

presented themselves merely as shapeless hard packets of crumpled-up silk of which it was quite impossible to determine the contents.² Such inspection as was possible at the time in the case of others furnished ample proof, in the shape of dirt-encrustation, rough stitching, coarse paper-backing, and similar repairs, of the fact that many of these large paintings had been exposed, for a long time before their final deposit, to neglect and damage from incense smoke, dust, and the like.

Treatment
of silk
convolutes.

The careful packing of all these convolutes of often extremely brittle fine silk proved a difficult task, and still more their opening out when they had safely reached the British Museum. Fortunately all the technical resources of the Department of Prints and Drawings were made available for this task, and its labours, extending over more than six years, succeeded in overcoming the difficulties. Most of the paintings, whether big or small, had to undergo a special chemical treatment before they could be safely opened out by expert hands and made accessible for examination.^{2a} Many surprises attended this portion of the work; for from some of the least promising convolutes, when their contents of crinkled and friable silk had been restored to their original condition of suppleness, there came to light unsuspected pieces of fine paintings, often of great artistic value, even when fragmentary. In this way portions missing in some large composition were occasionally recovered from a different conglomeration of what looked like dirt-encrusted silk rags.

Treatment
of silk
paintings.

After the painted surface had been cleaned with extreme care, each painting on silk had to be strengthened to make it quite safe for handling. The small silk banners were temporarily mounted on a fine gauze with large meshes which allowed the reverse surface, in their case also usually painted, to be examined, and they were subsequently fixed under sheets of glass. The large compositions had to be first provisionally backed and mounted with thin sheets of Japanese paper, which made it possible to roll them up in the traditional fashion of the Far East for convenient keeping. It was while they were in this stage that most of the silk paintings shown in the plates of the present publication had to be reproduced during the years 1911 and 1912.³ The final mounting of these hundreds of paintings on a permanent background of suitably chosen Japanese silk stretched over a light wooden frame was a further task requiring much care and time, and owing partly to the effects of the war it is not quite completed even now (1917). For the publication referred to below the later date fortunately permitted the selected specimens of paintings to be reproduced in their final mounting, which does better justice to their character as works of art.⁴

Mounting
of silk
paintings.

All these protracted labours have been carried on under constant and careful supervision, mainly that of Mr. Laurence Binyon. To his unfailing knowledge and care, and to the help given by Sir Sidney Colvin at the beginning, all students of these fine remains of Buddhist art owe gratitude for the ease with which they can now be examined. Any attempt at restoration has been scrupulously avoided. But it has not always been possible to retain what remained of the outer border in plain silk or other cloth which originally framed the larger silk paintings and served for their hanging; for the contraction undergone by this different material would have endangered the preservation of the painted surface when it was mounted.⁵ In a few cases the original border was replaced by strips of suitable Japanese brocade applied after the traditional *Kakemono* fashion and plainly indicating its modern date. The methods of preservation and treatment above

² For a specimen of such a packet, unopened, containing the painting Ch. 00350, see Pl. LXXVI; also Ch. lviii. 006 in *Journal of Indian Art*, October, 1912.

^{2a} Regarding the very valuable assistance rendered in this work by the late Mr. S. W. Littlejohn, cf. *Burlington Magazine*, 1918, p. 19.

³ See, e.g., Pl. LVII, LX, LXII, LXIII, LXIV, LXVIII-LXX, LXXIV, etc. In Pl. LVI, LVIII, LIX, the paintings are shown

as finally mounted on silk.

⁴ Thus Pl. LXIII may be compared with the reproduction of the same painting in *Thousand Buddhas*, Pl. XVII.

⁵ Such original borders, or remains of them, are seen, e.g., in Pl. LVII, LVIII, LX-LXVIII, LXXIII. Pl. LX illustrates a case where the original border had to be severed in places before even provisional mounting of the painted silk was possible without damage.