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THE FEATURES OF THE INTERPRETATION OF MAÑGALA-SYMBOLS IN BUDDHIST SANSKRIT MANUSCRIPTS FROM CENTRAL ASIA

Palaeographers working with the Buddhist MSS debate about the interpretation of the *mañgala*-symbols opening the Buddhist manuscript texts. The main problem of this dispute is how to interpret ornamental symbols-ideograms (*per se* — logograms) at the beginning of the text: as *om*, as *siddham* or (more rarely) as *svasti*? As Lore Sander (Germany) points out, such question arises when studying the Gilgit manuscripts mainly [1]. At first glance, there is no fundamental difference between these three openings: each of them represents the good wishes to adept before text reading. However, the accuracy and thoroughness of palaeographic science, as well as the nuances of the etymology of the three sacred words, require their clear identification.

Today the main propositions concerning the problems of interpretation of opening *mañgala*-symbols accepted in the modern Indian palaeography are most clearly reflected in three publications: the article of German Indologist Gustav Roth (1916—2008), “*Mañgala*-Symbols in Buddhist Sanskrit Manuscripts and Inscriptions” [2], in the article of his colleague Lore Sander “Om or Siddham — Remarks on Openings of Buddhist Manuscripts and Inscriptions from Gilgit and Central Asia” [3], as well as in the extended researching remark of Japanese Buddhistologist Hirofumi Toda in his article “Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscript from the National Archives of Nepal” [4].

Actually, the problem of the interpretation of the opening *mañgala*-symbols coincides with the beginning of the study of Sanskrit manuscripts. At the end of 19th century Lorenz Franz Kielhorn and Louis de la Vallee Poussin encountered this problem.

At the end of 19th — beginning of 20th centuries the Sanskrit edition of a manuscript in Brahmi script prepared by Augustus Frederick Rudolf Hoernle (1841—1918) was published. This manuscript on birch bark numbering 51 folios was acquired by British lieutenant Hamilton Bower (1858—1940). The discovery of the manuscript has become an event in the world manuscriptology because it testified on the existence of the Buddhist civilization in East Turkestan. Hoernle, having managed “on the face of it, incomprehensible” text, has

identified the ideogram of initial *mañgala-śloka* as *om* [5].

In the 20s of 20th century E. Hultzsch (1857—1927) solved this problem researching the epigraphic material — namely, the Aśoka's Rock Edicts [6].

The discovery of ancient manuscripts near Gilgit in 1936 gave a new impulse to the study of Central Asian Sanskrit manuscripts. N. Dutt and U. Wogihara were the leaders of that research process. After the World War II palaeographers turned to the studying of the Central Asia manuscript heritage again. So the dispute regarding the interpretation of opening *mañgala*-symbols was continued. We can distinguish three different point of views, showing all possible answers to this question: some scholars think that most of the opening symbols must be interpreted as *om* [7]; others consider *mañgala-ślokas'* openings as *siddham* [8]; the third “group” of researchers does not hurry to unambiguously interpret the opening *mañgala*-symbols, inclining, however, to the second point of view [9].

Particularly, we would like to cover the work of J. Boeles “The Migration of the Magic Syllable OM” [10], where the author basing on results of Hoernle research pointed in detail the first mentions of this *mantra* in the Védas and Upaniṣads and presented the *om* traditional interpretations and modes of its writing. Also, J. Boeles retraced the changes in the writing of this sacred syllable-word that have taken place throughout the expansion of Indo-Buddhist culture — from India to South- East Asia, Central Asia and the Far East.

It is necessary to note that J. Boeles holds fast the point of view that ideograms often occurring in the early Central Asian manuscripts and depicting the sacred conch *śaṅkha* located horizontally and shaped like a curl with a loop should be treated as *om* [11]. To solve the problems of his research J. Boeles used Tibetan woodcut, Sanskrit manuscripts and the data of Indian epigraphy.

Thus, basing on analysis epigraphic material of the Gupta period J. Boeles have dated the the earliest examples of the *om* writing in the form of right-curl, resembling the Buddha's curl (the one of thirty two icono-