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EXTENSION

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The Stratigraphy of Manuscripts in the Light of Codices Recovered from the Dunhuang Library Cave

Abstract With the development of codicology and the history of books in the second half of the 20th century, Western manuscript researchers proposed the notion of the "stratigraphy of the manuscript," a methodology that utilizes the "strata" of archaeological sites as a metaphor for the historical layers of a given manuscript. This study takes several codices discovered in the Dunhuang Library Cave as examples and examines their internal strata using the methods of Western codicology in an attempt to offer additional insights into the collation and cataloging of Dunhuang manuscripts.

Keywords Dunhuang manuscripts; codex; codicology; stratigraphy; history of books; cataloging

In the second half of the 20th century, with the development of codicology and the history of books, Western scholars began to pay closer attention to the internal textual and material layers of individual manuscripts. Most surviving medieval and Renaissance manuscripts possess complex internal layers: After a scribe finished the copying of a manuscript, additional texts, punctuation, or corrections might be added to the same manuscript at a later date, resulting in the formation of multiple layers within it. As a manuscript was passed on to others, other scribes might also leave their handwriting, turning the manuscript into an assemblage shaped by the participation of multiple individuals. Changes in a manuscript's material form—such as the addition of new folios, the merging of multiple manuscripts, or the use of discarded manuscripts for repairs—also increase the complexity of its internal composition. Manuscripts could even be dismantled to serve as raw materials for producing, binding, or repairing other manuscripts. Western manuscript researchers have noted that text-oriented collation and cataloging often fail to capture a manuscript's internal historical layers and changing process. To more accurately document the internal composition and evolutionary development of manuscripts, Western researchers have proposed various

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theories and frameworks for describing and studying manuscript layers, one of which is the "stratigraphy of the manuscript." This theory compares a manuscript to an archaeological site, viewing its internal historical accumulation as archaeological strata, where each change to the manuscript forms a distinct stratum. Just as archaeologists must determine the strata of antiquities when examining them, studying the contents and texts of a manuscript requires identifying their respective "strata" and observing their environment and context of generation to determine the chronological sequence and nature of multiple texts.

Many Dunhuang manuscripts similarly possess complex, accumulative internal structures, featuring "strata" formed through their evolution over time. Some manuscripts contain multiple texts on their recto and verso, which were either copied by the same scribe at one time, added by the same scribe at different times, or written successively by different individuals. In the latter two cases, the time gap between the texts creates multiple strata within the manuscript. Additionally, some manuscripts incorporated older manuscripts as repair patches or binding materials. Similarly, later manuscripts may contain earlier texts and paper. The nature of each stratum in a manuscript, the chronological sequence between strata, and the specific stratum in which a text is located can all affect the assessment of the text's copying date and nature. Applying Western codicological methods to analyze the internal strata of Dunhuang manuscripts represents a valuable endeavor in Dunhuang studies.

This study first introduces the relevant theories and methods of Western stratigraphy of the manuscript and then takes the codices discovered in the Dunhuang Library Cave as examples to analyze two aspects: the strata generated by text additions within the codices and those generated by the reuse of old manuscripts. This study aims to identify and analyze the textual and material layers of several manuscripts and reconstruct their formation processes, thereby providing a reference for the collation and cataloging of Dunhuang manuscripts.

1 The Stratigraphy of the Manuscript

Manuscripts serve as carriers of ancient texts, but they are also material entities in their own right. The materials, forms, binding, ink, and page layout of a manuscript provide valuable insights into its production and use. Ignoring their material form means losing temporal and spatial information about the copying of the texts and the use of the manuscripts. In this sense, the study of manuscripts is also a study of the physical remains left behind by past human activities, much like the study of artifacts in archaeology. As early as 1950, historian and codicologist François Masai argued that codicology is closely linked to archaeology: "Codicology is the archaeology of the most precious monuments of a civilization: its books" (Masai 1950, 293). Another codicologist, Albert Derolez, compares manuscripts to archaeological sites: "In the book as well as in the sites, the concept of 'layer' is of primary importance … The first task of the codicologist will be to distinguish the layers in the manuscript. The second will be to establish its stratigraphy. This will allow them, much like in field archaeology, to determine a relative chronology of the layers, and sometimes an

absolute chronology" (Derolez 1974, 31).

