

NEW SANSKRIT AND PRAKRIT TEXTS FROM CENTRAL ASIA

The sensational finds of ancient Buddhist manuscripts in Central Asia at the turn of the 19th century marked a new stage in the study of Indian culture and considerably expanded the period's traditional views of the history and evolution of Buddhism and its schools.

The manuscripts confronted specialists in Buddhism with many new problems, such as the interrelation between Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna, the authenticity of the Pāli canon, the reconstruction of Buddha's pre-canonical doctrine, the rise and historical destiny of various schools of northern Buddhism. Simultaneously, a new branch of Oriental studies — Central Asian philology — came into being, with the discovery of two previously unknown languages (Khotanese-Saka) and Tokharian, and of new types of ancient Indian writing (the upright and slanting Central Asian *Brāhmī* alphabets).

The expeditions of P. Pelliot, A. Stein, A. Grünwedel, K. Otani, and other scholars yielded rich collections of Sanskrit and Khotanese Buddhist texts. By now a large part of these manuscripts has been published and studied.

Russian Orientalists, too, made a fundamental contribution to the study of the history of Central Asian culture. Suffice it to mention the expeditions of S. Oldenburg, B. Klements and M. Berezovsky, and the work of N. Petrovsky and N. Krotkov. As a result of their efforts, the Russian Academy of Sciences came to possess a superior collection of Buddhist texts in Sanskrit and Khotanese, mostly from Kashgar and Khotan. Credit for compiling this manuscript collection goes largely to N. Petrovsky.

Today these manuscripts are deposited at the Leningrad Department of the Institute of the Oriental Studies USSR Academy of Sciences. Both in scope and value, this fund is probably on a par with the London, Paris, Berlin and Tokyo collections. Unfortunately, specialists in the field still know too little about it, with the exception of certain

manuscripts and fragments which were published way back, at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century; these include some famous texts, e.g. fragments from the Prakrit *Dhammapada* in *Kharoṣṭhī* writing, the *Kāśyapaparivarta*, the Khotanese Manuscript « E ».

Academician S. Oldenburg, an enthusiastic pioneer in the field of studying Buddhist manuscripts and Central Asian variants of Indian writing, succeeded in identifying a number of Sanskrit Buddhist texts, which he published in the « Bulletin of the Oriental Department of the Russian Archaeological Society ». Altogether, he published more than 30 fragments from Petrovsky's collection. The publications of Oldenburg and his colleagues, N. Mironov and A. Stäel-Holstein, introduced new important data, which was highly appraised by scholars, and drew the attention of specialists in this field (E. Leumann, L. Finot, S. Levi, H. Kern, B. Nanjio and others) to Petrovsky's collection.

The publications of S. Oldenburg, N. Mironov, A. Stäel-Holstein, V. Vorobyov-Desyatovskiy present more than 50 Buddhist texts (mostly fragments) in Sanskrit and Khotanese. This, however, is but a small part of the Leningrad collection: it can be safely asserted today that it contains a large number of new, original Buddhist texts (in Sanskrit), previously known only in Chinese and Tibetan translations. It is clear already at this stage that among the Khotanese fragments there are several texts previously unknown in any form.

At the same time, the Leningrad collection comprises important texts whose existence has long been known but which have remained unpublished. This refers above all to the oldest extant copy of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (the so-called McCartney manuscript) — a *poṭhi*-type manuscript of 280 folios, in ornamental upright Central Asian *Brāhmī*. H. Kern drew on parts of this copy when he published the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*. The McCartney manuscript, however, is far from the only version of this *sūtra* in the Leningrad collection, which contains approximately 100 other fragments of different *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* copies, unknown to the scholars who published this *sūtra*. Work to prepare for publication the McCartney manuscript and the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* fragments is already under way. They will presumably be of great help to students of Buddhism and Indian Culture.

