the colophon of the *Vajracchedikā* and notes that, contrary to what had been assumed by the American scholar, Wang Kiai, the person mentioned in the colophon as dedicating the text to his parents, is most likely not the printer: “[Wang Kiai] n’est pas plus un «imprimeur» que celui qui fait exécuter une statue ou un bas-relief n’est un «sculpteur»: c’est un donateur qui fournit l’argent et voilà tout.”

Incidentally it is worth noting that the region of Sichuan and the valley of the Yangzhi saw an important economic development in the 8–9th c. and the cosmopolitan capital of Sichuan was famous as a prosperous city, where merchants were meeting on intersecting trading paths, and where the first cheques were circulating since 806–820. Intriguingly, this was shortly before the first attacks of Nanzhao on the region of Chengdu.11 Sichuan, famous for paper-making and printing, is also the region where the first xylographic blocks of the Chinese Canon were carved, and subsequently sent to the capital Kaifeng (Hunan). In his additional note to DIC, Paul Demiéville (DIC: 121) explains that

Le Hien-cheng sseu était un monastère de Pien-leang, l'actuel K’ai-fong, chef-lieu du Ho-nan, alors capitale des Song. C'est là qu'en 1071 furent déposées les planches de la première édition imprimée du *Canon bouddhique*, celles qui avaient été gravées au Sseu-tch'ouan de 971 à 983, avec leur suite gravée depuis 983, et c'est là qu'un tirage de cette suite fut fait deux ans plus tard, en 1073, pour le pèlerin japonais Jōjin.

Further on, Pelliot in his critical approach to the history of stamping the inscriptions carved on stone (*estampages*), gives a clear idea of the process. In introducing the description of the technique of stamping, Pelliot cites Stanislas Julien (DIC: 93) who

[N']avait jamais rien compris à ce qu'est l'estampage chinois. Julien a cru que la face des tirages qu'il avait sous les yeux était celle qui avait été appliquée contre la pierre encree elle-même au préalable, et qu'il

10 Cf. Drège 1986, 36 and n. 25.
11 See Gernet 1972, 229–231.
s’agissait d’une véritable impression, ce qui aurait nécessité des caractères inversés sur la pierre originale. Mais il est à peine besoin de rappeler que l’estampage chinois consiste à appliquer sur la pierre un papier très mince qu’on mouille et qu’on fait pénétrer dans tous les traits gravés en creux; on encre ensuite ce papier à plat extérieurement, et les caractères viennent en blanc sur noir sur la face externe du papier et, dans le même sens où ils étaient gravés sur la pierre; il n’y a donc pas lieu d’inverser la gravure des caractères comme dans l’imprimerie proprement dite.

The ancientness of this technique could be proved by the fortunate find of Paul Pelliot, while still in Dunhuang, on the 6th of March, 1908 (Carnets 280): “[Trouvé] un superbe rouleau donnant un estampage pris au plus tard au début du Xe siècle (je n’en ai jamais vu citer en Chine d’avant les Song du nord) d’une Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya sūtra écrit par le célèbre Lieou Kong-ts’ıuan et gravé sur pierre.” Later on Pelliot (DIC: 95) revises his previous note and correctly identifies the text as the Vajracchedikā, further explicating the context. The text, calligraphed in 824 by Lieou Kong-k’ıuan, is a complete stamp taken under the Tang and, as Pelliot shows, it represents a new progress in the technique. Indeed one may see that it is already a text expressly carved on a certain number of elongated slabs, and numbered, in order to be stamped.12 Incidentally, this description vividly recalls the sūtra-stones that, along the centuries, have paved several sacred sites, in China, Burma, and Tibet (Fig. 8.1).13

4 The Wooden Cubes and the Mobile Fonts

A further change in the technique may be observed thanks to the collection of the small wooden cubes or hexahedron blocks, discovered by Paul Pelliot in the Yuan caves of Dunhuang,14 in 1908. Four of them were possibly offered by Pelliot himself to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (n° 24.114.1–4),

12 “Le Kin kang pan jo po lo mi king calligraphié par Lieou Kong-k’ıuan (778–865) en 824 et dont j’ai rapporté à Paris un estampage complet pris sous les T’ang marque un nouveau progrès: c’est déjà un texte gravé expréssement en vue de l’estampage sur un certain nombre de dalles plus longues que hautes et numérotées . . .”

