

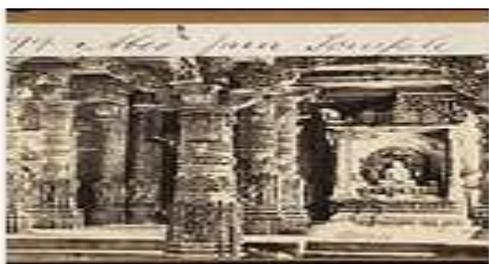
Nalini Balbir
Bodleian Library, 25.5.2012

Jain Treasures at the Bodleian Library

Portuguese, Dutch, British, Italians or French who happened to travel to India for trading or missionary purposes in the 16th and 17th centuries on the Western Indian coast came face to face with people whom they often designated as Baniyans.



In their parlance, this means Jains. Occasionally they came across people they called “Vartia” or “Vertea”. This term refers to Jain monks. Travellers often mention the wearing of a mouth-mask in order to avoid killing insects and the carrying of a cotton broom to the same effect. The *muhpatti* and the *rajoharana*, along with plucking out of the hair, prohibition to eat at night and fasting unto death are recurring features in their accounts. Records of these encounters show that they were rather puzzled and embarrassed. Mostly, all were struck by a foreignness about which they did not know what to think, and by all behaviours favouring respect of life - *ahimsā* - to an extent which was, for them, beyond understanding. But they could only remain at the surface, describing only visible signs of practices which were totally alien to their intellectual frames. Or they had come across temples or monuments in Gujarat and in South India.



All this was, indeed, intriguing or fascinating. But, a few exceptions apart, there was no acknowledgment of a specific Jain tradition – no ‘Jainism’ recognized. People wondered how to locate the faith corresponding to these individuals or these monuments within the Indian religious landscape: was this faith identical with Hinduism? Was it the same as Buddhism? Or how much was it distinct from them?

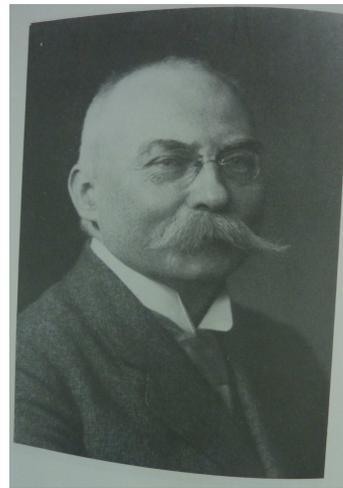
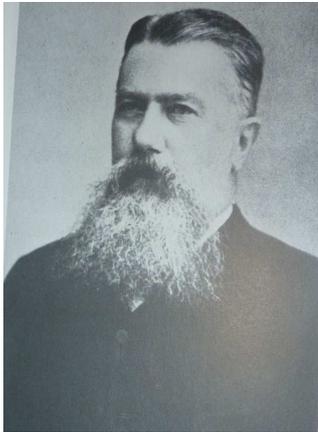
During the first decades of the 19th century, however, and even more in the later part, an increasing interest was directed to textual evidence related to Indian culture in general and Sanskrit. This means manuscripts, documents that were written by hand over the centuries. Slowly, a systematic search for all sorts of manuscripts was undertaken and organized under the British government. Manuscripts produced by the Jains were discovered in large numbers, especially in the so-called Bombay Presidency, which covered Gujarat and Rajasthan. They led to establish that there are, indeed, scriptures specific to the Jains where principles of their faith, stories, prayers and so many other contents have been handed down continuously. With the result that it could be demonstrated beyond doubt that Jainism is a faith distinct both from Hinduism and from Buddhism, but they were all born in the Indian land at a time when some topics such as caste system, human or divine leadership and other profound issues were the subject of burning discussions. So it was shown that Mahāvīra was an early predecessor or a contemporary of the Buddha, and lived in the 6th-5th centuries BC. Both, indeed, were perfect sages, leaders who preached in the same area, known as Magadha in Eastern India, both led communities made of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen, their faiths shared some features, but they always were distinct and parallel.

Jain teachings were first transmitted orally, from master to disciple, from Mahāvīra to his direct disciples and then through lineages of ascetics. But in the first centuries of the Common Era, the need to have these teachings fixed was felt. The two Jain sectarian traditions, the Digambara and the Śvetāmbara, differ on how this was done. The former hold that their authoritative texts were put to writing around the 2nd cent. CE, the latter in the middle of the 5th cent. However, none of the written evidence, the manuscripts, dates back to these early periods. Whatever Jain manuscript we have is not earlier than the 11th century. It is assumed that the rest did not survive the Indian climatic conditions, the warmth and the dampth combined. The most recent ones were written in the 20th century. Even now, Jain monks and nuns are encouraged to copy and to write by hand, sometimes producing true artefacts.