Another unique specimen is the *Kāśyapaparivarta* manuscript in Sanskrit, so far known only from Stäel-Holstein's transliteration. A facsimile edition of this important Buddhist work will undoubtedly stimulate fresh interest in it.

Of great value are the unpublished fragments of the *Sārdulakar-nāvadāna*, their texts differing markedly from the Nepalese version published by E. Cowell and R. Neil.

And yet the greater part of Central Asian documents from the Leningrad collection have not been identified and studied so far, although the fund obviously contains many new texts of the *dhāraṇī* type; frag-

ments of the Sanskrit *Vinaya*; Prajñāpāramitā and Avadāna texts; fragments of the major Mahāyāna *sūtras*, as well as fragments of *sūtras* and business documents in Khotanese.

The first steps taken to resume the study of the Leningrad collection have already produced tangible results. We would like to mention some of them in this paper.

Until recently scholars were familiar with only one version of the Sanskrit text of the *Dharmaśarīra*, from Indikutśahri (one folio, 32 by 7 cm., bearing 32 lines) it was published by H. Stönnner. Now we know that the Leningrad collection includes the full text of another *Dharmaśarīra* version, differing from the published one both in its content and size, moreover, the colophon is preserved. The text is inscribed in black Indian ink on five folios of yellowish paper, 36.5 by 8.3 cm., in upright Central Asian *Brāhmī*, with four lines on each side of every folio. The *Dharmaśarīra* from the Leningrad collection contains a short list of the basic Buddhist categories and reveals direct analogies with works of the *Dharmasaṅgraha* and *Mahāvīyutpatti* type.

The specific importance of this document is still further enhanced by the recent find of a fragment of the Khotanese version of the *Dharmaśarīra* (three folios, recto and verso). Paleographic analysis suggests that it dates from the 7th or 8th century A.D. This text, although it shows traces of affinity with H. Stönnner's Sanskrit text, on the whole cannot be regarded as the latter's Khotanese version. The Khotanese text is much closer to the abovementioned manuscript of the Sanskrit *Dharmaśarīra* deposited at the Leningrad Department of the Institute of the Oriental Studies — but it does not tally completely with that version either. It can be assumed that this is a fragment of the Khotanese text of the *Dharmaśarīra* — a translation of another, as yet unknown, version of the Sanskrit original which nevertheless is rather close to the Leningrad manuscript.

Among the Buddhist Sanskrit fragments there is one folio (recto and verso) retaining the colophon of the Sanskrit original of the *Nagaropamasūtra*, a work previously known only in a Chinese translation, and a small fragment (one folio, recto and verso) of the *Pratimokṣasūtra*, which makes it possible to fill in some of the gaps in the text published by L. Finot. Mention should also be made of the fragment from the *Samādhirājasūtra*, as important *Mahāyāna sūtra*. In several instances the fragment gives an alternative reading compared with the text published by N. Dutt.

In the imposing catalogue of texts of the *dhāraṇī* type, there stands out a section of the Sanskrit *Vajrapāṇisumukhanāmadhāraṇī*; previously it was only known from Chinese, Tibetan and Khotanese translations and the Sanskrit original was believed to be lost. The Sanskrit text is all the more valuable since it materially helps to understand the Khotanese version. Collation of the Sanskrit original with translations makes

it possible to tackle the reconstruction of the original text and to elucidate the evolution of its various versions.

Of exceptional importance are six Sanskrit fragments of the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, a prominent work of the Buddhist canon.

Before that, scholars knew a Sanskrit fragment of this sūtra, published by R. Höernle in 1916. Other Sanskrit fragments of the sūtra, discovered by the third and fourth German expeditions in Turfan and published by E. Waldschmidt, on the whole correspond to the Pāli Hīnayāna version and form part of the Sanskrit canon of the Sarvastivādinās. The six fragments from Leningrad are of unique value, especially in the context of the problem of the relationship between the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna canons.

The Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* was widely popular, as attested by its Tibetan and numerous Chinese translations, and also by the evidence of the Chinese sources that the Indian scholar Dharmakṣema made a special journey to Khotan to look for the full text of this sūtra.

The attempts to collate the new fragments with their Tibetan and Chinese translations have been crowned with success and it is now possible to undertake the reconstruction of the full Sanskrit text of these fragments. The fragments are inscribed on grey paper in black Indian ink, in slanting *Brāhmī* of the transitional type (from the Indian to the Central Asian). One of the fragments repeatedly mentions the name of the sūtra, and, moreover, bears the colophon of a section entitled « End of second section entitled "Unperishable Body of Vajra" ». The text offers the Mahāyāna interpretation of several episodes from Buddha's life (e.g., his meeting with Cunda) and of certain concepts of the Buddhist doctrine. The fragments from Leningrad radically differ from the well-known Pāli version and contain new material, indispensable for studying the Mahāyāna doctrine.

The six fragments of the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* are currently prepared for the press. They are likely to command considerable attention among students of Buddhism.

In recent years, intensive work of Soviet archaeologists in the Soviet Central Asian republics yielded interesting material enriching our knowledge not only of the history, but also of the culture of that important region of the ancient civilization of the East. Much has become clearer in respect of the history of Buddhism in Central Asia and the links of the region with India. The new discoveries have made it possible to regard in a new light such a complex problem as the Kushan art.

As the results of archaeological investigations, whole Buddhist centres, including wonderful monuments of art, were discovered. Excavations yielded also numerous written evidence, from votive inscriptions on the pottery of the Kushan period to bulk manuscripts of the 6-8th centuries A.D. Quite a number of Prakrit and Sanskrit writings in Indian scripts (*Brāhmī* and *Kharoṣṭhī*) were found in different areas of Soviet

Central Asia, and an analysis of these texts provides scholars with new great possibilities of studying a whole set of problems of history and culture of Central Asia and India.

These writing may be classified in the following way: pottery inscriptions, inscriptions on gold bars, and birch bark manuscripts.

The first group comprises inscriptions from Kara-tepa and Fayaz-tepa (near Termez) where Buddhist centres of the Kushan period were discovered. Unfortunately, the finds are only fragments of inscriptions in *Kharoṣṭhī* and *Brāhmī*. Up to now 55 inscriptions on pottery have been found, 36 of them in *Kharoṣṭhī*. They bear the names of the Buddhist donors and parts of votive Buddhist formulas. Especially interesting is the mention of the Mahāsaṅghika sect in a Fayaz-tepa inscription of the Kushan period. (Some of the inscriptions were published in the « Kara-Tepa » volume). After the publication of this book many other inscriptions were found at Fayaz-tepa during the excavations conducted by Professor L. Albaum. Almost all of them are in *Kharoṣṭhī*.

The following is the text for example of a inscription on pottery found there:

*ayaṃ suyi kuḍa... ṇāti-salohidāṇa puyae
sarvasatvana hidaye suhaya saṃpurvati*

(« This sacred vessel for water... to glorify one's kinsmen and blood relatives. May it be filled for the good and happiness of all living beings »).

In 1974 a few other fragments of *Kharoṣṭhī* inscriptions were found, also mentioning the Mahāsaṅghika community. All this justifies as assumption that during the Kushan period this school was quite influential in the Buddhist centres of the Termez region. Of great interest was the discovery at Kara-tepa of a bilingual inscription in Sanskrit (*Brāhmī* script) and Bactrian (Bactrian script): *Buddhaśira ddharma-kathikasya* (« a gift of Buddhaśira, preacher of *Dharma* »).

Mention should be made also of a clay tablet with a *Brāhmī* inscription found in 1973 during the excavations of the Ajina-tepa Buddhist monastery in South Tajikistan and dated in the 7-8th centuries A.D. It contains the text of a Buddhist prayer formula. Paleographically the text resembles the tablets from the Gazni region published by M. Tadey. Unfortunately it was poorly preserved.

