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The Buddhist Indus Script and Scriptures

On the so-called Bhaikṣukī or Saindhavī Script
of the Sāṃmitīyas and their Canon

2020

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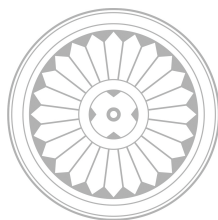
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In memoriam

Prof. Dr. Michael Hahn
(1941–2014)



P R E F A C E

In order to avoid any potential misunderstanding, I should point out straight away that the present book does not deal in any conceivable way with the so-called «Indus script» of the Indus Valley Civilization. I had to use the name «Saindhavī» on numerous occasions in this study, even though the script and scriptures which form the main subject of this book have nothing to do with the ancient culture of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro and despite the fact that some Indian scholars refer to the symbols on the seals discovered in the Indus valley by using the name «Saindhavī lipi» or «Sindhulipi» (i. e., Saindhavī or Sindhu script). Unlike the enigmatic symbol system of the Indus civilization,¹ the curious script to be discussed in the following pages has never posed any serious problems of decipherment. Its discoverer Cecil BENDALL read it without much ado immediately after he came across two rare specimens of it in Kathmandu and Calcutta some ten years after the first Harappan seals had been unearthed in the early 1870s. BENDALL initially described the script as «arrow-headed or point-headed character» and then, following a hint he had once given, most later scholars started calling it «Bhaikṣukī». Since this script appears indeed to have been used exclusively by Buddhists, and its original name was rather «Saindhavī», as I have suggested recently

¹ Recently PARPOLA acknowledged that «[t]he potential of the Indus inscriptions to shed new light on the dark prehistory of South Asia has attracted more than 100 published claims of decipherment since the 1920s, none of which has been widely accepted.» (PARPOLA 2015, p. 27), whereas other scholars have argued outright that «the Indus system cannot be categorized as a 'script' [. . .] since the brevity of the inscriptions alone suggests that they were no more capable of performing extensive mnemonic or accounting functions than of systematically encoding speech.» (FARMER/SPROAT/WITZEL 2004, p. 19, note 2).

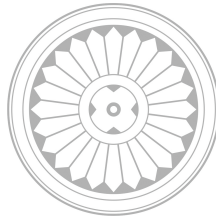
in my article «Die entzifferte Indus-Schrift» (2017) and as I argue in more detail here, it should be perfectly acceptable now to refer to it also as the «Buddhist Indus script».

I had the chance to see myself one of the few specimens preserved in this script only as late as 2005 when a microfilm copy of a codex written allegedly in a script called «Khoṭāṅga» came to my notice in the vast collection of the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project. As it turned out, the two folios microfilmed in Kathmandu belonged actually to the same *codex unicus* of the *Candrālaṃkāra* which BENDALL had discovered in the winter of 1884. I was able to study this manuscript more closely from March 2007 until February 2008 in the course of the Arrow-headed Script Project which my teacher, the late Professor Michael Hahn, had initiated at the University of Marburg. I could not have anticipated that several years later I will have the opportunity to conduct even more extensive research on the Buddhist Indus script and the scriptures of the Sāṃmitīya Buddhists with even more surprising results collected in the present volume.

Since the credit for reviving the interest towards the script which I have proposed to call «Saindhavī» goes to Professor Hahn, without whose initiative the remnants of the Sāṃmitīya literature transmitted in several manuscripts written in this script would have probably remained still largely forgotten, as a token of gratitude and admiration I dedicate the present study to the fond memory of my late teacher.

Marburg, December 2019

Dragomir Dimitrov



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work on the present book started in the second half of 2014, yet due to various distractions and many other obligations I needed no less than five years to bring it to completion. It was actually not planned at all to prepare a book, for it evolved out of the humble idea of writing only a short paper summarizing mostly what had already been learnt about the peculiar Buddhist script until the end of the first decade of the third millennium. It soon became clear, however, that the surprising details which started emerging in the course of my work on this paper should rather be discussed within the larger scope of a new book.