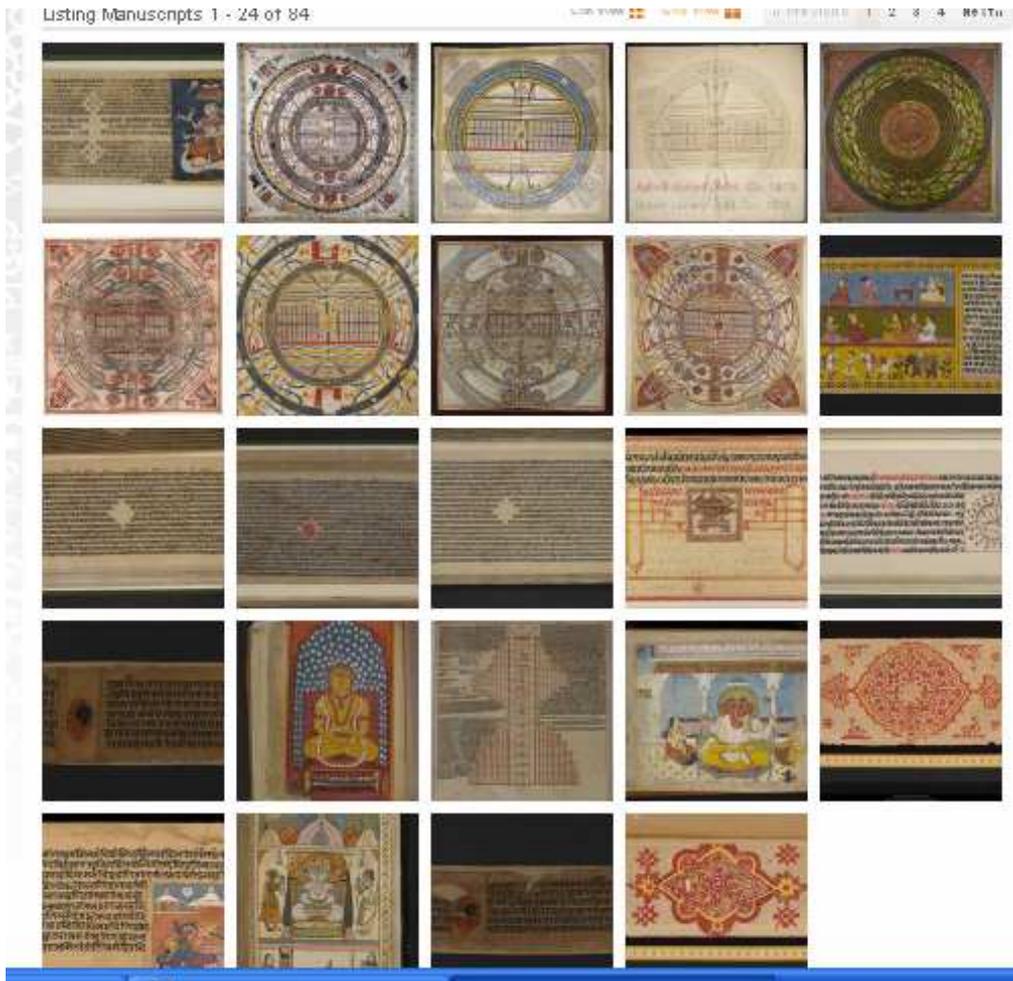
In the course of history, Jains have always been a minority in Indian society. But they have often been a very influential minority thanks to the positions they occupied in economy and finance, and thanks to the close relationship they had at times with dynasties in power. It is difficult to determine for earlier periods the percentage of literacy among the Jains. But the sustained evidence of works copied in the form of manuscripts from the 11th century onwards indicates that there were all along at least elite groups that were highly literate, and gave importance to reading and writing. These were merchants or businessmen – Seths – and their families that could pay in order to commission the production of manuscripts. In many cases they were copied by professional scribes and painters who had to be paid for their work. When the copyists were monks or nuns, there was of course no payment. Monks or nuns were those for whom a majority of manuscripts were produced. But members of the Jain lay community – the *śrāvakas* and *śrāvikās* could also be the readers. The close bond between the four parties making the Jain sangha is acknowledged as crucial in the doctrine itself. Copying or getting copied the sacred texts in manuscripts and presenting them to monks and nuns for reading and studying is one of the seven fields where pious laypeople are invited to sow their wealth, as the Jains put it, in order to gain merits.

Thus, manuscripts are central to Jain culture and are made visible on a number of occasions like yearly festivals. All Śvetāmbara Jains know that during the Paryuṣaṇ festival, one of the most important of their religious calendar, copies of the famous *Kalpasūtra*, in manuscript form or in print, are carried in procession and worshipped. Among the Digambaras, the counterpart of Paryuṣaṇ is the Daśalakṣaṇaparvan which features another authoritative work, the *Tattvārthasūtra*. Another festival, celebrated by the Śvetāmbaras as Jñānapañcamī and by the Digambaras as Śrutapañcamī at two different times of the year, has the transmission and knowledge of scriptures at its centre. It is dedicated to Sarasvatī and to all religious books in general. Such events developed in the course of time but have now become facts in the life of the Jain community. These factors are among those which explain that the Jain libraries (the so-called *bhaṇḍārs* or *jñānabhaṇḍārs*) are real treasure-houses where an immense wealth of manuscripts of all types, all periods and all origins can be found. Well-known place names are Jaisalmer, Patan, Cambay, Ahmedabad, Surat, Jaipur, Bikaner in Western India, or Moodbidri in Karnatak.

