

stencil for a Bodhisattva figure, while the fragment of a Lokapāla drawing, Ch. 00426, on paper made transparent shows how tracing was practised.

The woodcuts form a small but interesting collection by themselves. They illustrate at the same time the high stage of technique which the art of printing from wooden blocks had attained comparatively soon after its first invention in the T'ang period,<sup>10</sup> and also the earliest use to which it is likely to have been put. Among our woodcuts there are four for which exact dates corresponding to A.D. 868, 947, and 980 are recorded in the accompanying block-printed Chinese texts, and the earliest of these shows the xylographer's craft already fully developed as regards the reproduction both of designs and of written characters. The printed roll, Ch. ciii. 0014, dated A.D. 868 and containing in its 16 feet of length the complete text of a Chinese version of the *Vajracchedikā*, is the oldest specimen of printing at present known to exist, and its fine frontispiece, reproduced in Plate C, is the earliest datable woodcut. It shows Śākyamuni seated on a lotus throne, attended by a host of divine beings and monks and discoursing with his aged disciple Subhūti. Design and execution are of thoroughly Chinese style and, considering the great popularity of the text and the cost involved in engraving, it is reasonable to suppose that it was produced in China proper.

Collection of woodcuts.

Chinese printed roll, with frontispiece, dated A. D. 868.

Local origin on the other hand is very probable in the case of the printed prayer-sheets, Ch. 00185. a-f (Plate CIII), 00158, etc. (Plate C), dated A.D. 947 and showing figures of Avalokiteśvara and Vaiśravaṇa respectively; for on woodcuts of the same date, evidently belonging to an identical series which M. Pelliot recovered from the hoard, Ts'ao Yüan-chung, known from historical records as chief of Tun-huang about the middle of the tenth century, is mentioned as having ordered the engraving.<sup>11</sup> The year corresponding to A.D. 980 is named in the block-printed copy of a Buddhist charm, with Chinese and corrupt Brāhmī text, Ch. xliii. 004 (Plate CII). But here the place of production is uncertain.

There can be no doubt that, just as in the West, the cutting of wooden blocks was first used by the Chinese for the reproduction of designs, presumably of divine figures, sacred diagrams, and the like, and only in the sequel applied also to the printing of texts. The Buddhist fondness for the multiplication of identical sacred images as a convenient means to accumulate religious merit must have made use of the new invention quite as eagerly as it did of plaster moulds for the rapid reproduction of miniature Stūpas and relievo images in clay. We see this aspect of wood-engraving illustrated in a very characteristic fashion, not only by the numerous copies found in the collection from identical blocks of sacred designs and prayer-sheets,<sup>12</sup> but also by the number of rolls and big sheets of paper bearing impressions *ad infinitum* from the same woodcuts.<sup>13</sup> In a few copies from larger woodcuts, colours have been applied by hand.<sup>14</sup>

Block-printed figures and prayer-sheets.

Within the limitations imposed by the smaller number and size of the woodcuts we find among them most of the subjects represented with which we have met in the paintings. That of the frontispiece Ch. ciii. 0014 (Plate C) may be taken as corresponding in character to the scenes from Gautama Buddha's Life, and scarcely suffers by comparison. Figures of Buddhas are found frequently, and in different attitudes.<sup>15</sup> Among Bodhisattvas, Avalokiteśvara, shown always in 'Indian' style, is

Buddhist subjects of woodcuts.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Pelliot, *B.É.F.E.O.*, viii. p. 526, where the interest of the woodcuts from Ch'ien-fo-t'ung is fully discussed. The specimens recovered there by M. Pelliot belong to the tenth century.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Pelliot, *B.É.F.E.O.*, viii. p. 526; for Ts'ao Yüan-chung, cf. also above, p. 838, note 11, and M. Chavannes' notes, Appendix A, V. c.

<sup>12</sup> See Ch. 0020, 00150. a-d, 00151. a-s, 00158, 00203.

a-e; lvi. 0026, etc.

<sup>13</sup> See Ch. 00414-19, 00421-22.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Ch. 00150. a, 00421.

<sup>15</sup> See Ch. 00154, 00414, 00415, 00417, 00419, 00421; the third shows two attendant Bodhisattvas. Ch. 00152 (Pl. XCIX) shows Amitābha Buddha seated within the Sanskrit text of a charm; cf. also Ch. 00203. a-e; xliii. 003.