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THE JAPANESE COLLECTION OF THE FONDATION MARTIN BODMER, GENÈVE: AN INTRODUCTION

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The Fondation Martin Bodmer

The Fondation Martin Bodmer, with its museum and library, is a true jewel. Located on the outskirts of Geneva with a view over Lake Léman, it houses an astonishing array of manuscripts from the beginning of writing to the present day, as well as *objets d'art*, known collectively as the Bibliotheca Bodmeriana. Martin Bodmer bequeathed his private collection of enormous scale, encompassing more than 150,000 items, to the city of Geneva shortly before his passing in spring 1971. The museum was opened in 2003 in a building designed by the architect Mario Botta. One should also bear in mind that it was Martin Bodmer who established one of Switzerland's oldest literary awards, the "*Gottfried Keller Preis*" (MELA 2004: 29), which counts Herman Hesse amongst its recipients (in 1936). Bodmer's own words perhaps best describe the nature of the Fondation: "*Sie möchte das Menschlich-Ganze umfassen, also die Geschichte, wie sie sich in den Geistesschöpfungen aller Zeiten und Zonen spiegelt..*" ("It represents an attempt to embrace humanity as a whole, or in other words history, as reflected by spiritual

creation throughout all ages and in all parts of the world") (MELA 2004: 11). Any other description would only repeat its content, but less elegantly. One can understand what Bodmer terms *das Menschlich-Ganze*, in a philosophical manner, meaning *humanitas* rather than *humanity*. This firm ambition has reached a considerable level of accomplishment in the vast collection of manuscripts and art objects. In describing the items in his collection, Bodmer chose the term "*Schriftdenkmäler*" (MELA 2004: 11), "literary monuments", or perhaps rather "scriptural monuments".

Bodmer's focus remained firmly on the five pillars, whether as a regional division of the world into Western, Oriental, Indo-Iranian, Sino-Japanese and pre-Columbian regions, or as five realms of "the quintessential products of the mind" (MELA 2004: 41) that are still strongly represented in the displays today: Religion, History, Philosophy, Art and Poetry. Within the last category Bodmer particularly pursued collection of the works of William Shakespeare, beginning as early as in his youth, as well as those of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.¹

¹ The author expresses her gratitude to Ms Stasa

*The Japanese Items in the
Collection Bodmer*

The “quintessential products of the mind” from the cultural regions mentioned above, as well as scientific papers and musical notes, constitute the Bibliotheca Bodmeriana. One limitation in Bodmer’s endeavor to collect a library of *Weltliteratur* results from his firm roots in Western orthodox education, as well as his intellectual attitude. The East Asian section of the collection, where Japan belongs, contains representative items with the potential to cover more than one of the five pillars, yet history and philosophy remain untouched. Bodmer based his collection on chosen representative examples and acknowledged the limitations he thereby encountered, so he should perhaps be forgiven for the limitations present in the Japanese collection. It would be a welcome future development to add to the collection works pertaining to Japanese history and philosophy, which are currently absent. The high quality of the items in the Japanese display is nevertheless remarkable. In this short introduction to the collection, I shall aim to present an overview of the items, and refer to more thorough research whenever possible.

Monogatari

The bulk of the Japanese collection consists of *monogatari*, one of the major literary genres of Japan, and in a narrow sense the fictional one². These were popular from the middle of the Heian period (10th century) to the Muromachi period (15th century). Within this genre, the copy of *The Tale of the Bam-*

boo Cutter (Taketori monogatari 竹取物語; no. 607), dated to the 18th century with fifteen illustrations, should be mentioned first. *Taketori monogatari* is the oldest of all *monogatari*. The author is unknown, but the tale is presumed to have been composed in the mid-10th century at the latest, due to several references found in texts from the 10th century onwards. One such example is notably *The Tale of Genji (Genji monogatari)*, the most famous of Japanese stories. Written in the early 11th century and attributed to Lady Murasaki Shikibu, it is also present in the Bodmer Collection in three copies. The first example (no. 604) is an 18th-century work on *torinoko* paper with fifty-four illustrations by a Tosa-school (土佐派) artist. The second example (no. 605), also dated to the 18th century, is accompanied by 300 monochrome drawings. The oldest example (no. 609), with twelve illustrations again by a member of the Tosa School, is dated to the 16th century, placing it at the peak of this group of artists as court painters to the Ashi-kaga Shogunate during the Muromachi period.