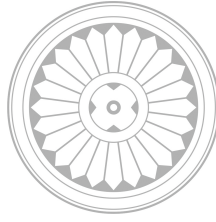
It would have never been possible to complete this monograph without the generous help of many colleagues and friends who assisted me in various ways, most importantly by enabling me to get access to literature and sources which otherwise would have remained out of my reach or which I would have failed to observe. Most fascinating proved a documentary shown in the winter of 2012 on Xizang Television, since in this film the viewers could see among other hidden treasures quite unexpectedly also a few images of a manuscript written in the same Buddhist Indus script which more than a century earlier had come to the attention of Western scholars for the first time. This was followed by another surprising discovery of a similar codex in a private library in Rome, as well as by the fortunate sighting of several other snippets of a few other comparable codices kept in Tibet. Once helpful friends had enabled me to consult at least these few snapshots, I was in a position to re-assess in the light of the newly emerged sources some other relevant materials which have been accessible to us for a much longer time. For making my research possible I owe debts of gratitude to the following persons:



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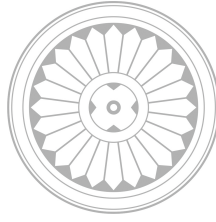
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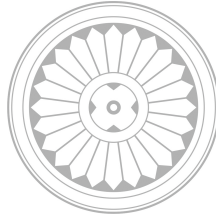
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ABBREVIATIONS & SYMBOLS

1. Abbreviations

a. c.	<i>ante correcturam</i> before correction
AD	Anno Domini
aor.	aorist
c.	<i>circa</i> approximately
Cān.	Candragomin's <i>Cāndravyākaraṇa</i>
cf.	<i>confer</i> compare
cm	centimetre(s)
Co	Saindhavī <i>Dharmapada</i> (ed. CONE 1989)
coni.	<i>coniecit</i> conjectured
ed.	edited (by), edition
fem.	feminine
fig.	figure
fol(s).	folio(s)
fut.	future
GDhp	Gāndhārī <i>Dharmapada</i>
IASWR	Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religions
<i>ibid.</i>	<i>ibidem</i> in the same place
i. e.	<i>id est</i> that is
imprv.	imperative
in	inch
i. o.	instead of
km	kilometre(s)
MAK	Museum für Asiatische Kunst (Berlin)
marg.	<i>in margine</i> in the margin
masc.	masculine

Mi	Saindhavī <i>Dharmapada</i> (ed. MIZUNO 1990)
MS(S)	manuscript(s)
Mt.	Mount
Mv	<i>Mahāvastu</i> (ed. SENART 1897)
NGMCP	Nepalese-German Manuscript Cataloguing Project
NGMPP	Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project
nom.	nominative
no(s).	number(s)
p., pp.	page(s)
Pa.	Pali
Pāṇ.	Pāṇini's <i>Aṣṭādhyāyī</i>
p. c.	<i>post correctionem</i> after correction
PDhp	Pali <i>Dhammapada</i> (in quoted literature: Patna <i>Dharmapada</i>)
pl.	plural
pres.	present
Ro	Saindhavī <i>Dharmapada</i> (ed. ROTH 1980)
SDhp	Saindhavī <i>Dharmapada</i>
sg.	singular
SH	Saindhavī <i>Dharmapada</i> (ed. SHUKLA 1979)
Skt.	Sanskrit
Sn	<i>Suttanipāta</i> (ed. ANDERSEN/SMITH 1913)
SN	<i>Samyuttanikāya</i> (ed. FEER 1884)
s. v(v).	<i>sub voce, sub verbis</i> under the word(s)
TBRC	Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center
Th	<i>Theragāthā</i> (ed. OLDENBERG/PISCHEL 1966)
Tib.	Tibetan
tr.	translated (by), translation
Ud	<i>Udāna</i> (ed. STEINTHAL 1885)
Uv	<i>Udānavarga</i> (ed. BERNHARD 1965)
v. l.	<i>varia lectio</i> variant reading
voc.	vocative

