



tradition of painting constellations on the ceilings of tombs started in the Han dynasty in China and carried on into the Koguryo kingdom in Korea.

Other Koryo tomb murals remain from the eleventh- or twelfth-century Surakam-dong tomb in Kaesong, the thirteenth-century Poptangbang tomb in Changdan, and Kochang tomb in South Kyongsang province, likewise of the eleventh or twelfth century and discovered in 1971. The latter tomb has musicians and dancers in addition to the twelve zodiac animal spirits. Smooth, flowing lines and bright colours characterize these tomb paintings, as does a residual influence from Koguryo tomb paintings.²⁹

Slate coffins were used in Koryo burials, usually filled with precious burial goods such as celadon vessels, placed beside the cremated remains of the tomb occupant. Examples of these slate coffins, which had carved decoration around the outsides depicting the animals of the four directions, can be seen in the Victoria and Albert Museum,³⁰ the National Museum of Korea and Songgyungwan University Museum in Seoul.

Temples

No temple buildings survive from the early Koryo, although the establishment of many temples is recorded. As in China and Japan, most of the structures were of wood, which is easily destroyed. The earliest surviving wooden Koryo building is at Pongjong temple in Andong, probably dating to the thirteenth century. The best example is the Hall of Eternal Life (Muryangsu-jon) at Pusok temple in Yongju, also of the thirteenth century. Notable features are tapered columns, three-tiered roof supports, a dual roof edge and ceilingless openwork in the hall giving a sense of grandeur (fig. 42).³¹

Pagoda styles varied in the Koryo, the earlier ones predictably continuing the Silla

42. Above: The Hall of Eternal Life (Muryangsu-jon) at Pusok temple in southeast Korea is one of the earliest surviving wooden buildings in Korea. Koryo period, 13th century AD.

43. Right: Ten-storey stone pagoda from Kyongchon temple, with Mongol Lamaist Buddhist decoration, showing the all-pervading effect of the Mongol defeat of Korea in the late 13th century. Late Koryo period, 14th century AD. Ht: 13.5 m.





44. Paradise scene on the frontispiece to the Amitayus sutra. Painted and written in silver and gold by a monk-scribe for his mother, this is an example of the large numbers of such magnificent Buddhist manuscripts produced at this time. Koryo period, AD 1341. Ht: 22 cm.

The outer covers of these manuscripts are usually decorated with large flowers known as 'precious visages' (*posang tangcho*), with a rectangular cartouche containing the title of the work in vertical gold or silver characters. Two characters resembling inverted commas are usually placed at the top of the title. These are a mantra, corresponding to the *siddham* seed character *om*. The mantra *om* refers to the 'lion's roar' or the voice of the Buddha, which is present in the sutra because it is the sermon the Buddha preached.³⁸

Inside the cover appears a magnificent frontispiece, an illustration of the Buddha preaching to an assembly. This is a painted vision of the words of the scripture and is meticulously drawn entirely in gold, using very thin 'iron wire' lines. Very occasionally tiny touches of colour are used for details of the divinities. The frontispiece presents a dazzling scene on the dark blue background and is usually framed with Buddhist symbols, such as the *vajra* (thunderbolt, symbolizing the indestructibility of the Buddha's teaching) and the *cakra* (wheel, symbolizing the Buddhist Law). Korean sutras can be distinguished from

straight-lined style. A softer Koryo type then developed, demonstrated in the eleventh-century, seven-storey pagoda at Hyonhwa-sa in Kaepung.³² Hexagonal or octagonal pagodas such as the nine-storey one at Wolchong-sa on Mount Odae were influenced by Song China, while unconventional, local styles are represented by the curious, mushroom-like thirteenth-century pagoda at Unju temple in South Cholla province. The latter has seven storeys whose flat circular forms may be wheel-shaped, referring to the Buddhist Wheel of the Law.³³ Unju-sa is an example of a temple begun in the Koryo which incorporated shamanistic features, such as seven flat round discs of rock on a hill beside the temple which represent the seven stars of the Big Dipper, popular in Daoist and shamanist iconography. It is called the 'Temple of one thousand Buddhas and one thousand pagodas', after the numerous pagodas lining the beautiful valley approaching the temple and the Buddha figures dotted all over the temple site. The Lamaist influence of the Mongols can be seen in late Koryo pagodas, such as the ten-storey marble pagoda from Kyongchon temple, now in Kyongbok palace in Seoul. This is dated to 1348 and is 13.5 m (44 ft) high, highly decorated with sculpted figures and buildings in relief (fig. 43).³⁴

Stone lanterns of the Koryo were made in many different shapes, with octagonal columns, columns in the shape of a pair of lions, round columns or octagonal platforms. One of the best examples of a Koryo stone lantern can be seen at Kwanchok temple in front of the gigantic Miruk statue (fig. 46). It is 5.45 m (17.8 ft) high and was probably made in the late tenth century. It shows influence from the Unified Silla stone lantern at Hwa'om temple, but the juxtaposition of a square top part on a cylindrical column is quite new.³⁵