Derolez proposes this metaphor during his research on the autograph manuscript of the medieval encyclopedia *Liber Floridus* (*Book of Flowers*). The *Liber Floridus* was compiled in the early 12th century. Several manuscript copies survive today, and the autograph manuscript of its compiler, the canon Lambert of Saint-Omer, has also been preserved. This original manuscript, comprising 287 folios, reveals the compiler's years-long process of extracting materials and compiling the book. During the compilation process, he continually added texts and images and made numerous additions, resulting in inconsistencies in the ruling and decorated letters. Texts inserted along the way also required some sections to be recopied and renumbered. New pages added to supplement the content also affected the material form of the manuscript, resulting in inconsistencies in codex structure and page dimensions. Faced with such a complex manuscript, Derolez reconstructs the chronological relationships among its various internal layers by analyzing its content and material form, thereby providing more details about the compilation process of the *Liber Floridus* (Derolez 1974, 27–36; 1998; 2015). Among medieval and Renaissance manuscript books, multi-layered manuscripts like the original *Liber Floridus* were not isolated cases. For instance, biblical manuscripts often feature later additions such as corrections, annotations, hymns, prayers, and diagrams (Lied & Maniaci 2018); some codices were initially copied separately and later bound together into thicker ones; scribes also added new folios to accommodate more content (Maniaci 2016, 27–46; Robinson 1978); other manuscripts reused folios from older ones, with monks in monasteries scraping or washing away the original text to write new content.[1] Cutting up discarded manuscripts for use as binding materials was also quite common. Fragments of earlier manuscripts can frequently be found in the covers, pastedowns, and spines of medieval manuscripts and even early modern printed books (Pickwoad 2000, 1–20).[2]

The above examples demonstrate that manuscripts are not static entities but dynamic ones. The completion of the copying process does not signify the end of a manuscript's life. As it was used and circulated, its textual composition and material form continued to change, eventually evolving into the state seen by researchers today. Michael Johnston and Michael Van Dussen once drew an analogy between studying the manuscript life cycle and studying the human life cycle. The production of a manuscript is akin to the formation of a human fetus. Just as an infant has a long life ahead after birth, a manuscript continues to circulate and be used for decades or even centuries after its production. "The manuscript is a process as much as it is a product" (Johnston & Van Dussen 2015, 4). Therefore, the study of manuscripts should be a comprehensive examination that encompasses their entire life cycle—from birth to decay. A manuscript is a dynamic entity, which means that no single date or context can fully represent its overall condition. For manuscripts with multiple internal layers, a specific date or context applies only to the corresponding stratum. Studying

[1] Such manuscripts are known as "palimpsests."

[2] Also refer to the website of the "Fragmentarium: Laboratory for Medieval Manuscript Fragments" project.

a manuscript requires investigating the context in which each stratum was formed and the chronological relationships among them in order to reconstruct the individual manuscript's internal stratigraphic history.