The second group of the Kushan inscription is made up of *Kharoṣṭhī* inscriptions on gold articles found a few years ago in Uzbekistan, at Dalverzin-tepa. Excavations there were supervised by Prof. G. A. Pugachenkova. In all, 11 inscriptions were discovered of which ten were dotted on gold bars and one on a gold plate. Their language is north-western Prakrit. The inscriptions are of a very great interest as they indicate the weight of the bars in staters, drahas and dhane, and tell the names of their owners.

According to the Dalverzin-tepa inscriptions, one stater contained 17.53 g of gold (according to Sogdian inscriptions it is 17.4 g), one dragma- 4.4 g (in Sogdian inscriptions - 4.7 g). While staters and drachmas had been registered in Central Asian texts earlier, dhane became known only from the Niya and Khorayana documents. The Dalzervin-tepa inscriptions provide us with the earliest mention of dhane in written evidence in the region. Below are given some examples of such inscriptions:

1) Sa XX dra I dha IIII

2) mitreṇa dita

(« 20 staters, 1 dragma, 4 dhane given by Mitra »). The weight of the bar is 358.1 g.

1) Sa XX IIII I aḍha dha naiasa

2) mitreṇa dite

(« 25 staters and half dhane belonging to Naia given by Mitra »). The weight of the gold bar is 449 g. aḍha (Skr. arḍha), naia (Skr. nāya).

On the basis of paleography M. I. Vorobyeva-Desyatovskaya dates the inscription in the 1st century A.D. The hoard of gold articles with inscriptions found at Dalverzin-tepa has yielded a lot of new information about the Kushans, the economy and culture of their period.

Of an exceptional interest are the birch bark manuscripts (*bhūrjapatra*) found at Zang-tepa (30 km to the north of Termez in Uzbekistan), in Merv and Bairam-ali (Turkmenia) and at Kafyr-kala (South Tajikistan).

Fragments of 12 manuscripts in the *Brāhmī* script were found at Zang-tepa during the excavations of a castle. Their approximate dating is the 6-8th centuries A.D. A Buddhist manuscript was discovered during the excavations at Merv in the *stūpa* of an ancient Buddhist temple. The manuscript is dated approximately in the 5th century A.D. because, judging by archaeological data, the vase in which the manuscript was, had been put in during the construction of the *stūpa*, sometime between the 5th and 6th centuries A.D. The Bairam-ali manuscript was discovered in a clay vessel bricked up in the Buddhist *stūpa*. Archaeologists found in the vessel also Sassanian coins of the Khosrov I period (the 18th year of his reign i.e. 549 A.D.). Scorched remnants of birch bark manuscripts were found at Kafyr-kala. They also are in the *Brāhmī* script. Archaeologically they are dated in the 7-8th centuries A.D.

The Bairam-ali manuscript is, no doubt, the most interesting one. After reconstruction it contains 150 folios in two types of handwriting. Many of the sheets retained pagination. The work is a kind of a synopsis of several Buddhist texts the titles of which unfortunately are not mentioned. The manuscript contains a brief exposition of Buddhist legends and tales and also some abstracts from Buddhist *sūtras* and *Vinaya*

texts. At times the summary is so short that only names and a bare outline of the story are given. At present, Dr. Vorobyeva-Desyatovskaya is working on the manuscript preparing the text for publication.

The analysis of the contents of the manuscript reveals it to be a kind of a manual for monks to be read to lay Buddhists. Secular stories alternate with Buddha's dialogues taken from the canonical *sūtras*. As well-known stories were cited, a parable sometimes contained only several sentences to revive in the minds of the listeners a familiar episode of the life of Buddha and his disciples.