13 On the sūtra-stones in Sichuan, cf. Suey-Ling 2014, 167–192; in Tibet, cf. Tropper 2009, 87–96. On the general problematic, see Scherrer-Schaub 2013a, 139–170, 153 and notes, 160 and Figs. 4 and 10.

14 Cf. Carnets: 295: “Samedi 23 mai 1908. Dans la grotte 181, trouvé nombre de cubes servant à l’impression de livres mongols [sic!], et pas mal de fragments imprimés dont un certain nombre de feuilllets si-hia”. Cf. Scherrer-Schaub 2013b, 371–408, 374.
and the remaining 965, are kept in the Musée Guimet, Paris (n° MG 25507, n° 926 des collections archéologiques de la mission Pelliot). The description given by Francis Macouin (1986: 149) shows that these wooden cubes bore on one face the types, carved in relief of ca. 2 mm. Remarkably enough

Tous les blocs présentent deux dimensions, la troisième étant variable. La première de ces deux dimensions constantes est la hauteur qui est de 22 mm, avec une variation inférieure à 1 mm en plus ou moins. Cette dimension constitue la hauteur en papier des caractères et il est à remarquer qu’elle est du même ordre que la hauteur typographique standard actuelle, 23,56 mm en France [underlined by the present author: it shows, if necessary, that technique, when optimal, may last for centuries]. La deuxième dimension, qu’on peut appeler le corps du caractère, est de 13 mm. La troisième mesure, qu’on peut qualifier de châsse, varie d’un caractère à l’autre en fonction du « mot » gravé, de 2 mm au minimum

15 Macouin 1986, 147–157.
à 34 mm au maximum. On peut constater par ces indications qu’il s’agit d’un ensemble cohérent et il est logique de penser que tous ces caractères appartenaient à une même police d’imprimerie. Il est évident cependant qu’un millier de signes est insuffisant pour imprimer un ouvrage et, par conséquent, nous n’avons là qu’une partie seulement de la police.16

Jacques Gernet (2013, 555) notes however that if the word ‘printing’, used by Carter and Pelliot is «commode», nonetheless when

[E]ntendu au sens que nous lui donnons depuis Gutenberg, il ne peut s’appliquer à la Chine qui ignorait la vis sans fin, le pressoir à vis, et n’a jamais utilisé régulièrement des caractères mobiles [underlined by the present author]. Si la Chine y eut recours à plusieurs reprises – ils sont attestés pour la première fois de façon certaine entre 1041 et 1048 – ils n’eurent pas chez elle de succès durable en raison du trop grand nombre de signes nécessaires à la reproduction du chinois [underlined by the present author]. Leur plus grande réussite fut celle des grandes éditions coréennes, commencées en 1403, un demi-siècle avant les débuts de notre imprimerie, où furent fondus 100 000 caractères chinois. C’est la xylographie et l’usage du frotton qui se sont imposés couramment en Chine et presque aussitôt dans les pays voisins Japon, Corée et Vietnam, où le chinois écrit s’imposait anciennement dans tous les domaines de la culture savante. Plutôt que d’imprimerie à notre sens, il serait donc plus exact de parler des procédés artisanaux qui ont permis à la Chine d’être pendant plus de cinq siècles le seul pays du monde qui pratiquait couramment la reproduction de l’écrit et le plus riche en livres et bibliothèques [underlined by the present author]. And a similar conspectus may be observed in the case of Tibet.17

16 The intuition of Francis Macouin is corroborated by a note of Hamilton 1992, 97–121, 100, n. 5: “Par ailleurs, j’apprends depuis peu avec étonnement que S. F. Ol’denberg, au cours de son expédition à Touen-houang en 1914–15, aurait trouvé encore 100 000 petits blocs mobiles portant des formes gravées en écriture ouïghoure. Voir l’ouvrage de S. L. Tixvinskij et B. A. Litvinskij, Vostočnyj Turkestan v drevnosti i rannem srednevekov’e. Očerki istorii, Moscou 1988, p. 42, ainsi que le compte rendu de Peter Zieme, Neue sowjetische Veröffentlichungen über die alten Kulturen Xinjiangs, «Orientalistische Literaturzeitung» (Leipzig), N° 499.”

