

Sacred Books : Words That Transcend

Bibliographic exhibition

April 22 to April 30, 2025

Lobbies - Alberto Aguilera 23 and Building A, Cantoblanco

On the occasion of the celebration of Book and Earth Day, Comillas Spirituality, in collaboration with the Library Service, presents the bibliographic exhibition Sacred Books: Words That Transcend. This exhibition brings together the sacred texts of five major religious traditions: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Its aim is to promote interreligious understanding and encourage visitors to explore the fundamental texts that have guided the beliefs and spiritual practices of millions of people throughout history.

The exhibition will be on display from April 22 to April 30, 2025, in the lobbies of Alberto Aguilera 23 and Building A in Cantoblanco.



Sacred Books: Words That Transcend

Since the dawn of humanity, writing has been a bridge between the earthly and the divine. Through it, different religious traditions have captured their wisdom, revelations, and principles, granting certain texts a sacred character. These books not only convey doctrines and norms but also serve as an expression of a spiritual quest that transcends centuries and cultures. In this exhibition, we present the sacred texts of five major religious traditions, each with its own history, significance, and message.



The Bible (Christianity): It is the sacred book of Christianity, composed of the Old Testament and the New Testament. It contains the accounts of creation, the history of the people of Israel, the life and teachings of Jesus, and the mission of his followers. It is a source of faith, inspiration, and guidance for millions of people around the world.



The word Bible comes from the Greek βιβλίον, which means "book." The Old Testament refers to the history of the people of Israel from creation up to the time before the coming of Jesus. It is divided into the Pentateuch (the first five books), the Historical books, the Prophetic books, and the Poetic books. The New Testament consists of 66 books, including the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), the Acts of the Apostles, the Letters, and the Book of Revelation.



Since the Bible is a compilation of several books written at different moments in history, there are various versions. The Catholic version includes 73 books—46 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament—while Protestant Bibles usually contain 66 books, omitting seven books from the Old Testament, known as the Deuterocanonical books.

The Torah (Judaism): The Torah comprises the first five books of the Hebrew Bible and forms the foundation of Jewish tradition. It contains the origin story of the people of Israel, as well as the Law revealed by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. As such, it is an essential text for Jewish identity and religious practice.

The Torah includes the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, which speak not only about the origins of the Israelites but also about the creation of the world. The Hebrew word Torah means "teaching," "instruction," or "law," and its contents reflect God's teachings to the people of Israel. The Torah should not be confused with other significant Hebrew texts used in Jewish religious life, such as the Talmud, the Tanakh, or the Mishnah.

The Qur'an (Islam): The Qur'an is the sacred book of Islam, regarded by Muslims as the word of God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad through the Archangel Gabriel. Written in Arabic, the Qur'an contains teachings on faith, morality, justice, and community life.

The Qur'an is composed of 114 chapters, called surahs, which vary in length and are further divided into verses known as ayat. In total, the Qur'an contains 6,236 ayat. Each part of the Qur'an holds specific meaning and purpose in the spiritual and religious life of Muslims.

The first surah, Al-Fatiha—also known as "The Opening"—is recited in every cycle of Islamic prayer (salat).



The Bhagavad-gītā (Hinduism):

The Bhagavad-gītā is a philosophical and spiritual dialogue that forms part of the Mahabharata, one of the great epics of Hinduism. In it, the god Krishna instructs the warrior Arjuna on duty, devotion, and the path to spiritual liberation.

The name Bhagavad Gita means "The Song of God," and it is considered the most important sacred text in Hinduism, offering profound philosophical and spiritual teachings. It consists of 700 verses written in Sanskrit, blending concepts from the foundational Hindu scriptures—the Vedas and the Upanishads—into a unique and coherent vision that emphasizes belief in one God and the underlying unity of all existence.



The Tipitaka (Buddhism):

The Tipitaka is the collection of the Buddha's teachings and forms the foundation of Theravāda Buddhism. It is divided into three main sections, called pitaka, meaning "basket," in reference to the containers in which palm-leaf manuscripts were stored.