To describe the internal stratigraphy of manuscripts and reconstruct the changes occurring at various stages of a manuscript's life, Western scholars have proposed a series of descriptive frameworks and terms. Taking *La Syntaxe du Codex: Essai de Codicologie Structurale* (*The Syntax of the Codex: Essay on Structural Codicology*)[3] as an example, the three authors of this book view a manuscript as a combination of multiple units, dividing its internal structure into "production units" and "circulation units." The former describes details of a manuscript's production, while the latter describes its condition during circulation and use (Andrist, Canart & Maniaci 2013, 59–61). These units originate from different times and places; they may combine or separate, resulting in changes, additions, and omissions in the manuscript's text and material form. Another important concept in the stratigraphy of the manuscript is the "break" or "discontinuity." During a manuscript's use and circulation, human intervention and environmental changes leave traces, creating certain "breaks," such as changes in handwriting, paper, ruling, and layout. Identifying these breaks is a prerequisite for distinguishing a manuscript's internal stratigraphy and reconstructing the history of changes in an individual manuscript. Johan Peter Gumbert emphasizes the significance of identifying breaks for textual research: "Finding the breaks in a volume is the most directly relevant task of codicology, especially for those who are interested in texts" (Gumbert 1995, 62). He points out that understanding a manuscript's stratigraphy "is vital, not only for abstract codicology but even for understanding the text in it, the precise form the text takes in this manuscript, and the combination with other texts in which it appears." However, "many philologists and other scholars, who use manuscripts in their research, are insufficiently aware of this matter, so that their use of the sources is often vitiated by serious methodological errors (they may, for instance, wrongly take a date given in one part of the volume as valid for other parts as well)" (Gumbert 2004, 18). This applies not only to the study of texts within manuscripts but also to other elements, such as illustrations, decorated letters, and marginal decorations.

Due to space limitations, further theories and methods related to the stratigraphy of the manuscript will not be detailed here (Andrist, Canart & Maniaci 2013, 11–44; Bausi 2015, 511–520; Bausi, Friedrich & Maniaci 2020; Friedrich & Schwarke 2016). Western codicology primarily focuses on the codex—a manuscript form in which multiple sheets of paper are folded in half to form a quire, with one or more quires sewn together. Similar book forms can also be found among the Dunhuang manuscripts. Some codices are sewn with thread, while others have their folios pasted together (Drège 1979, 17–28; 2014, 373–376; Du 2003, 451–459; Fang 2010, 154–183; 2018; Feng 2022a, 83–103; 2022b; Galambos 2020,

[3] The term "syntaxe" in the title of this book does not refer to syntax in the linguistic sense. The authors compare the physical components of a manuscript (such as materials, script, ink, forms, binding, and page layout) to words in a sentence, and "syntax" refers to the way these morphological elements combine and relate to one another (Andrist, Canart & Maniaci 2013, 9).

24–66; Li 2004). This study takes the codices discovered in the Dunhuang Library Cave as examples to analyze their internal stratigraphy.

2 Manuscript Strata Resulting from the Addition of Texts in Dunhuang Codices

The "strata" and "break" of manuscripts mentioned earlier are also widely found in Dunhuang manuscripts, most commonly taking the form of multiple layers resulting from the addition of texts. After finishing copying a text, a scribe might use the remaining blank space in the manuscript to append additional texts. People who later acquired the manuscript might also add more texts or leave miscellaneous writing. These subsequently added texts accumulate layer by layer, forming the internal strata of the manuscript.

Among these, texts added by the same person are relatively difficult to distinguish. When the handwriting is consistent throughout the entire manuscript, it is difficult to determine whether multiple texts were written in a single sitting or on different dates. If there is a colophon between two texts, it may indicate a time gap between their transcriptions. Taking P.3833 as an example, this manuscript is incomplete at both ends, containing only Chapter 3 of the *Poems of Wang Fanzhi* 王梵志诗 and the "Poem of Confucius's Exchange (Dialogue) with Xiang Tuo" 孔子项讬相(问)诗. The handwriting is consistent throughout, indicating that a single person wrote this manuscript. At the end of the *Poems of Wang Fanzhi*, there is a colophon: "Recorded by Wang Hetong 王和通, student of the Liantai Temple, on the 19th day of the second lunar month in the *bingshen* 丙申 year." Because the copyist left a clearly dated colophon here, the "Poem of Confucius's Exchange (Dialogue) with Xiang Tuo" appended afterward was likely not transcribed on the same day. A similar situation is found in S.5556. This codex is complete from beginning to end. The first part contains the *Avalokiteśvara Sutra* 观音经, with a colophon: "Copied and recited by the disciple Linghu Xingshen 令狐幸深 on the 13th day of the seventh lunar month of the *wushen* 戊申 year." This is followed by the song lyrics 曲子词 "Gazing at the South" 望江南. Although the character is larger, it was still written by the same person. It must have been copied after the 13th day of the seventh lunar month of the *wushen* year.