How, then, did Jain manuscripts travel from India to Europe? In British India, during the peak of the search for manuscripts I mentioned above, official rules were edicted, through which libraries outside India were authorized to buy manuscripts, in case several copies of the same work were found. This was how collections of Jain manuscripts started to be formed in Germany, Austria, Italy, France – and, first and foremost, in the UK. -- London, Cambridge – and Oxford, are the British cities where significant collections of Jain manuscripts are preserved. Adding up all the Jain manuscripts kept in British institutions, one gets the most important holding preserved outside India, with a total of approximately 2000 items. European scholars based in India were instrumental in the acquisition.



For instance, Georg Bühler (1837-1898) and Eugen Hultzsch (1857-1927) are those who played a role in procuring or selling Jain manuscripts to the Bodleian Library and to the Oxford Indian Institute.



(Grid view of Jain manuscripts on www.jainpedia.org)

The Jainpedia project and its architecture are meant to show Jain manuscript treasures housed in a number of British institutions, one of which is the Bodleian Libraries, to explain what they show and what they mean. Selected manuscripts have been digitized and are being described and analysed. They are correlated to an encyclopedia of Jainism in the form of about 200 articles specifically written by various contributors.

This lecture will focus on the Oxford Jain manuscripts and their contents, as an introduction to the display you can see in the Proscholium – for which we have to thank curators and all the staff involved in the programme.

Since all of you may not be familiar with what a Jain manuscript is, I will try to explain, with the help of some examples taken from the Bodleian collection.

All Jain manuscripts have been created in the Indian subcontinent. The languages used represent a wide range: several varieties of Prakrits as the

earliest authoritative scriptures of both Śvetāmbaras and Digambaras are written in these languages. Jains, like Buddhists, wanted to differentiate themselves from the Brahmin ideology and its connection with Sanskrit, thus they did not use it at first. Later, however, Sanskrit as the language of culture could not be avoided and was extensively used by Jain writers as well. All the languages written and spoken in the regions where Jain communities were or are present, such as Gujarati, Rajasthani, Hindi and Marathi in north India, Tamil and Kannara in south India, are extremely important as means of transmission of Jain principles, stories, devotion, etc. The Oxford collection of manuscripts comes from western India or north India and has predominantly scholarly texts in Prakrit or Sanskrit. Their script is Devanāgarī, with occasional variants, hence the particular name of ‘Jain nāgarī’ given to it.

In western India, palm leaf was the material used in manuscripts dating from the 11th to the 14th centuries. There are Jain libraries in India famous for having large collections of them. But, outside India, they are very rare. In UK, the only instances traced so far are two items preserved in the British Library : see for example <http://beta.jainpedia.org/manuscripts/detail-view-meta/manuscript/jita-kalpa-sutra-or-1385/text-1.html>.

Then paper manufactured in India became common. It demonstrates a wide range of colours, from cream to ochre, and can be of various textures – very thin or rather thick. If it has not been preserved properly, it may have become quite brittle by now.

The traditional format of Jain, or more widely Indian, manuscripts is a landscape shape, in which the page is a rectangle with sides on the right and left functioning as margins. This rectangle is long and narrow when palm leaf is used, generally shorter and wider for paper, although all types of sizes may be encountered. This 15th century manuscript

<http://beta.jainpedia.org/manuscripts/detail-view-meta/manuscript/uttaradhyayana-sutra-prakrit-c1/final-colophon.html>

is longer and more narrow than average, and recalls the size of earlier palm leaf manuscripts. Palm leaf as well as paper manuscripts are made up of loose pages, written on both sides, the recto and the verso, with the number generally found at the bottom margin of the verso. The text is sometimes put within manuscript covers. They are made of paper of the same size as the rest, but distinguish themselves through their colourful and sophisticated ornamentation, as you can see on

<http://beta.jainpedia.org/manuscripts/detail-view-meta/manuscript/jnatadharma-katha-prakrit-d-4/opening-page-floral-decoration-2.html>

In Indian libraries, manuscript pages are kept loose and generally put inside minimal brown paper covers. In libraries outside India, there are multiple practices. The most common has been to treat manuscripts like ordinary books, and thus to have them bound – sometimes even in leather binding! This happened in particular in the beginning period, when loose pages were probably an uncommon sight for European librarians. In more recent times, special covers or boxes have been prepared to insert the manuscripts without binding them.

Inks used in the manuscripts are from natural pigments. Black is the normal colour for writing. Red was used for ornamentation.