For this reason, the canon is traditionally known as the Tripiṭaka ("three baskets"):

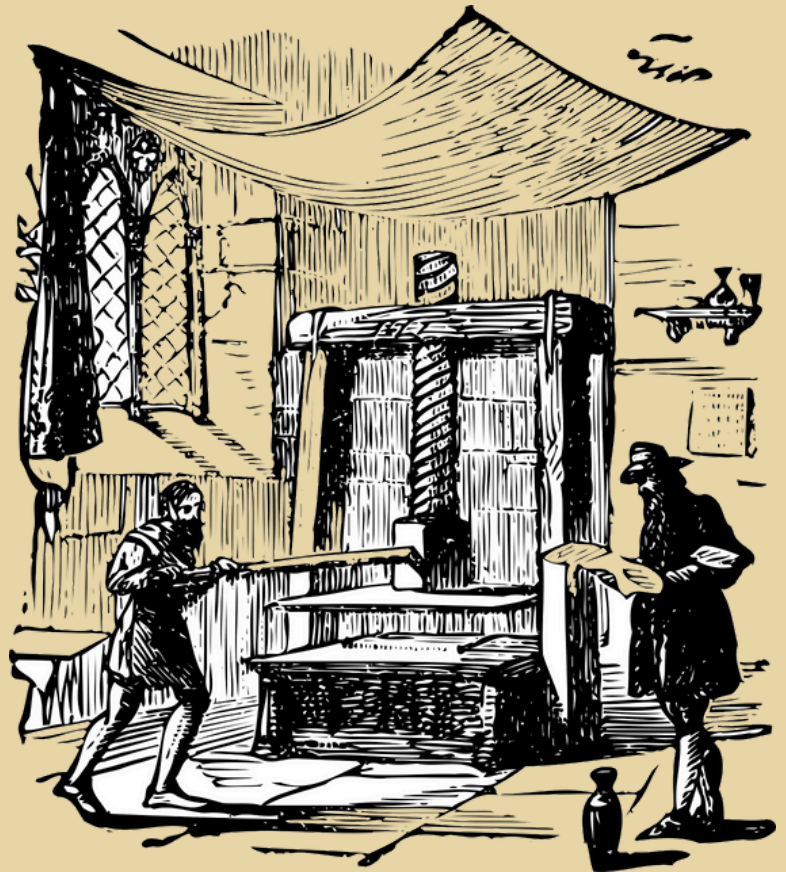
Vinaya Pitaka ("Basket of Discipline"): Deals with the rules and the disciplinary life of the sangha (the Buddhist community). Sutta Pitaka ("Basket of Discourses"): Contains sermons and teachings attributed to the Buddha, as well as religious poetry. Abhidhamma Pitaka ("Basket of Higher Knowledge"): Gathers philosophical treatises that elaborate on Buddhist doctrines, especially those concerning the mind and reality.

Although the canon was transcribed about two thousand years ago, its oral origins remain present in Buddhist practice: memorization and recitation continue to be common methods of study and transmission.

Bibliographic commentary

Bible

At the exhibition, visitors can admire a facsimile copy of the Gutenberg Bible, also known as the "42-line Bible." The original is a bibliographic treasure of incalculable historical and economic value that marks the beginning of the printing era. This invention represents a turning point in the history of knowledge dissemination, a crucial technological advancement during a time of increasing demand for books that could not be met by manually produced manuscripts. Its impact on culture, education, the 16th-century Protestant Reformation, and society was profound and enduring, laying the foundations for modern global communication.