Buddhist illuminated manuscripts

The hand-copying of Buddhist sutras (sermons attributed to the Buddha) was regarded as one of the most meritorious deeds in the Koryo. It required great accuracy and skill in calligraphy. Such hand-written sutra manuscripts (*sagyong*) were therefore commissioned by devotees with the aim of earning merit and thus being reborn in a better state or in paradise, released from all worldly suffering. Illuminated Buddhist sutras were produced in China and Japan as well as Korea, but in the Koryo dynasty Buddhism reached such a highpoint and artistic creativity was concentrated in such a way that remarkably beautiful works of art were created. Most of the extant Koryo illuminated sutra manuscripts are now in Japan and are little seen. The British Museum is fortunate to have one of the few examples outside Japan or Korea (fig. 44).³⁶

The manuscripts were incredibly sumptuous products, commissioned by the palace or aristocrats and written by monk-scribes. They were usually written on high-quality paper, dyed a deep indigo blue and lavishly embellished with the most precious materials available – gold and silver. The two most common sutras were the Avatamsaka sutra (*Hwaomgyong*) and the Lotus sutra (*Pophwagyong*). Sometimes white, purple or pale yellow paper was used in either of two formats, a handscroll or a folding, concertina-like booklet, the latter probably influenced by Chinese woodblock-printed sutras of the Song dynasty. It is thought that this folding booklet style originated with the early Indian sutras written on pothi leaves, as opposed to the traditional Chinese handscroll form.³⁷

Chinese and Japanese ones by the border above the painting, which is broader at the top than the bottom.

On the first page of text is written the name of the translator of the original Pali or Sanskrit. The text is written vertically in silver or gold Chinese characters in regular *haeso* (Chinese: *kaishu*), that is, standard script. There are usually seventeen characters to a line, occasionally fourteen or fifteen. At the end of the text is placed a colophon giving the date and the name of the patron who commissioned the manuscript and the reason for doing so. It is interesting that the earlier Koryo sutras were commissioned for the purpose of protecting the nation, whereas the later ones, as revealed by the colophons, were increasingly for the sake of personal happiness or profit.³⁹

The quantity and quality of such manuscripts produced in the Koryo is astounding. A Royal Sutra Scriptorium or Sagyongwon was established and appears in the *Koryo sa* in 1181 when the Tripitaka written in silver letters was commissioned by King Myongjong. In addition to monk-scribes, skilled professional calligraphers were employed in the Sagyongwon. It was divided up under King Chungnyol (reigned 1274–1308) into the Scriptorium of Silver Letters (Unjawon) and the Scriptorium of Gold Letters (Kumjawon). Sometimes the king wrote inscriptions on newly finished sutras and in some cases the name of the scribes are recorded, as in the British Museum's example, which is a small Amitabha sutra written by the monk Chonggo in 1341 to earn a meritorious deed for his mother. He must have been a high-ranking monk and was also the scribe of a 1340 copy of the Lotus sutra in gold letters, now in Japan.⁴⁰

Koryo illuminated manuscripts were treasured in China and Japan as much as in Korea. In Muromachi Japan Korean sutras were amongst the most sought-after and in Yuan China they were regular items of tribute. There are references in the *Koryo sa* to Koryo sutra-writers being sent to China: 'In March of the 16th year of King Ch'ungnyol (1290), the Chinese Emperor ordered the writing of gold and silver sutras, and selected excellent monk scribes, therefore 35 Korean monks were dispatched to the Yuan court ... In April of the same year, 65 Koryo monks, sutra-writers, were dispatched to Yuan. ...' The demand continued and, in 1305, a Mongol envoy took 'one hundred Koryo sutra-writers back with him'.⁴¹

Both the earliest and the most elaborate Koryo illuminated sutras are now in Japan. The earliest, in the possession of the Bunkacho in Tokyo, is a volume in handscroll format of the *Tae Pojokgyong*, dated to 1006. It has a frontispiece painted in silver of three standing Bodhisattvas and a text in gold on blue paper. The most elaborate is the entire Lotus sutra written in small gold and silver characters on dark blue indigo-dyed silk in the shape of a seven-storey pagoda, mounted as a hanging scroll. It is dated to 1249 and is stored in the To-ji in Kyoto.⁴² The latter is an example of a combination of worship of the pagoda and writing of a sutra, the two most meritorious deeds. Writing out the sutra in the form of a pagoda to worship is a supreme instance of pious action.

The fact that so many of these Koryo illuminated manuscripts have been carefully preserved in Japanese Buddhist temples is testimony to the aesthetic and religious values attributed to them. They are beautiful examples of the refined courtly style of Koryo art, as well as important historical documents.