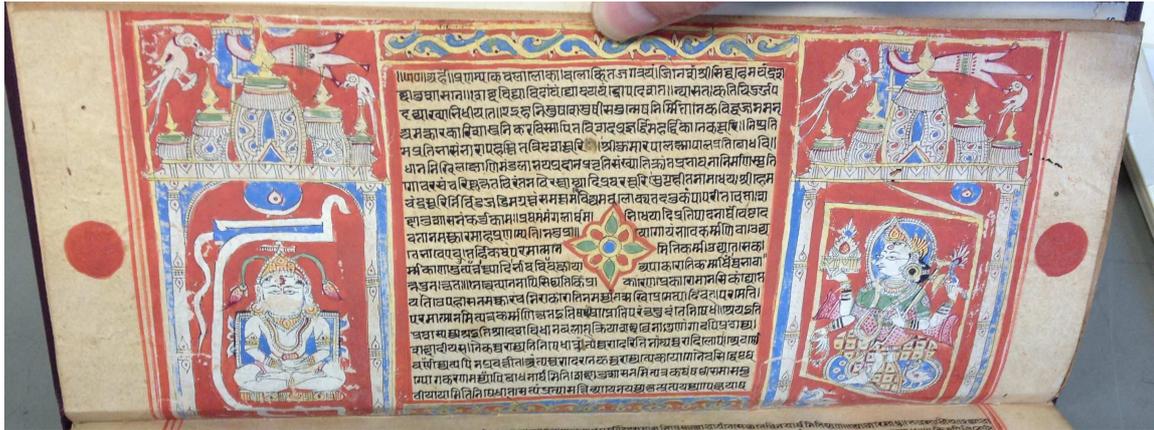
<http://beta.jainpedia.org/manuscripts/detail-view-meta/manuscript/jnatadharmakatha-prakrit-d-4/first-page-decorations.html>

Here you see how it is used for elaborate ornamentation in the margins, and for a special motif to make the folio number visible. It can be used for emphasizing some element of writing, such as auspicious signs or homage formulas at the beginning, colophon at the end, verse number, title of section, etc. Silver and gold were used for painting and yellow or orange pigment as eraser.

A manuscript usually starts with an auspicious sign, of somewhat mysterious origin, and with an invocation phrase. If the work to follow is a Jain religious scripture, the addressee will be the Jinas. The importance ascribed to the beginning is often underlined by an auspicious painting. This manuscript is just plain text all along. But the first page

<http://beta.jainpedia.org/manuscripts/detail-view-meta/manuscript/jambudvipa-prajnapiti-sutra-ms-ind-inst-sansk-109/a-jina-in-meditation.html>

has a fine painting showing a Jina. He is seated in meditation posture, within a temple structure. On each of his sides are worshippers showing respect with their folded hands. The Jina image has ornaments, which is usual among Śvetāmbara Jains. The Jina is a spiritual king. One of the royal emblems, the umbrella is over his head. Elephants at the top perform anointment. Worship takes place in a joyful atmosphere, indicated by dancers. So this is an adequate visual translation of the initial phrase of homage *namo arahantāṇaṃ* ‘Homage to the Arhats’.



(Bodleian Library MS. Prakr. a.1, fol. 1v, Jina and Sarasvatī, arham and aim © The Bodleian Libraries)

Arham, which somehow reminds of Arhats, is precisely among those words which are considered auspicious and found at the beginning of manuscripts. It comes in the first line, and this is normally the end of the matter. But here, we have a rather uncommon visual exploitation. The outline of the syllable is represented in white, with the shape of a moon crescent and a dot on top to signal the *am*. It serves as a frame within which a Jina in meditation posture is seated. And these two elements are placed inside a classic Jain temple structure, with pinnacles and a flag. *Arham* is seen here as a seed-mantra which concentrates all the power attached to the Arhats and other supreme beings. For instance, in yoga as described by the 12th century Jain famous author, Hemacandra, it is one of the syllables used for meditation.

‘The first letter [of the syllabary, *a*] should be placed in front [of the lotus], and the final letter [*ha*], in its centre accompanied by [the letter] *r* – which is spotless as snow – a pleasant crescent and a dot. This holy word, *arham*, which brings one in contact with the essence of life, [should first be uttered in the mind] with a short [sound], then with a long, [then with *a*] protracted, [then with *a*] subtle and [finally with *an*] excessively subtle sound. After that, one should imagine as if one splits the knots (*granthi*) from the center of the navel to the heart, to the throat, and so on, by means of [this] very subtle sound as it moves through the middle path [or *susumnā*]. Thereupon one should imagine as if one’s internal Self (*antarātman*) is being submerged with waves of nectar, white as milk, emerging from a crescent heated by a dot’ (Hemacandra, *Yogaśāstra* VIII.8ff., English translation by O. Qvarnström, Harvard University Press, 2002, pp. 151-152).

On the right side is shown Sarasvatī, the goddess of speech and arts, with four arms, holding a lotus in one of her hands, the lute, the *vīṇā*, in another one, accompanied by white haṃsas, the birds associated with her. She is worshipped by Jains as well, and an invocation to her often starts Jain texts. Like the Jina on the left, her image is placed in a temple structure. Here also the image is described within the outline of a sacred

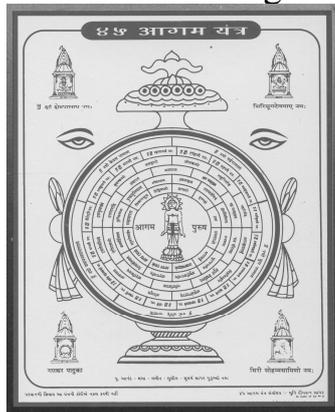
syllable – this time *aim*. The vivid red of the background, a colour meaning auspiciousness, is most appropriate to emphasize the almost magic power ascribed to the sacred syllables.