17 Cf. Eimer 2007, 35–60, 39: “At the time when the first Kanjur edition was printed in China, the technique of movable type – made of clay, porcelain, wood or bronze – had already been developed. But it was obviously not used for disseminating Tibetan texts. We can only infer that movable type was seen as a very apt invention for the common Chinese books in the juan style, but not for Tibetan books in dpe cha – pothi format with their
When Pelliot brought back to Paris the wooden cubes (Fig. 8.2), found in cave 181 at Dunhuang, there were also, from the same deposit, “cinq petits carnets de manuscrits bouddhiques en ouïgour tardif des environs du XIVe siècle”. As James Hamilton notes one of these *cahier* contained a letter addressed by a Buddhist religious practitioner to his correliigionist Alp Qaya residing in Dunhuang. This letter, studied previously by Takao Moriyasu, arrested the attention of Hamilton (1992, 98–99) when in 1987 he was examining some manuscripts together with Kudara Kogi. Hamilton reconsidered the interpretation of the term *yonar*

[T]iré sans doute du verbe turc *yon-*-, tailler, sculpter, couper, qui désignait une importante activité se déroulant au XIVe siècle en milieu boud-

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oblong form, which in the case of the Kanjur printed in China measures about 73 to 27 cm. The peculiarities of the Tibetan script do not favour the use of movable type, as the super- and subscript letters and vowels put above and below the consonants require ample space between the lines. This problem does not occur with the quadrangular shape of the Chinese signs, which can be set in close lines.” Apparently however the question of the format (*dpe cha*, that is to print on fly leaves *versus* to print on *juan*, i. e. scrolls that are themselves composed by fly leaves) does not enter in question in the case of mobile types. Cf. the interesting contribution of Jean-Pierre Drège on the Sino-Tangut printed books where, among others, the author clearly explains the elements that may help to ponder the analysis of texts printed with wood-blocks or mobile types. Drège lists the criteria that permit to distinguish the two sort of printing: “Les différences des caractères et leur épaisseur irrégulière, leur alignement parfois défaillant, un espacement parfois inégal, ainsi que les différences d’encrage que l’on peut observer notamment en examinant le revers des feUILles imprimées. La différence d’encrage résulte d’une hauteur inégale des caractères mobiles qui entraîne une absence relative d’encre aux endroits les plus bas. le décalage des caractères mobiles dont certains peuvent être plus ou moins obliques provient évidemment d’un calage insuffisant de la composition typographique ou de la perte d’une des petites cales utilisées pour bloquer les types. (…) Il est en effet difficile d’établir des critères clairs de différenciation des imprimés en caractères mobiles de bois et de terre cuite dont on ne connaît aucun spécimen pour les périodes anciennes. Il n’y a certes pas lieu de contester que la plupart des exemplaires considérés comme des imprimés typographiques le soient réellement. Encore peut-on appeler à la prudence quant à certains critères utilisés. En effet l’observation du revers de certains imprimés xylographiques montre, par exemple, que l’encrage n’est pas toujours bien réparti sur la planche, ou du moins que l’impression peut être inégale. Cela tient à plusieurs raisons, telles que l’usure de la planche ou encore la manière plus ou moins régulière de passer le frotton,” see Bussotti & Drège (2015). On the history of movable types, their fabrication and use in China, see Comentale 1986, 41–55, and p. 54 where Jacques Gernet’s response precisely defines the distinction between printing in China and in the Western world, cf. *supra* p. 159–160 and n. 17.