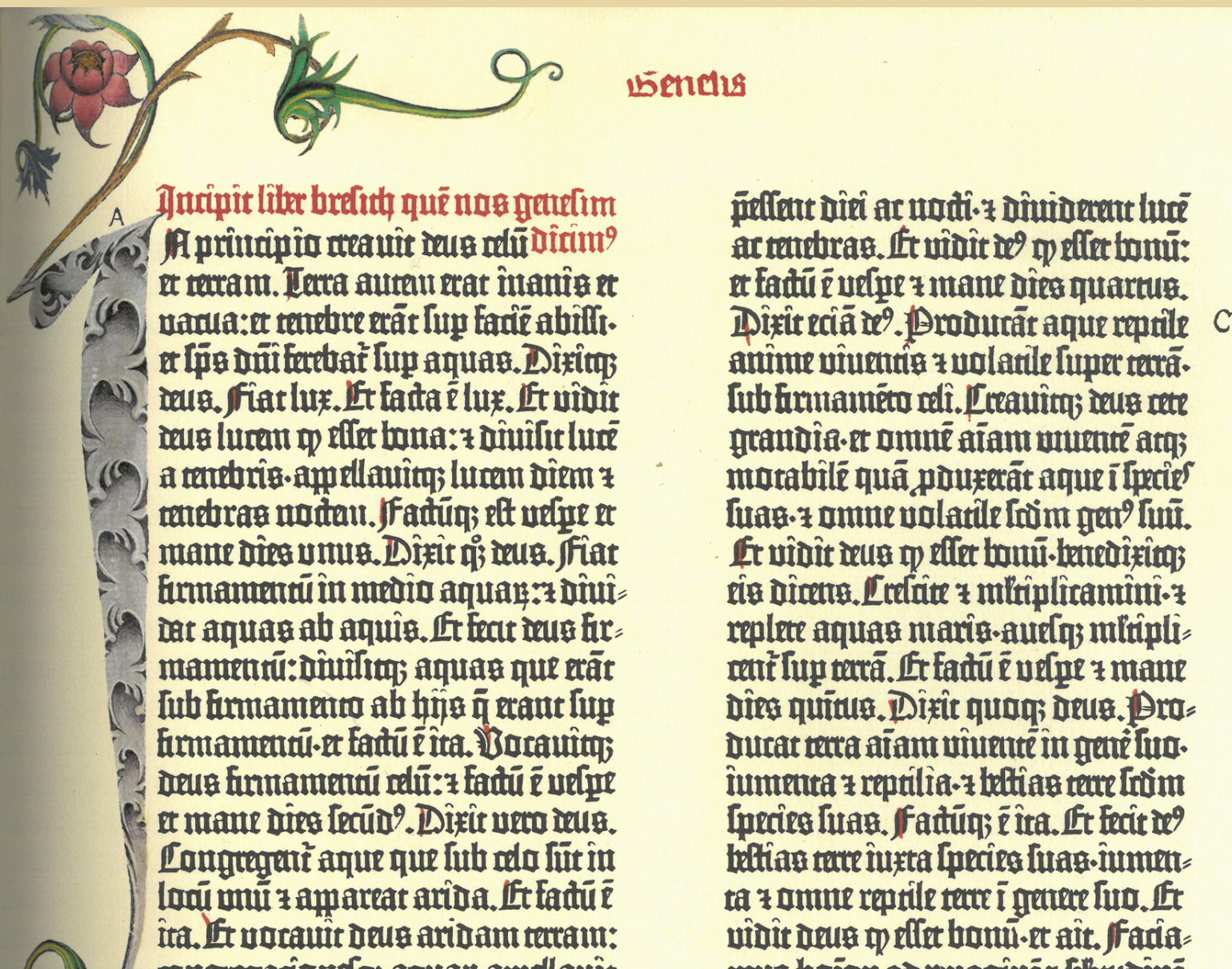
Initially printed by Johannes Gutenberg in Mainz around 1454, with its final edition published by Fust and Schöffer in 1456, it is considered a monumental work, not only as the first book printed using movable type but also for its extraordinary quality. The original print run consisted of approximately 180 copies: 150 on paper and 30 on vellum. Today, around 40 copies survive worldwide, only 20 of which are complete. It contains 1,282 pages, typically bound in two volumes, with each page featuring two columns of 42 lines. It uses Gothic script, prevalent in early printing, and is printed in two inks with blank initials for later illumination. Each copy is unique due to personalized binding and decoration.

Spain houses two copies: the first, incomplete, is held at the University of Seville. This New Testament has ties to the Jesuit Order as it originated from their Professed House in Seville. Initially a Humanities College (1558), it became a Professed House in 1579 until the Jesuits were expelled by Charles III in 1767. From 1771 onward, it served as a university site until its relocation in 1954. This "Sevillian and Jesuit" volume is printed on paper with exquisitely decorated initials featuring miniatures and bound in Dutch style, likely from the 19th century.