These paintings, thus, are a way to underscore globally the sacredness of the manuscript and the text it contains. They have no direct connection with the text itself, here a Sanskrit grammar and its commentary. But they aptly indicate that the fundamental and smallest units of language, namely the syllables, gather in them the alpha and omega of the teaching, which is found in expanded form in the scriptures. Such seed-mantras are not contradictory to the teaching, they are intimately associated with it. This is evidenced, for instance, by the association of the syllable *hrīm* with Mahāvīra’s eleven disciples, Indrabhūti Gautama in particular, <http://beta.jainpedia.org/manuscripts/detail-view-meta/manuscript/kalpa-sutra-or-11921/mahaviras-eleven-chief-disciples-1.html>

and by the development of a mantra yantra tradition around one of the basic Jain hymns, the *Bhaktāmara-stotra*, <http://beta.jainpedia.org/manuscripts/detail-view-meta/manuscript/bhaktamara-stotra-or-13741/yantra-for-stanza-1.html>

The end of a manuscript is similarly standardized. It is there that one finds the title of the text, in the phrase ‘Thus is X now complete’, the author’s name, the date, and sometimes much more. This is the place where one can look for information on the actors involved in the production of the manuscript, and get insights in the community life of Jains of the past. <http://beta.jainpedia.org/manuscripts/detail-view-meta/manuscript/mahanisitha-sutra-prakrit-d-18/last-page-with-colophon.html>

Here we learn that the manuscript was copied in the year corresponding to 1777. It was the result of a collective undertaking, as it had been commissioned by a group of lay women residing in Surat, at the instigation of the monk Uttamavijayagaṇi. And it was copied in order to conclude the fast called ‘45 Āgamas’.

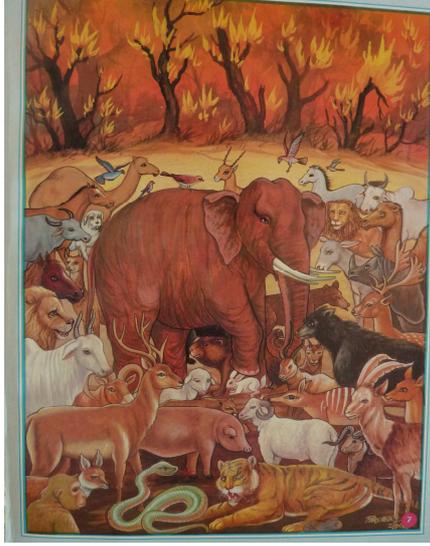


From the 17th century onwards special fasts and ceremonies developed around the worship of the 45 canonical scriptures which Śvetāmbara Mūrtipūjak Jains recognize as authoritative. These are a way of publicly asserting their sectarian identity, against the Sthānakavāsins, who recognize 32 such scriptures. Uttamavijayagaṇi is a teacher and author who is known from other sources to have played a significant role in promoting such ritualized worships. The text in this manuscript is the *Mahāniśītha-sūtra*, a work whose authority has been disputed among Śvetāmbaras. It is rejected as suspicious by Sthānakavāsins who do not include it in their list of canonical scriptures. This gives even more significance to the monk's gesture to get it copied and become the focus of a worship. This is just an instance to show how reading a manuscript colophon provides insight into the reality of daily religious life and the way it is publicized.

In this same manuscript, <http://beta.jainpedia.org/manuscripts/detail-view-meta/manuscript/mahanisitha-sutra-prakrit-d-18/last-page-with-title.html> you see an additional type of information. This is a library reference. It was added after the creation and delivery of the manuscript, and is expressed in the usual phrase manuscript number X, box number X. These refer to the traditional way of keeping manuscripts in Jain libraries, where several manuscripts are put in large wooden boxes until they are full. Hence the reference system is meaningful only at a local level. When the manuscript is out of context, the meaning of these numbers disappears.

Manuscripts have a sacred value, but they are also objects of use, consumables one could venture to say. We have just seen that they can be stated to belong to a specific collection, where they are located. But they also used to change hands, they could be transferred to a place which was not their original one. Here, <http://beta.jainpedia.org/manuscripts/detail-view-meta/manuscript/jambu-dvipa-prajnapiti-sutra-ms-ind-inst-sansk-109/last-page-partly-erased-colophon.html> we have the date, corresponding to 1596 CE, and we have the mention of the Śvetāmbara sub-sect involved in the process of commissioning and copying – the Br̥hatKharataragaccha. And in the last line, we have a common usual benediction: ‘May the manuscript rejoice for a long time! May there be wellbeing! May there be good! May there be wellbeing! May there be prosperity’ – But in between are six lines covered with yellow – over the original text in red which is no longer legible. They surely contained names of individuals – which have been deliberately deleted. Such acts are not uncommon, and suggest competitions and rivalries between monastic groups or local communities.

