

# Guardian of the Flame Sri Lanka Manuscripts Collection



Robert Spindler  
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# 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 3<sup>rd</sup> century
  - These copies written 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> 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



<b>MSS #</b> 1773	<b>Accession #</b> 	<b>Author:</b> Mayurapada Buddhaputra
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<b>Title (Pali)</b> Pujaval <sup>2</sup>
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<b>Title (Roman)</b> Pujavaliya
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<b>Title (English)</b> Garland of Offerings
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<b>Languages</b> Sinhala
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<b># Pages/Leaves</b> 501	<b>LxWxH in mm</b> 
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<b>Text</b> 	<b>Date Original Text</b> 13th c.	<b>Date Transcribed</b> 
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<b>Taxonomy</b> 
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<b>Berkwitz</b> 
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<b>Bandara</b> 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.
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<b>Conservation</b> 
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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

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## ■ Progress to Date - Events

- Lecture: "Buddhist Histories and the Power of the Past in Sri Lanka" Prof. Stephen Berkwitz, 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  
[http://www.asu.edu/clas/religious\\_studies/lanka/collection.htm](http://www.asu.edu/clas/religious_studies/lanka/collection.htm)



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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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    - 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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