Also well preserved and of fine quality is the example of *The Tale of Sumiyoshi (Sumiyoshi monogatari 住吉物語, no. 606)* with sixteen illustrations, dated around 1650. The storyline of *Sumiyoshi monogatari* is similar to all archetypical stories involving a persecuted heroine, such as Cinderella. The heroine princess, whose mother has passed away, despairs at the hindrances that her stepmother puts in her way, whenever the opportunity of a happy marriage arises. She subsequently relies on her late mother’s nanny and hides at Sumiyoshi, a place famous for its grand shrine. The prince searches widely for her and whilst praying at the grand shrine of Sumiyoshi, receives a divine message of her whereabouts and the two are happily united. The stepmother meanwhile dies, sunken into poverty. The story is widely accepted as having been formulated during the

Bibic, curator of the Fondation Martin Bodmer, for a detailed explanation of the concept.

² The genre of *Gunki monogatari* (軍記物語) for example, is largely based on historical facts yet includes fictional aspects. This genre is excluded here.

Kamakura period, as an example of the genre of *giko monogatari* 擬古物語, stories unfolding against the backdrop of Heian-period aristocratic life. The genre was popular from the Kamakura period well into the Edo period, and was rooted in a series of stories that circulated until the late Heian period³, heavily influenced by *The Tale of Genji*. *Sumiyoshi monogatari* is usually presented in two volumes, as is the case with the Bodmer example. The typical *emaki*-type illustrations were possibly executed by Tosa Mitsuoki 土佐光起 of the Tosa school during the 17th century. The narrative passage (*kotobagaki* 詞書) preceding each illustration is written in a fluent manner using both *kana* and *kanji*. Another example of this genre at the Fondation Bodmer is the copy of *Ise monogatari* 伊勢物語 (no. 601), consisting of two handscrolls with fifty illustrations by a Tosa-school artist, dated to the 17th century.

The example of *The Story of Bunshō* (*Bunshōzōshi* 文正草子; no. 608), an example of a *Nara ehon* with twelve illustrations by the Rimpa School, is dated to the 17th century. The auspicious storyline of a poor and unfortunate hero rising to fortune made this *monogatari* a suitable choice for reading on auspicious occasions, such as at New Year. *Nara ehon* are manuscript books belonging to a genre of popular literature known as *otogi-zōshi* 御伽草子, widely appreciated from the late Kamakura to the middle of the Edo period. They are often also called “Muromachi tales” because they were most popular during the Muromachi period. The standard format was a handscroll or fascicle of narrative texts alternating with polychrome illustrations. *Bunshōzōshi* represents the historical finale of the series of *monogatari* literature within the Bodmer Collection. All the above-mentioned items were

acquired in the United States, mainly in California, between the 1950s and the 1970s.

Religious Scriptures and Painting

Shaka no honji 釈迦の本地 (no. 600) does not strictly belong within the genre of religious items. It falls rather in the *monogatari* genre, being an example of *otogi-zōshi*, yet it stands as a bridge between the two. The example of the Bodmer Collection consists of two bound volumes with twenty-nine illustrations, initially dated around 1570 at the point of acquisition, yet it might be of a slightly later date, such as the Keichō era from 1596 to 1615. It was acquired from Zeitlin, Los Angeles, in September 1957, but the volumes each bear a red seal on the last page, stating the name Getsumeisō, signaling its provenance as Kōbundō, the renowned dealer in Tokyo (GRIOLET and BRISSET 2010: 101). The small size of the seal suggests a later date in the career of Sorimachi Shigeo, the collector and dealer behind Kōbundō.

The scroll of *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* (般若波羅蜜多經, no. 603, fig. 1), formerly dated to the 9th century, was acquired from Breitlin & Ver., Bruges, in December 1953. This work is of central interest to our research project “*Japanese Buddhist Art in European Collections*”. As a *sutra*, it is a major scripture transmitting many of the basic principles of the Mahayana doctrine. It encompasses 600 chapters. This sutra was introduced to China from India by the renowned monk, scholar and translator, Xuanzang 玄奘, who translated into Chinese in the 7th century. The title of the unmounted Bodmer scroll additionally provides the information that it is “Chapter 504”. The *sutra* is written in black ink on high-quality paper, very likely *kōzoshi* 楮紙, made of fibres from the bark of the mulberry tree, a treasured type of paper used for important documents during the early periods of Japanese history. Despite some damage and evidence of

³ Some examples are the *Sagoromo monogatari* 狭衣物語 or *Hamamatsu Chūnagon monogatari* 浜松中納言物語.