The second copy belongs to the State Public Library in Burgos and is one of the few complete editions worldwide. It consists of two volumes with remarkable illumination and Renaissance binding. It arrived at the library through a donation from Luis de Maluenda, canon of Burgos Cathedral, to the San Juan de Ortega Monastery in 1488. It was rediscovered among the library's holdings by Matías Martínez, its director in the early 20th century.

The presence of two Gutenberg Bible copies in Spain constitutes valuable testimony to the country's rich bibliographic heritage and highlights the historical significance of the Jesuit cultural.

The facsimile displayed at the exhibition, produced by Vicent García Editores in Valencia (1995), stands out for its technical rigor and historical fidelity. It replicates the copy preserved in Burgos and was created as a limited and numbered edition of 690 copies. Bound in leather over wooden boards with metal fittings, it reproduces the original dimensions, watermarks, and laid paper used by Gutenberg in 1454. This magnificent edition showcases Gutenberg's technical perfection and serves as a key piece for understanding book history and cultural dissemination during the Renaissance. It was generously donated by José López Calo, SJ (1922–2020), emeritus professor at the University of Santiago de Compostela, to Comillas Pontifical University, a legacy reflecting his lifelong commitment to promoting cultural and religious heritage as an eminent musicologist.



Torah

The Torah on display is a remarkable Viennese edition from 1859, notable for its historical significance and contribution to the study and understanding of the Hebrew text. This work consists of five volumes, each dedicated to one of the books: Bereshit (Genesis), Shemot (Exodus), Vayikra (Leviticus), Bemidbar (Numbers), and Devarim (Deuteronomy). The exhibition features the first two volumes, Genesis and Exodus, which provide a fascinating window into the origins and liberation of the Jewish people.



The edition includes the commentary of Rashi, an acronym for Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki, a prominent Jewish scholar of the 11th century. Born in 1040 in Troyes, France, Rashi became a central figure in Ashkenazi Judaism and left an indelible mark on classical rabbinic literature. His commentary on the Torah is considered his masterpiece and one of the most influential works in Jewish history. Rashi's insights combine linguistic precision with profound spiritual depth, making his work essential for understanding both the Torah and Talmud.

This magnificent edition allows visitors to appreciate the linguistic richness and spiritual profundity of Judaism's foundational texts, presented in a format that blends scholarly rigor with typographical beauty. It is a valuable piece of historical heritage from the Pontifical Comillas University, originating from the rich bibliographic collection of the Society of Jesus in Marneffe, Belgium. This institution served as an intellectual and spiritual refuge for Jesuits exiled from Spain following the dissolution of their order in 1931.



The Quran

the sacred text of Islam, has been the subject of numerous editions. Among them, we highlight a masterpiece of bibliophilia published in 1980 by the Editora de los Amigos del Círculo del Bibliófilo. This bilingual Spanish-Arabic edition, featuring the Spanish translation by Vicente Ortiz de la Puebla, combines editorial artistry with Islamic spirituality. Its limited print run of 1499 numbered copies enhances its exclusivity and appeal to collectors and bibliophiles. Bound in full leather adorned with delicate mosaics in shades of blue and green, gold embossing, and gilt-edged pages, it stands as a bibliographic gem. Each page is beautifully decorated with two-tone borders, a design that not only accentuates the religious content but also transforms this book into an object of aesthetic contemplation.



Beyond its religious function, this magnificent edition of the Quran serves as tangible evidence of how sacred words can inspire the creation of true works of art, transcending their original purpose to become a symbol of cultural and spiritual richness.