Here is, for instance, a story connected with Buddha's second Benares sermon: « How three noble men, Ajñyatakenditya, Bimbisāra and Śakra, received exhortations from the Bhagavat, one after another, together with eighty thousand strong retinue (it is about this that the more detailed *avadāna* tells) ». The content of some short tales has a strong resemblance to *Jātakas*. Thus, the tale about a turtle (*kacchapa iti*) resembles *Jātaka* N 283 (*kacchapa-jātaka*), the tale of the drum (*praṇādo iti*) has a similarity with *Jātaka* No 59 (*bherivada-jātaka*). Some tales have not yet been identified.

Especially remarkable is a text which looks quite complete. It begins with traditional *siddham* and ends with a colophon. This text is a kind of a compilation of texts of the Sarvastivadina's *Vinaya* — the *Pratimokṣa-sūtra*, *Vinaya-vibhaṅga*, and *Vinaya-vastu*. The main *Vinaya* rules are stated there — the rules of debating, of *kleśas*, monks' living in the community, the ways of using *pātra*, of *cīvara*, etc.

The colophon is very important as it shows that the text and its copyist belonged to the Sarvastivada school and gives for the first time the composition of the Sanskrit *Vinaya* of that school.

« Who should have mercy? The old, the sick, those who suffer from misfortune and enmity, who live in fear or among evil monks. Who should not have mercy? Those who are not old, who are not sick, who do not suffer from misfortune and enmity, who do not live in fear or among evil monks. To decide these questions meetings must be called. Neither the *Pratimokṣasūtra* with the *Vibhaṅga* nor the *Vinaya-vastu* consisting of eighteen sections contain this enumeration. It is also absent in the separate *nidāna* (apparently the *Vinayanidāna*) and in the *Vinaya-matrika*, *Vinaya-pañchika*, *Vinaya-śoḍaṣika*, and *Vinaya-uttarika*.

That is the end of the chapter on the collection of rules entitled « The meeting of 500 bhikṣus, not more and not less than five hundred ». To the person who ordered it to be written with the help of his best friend, expert in *Vinaya*, representative of the Sarvastivada school, for the benefit of himself and others. Glory to all Buddhas, May he who copied this *śāstra* get rid through it of ignorance! ».

This manuscript expands our knowledge of the Sanskrit literature of the Sarvastivadinas who, as the above text shown, had their followers

at the ancient Buddhist centers of Central Asia. Some of the texts enumerated in the colophon have been mentioned there for the first time, and we do not know them in Chinese translations.

There is no doubt that the publication of the Bairam-ali manuscript will be a valuable contribution to the study of the Buddhist Sanskrit literature and of the history of Buddhism in general.

The fragments of the Zang-tepa manuscripts represent works of the Vinaya type, too. M. I. Vorobyeva-Desyatovskaya identified one of the text as a passage from the *Vinaya-vibhaṅga*. The text deals with the rules of punishing those who repudiated the principles of the teaching — *śiksāṃ-prayākhyāta*.

The text, despite its fragmentary nature, contains an enumeration of the categories of those who « repudiate the principles of the teaching », Buddha's *dharma*, *saṅgha*, and Vinaya rules. Paleographically, the manuscript resembles most the Gilgit manuscripts of the « Prajñāpāramitā » and is approximately dated in the 7-8th centuries A.D.

Such are the major written sources in *Brāhmī* and *Kharoṣṭhī* discovered by Soviet scholars in Central Asia in recent years.

Soviet Indology has solid and glorious traditions of studying the history and civilization of India, traditions associated with the names of scholars of world renown — I. P. Minayev, V. K. Vasilyev, F. I. Shcherbatskoy, S. F. Oldenburg .

We strive to preserve and further develop these traditions and to promote our Sanskrit studies. Every year translations of Sanskrit literary sources and texts of the most important writings are published in the USSR. Many unique Indian texts from the USSR manuscript collections as well as those found by archaeologists excavating in Central Asia become objects of scholars' study. We hope that the results of this study and the newly discovered texts will help to solve many problems of the historical and cultural development of India and her neighbours.