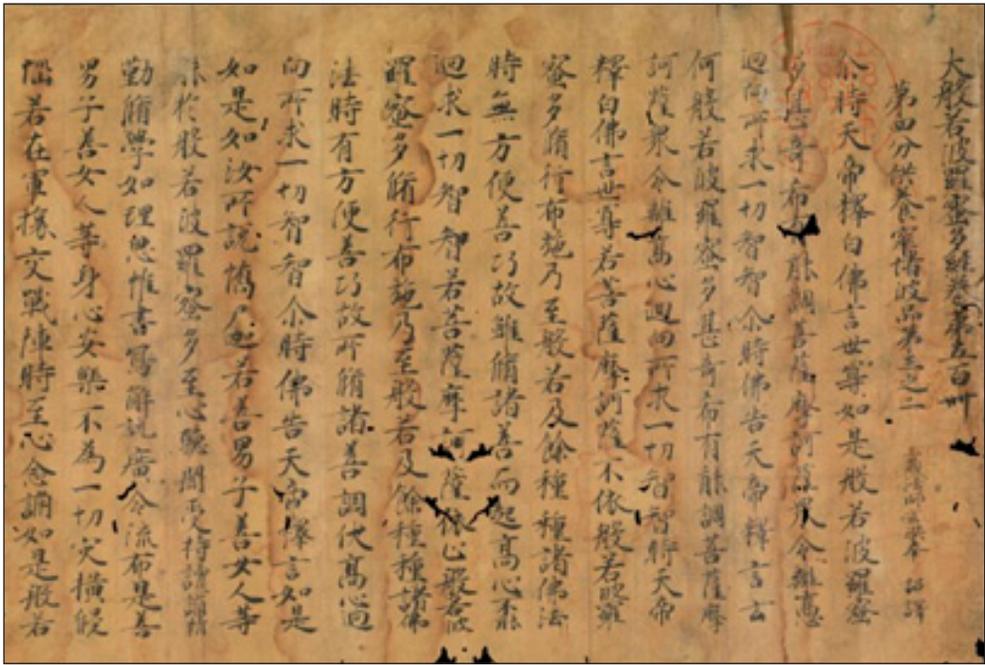


Fig. 1: *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra*, chapter 504. Possibly 13th century. Ink on paper. © Fondation Martin Bodmer, Genève. See also colour illustration C16.

infestation such as worm holes, the paper is very stable.

There is a circular red seal placed over the top of the first four lines of the text at the beginning of the scroll, stating “Yakushi-ji-in” (seal of the temple Yakushi-ji 薬師寺), which might carry some weight. A thorough research is needed to determine whether this seal was painted by hand or not, but this seal suggests this scroll to be a part of a *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* formerly in the possession of the Yakushi-ji in Nara, then possibly taken out of the temple during the Meiji or Taishō period. There is a similar famous set of the same *sutra* called *Gyoyō-kyō* dating from the 8th century. It similarly leaked out of Yakushi-ji during the Taishō period. The Nara National Museum houses one such scroll, chapter 96. A bulk of it is still in Japan, notably 387 chapters in the Fujita Museum Osaka, many can be found in the USA. But the Fujita

Museum also possesses the chapter 504, which makes it highly unlikely for this example to belong to the *Gyoyō-kyō*. During our on-site research as part of the “*Japanese Buddhist Art in European Collections*” Project⁴, we concluded this Bodmer scroll leaves little doubt to be of mediaeval origin, but for a more detailed analysis, further research is required.

The collection contains a hanging scroll (*kakejiku* 掛軸) depicting the scene of *Shakyamuni leaving the mountain* (*Shutsuzan Shaka* 出山釈迦, no object number, fig. 2), a popular subject in Zen Buddhism. The painting is executed with ink and light colours on paper and shows Shakyamuni leaving the mountain, symbolizing his rejection of severe asceticism. This is a standard part of the genre of *Dōshaku*

⁴ On-site research so far conducted between July 2013 and March 2014.