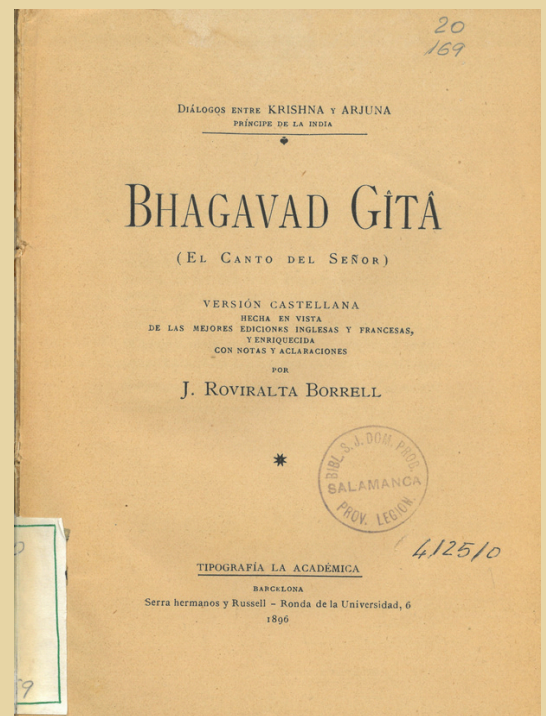
The translation by Vicente Ortiz de la Puebla, pseudonym of Francisco Nacente y Soler (1841–1894), a prominent 19th century writer, editor, translator, and historian, is based on the French version by orientalist Albert Kazimirski published in 1840. Despite being a retranslation, it is recognized for its innovative and accessible approach by enriching the text with explanatory notes and commentary that facilitate understanding. This pioneering work played a key role in spreading Islam in Spain and marked a milestone in its time.

The second selected edition of the Quran is the one prepared by Arabist Julio Cortés Soroa (1924–2009) and published by Herder in 1999. It is a translation based on the official Arabic text sponsored by King Fuad I of Egypt in 1923. This version is known as the Amiri Quran or Cairo Edition and holds great historical and religious significance. Originally published on July 10, 1924, it was the result of a project that began in 1907 under the supervision of prominent scholars from Al-Azhar University and marked a turning point in Islamic history as it was the first printed Quran recognized by a Muslim authority.

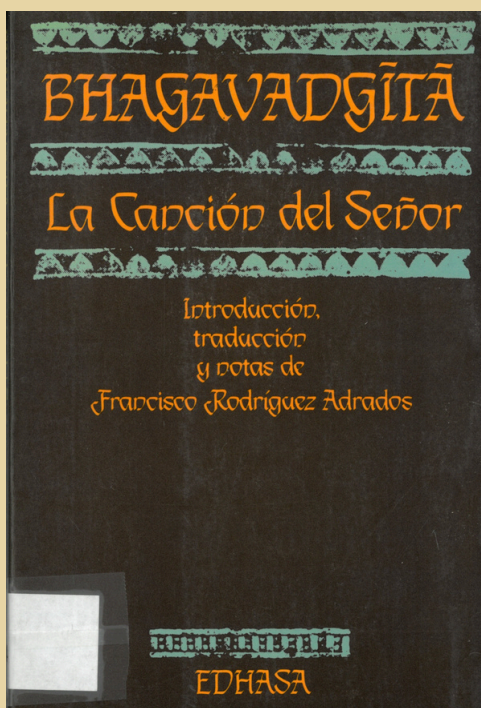
Julio Cortés' work stands out for its thoroughness and academic rigor. This bilingual edition juxtaposes the original Arabic text with a carefully crafted Spanish translation, enabling deep comparative study. The work is enriched with an introduction that places readers within the historical and cultural context of the text, a glossary of Quranic terms, and an analytical index. This combination of elements makes Cortés' edition an important reference for scholars and readers interested in Islam within the Spanish-speaking world.

Bhagavad-gītā

The Bhagavad-gītā has been highlighted through two notable editions, showcasing its significance as a sacred Hindu text. The first is the Spanish translation by José Roviralta Borrell (1856–1926), published in Barcelona in 1896. This version marked a milestone in disseminating the classical Hindu text among Spanish-speaking readers and is distinguished by its valuable notes that facilitate understanding of the complex philosophical and religious concepts in the original Sanskrit. Edited by Serra Hermanos y Russel, renowned for their high-quality printing under the emblematic “La Academia,” this edition played an important role in Barcelona's publishing and typographic landscape during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.



