

***Ancient Buddhist Scrolls from Gandhāra. The British Library Kharoṣṭhī Fragments. Richard Salomon with contribution by Raymond Allchin and Mark Bernard. University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1999, 271 pp. + 34 plts. + Appendix.***

The book under review represents a unique feat. Richard Salomon was brave enough to undertake a detailed description of the British Library's entire collection of manuscripts and ceramic inscriptions in Kharoṣṭhī writing. He has taken into account all aspects: dating, place of discovery, means of preparing writing materials, palaeography, orthography, special features of language and style, content of identified works, general conclusions about the culture of Gandhāra, characteristics of the local Buddhist tradition, and novelties introduced by the materials under consideration into the history of Buddhism.

Since 1962, when John Brough released a separate volume of fragments from the *Dharmapāda* manuscript in Kharoṣṭhī script in Gāndhārī prakrit from manuscript collections in St. Petersburg and Paris, such complete and detailed studies have been lacking. In his own words, Salomon's book is merely the first volume of his study; the publication of the texts themselves with translation is anticipated in the near future.

The description of newly discovered birch-bark scrolls formed the basis for his first book, and the discovery itself served as the stimulus for writing it. It occurred that members of the Manuscript Section of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies were among the first to learn of these new manuscripts. In 1994, Mark Bernard, a member of the Preservation and Conservation Department, Oriental and India Office Collections of the British Library, worked in the repository of Eastern manuscripts at the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies. It was he who told us of the difficult task of restoring birch-bark manuscripts in lamentable condition recently acquired by the British Library. Since a preliminary inspection showed that the new manuscripts were similar to already published fragments of the *Dharmapāda*, we decided that the middle part of this manuscript, which has still not come to light, had finally been found.

R. Salomon's study demonstrates that we were wrong. The British Library acquired yet another birch-bark manuscript, probably not linked to the first one. It consisted of 29 fragments. It remains unclear whether this is an entire volume in the form of scrolls or whether the scrolls existed independently. Salomon counted 21 original scrolls of individual fragments. The number of separate hands he identified also totals 21.

Since news of the discovery appeared, scholarly interest in the manuscript has grown rapidly. There is reason for this: the manuscript is from ancient Gandhāra and may be unique (debate continues over whether a manuscript of the

*Dharmapāda* discovered in Khotan was copied in India or Central Asia). Moreover, it is possible that the most ancient of Indian manuscripts has finally appeared. The speculation proved founded: Salomon gathered all possible proof that it was copied between the beginning of the first and second centuries A.D. The most important link in the chain of proof is the mention of historical figures active at the time of the manuscript's creation: *mahākṣatrapa* Jihonika and Aśpavarmana. They can be identified as Indo-Scythian rulers of the early first century A.D., judging by their names known through legends on coins and inscriptions.

Salomon successfully integrated the new manuscript into Gandhāra Buddhism, analysing this in chapter 1: "The background: Gandhāra and Gandhāran Buddhism". The book's second chapter provides a detailed description of all Kharoṣṭhī writing materials held at the British Library. They are divided into two groups: birch-bark manuscripts which have only recently joined the collection, and inscriptions on whole ceramic vessels and fragments of inscriptions on ostraca.

The first part of the book — on the manuscript — is the most valuable. Salomon has done immense work, deciphering the manuscript and identifying the texts it contains. It is clear that we deal here with a collection, although not all of its parts have yet been identified.

Salomon notes the following groups of texts identified by their contents:

1) fragments of Hīnayāna *sūtras* with commentaries; they are not numerous (see section 2.2.1). The best preserved is the *Saṅgīti-sūtra* with an unknown commentary (fragment 15). Texts such as this *sūtra* as an important link in the formation of the *Abhidharma-piṭaka* and Buddhist philosophy as an independent branch of knowledge. Fragments 12—14 were identified as a text parallel to the *Aṅguttaranikāya*. Fragments 26 + 29 preserve excerpts from an unidentified *sūtra*.

2) Most numerous in the manuscript are stories which are called *avadāna* or *pūrvayoga* (lit. "past rebirths"). The principle for selecting *avadānas* by content is not clear. Plots that we well know in Sanskrit and Pāli literature are represented by independent versions; in Salomon's view, these are close to stories translated into Chinese as part of the Dharmaguptaka canon. Previously, exact information on the spread of this school in Gandhāra was lacking. Salomon's conclusions are undoubtedly new, but require additional research.

Especially important is the question of which type of collection we encounter here. In many ways, the new manuscript is close to a birch-bark manuscript from Bairam-Ali (Merv oasis, Turkmenia). It is written in Sanskrit, in Brāhmī script, evidently somewhat later (5—7 centuries A.D.). (Excerpts from this manuscript have been published by