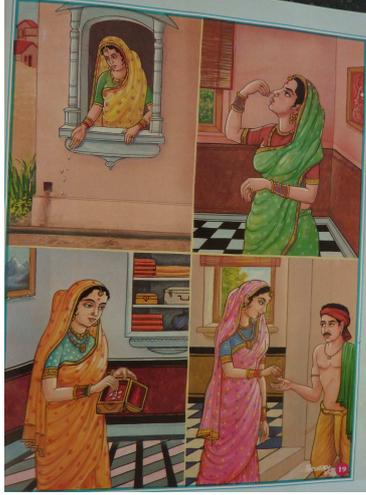
The majority of Jain manuscripts are handwritten copies of texts belonging to the Jain tradition. This primarily means Jain religious scriptures. In the Bodleian collection are several specimens of Śvetāmbara canonical works written in Ardhamāgadhī Prakrit. Their antiquity and language should not be seen as intimidating. The sixth Anga manuscript (Bodleian Prakrit d.4), the *Nāyādhammakahāo*, is not illustrated. But it could well have been – as its contents is made of stories rich in events, in scenes of daily life or fantasy. It is in this work, for instance, that one reads moving dialogues between young enthusiastic candidates for dīkṣā and their reluctant parents – which could well take place among today’s Jains. Many Jains are familiar with the story depicted here in modern fashion.



(Reproduced from *Illustrated Jnātā Dharma Kathāṅga Sūtra*, ed. Shri Amar Muni, vol. 1, Delhi-Agra, 1996, with the kind authorization of Diwakar Prakashan, Agra).

In order to escape a terrible fire, all the animals in the forest took refuge in a large circle an elephant had prepared for this purpose. The place was packed with animals, with barely room for them to move. The elephant lifted one of his legs to scratch but when he wanted to put his leg back on the ground he realised a little rabbit was occupying the space. Out of compassion for living beings, the elephant kept his leg lifted for two days and a half, until the fire was over. However, he died in severe pain as soon as he put his leg back on the ground. As a result of this exemplary behaviour, he was born as Prince Megha. This has become an exemplary story of ahiṃsā.

Another famous example from this work is the parable of the five rice grains, which has been shown to have parallels in the Biblical tradition. A merchant gives five rice grains each to his four daughters-in-law to test them, saying that they will have to return them when asked.



(Reproduced from *Illustrated Jnātā Dharma Kathāṅga Sūtra*, ed. Shri Amar Muni, vol. 1, Delhi-Agra, 1996, with the kind authorization of Diwakar Prakashan, Agra).

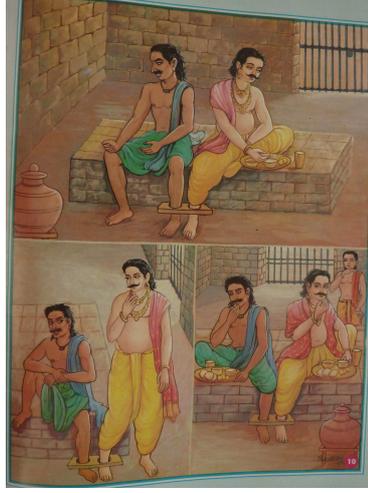
The first one throws them away. She thinks that when she needs to return them she can take another five grains from the huge quantity of rice in the storehouse. The second one thinks the same, but swallows the grains. The third one thinks there is some reason behind this strange gift and condition. She carefully wraps the grains in a piece of cloth in her jewellery box, near her bed. She checks it three times a day. The fourth one, Rohiṇī, thinks that she should not only preserve the rice grains but increase them. She arranges for the grains to be sown at the proper time and cultivated properly. A large quantity of rice is harvested from these original five grains year after year. When five years have gone by, the merchant asks the young ladies to return the rice grains he had given them. Each of them is rewarded according to her deeds:

- the first one is put in charge of menial duties in the house
- the second one is appointed to prepare food
- the third one is put in charge of precious things in the house
- Rohiṇī is appointed the head of the family.

The five rice grains are equated with the five great vows – *mahā-vratas* – which mendicants may spoil or develop appropriately – but this is also an adequate story for housewives!

An example of an eventful story in the same work is this. After a long married life without children, the wife of the merchant Dhanya gives birth to a son, as a result of praying to a god. He is cared for by a young boy servant. While the servant plays with other children, the richly adorned baby attracts the attention of the thief Vijaya. He kidnaps the baby, kills him and throws the body in a well. The police discover the child's body and arrest the thief, who is put in jail. Now, it so happens that the

merchant is jailed as well, after he has been accused of offending the king by fellow merchants.



(Reproduced from *Illustrated Jnātā Dharma Kathāṅga Sūtra*, ed. Shri Amar Muni, vol. 1, Delhi-Agra, 1996, with the kind authorization of Diwakar Prakashan, Agra).

Thief and merchant, both are chained together as a pair and cannot move without each other. The first time Dhanya is brought food, he eats alone and refuses to share it with the thief. However, when he wants to go to relieve himself the thief refuses to go unless Dhanya shares his food with him. Later on, Dhanya is released from jail on the payment of a fine. His wife is angry that he has shared food with the thief who murdered their son. The merchant explains that the only reason he had done so was to satisfy the needs of his body. Similarly, ascetics take food only to sustain their bodies, not for any other purpose, such as pleasure. The thief is later reborn in the hells, while Dhanya takes monastic initiation after hearing the teachings of a Jain ascetic.