Moriyasu 1982, 1–8.
dhisté à Cha-tscheou et qui se trouverait apparemment en relation, d’une part, avec le travail manuel difficile et fatiguant échu au religieux Al Qaya et, d’autre part avec la fabrication d’objets poursuivie par le ou les maîtres bouddhistes, en même temps qu’avec leur étude des œuvres sacrées bouddhiques. Cette activité dite *yonar*, préoccupation toute particulière de l’auteur de la lettre, qui semble correspondre à un travail de sculpture, de taille, ou de gravure en relief (…) m’a évidemment fait penser au milieu de petits blocs de bois portant en relief des caractères ouïghours taillées ou sculptées, qui furent trouvés par Paul Palliot en 1908 dans la grotte 181 du groupe septentrionale de Touen-houang, aménagée à l’époque mongole, d’où proviendrait justement notre cahier ouïghour. . . .

5 Xylography and Its Technique

Xiong Wenbin in a public lecture in Paris, and while presenting the work of his colleague Sherab Sangpo, mentioned the interesting case of the Buddhist Tibetan texts printed by members of the imperial family of the Yuan dynasty.¹⁹ A series of Tibetan Buddhist texts were indeed impressed on xylographs and illustrated, on behalf of the imperial ladies, between 1284 and 1351. Some of these copies, originally printed at the capital Dadu/Khanbalik, are today kept in the monastery of Drepung. They show, once again, the preeminent role of royal ladies in religious matters, mediating, as it were, the transactions between religious and political parties.²⁰ They also show the close relationship linking the imperial ladies with the imperial preceptors.²¹ Finally, the colophon of the last group of texts indicates other interesting data on the artisans, as it says that the text in question had been ‘put down in letters’ (*yig ger bkod*) by a Tibetan copyist (*bod kyi yi ge pa*) and carved by Chinese artisans (*rgya nag bzo bo’i tshogs kyis du brkos*).²²

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¹⁹ Cf. Sangpo 2009; Sangpo 2013.
²⁰ See Scherrer-Schaub 2014, 117–165.
²¹ Following Xiong Wenbin the texts that were ordered to be printed cover a large field, *na.* logic (an indigenous manual), scholastic (Abhidharma), philosophy (Mādhyamika and Yogācāra), monastic discipline, medicine, *mahāyānasūtra*, and *tantra*. This interesting selection of texts, destined to be carved and impressed, appears as an exemplary small collection of the essential for the monastic educative program.
²² Cf. Scherrer-Schaub 2014, 145–146, 146, n. 72 citing the analogous case of the bell at Khra ’brug (Richardson 1985, 82–83), dedicated by the Jo mo rgyal mo btsan yum to her son *lha btsan po* Khri lde srong brtsan (c. 800–815), and casted by the *mkhan po* (*mkhyen po*), and *bhikṣu* of China (*rgya’i dge slong*), Rin chen. While the imperial noble ladies played an important role during the Yuan period, they received little attention from the part
The first printed text of the collection seems to be Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga’ rgyal mtshans’ (1182–1251) Tshad ma rigs pa’i gter, measuring 64 × 11 cm, with 6 lines per page, in 190 folios. It shows two illustrations on the first page and is kept in the monastery of Drepung. It had been written, engraved and printed at the Capital Dadu/Khanbalik in 1284 (a mere three years after the passing away of its author!), on behalf of feu dPon mo chen mo cha bu (?–1281) and Go go cin of Tibetologists, quite. On imperial ladies during the Tibetan Empire, see Uebach 1997, 53–74.

23 Schaeffer 2009, 9: “The earliest Tibetan-language wood-block print currently known is a small prayer printed in Khara Khoto in 1153,” and n. 48.
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(?–1300), wives of Qubilai Qan. Subsequently, on behalf of dPal mo ’bol gan the text was reprinted in 200 copies (see Sherab Sangpo in this volume).