Some copyists would add extra paper to accommodate more text. P.4071 is one such example. This codex contains a fortune-telling text, the *Dharani Sutra of the Buddha's Ushnisha Sitatapatra* 大佛顶如来顶髻白盖陀罗尼神咒经 and several lines of Tibetan text. Following the fortune-telling text is a colophon by Kang Zun 康遵, a diviner from Lingzhou Prefecture, dated the 11th day of the 12th lunar month of the seventh year of the Kaibao 开宝 era (975). Based on the content, this is known to be a draft of a fortune-telling text written by the diviner Kang Zun in 975 for a person born in 930 of the Later Tang (923–936) (Arrault 2004, 413; Guan 2019, 1377). Following the fortune-telling text and colophon is the *Dharani Sutra of the Buddha's Ushnisha Sitatapatra*. It is worth noting that the boundary between the fortune-telling text and the sutra precisely coincides with a physical break in the manuscript. P.4071 is complete from beginning to end and consists of two quires. Each quire consists of

three sheets of paper folded in half to form six folios, with a single bifolium inserted between the two quires. The end and colophon of the fortune-telling text are located precisely on the 15th folio of the codex, which corresponds to the third page of the bifolium between the two quires. It can be surmised that the first quire was insufficient to accommodate the full text of the fortune-telling text, prompting the copyist to add an extra bifolium. Later, wishing to append a copy of the *Dharani Sutra of the Buddha's Ushnisha*, *Sitatapatra* the copyist added another six-folio quire to the end of the codex to accommodate the text.

Among Dunhuang manuscripts, it is quite common to find different individuals successively adding texts to the same manuscript. Take P.3627 + P.3867 as an example. This codex is missing its beginning but is intact at the end. It starts with "Transformation on Wang Ling in the Destruction of the Chu and the Rise of the Han in the Eighth Year of the Han" 汉八年楚灭汉兴王陵变, followed by a colophon: "Copied by Bibliographic Secretary Yan Wucheng 阎物成 on the 16th day of the eighth lunar month of 939." Upon completion of this transcription, the codex still contained nine blank pages, on which another person subsequently wrote six petitions (Zhao 1997, 360–364). The handwriting is crude and far inferior to that of Yan Wucheng, with corrections throughout. This indicates that the writer was unfamiliar with the characters used in the petitions and that the text was likely a student's writing practice. These six petitions occupy six pages, and the remaining three pages bear the handwriting of two other persons: the first wrote two silk loan contracts ("Contract for the Loan of Raw Silk by Long Bolüe of Mogao Township on the 15th Day of the Second Lunar Month of 942" 壬寅年[942]二月十五日莫高乡龙钵畧贷生绢契), while the second copied epistolary formulas. On the right margin of the codex's final page is a colophon: "Handwritten by Zhang Tongying 张通盈 on the 23rd day of the first lunar month of 943."[4] The handwriting differs from that of the silk loan contracts and the epistolary writing practice, appearing much closer to the handwriting of the preceding petitions. Moving from the end of the petitions to the colophon at the back of the codex, one can even observe that the ink on the student's writing wooden pen was gradually drying up, rendering the handwriting of the colophon faint and indistinct. It can be inferred that the colophon at the end of the codex was left by the copyist of the petitions, meaning that the Zhang Tongying mentioned in the colophon was likely the copyist. The chronological sequence of the texts in this codex is as follows: In the eighth lunar month of 939, Yan Wucheng copied "Transformation on Wang Ling in the Destruction of the Chu and the Rise of the Han in the Eight Year of the Han." Over three years later, in the first lunar month of 943, Zhang Tongying utilized the codex's blank pages to copy petitions. Subsequently, two other persons used the remaining blank pages to copy silk loan contracts and epistolary formulas, both of which were copied later than Zhang Tongying's petitions. This codex illustrates the process by which texts were