2. Typographical symbols

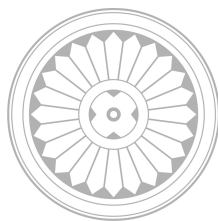
« »	double angle brackets indicate an insertion by first hand
[]	square brackets denote a reconstruction of partially damaged or illegible <i>akṣaras</i>
()	round brackets indicate an uncertain reading
..	two dots indicate an illegible <i>akṣara</i>
.	one dot indicates an illegible element of an <i>akṣara</i>
+	a plus sign indicates a lost <i>akṣara</i>
=	an equals sign indicates a textual correspondence
≠	a slashed equals sign indicates a textual dissimilarity
×	a multiplication sign may indicate a lost <i>akṣara</i> or a character deleted by first hand and overdrawn with a deletion symbol
*	an asterisk marks a conjecture
°	a superscribed ring marks an abbreviation
~	a tilde marks identical text passages
	double daṇḍa
	single daṇḍa
/	a solidus may mark the end of a quarter of a stanza
//	a double solidus may mark the end of one half of a stanza
///	a triple solidus marks a textual disruption in a manuscript
:	a deletion and filler symbol in some manuscripts
·	a word-division marker in some manuscripts
□	a square indicates a binding hole area in some manuscripts
,	a subscribed tiny bar indicates the beginning of a new line
√	a root symbol marks a verbal root

اثني عشر حينئذ أربعة وعشرين وذلك في زمان اردشير بن دارا بن اردشير بن كورش على رأى
مورخى أهل المغرب وأما كثرت حروف الهند بسبب أفراد صورة للحرف الواحد عند تناوب
الاعراب أيّه والتجويد والهمزة والامتداد قليلا عن مقدار الحركة والحروف فيها ليست في لغة
مجموعة وان تفرقت في لغات وخارجة من خارج فلما تنقاد لإخراجها آلتها فأنها لم تعد بل
وما لا تشعر أفعالنا بالفرق بين كثير من اثنين منها وكتابتهم من اليسار نحو اليمين كعادة اليونانيين
لا على قاعدة ترتفع منها الروس وتخط الأذناب كما في خطنا ولكن القاعدة فوق وعلى
استقامة السطر لكل واحد من الحروف ومنها يتوّل الحرف وضوئه الى أسفل فان علا القاعدة
شيء فهو علامة تحوية تقيم أعوانه فالأخط المشهور عندهم فيسمى سدمترك وربما نسب
الى كشمير فالكتابية في أعليا وعليه يجعل في بارانسي وهو وكشمير مدرستا علومهم ثم يستعمل
١٠ في مدديش اعلى واسطة المملكة وفي ما حول كتوج في جهاته ويسمى ايضا أرجافرت وفي حدود
مالوا ايضا خط يسمى ناكر لا يفصل ذاك الآ بالصورة فقط ويتبعه خط يسمى اردناكرى اى نصف ناكر
لأنه شوج منهما ويكتب به في بهاتيه وبعض بلاد السند وبعد ذلك من الخطوط لمقارى في
ملقشوى جنوب السند نحو الساحل وسيندب في بهنوا وفي المنصورة وكرنات في
كرنات ديش التي منها الفرقة المعروفون في العساكر بكثرة وأنكرى في انترديش ودرورى
١٥ في درورديش ولارى في لاركيش وكورى في پورب ديش اى ناحية المشرق
ويكشك في أودنيور هناك وهو خط البدء ومقتنع الكتب عندهم بوم الذى هو كلمة
التكوين لافتتاحنا باسم الله تعالى وهذه صورة أوم ١٦ وليس من حروفهم وأما في صورة مفردة
له للتبرك مع التنويه لاسم الله عند اليهون فأنه يكتب في الكتب ثلاث باءات عميقة وفي
التورية يهوه بالكثينة والذوق باللفظ وربما قيل به فقط ولا يكتب الاسم الملقوظ به وهو
٢٠ اذوى وليسوا يجرون على حروفهم شيئا من الحساب كما تجريه على حروفنا في ترتيب الجمل وكما أن
صور الحروف تختلف في بقاعهم كذلك أرقام الحساب وتسمى انك والذى نستعمله نحن مأخوذ من