6 Printing ad usum modernorum?

The changes of support in the art of communication have increasingly impacted our life in the past decades, and the process is still on-going. That earlier forms persist despite the fact that they are instrumentally obsolete is something that we may easily observe. For example fonts, such as ‘courier’, ‘bodoni’, or ‘garamond’ that we are here using ad modum antiquum, have not been carefully drawn with due consideration to the most common softwares. And yet, these fonts that were often used in typography and in typewriting continue to be used in text written with a computer. The reason may well be inertia, given that technique and technology, and contrary to economics (as it seems . . .), does not need ‘destruction for construction.’

We may follow this idea in the exemplary case of the use of string-holes, inherited from the Indian palm-leaf MSS’s practice, and observable in Central Asia, Dunhuang (Fig. 8.3) and Tibet, at an early date. In some cases, the string-holes may be reduced to one, usually placed in the middle of the left side of the folio, for instance in the MSS from Khotan. A beautiful example of the use of the string-hole ad modum antiquum may be seen in a Sanskrit folio on paper, most likely from the Northern route of the Taklaman desert though of uncertain origin (Turfan? Dunhuang?), and dated approximately between the 9th c. and the 12th c. or more likely to the 13–14th c., that is to the Yuan period (Fig. 8.4). It is kept at the Musée Guimet in Paris and shows the motif of an ornamented lotus where, traditionally, the string-hole was placed. The folio belongs to a Madhyamāgama, it is printed on xylograph and bears on the verso side the title in Chinese (Zhang a han), and the folio number ‘89’. It contains a passage from the episode of the conversion of Upāli.24

24 A.A.VV. 1995, 69–70, n. 34, 69b: “[M]algré un changement de matière, passage de la palme au papier, et de technique, l’imprimé ramplaçant le manuscrit, on constate la perpétuation de la forme des livres indiens qui transmettaient les textes sacrés. Ce feuillette témoigne aussi de la persistance de la culture d’origine indienne et de la connaissance par certains du sanscrit puisque tout un ensemble de sūtra a été imprimé, ce qui laisse supposer la production d’un nombre d’exemplaires non négligeable. En outre, l’impression d’un autre recueil de sūtra, dits Samyuktā-āgama, est connue par des fragments découverts à Iduksari près de Turfan et aujourd’hui conservés à Berlin.” See Nakatani 1986, 306: “Dans l’état actuel, ce fragment, qui rappelle les feuillets de palmier de format oblong, mesure 10,5 cm de longueur et environ 28 de largeur. […] Le papier est jaunâtre, assez
As far as the Tibetan MSS are concerned, the practice of displaying string-holes may have been introduced, since the beginning and with rare exceptions, *ad modum antiquum*. During the period from *ca.* mid-13th century to the beginning of the 15th c. (Type II of MSS), these string-holes tend to disappear. Later on, that is beginning from the first part of the 15th c. (Type III of MSS), one may observe the increasing practice of elaborate imitations of the string-holes, used as ornamentation (if not apotropaically!) and, at times, very sophisticated.25

An interesting case is represented by a folio of a xylographic print of *'Grel ba don gsal ba* from Shel dkar to which Hildegard Diemberger kindly drew our attention (Fig. 8.5).26 Dated to 1407, the folio displays the paleographic features typical of Type II27 and present two string holes. As discussed elsewhere in this volume, the xylographic technique intrinsically coexisted with handwriting, since the text is first copied on a thin leaf of paper, and subsequently glued on its reverse side upon the wooden-block.28 The presence of the string-holes is

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25 See Scherrer-Schaub and Bonani 2002, 184–215, 207–208.
26 See Diemberger 2012.
27 Cf. Scherrer-Schaub and Bonani 2002, 207.
28 See the description of Eimer 2007, 38–39, and 39, n. 23: “The Chinese printers found a peculiar solution to the problem of how to bring the mirror-like letters onto the prepared wooden block: the scribe wrote the text in calligraphy with birch bark soot or lampblack ink on a sheet of [thin] paper, using only one side. The written text – the master copy, as it were – was glued face down on the prepared wooden planks and kept moistened for some time. Thus the ink pigment seeped into the pores of the wood and the block received the mirror image of the text written on paper. Before the carver set to work, the remnant of the soaked master copy were wiped off from the block while the ink remained in the...
thus quite normal, all the more since, as seen already with manuscripts, the holes were no more *instrumentals*. They are thus seen here as an aesthetic element enhancing the beauty of the text, in agreement with the ancient rules given in Indian texts, at an early date.²⁹ Kurtis Schaeffer translates the verses in praise of ‘books as both material and symbolic objects’ that Phags pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1235–1280) wrote in Sakya and where he repeatedly comments on the aesthetic of the work. Closer to our topic is the quotation from sTag tshang Lo tsa ba Shes rab rin chen (1405–1477) where the Lo tsa ba gives details on the page layout, mentioning the string-holes: “In Indian books there is