[4] Chen Guocan 陈国灿, Sha Zhi 沙知, and Dohi Yoshikazu read the name as "Zhang Tongwen" 张通温 (Chen 1984, 7; Dohi 2015, 435; Sha 1998, 207). Ikeda On reads it as "Zhang Tongfu" 张通富 (Ikeda 1990, 483). The *Catalogue des manuscrits chinois de Touen-houang* reads it as "Zhang Tongying" 张通盈 (Soymié et al. 1991, 115). Zhao Heping 赵和平 reads it as "Zhang Tongru" 张通儒 (Zhao 1997, 363).

successively added to the manuscript over time, gradually enriching its contents.

In some manuscripts, the texts added by later individuals bear a certain relationship to the original texts, as is the case with S.5554. The beginning of this codex is missing. It contains a copy of the Chapter of the Universal Gateway of Avalokiteśvara 观世音菩萨普门品 from the *Sutra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Dharma* 妙法莲华经. Following this, another person wrote in reverse order, starting from the end of the codex and working backward to page 27. First came a prayer (pages 40–44), followed by the "Avalokiteśvara Gatha" 观音偈 (pages 27–39). The "Avalokiteśvara Gatha" praises Avalokiteśvara for compassionately saving all beings. Its content corresponds to the Chapter of the Universal Gateway of Avalokiteśvara from the *Sutra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Dharma*, and is a popular adaptation of that chapter (Wang 2000, 307–338). The believer who acquired this codex added the prayer and the "Avalokiteśvara Gatha" to the end, likely for the veneration and repentance rituals, making the recitation more convenient.

3 Manuscript Strata Resulting from the Reuse of Old Manuscripts in Dunhuang Codices

Among the Dunhuang manuscripts, there are instances where discarded manuscripts were reused to produce, bind, or repair other manuscripts. This practice incorporated earlier manuscripts into later ones, creating strata from different periods within a single manuscript. Traces of repairs made by medieval conservators can often be observed in the Dunhuang scrolls, even though modern conservators have removed most of the repair patches from the back of the scrolls (Rong 1994, 27). Many of these repair patches contain incomplete characters, indicating they were cut from discarded manuscripts. Some manuscripts have damaged edges where the gaps appear to have been cut out piece by piece. These missing sections likely served as repair patches for other manuscripts (Liu 2014, 138). Some codices, such as S.5589, also use fragments from discarded manuscripts to reinforce their covers and spines. Measuring 12.5×11.5 cm, this small squarish codex contains several mantras and the "Feeding Text" 散食文. A piece of paper is affixed to the outermost cover, covering the spine and approximately two-thirds of the front and back covers. Additionally, there are three irregularly shaped paper patches on the spine. The paper covering the front and back of the codex is 13.5 cm tall, slightly taller than the codex itself. The excess paper is folded inward along the top and bottom edges of the cover, much like how books are wrapped today. This "book cover" bears two lines of scrawled scribbles with some characters trimmed off, indicating that it was cut from another manuscript.[5] The miscellaneous writing was not added after the codex was bound, but originated from other discarded manuscripts.

Some manuscripts were created directly from older ones. Their paper and some of the

[5] The inward-facing, pasted side of the book cover also contains text, where the characters "Shakyamuni Buddha" 释迦牟尼佛 can be discerned.

existing text date to an earlier period, while the newly written text dates to a later period. In his study of Chinese-Tibetan manuscripts, Jean-Pierre Drège provides a detailed account of the practice of dismantling Chinese scrolls to create new scrolls, pothis, and concertinas for writing Tibetan texts. Paper analysis of these manuscripts indicates that the dismantled Chinese scrolls date from the seventh century to the mid-eighth century and the Tubo period (Drège 1985, 496–500). Some 10th-century codices, such as Stein painting 209, S.5470, S.5640, and S.5588, were also made by cutting and folding discarded scrolls. The paper in some of these codices predates the mid-eighth century (Feng 2022c, 320–325).