The *Mahāniśūtha*, the Oxford manuscript of which was commissioned by a group of 18th century ladies from Surat (see above), is a curious text that contains disparate material. For instance, it gives to mantra and spells a place that is uncommon in canonical works – explaining that it was regarded as suspicious by a part of the Jain tradition. Not a single Jain can ignore the Namaskāra-mantra, which is at the core of Jain identity. Many Jains regard it as an efficient protection formula against all sorts of dangers.

The *Mahāniśūtha* is one of the first works where each word – Arihanta, Siddha, Āyariya, Uvajjhāya, Sāhu, is discussed and explained – Arihantas, for example, are so-called because they kill enemies – passion and desire, - one of the first works where indications are given as to the efficiency of the fivefold homage. And there is no end to the stories proving how powerful the recitation of the Navakāra-mantra can be

against all sorts of dangers – how miraculous it is. Just for fun, I may add my personal experience of how it proved an effective password: as I wanted to visit the Dilwara temples at Mount Abu one fine morning, access was forbidden to non-Jains. An impressive guard stood at the entrance. After some discussion, he said: prove that you are a Jain and you may enter. I recited the mantra and with a condescending hand gesture he granted access.

To return to the *Mahāniśūtha*, it contains several stories. In one of its chapters dealing with the behaviour of the trained mendicant there are a number of examples featuring monks or nuns who behaved wrongly or questioned in their minds the prescriptions and prohibitions of Jainism. The life of monk Nandisena consisted of forbidden behaviours: he attempted at suicide, did not observe rules relating to alms, etc. Finally, after having suffered too much, he went back to his superior, understood the true doctrine, practiced difficult atonements, at the end of which he was finally liberated. Monk Āsaḍa is an example of improper understanding of what asceticism is. He thinks that committing suicide is a proper practice. Then, on the contrary, he indulges in pleasant life. Later he realizes that all these thoughts are wrong, and decides on his own accord to undertake harsh atonements, however without referring to his superior. This causes him to wander for a long time in the world of rebirths. Nun Rajjā lived in a monastic group where the rule was not to take anything else than pure water every four meal. She became ill because of previous bad karmas but thought that her illness was due to this special diet. Thus she encouraged other nuns to give it up. All did so, except one who decided that she would feed only on water-meals until her death. She became an omniscient being, praised by gods. Rajjā went to this omniscient being asking about the reason for her own illness. She got the explanation and requested for an atonement, but was told that there is none, for she had encouraged fellow-nuns to break the vow. Lakkhaṇadevī was a king's daughter who chose her husband herself during the ceremony known as svayamvara. Soon he died. Together with her family she entered the monastic order. Once the sight of a pair of birds enjoying each other led her to question the Jina's prohibition for mendicants to see such enjoyments. She realized that these were wrong thoughts, and decided to practice harsh atonements, on her own accord. With the result that she was reborn as a prostitute. During that rebirth and many others she underwent sufferings until she was finally liberated. All these characters are challenging as they show that monks and nuns are not all perfection and need to improve, like everybody else!

All the examples just mentioned relate to texts that have been transmitted with a certain uniformity: their contents do not vary from one manuscript to the other, even if their wording does occasionally.



(Bodleian Library, Ms. Prakrit a.1. © The Bodleian Libraries)

This one is different. - First you see that it is very carefully executed: it has elaborately ornamented margins, red ink is profusely used, and the central space is occupied by the painting of various auspicious symbols. – Now, the contents. It is relevant to all Jains for it provides textual material for the liturgy of the *Pratikramaṇa-sūtra*, which has always been at the heart of Jain religious practice. Strictly speaking, it is a ritual of repentance for ascetics and laymen, where one comes back on faults that have been committed since the last time the ritual was performed. But, more widely, it is the central part in a set of obligatory duties that imply *sāmāyik*, the commitment to equanimity and peaceful relationship with all living beings, veneration to the 24 Jinas, veneration of mendicants in the lay version or of superiors in the ascetic version, standing meditation, and resolution to perform religious observances or acts that are efficacious for destroying the karmas. Ideally, this is done in the presence of a religious teacher or superior. The core of it is the recitation of formulas, associated with specific gestures. These formulas are old and are mostly recited in their original language, Prakrit, even today. They alternate with devotional hymns in Prakrit, Sanskrit or modern Indian language. The result is not a continuous text, but, rather, a sequence of various textual units, some of which are always there once or repeated at places, while some others may change. They may be combined in different ways, the kind of combination depending on various factors, for instance the

sectarian affiliation. Therefore *Pratikramaṇa-sūtra* manuscripts may differ considerably from one another. They are a unique evidence of religious practice in different environments.

All of them, however, like this one start with the Namaskāra-mantra, which is a necessary preliminary to any ceremony.