pores. Thus the mirror-image letters were still visible when the carver cut off the surplus wood.” Cf. Schaeffer 2009, 11 and n. 60.

²⁹ It should be stressed however that aesthetic criteria may coexist with functionality. See e. g. the case of the MS of the *Vessantarajātaka* in Pāli and ‘Cambodian’ script on palm-leaves, kept at the British Library (OMP B Or. 1245A), and displaying elaborate and beautiful ornamental string-holes showing traces of their actual use, see Zwalf 1985, n. 52.

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*FIGURE 8.4* Fragment of the Madhyamāgama, in Sanskrit, printed on xylographs (c. 13–14th c. from Turfan? Dunhuang?) and showing the motif of an ornamented lotus there where, traditionally, the string-hole is placed, from Sérinde, Terre de Bouddha. Dix siècles d’art sur la Route de la Soie. Paris, Éditions de la Réunion des Musées nationaux, 1995: 69–70, n° 34.
either one hole or two. […] In the first case [place the hole] at the line between the second and third fifths of five parts. In the second case, divide [the page] in thirds and place the hole there. A round or square hole [should be] neither too big nor too small, but attractive.”30

7 By Way of a Conclusion

While printing with mobile types renders the practice of amanuenses obsolete within a relatively short period of time, the xylographic print, whose technique, as seen, requires the work of copyists and calligraphers, contributes to perpetuate the rules and principles of handwriting but, at the same time, it also perpetuates paleographic variations and orthographic mannerisms, if not mistakes. This also might have been one of the reasons that induced Si tu Pañ chen Chos kyi ’byung gnas (1699/1700–1774) to assemble a school of amanuenses, especially trained in view of the printing of the sDe dge’s Tibetan Canon, following the rules and principles faithfully transmitted from the times of the redactors of the sGra sbyor bam po gnyis pa, to ’Phags pa or Bu ston Rin chen grub. The innovation that resulted from this gigantic enterprise was the founda-

30 Rten gsun bzhengs tshul dpal ’byor rgya mtsho, Stag tshang lo tsa’a ba shes rab rin chen gyi gsung skor, Kathmandu. Sa skya rgyal yongs gsung rab slob gnyer khang, n. d.: 1, 449–540, 509.7–511.2, see Kurtis Schäffer 2009, 9 and n. 47; on the tradition of aesthetic in editorial practice, see pp. 29–31.
tion of the printing house of sDe dge in 1729, and the rivalry that arose between the king of sDe dge and Pho lha nas (1689–1747) who was presiding over the xylographic print of the bKa’gyur of sNar thang (1730–1732). In this quintessentially virile competition (from which non-virile ones are not excluded), Pho lha nas invented a stratagem to prevent the return of Si tu Paṇ chen to sDe dge, but the Great scholar, impassible as a scholar should be, renouncing the sight of the precious Sanskrit manuscripts he was offered, spoiled Pho lha nas’s ruse, and the sDe dge Canon appeared in 1729.31

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31 See Chaix 2010, 93, n. 29: “Cette rivalité entre Pho lha nas et le souverain de sDe dge se poursuivit lors de la réalisation de l’édition du bsTan gyur. Si tu paṇ chen mentionne dans son autobiographie (p. 164), pour 1735, une tentative de Pho lha nas et de mDo mkhar zhabs drung pour le faire rester au Tibet central en lui offrant notamment des textes sanskrits rares.”
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