The covers of some codices, such as Pelliot tibétain 44, were also cut from old manuscripts. The main text of this codex recounts the transmission history of the Phur pa teachings and the deeds of Master Padmasambhava (Bischoff & Hartman 1971, 11–28; Cantwell & Mayer 2008, 41–67; Luo 1989, 61–76), consisting of 13 bifolia bound into a single quire. The outermost bifolium serves as the cover of the codex. It bears a seal and the lower strokes of the Chinese character *chi* 敕, as well as two lines of Tibetan text with their beginnings and ends trimmed off, which include the dates "second year" and "year of the tiger." According to Tsuguhito Takeuchi's research, the year on the cover is 978, and the cover was cut from a letter sent by the King of Khotan, Viśa' Dharma 尉迟达摩, to Cao Yanlu 曹延禄. A similar letter format is also found in P.5538, a letter dated 970 from the King of Khotan, Viśa' Śūra 尉迟苏拉, to Cao Yuanzhong 曹元忠, the Great King of Shazhou Prefecture 沙州大王. There are also seals on folios 4 and 24 of the codex, indicating that some folios of the main text were similarly cut from the margins of documents.

It is worth noting that the Tibetan text on the cover runs perpendicular to the main text inside the codex, whose producer rotated the cut piece of paper 90 degrees before attaching it to the outside as a cover. This practice is not an isolated case; it is also seen in Pelliot tibétain 103 and P.3494. Pelliot tibétain 103 contains Buddhist texts such as the *Sutra of the Questions of Brahma* 圣天所问经 and the "Praise to the Supreme Manjushri" 文殊至尊赞, and consists of seven bifolia. The bifolia are bound into a single quire; the outermost bifolium, serving as the codex's cover, is nearly half destroyed, leaving only the back cover. The cover was similarly cut from a discarded manuscript, and its original text was also rotated 90 degrees, running perpendicular to the main text. P.3494 is a fast ritual manual consisting of nine bifolia pasted together along the outer edges of their folds. An additional bifolium wraps around the nine, serving as the codex's cover. Four lines of text on the inside of the cover also run perpendicular to the codex's main text. Their content partially overlaps with the first "Text for the Buddhist Hall" 佛堂文 in the codex (from the 10th character on line 4 of page 4 to the fourth character on line 3 of page 5) and was written by the same person. The cover of this codex was likely cut from an old draft that the copyist had discarded before completion.

A more complex example is P.2880, which features strata formed by repurposing old manuscripts for its cover, as well as strata resulting from the successive addition of texts. The disordered state of its pages further complicates the identification of its original layers and the reading of the text. I have conducted a physical examination of this manuscript and will

discuss the relevant issues.