(Bodleian Library, Ms. Prakrit a.1. © The Bodleian Libraries)

Here we can distinguish one of the key elements in the set: the *Cauvīsa-thaya*, a short hymn of praise to the 24 Jinas. The whole ritual involves the practitioner and a teacher. The former, therefore, is involved as ‘I’:

‘I shall praise the 24 Jinas, the Arhats of perfect knowledge, who illuminate the world and create the sacred doctrine as a way across. - Then come the 24 names and the conclusion: ‘Thus I have extolled the 24 Jinas who have shaken off impurities and defilements and rejected old age and death; may they, the Tīrthamkaras, be gracious to me ; may they, the Siddhas, the best of beings, give me enlightenment and tranquillity and final release, they who have been praised and worshipped and adored. May the Siddhas, purer than the moons, more radiant than the suns, and profound as the oceans, give me bliss’ (Williams, *Jaina Yoga*, London 1963, reprint Delhi 1983, pp. 195-196).

This is an ardent expression of the Jain style of devotion: greatness and light of the Jinas are underlined through comparisons with images of greatness and light, which pervade all songs of devotion, sun, moon, ocean. The ideal to be reached is enlightenment.

An example of a dialogue unit in the performance of *Pratikramaṇa* is this *sūtra* :

‘Allow me, o Lord – I desire to repent for injury on the path of my movement, in coming and in going, in treading on living things, in treading on seeds, in treading on green plants, in treading on dew, on beetles, on mould, on moist earth, and on cobwebs; whatever living organisms with one or two or three or four or five senses have been injured by me or knocked over or crushed or squashed or touched or mangled or hurt or affrighted or removed from one

place to another or deprived of life – may all that evil have been done in vain’ (Williams, *Jaina Yoga*, p. 204).

Among the core Jain hymns, also included in this ritual set is the very famous *Uvasaggahara-stotra*, a short Prakrit poem dedicated to the 23rd Jina, Pārśvanātha which is ascribed with almost miraculous powers of protection : - *uvasaggaharam Pāsam Pāsam vandami*:



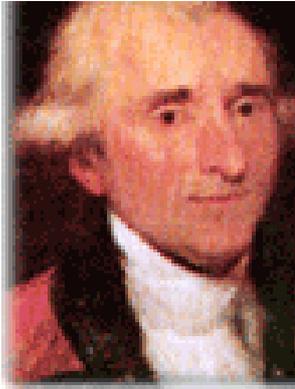
(Bodleian Library, Ms. Prakrit a.1. © The Bodleian Libraries)

1. I bow down to Pārśvanātha whose attendant god is also named Pārśva who is freed from intense karmas. He destroys the poison of the venomous cobra, he is the abode of all that is good and auspicious.
2. The man who can hold the *visahara phullinga mantra* forever in his neck or in his throat, for him the effect of bad planets, disease, plague, evil, fever, will subside.
3. Not to mention your mantra - Even simply bowing down to you is extremely fruitful. The souls no dot undergo a bad destiny with sufferings among hell or animal beings.
4. Having obtained faith in you, one has a wishing stone and a wishing tree which grant all wishes. Without any obstacle, souls reach the place where there is neither old age nor death.
5. O extremely glorious, thus I praise with a heart full of devotion to the brim. Therefore, o Lord, please give Enlightenment in this very life, o Pārśva, Lord of the Jinas.

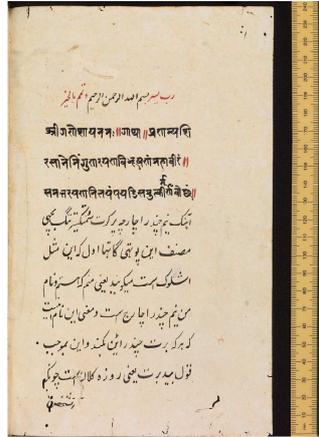
Finally, no field of knowledge whatsoever has remained oreign to Jain monks. Grammar, astronomy and mathematics are areas where Jain monks were highly competent. Over the centuries several Jain monks have also written well-known commentaries on classics of Sanskrit literature. Jain scholars have extensively read and commented upon Buddhist philosophical works and thus Jain temple libraries have become valuable repositories of the common Indian literary heritage as well.

On the other side, works belonging to the Jain religious tradition have also circulated outside Jain circles. Jainism has been one faith on the Indian map that has not been ignored by those who, in the course of Indian history, were concerned by interfaiths relations. One such period was the reign of Mughal emperor Akbar. In the famous *Ain-i-Akbari*,

Jainism is dealt with at greater length than any of the other eight systems of thought. This is likely to echo the heavy presence of Jain monks at the court, who were direct informants.



Claude Martin (1735-1800)



Nemicandra's *Karmaprakṛti* with Persian translation, Oxford MS. Wilson 262

The text in Indian script is the *Karma-prakṛti*, a Jain work dealing with the theory of karma written by the 11th century Digambara author, Nemicandra. Each verse in Prakrit is followed by a Persian translation. This copy was made in 1796 for Major-General Claude Martin, a celebrated soldier and Nawab at the court of Asaf al-Dawlah in Lucknow, but the translation itself may date back to 1561, a period which saw the undertaking of many translation projects of scriptures belonging to the various faiths. Such manuscripts demonstrate intercultural exchanges in premodern India.

I hope to have shown that reading manuscripts as objects which are the result of a production process involving several persons gives insight into the religious and cultural life of these people within the particular contexts where they were written or painted. The Oxford collection of Jain manuscripts, although it may not be that important in size, does, indeed, have fascinating material for such an immersion in the intellectual activities of the Jain lay and monastic communities over the centuries.