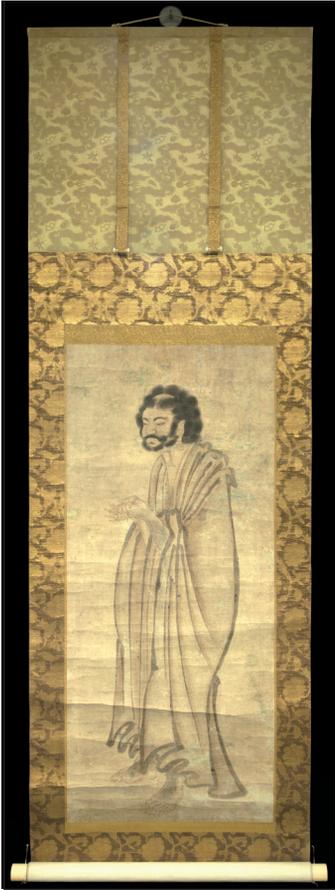


Fig. 2: Shutsuzan Shaka. Late Muromachi. Ink and polychromy, gold on paper, brocade mounting. © Fondation Martin Bodmer, Genève. See also colour illustration C17.

jimbutsuga 道釈人物画, portraits of religious figures from Daoism and Buddhism, which was introduced to Japan from China during the Kamakura period and which established itself as an important part of *Zenga* 禅画. The scroll is a fine example mounted with gold brocade suitable for its subject, and further research by specialists would be fruitful.

At the time of publication further information about a hanging scroll depicting a wisdom king (*myō-ō* 明王) was not available.

A mounted scroll of *Murōju-shūyō-kyō* 無量寿宗要經 in Tibetan, originating from Dunhuang, should also be mentioned here. Despite its being a Tibetan holy scripture, the description on the reverse of the mount suggests this scroll was brought back from Central Asia by a Japanese expedition party. The inscription reads as follows: *Tonkō shutsudo Zōbun Murōju-shūyō-kyō* 敦煌出土 藏文無量寿宗要經, “The *Murōju-shūyō* Sutra in Tibetan, discovered in Dunhuang”⁵. Dr. Jerome Ducor of the University of Geneva has been attempting to trace this scroll back to an original source in Japan. According to Dr. Ducor, there are some indications pointing towards the Ōtani expedition as the initial source, yet more research is needed.

Poetry

The Collection of Japanese Poems of Ancient and Modern Times (Kokin wakashū 古今和歌集; no. 602) is a representative example of Japanese poetry in the Bodmer Collection. It was written by Asukai Masatoshi 飛鳥井雅俊 (1462–1523), an aristocratic poet and kickball (*kemari*) master to the Ashikaga house during the late Muromachi period. It was similarly acquired from Kōbundō, the renowned Tokyo-based book dealer, in February 1962.

The choice of dealers from whom Bodmer acquired items proves his skill in obtaining valuable and authentic manuscripts. Further examples of Japanese poetry and related

⁵ The Sanskrit title of the sutra is: *Aparimitā-yurjñāna nāma mahāyāna sūtra*; the Tibetan title is *Phags-pa tse dan ye-ses dpag-tu med-pa zes-bya-ba theg-pa chen-po'i mdo*. This can be translated as “Mahāyāna Sūtra on Immeasurable Lifespan and Wisdom”. It is a part of the Tibetan Buddhist canon, *Kanjur*. The Chinese title given on the reverse of the mount is its translation in the Chinese canon. Details courtesy of Dr. Jérôme Ducor, Université de Genève and Musée d’ethnographie de Genève.

objects are firstly a libretto of Noh plays printed by Hon'ami Kōetsu 本阿弥光悦 (1558–1637), as well as an edition of the *One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each* (*Hyakunin isshu* 百人一首), with illustrations by the *ukiyo-e* artist Keisei Eisen 溪斎英泉, dated before 1820.

Conclusion

The foregoing information on the Japanese items in the Collection of Martin Bodmer was based partly on our on-site research and largely on the data kindly made accessible by the Fondation Bodmer, as well as on the latter's publication *Legends of the Centuries*. Its nature speaks of Bodmer's intention to cover the region of Japan according to the division into five sections which he established for his collection: Religion, History, Philosophy, Art and Poetry.

The *monogatari* collection represents art, poetry and a notion of history as well as religious aspects, whilst poetry is further represented by the last group. The religious manuscripts and scrolls are of outstanding quality, a remark that should be justified despite the current lack of detailed knowledge about the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* and the Tibetan *sutra*.

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