P.2880 contains only six folios. As shown in Figure 1, its main body is composed of two bifolia, with an additional bifolium wrapping around it to serve as the cover. The two bifolia of the main body contain a vocabulary list titled " A Collection of Miscellaneous Essential Characters for General Use" 杂集时用要字 in the *Collection of Dunhuang Manuscripts in the Classics Category* 敦煌经部文献合集 (Zhang 2008, 4212–4217). The cover wrapping the main body, moreover, features numerous miscellaneous writing and images. Before analyzing the internal layers of this codex, it must be noted that its pages are currently out of order. The page sequences shown in the microfilm and color photographs taken by the National Library of France are also incorrect, making it difficult to discern the manuscript's internal layers. This page disorder occurred because the two bifolia in the codex's main body were folded in the wrong direction, causing content that should have been on the inner side to end up on the outer side. Furthermore, the sequential order of Bifolium 1 and Bifolium 2 was reversed. Analysis reveals that the three bifolia in this codex, including the cover, share a common feature: one side of the fold bears traces of glue and tearing, forming a narrow, elongated area of a different color, while the other side of the fold has uniform paper color with no traces of glue or tearing. The areas with traces of glue and tearing were likely originally adhered together, corresponding to the pasting positions indicated by the dashed lines in Figure 1. For the two bifolia in the main body, the side with traces of glue and tearing at the fold is likely the outer side, while the side without such traces is the inner side. Based on the patterns of glue and tearing traces, as well as the continuity of text and ink color, in Table 1 I simulate folding two bifolia in opposite directions, turning the outer sides of the bifolia inward and the inner sides outward (i.e., page 1 becomes page 3, page 2 becomes page 4, page 3 becomes page 1, and page 4 becomes page 2). By then swapping the positions of the two bifolia, the pages of P.2880 are rearranged into a correct order (see Table 1).

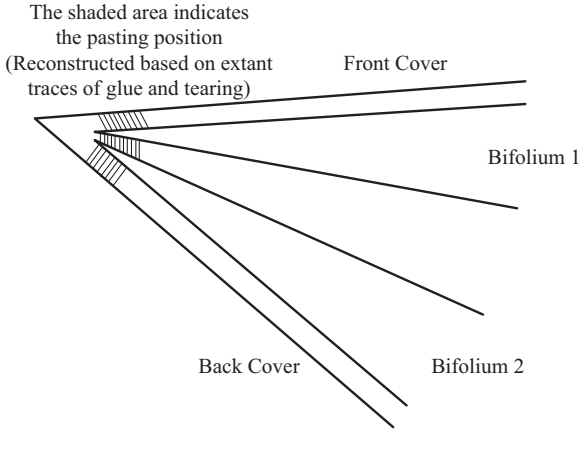
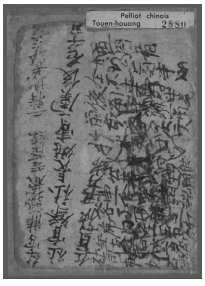
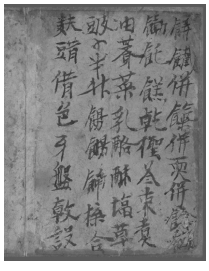
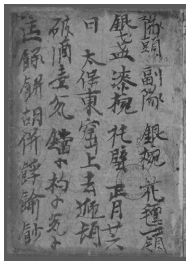
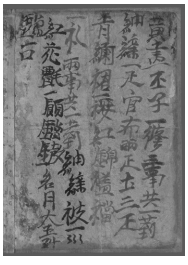
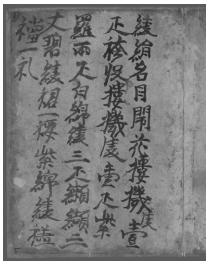
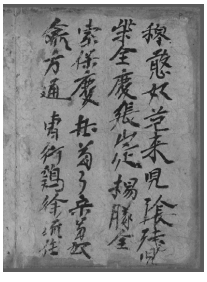
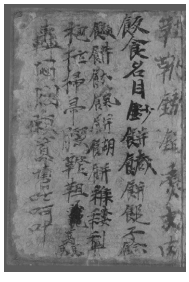
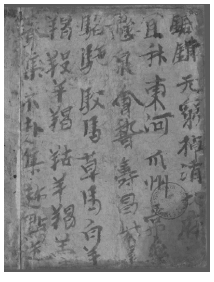
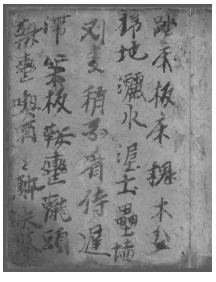
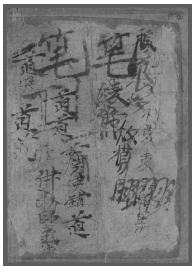
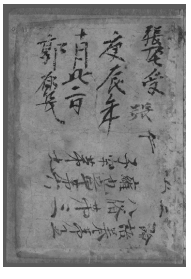


