

# ***Marginal Comedy and the Production of Sutras in 9th-Century Dunhuang***

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## *Abstract:*

There is something delightful about jottings and doodles in the margins of religious books. Perhaps it is the counterpoint that they offer to the generally serious and devout contents of the texts they abut. Perhaps it is also that marginalia emphasize the process of producing scripture, and the human hands at work. Marginalia, particularly marginal images, are more familiar to studies of medieval European manuscripts than to Asian manuscript studies. This talk employs a selection of jottings and doodles created during the production of copies of the Tibetan Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in 100,000 lines (Skt. Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā; Tib. Yum 'bum pa) at Dunhuang from the late-820s to early 840s. Attending to scribes' and editors' fits of anger and devotion, and also to their comedic doodles and scrawls, it offers a glimpse into the personalities and lives of the Chinese and Tibetan men and women tasked with producing these sutras. It suggests that we appreciate their comedy both as a relief from the sometimes monotonous nature of their work, and from the challenging conditions under which they labored.

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