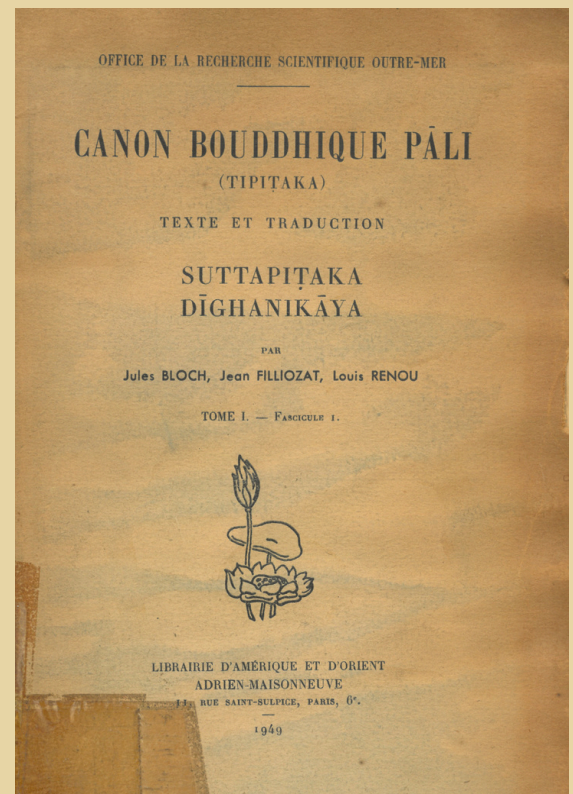
José Roviralta, the translator, was a prominent figure in introducing and promoting Theosophy in Spain during the same period. His work contributed to incorporating new philosophical and spiritual ideas into Spain's intellectual panorama. Beyond spiritual texts, Roviralta is also celebrated for his translation of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's Faust, which was revised and prefaced by Francisco Ayala, demonstrating the lasting quality of his contributions.



The second edition of the Bhagavad-gītā selected is the one published by Edhasa in 1988, titled The Song of the Lord. This literary and academic gem was translated from Sanskrit by the renowned philologist and Hellenist Francisco Rodríguez Adrados (1922–2020). With his extensive expertise and scholarship, Adrados achieves a balance between fidelity to the original text and accessibility for readers. His introduction and explanatory notes provide valuable cultural and historical context, enabling readers to delve into the philosophical and spiritual depths of this sacred Hindu text. This translation is considered essential for anyone interested in Eastern philosophy, spirituality, or classical literature.

Tipitaka

Two works have been selected that significantly contribute to the study and dissemination of Buddhism in the West. The first is the edition of the Pali Buddhist Canon (Tipitaka) published in Paris in 1949 by Lib. D' Amerique et D' Orient, a scholarly gem. This bilingual work presents 97 pages of text in Pali alongside its French translation on facing pages, facilitating direct access to Buddhist teachings in their original language. The translation, carried out by the eminent French Indologist Louis Renou (1896–1966), adds notable value to this edition. Although the project remained unfinished, the 1949 edition stands as an invaluable testament to academic efforts to bring Buddhism closer to the West. Its recent reprint in 2023 underscores the continued relevance of this work in Buddhist studies.



The second, *In the Buddha's Words*, edited by Bhikkhu Bodhi and published in 2005 by Wisdom Publications, is an essential anthology of Buddha's discourses drawn from the Pali Canon, the oldest record of his teachings. The text is structured into ten thematic chapters covering a wide range of topics, from everyday aspects such as marriage and family relationships to deeper issues like renunciation and the path to enlightenment. Each chapter includes a concise introduction that guides readers toward a deeper understanding of the texts, directly translated from Pali into English by renowned experts. Its editor, Bhikkhu Bodhi (1944–), an American Buddhist monk, is considered one of the world's leading authorities on Theravada Buddhism and presides over the Buddhist Association of America. Bodhi has made significant contributions as a translator, author, and editor of Buddhist texts, and in this selected work, he systematically presents Buddha's teachings in an accessible and comprehensible manner, making this anthology an indispensable resource for both researchers and practitioners.

Both works, separated by more than half a century, exemplify the ongoing effort to make Buddhist teachings accessible to Western audiences. While the 1949 edition provides the original text, Bhikkhu Bodhi's anthology offers a structured guide through Buddha's fundamental teachings. Together, these works constitute invaluable resources for anyone interested in deepening their understanding of Buddhism.

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