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Encyclopaedia of Manuscripts Cultures in Asia and Africa, Michael Friedrich, Harunaga Isaacson and Jörg B. Quenzer, Berlin: de Gruyter. **À paraître**

Taoist Canon

The Ming *Daozang* (Repository of the Tao), compiled during the first half of the fifteenth century, is the last and only extant Taoist Canon. It comprises about 1,500 texts including important scriptural corpuses dating back to early medieval times. Due to the vicissitudes of Chinese history, none of the successive Taoist canonical collections that were produced – always under imperial authority and sponsorship – during the preceding millennium have survived. It is known, however, that the first inventory of Taoist scriptures dates to the fifth century. It was presented to the throne by the court Taoist master, Lu Xiujing (406-477). Several other Taoist editorial endeavors were offically undertaken during the following centuries, but a Taoist Canon worthy of the name only appeared in the Tang dynasty. Edited under the patronage of the pro-Taoist emperor Tang Xuanzong (712-756), this *Kaiyuan Daozang* (Taoist Canon of the Kaiyuan Reign Period) contained no less than 3,400 manuscript scrolls (*juan* 卷) including ancient texts as well as contemporary scriptures. It did not survive the uprisings of the mid-Tang period which destroyed the two capitals, but it continued to serve as a virtual model for all later Taoist Canons.

Nothing is materially left of these ancient collections as a whole, but a large number of authentic medieval copies of Taoist scriptures (about three hundred manuscript copies of about one hundred texts) have been discovered in Cave 17 at Dunhuang. Although they do not form a homogenous scriptural corpus, they offer invaluable testimony, not only in respect to contents, variations, and extracanonical sources, but also relating to codicological aspects. Most of the Taoist texts from Cave 17 were discarded documents issued at different locations and dating to the period from the late fifth through the eighth century. They might have originally been stored in neighbouring Daoist temples, such as the Kaiyuan Abbey 開元觀 or the Divine Source (Shenquan 神泉) Abbey, both officially established under the Tang.

A few of these documents are of major significance for the prehistory of the Taoist Canon. The table of contents found in manuscripts P. 2256 and P. 2861, for example, permit

the identification and reconstruction of the aforementioned fifth-century catalogue edited by Lu Xiujing.

A number of manuscripts issued from the Tang-dynasty capital bear imperial colophons, offering exceptional insight into the court's relation to Taoism and official patronage for scriptural production. The colophon in a copy (S. 2295) of the *Scripture of the Transformations of Laozi* (*Laozi bianhua jing*) indicates, for example, that it was made in 612 under the supervision of a Taoist master of the official Mysterious Metropolis (Xuandu) academy in Chang'an in order to be included in the imperial library. Another significant example is the version of the great fifth-century Taoist apocalypse, the *Scripture of the Divine Incantations of the Abyssal Caverns*, which, according to the two colophons found in manuscripts P. 3233 and P. 2444, was made in the year 664 for the sake of the crown prince.

The great majority of the Dunhuang Taoist manuscripts date to the reign of emperor Tang Xuanzong. Contemporaneous to the first Taoist Canon, they might be, in fact, quite similar in style and structure to its handwritten canonical scrolls. Some of these eighth-century Taoist manuscripts were local productions. This was the case, for example, of devotional copies of the famous sixth-century Taoist encyclopedia, *Supreme Secret Essentials (Wushang biyao)*, which bears colophons dated 718 attesting that it was completed in the aforementioned Shenquan Abbey at the request of three of its Taoist masters (P. 2602, P. 2371, P. 3141, Pékin 珍 12).

During the Song dynasty, under the aegis of emperor Song Huizong (r. 1100-1125), the Taoist Canon was printed for the first time. By then it amounted to 5,387 juan and required the engraving of approximately 70,000 blocks. In 1188, with the rise of new rulers in northern China, the Jin dynasty, these printing blocks, previously kept in Kaifeng, were transported to the Middle Capital (modern Beijing). There, the Jin Taoist Canon was printed in an enlarged edition (6,455 juan). In 1281, due to the official ban on Taoist books enacted by Khubilai Khan (r. 1260-94), the founder of the Yuan dynasty, all copies of the *Daozang* including the printing blocks were to be destroyed.

It was only in 1445 that the exant Taoist Canon initiated at the command of emperor Yongle (r. 1403-1410), forty years earlier, by the forty-third Celestial Master Zhang Yuchu (1361-1410) was finally completed. By the 1920s, only two or three copies of it had survived. At the urging of President Xu Shichang (1855-1939) a photolithographic reproduction of

these was published in 1926 in a reduced format by the Hanfenlou branch of the Commercial Press of Shanghai. Threadbound in 1,120 fascicules, the original 4,551 juan composing the Ming *Daozang* became accessible to modern scholarship and thence served as the basis for subsequent editions of the Canon.

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