Figure 1 Internal Structure of P.2880 (After Rearranging the Order of Pages)

Table 1 Rearrangement of the Pages in P.2880

Front Cover			
		Page 2 (Inner Side of the Front Cover)	 Page 1 (Outer Side of the Front Cover)
Bifolium 1			
 Page 6	 Page 5	 Page 4	 Page 3
Bifolium 2			
 Page 10	 Page 9	 Page 8	 Page 7
Back Cover			
		 Page 12 (Outer Side of the Back Cover)	 Page 11 (Inner Side of the Back Cover)

After rearranging the pages, the ink transitions between them become smooth, and the text content flows seamlessly, allowing us to analyze the codex's original textual and material layers more accurately. Starting on Page 3, the contents of the main body of the codex are, in order: a list of silk fabrics, a list of cooking utensils (followed by miscellaneous names such as food, place names, waterways, and animals), and a list of meals. The list of names on Page 10 continues onto the inner side of the back cover (Page 11), followed by the date "the 12th day of the 10th lunar month of the *gengchen* 庚辰 year." The names and date appear to have been copied from a circular 转帖. On Page 11, below the names and date, there are four lines of text written at a 90-degree angle to the main text, continuing from the inner side of the front cover (Page 2). Its content is the end of the "Xiang Dang" 乡党 of the *Analects of Confucius* 论语. Following the last sentence, "Zilu 子路 took a few deep breaths and bowed to Confucius," is the title "*Analects of Confucius*, Chapter 5"; appended to this is a table of contents listing the titles of Chapters 1 through 10 (Figure 2). The cover of this codex appears to have been cut from a manuscript of the *Analects of Confucius*, and the codex's producer also rotated the cut-out paper by 90 degrees.

There is also a copy of the association circular for the spring banquet 春座局席社司转帖抄 (Page 1) on the front cover, but on the other side (Ning & Hao 1997, 206–208). The copyist rotated the codex 90 degrees to the right, with the fore-edge facing up and the spine facing down, and wrote vertically from left to right. When reaching the section with the names of the association members, the copyist once again rotated the codex

Figure 2 The "Xiang Dang" of the *Analects of Confucius* on the Inner Side of the Cover of P.2880

90 degrees to the right, utilizing the blank spaces on the page to copy the names. There are doodles on the circular, making the content illegible. The page margins also contain miscellaneous writing such as "association official" 社官, "The Sutra of Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha Spoken by the Buddha" 佛说地藏菩萨经, and "At that time, Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha" 二(尔)时地藏菩萨. The inner side of the front cover features a human figure and a horse's head (Page 2), while the outer side of the back cover bears a student's calligraphy practice (Page 12). Except for the text from the *Analects of Confucius*, none of the text on the front and back covers crosses the fold of the cover. Some of the text clearly stops at the fold, indicating that it was added after the cover was pasted to the codex.

4 Conclusion

The manuscripts discussed in this study may be texts copied successively by one or more individuals or incorporate fragments of discarded manuscripts. They combine writing preserved from different periods and possess a layered internal structure. This study illustrates how people in the medieval period bound, restored, used, and reused manuscripts, providing further details for research in the history of material culture and book culture. Moreover, drawing inspiration from the Western theory of the stratigraphy of the manuscript, this study reconstructs the formation and changing processes of certain manuscripts by analyzing their textual and material layers, thereby offering guidance for the collation of relevant texts and manuscript cataloging. Just as different strata are distinguished at archaeological sites, identifying the strata of a manuscript allows us to better determine the chronological relationships and nature of its various components, as well as to reconstruct the textual and morphological changes, additions, and deletions within the manuscript. A comprehensive understanding of the history of an individual manuscript and the context surrounding each change will provide valuable insights for manuscript cataloging and textual research.

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