PLATE 1

Excerpt from al-Bīrūnī's *Kitāb al-Hind*

Editio princeps by Carl Eduard SACHAU (1887, p. 82)



PROLOGUE

*But a time will come, O Babe of Tegumai,
when we shall make letters—all twenty-six
of 'em,—and when we shall be able to read as
well as to write, and then we shall always say
exactly what we mean without any mistakes.*

(KIPLING 1902, p. 138)

THE EARLIEST historical account of the Indian script to be discussed in this book is considered to have been contributed nearly one thousand years ago by the Muslim polymath Abū Raiḥān Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad, better known as al-Bīrūnī (973–1048). He wrote his *Taḥqīq mā lil-Hind min maqūla maqbūla fī l-ʿaql au marḍūla* or «Detailed description of the doctrines of the Indians, whether rationally acceptable or unacceptable» in a turbulent period when in the first three decades of the eleventh century Sultan Maḥmūd of Ghazna (971–1030) had been regularly plundering north-western and northern India during no less than seventeen campaigns, thereby enabling his court scholars to get a direct access to a wealth of information concerning the raided territories. Al-Bīrūnī's monumental opus written in Arabic, «one of the greatest achievements not only in the history of Islamic studies of India specifically, but in the study of South Asia in general»,¹ became known in the West much later, in fact only less than two centuries ago.² It owes its accessibility and popularity

¹ HALBFASS 1988, p. 25. ² STROHMEIER notes that the first excerpts from this work were provided in Europe by the French orientalist Joseph Toussaint REINAUD (1795–1867) in 1845 (see STROHMEIER 2002, p. 29).

beyond the Muslim world to a great extent to the German scholar Carl Eduard SACHAU (1845–1930) who in 1887 first edited the treatise and one year later completed his English translation entitled *Alberuni's India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India about A. D. 1030*.³

The sixteenth chapter of al-Bīrūnī's *India* or *Kitāb al-Hind*, as this work is commonly referred to in brief, contains among other things some very interesting «notes on the writing of the Hindus». These notes include the following list of eleven Indian scripts:

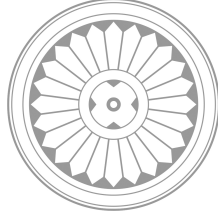
The most generally known alphabet is called *Siddhamâṭṭrikâ*, which is by some considered as originating from Kashmîr, for the people of Kashmîr use it. But it is also used in Varânaṣī (*sic*). This town and Kashmîr are the high schools of Hindu sciences. The same writing is used in Madhyadeśa, *i. e.* the middle country, the country all around Kanauj, which is also called Âryâvarta.

In Mâlava there is another alphabet called *Nâgara*, which differs from the former only in the shape of the characters.

Next comes an alphabet called *Ardhanâgarî*, *i. e.* half-*nâgara*, so called because it is compounded of the former two. It is used in Bhâtiya and some parts of Sindh.

Other alphabets are the *Malwârî*, used in Malwashau, in Southern Sind, towards the sea-coast; the *Saindhava*, used in Bahmanwâ or Almanṣûra; the *Karnâṭa*, used in Karnâṭadeśa, whence those troops come which in the armies are known as *Kannara*; the *Andhrî*, used in Andhradeśa; the *Dirwarî* (*Drâviḍî*), used in Dirwaradeśa (*Draviḍadeśa*); the *Lârî*, used in Lâradeśa (*Lâṭadeśa*); the *Gaurî* (*Gauḍî*), used in Pûrvadeśa, *i. e.* the Eastern country; the *Bhaikshukî*, used in Uduṇpûr in Pûrvadeśa. This last is the writing of the Buddha.⁴

³ SACHAU started his work on this book in 1883 and first prepared a German translation which, however, has never been published. ⁴ Tr. SACHAU 1888, I, p. 173.



COLOPHON

बौद्धस्य सिन्धुलिपिमागमखण्डसार्धं
सुख्यातधर्मपदसंग्रहमप्यवेक्ष्य ।
शान्तिप्रियेन रचितो ऽत्र चितो बलेन
ग्रन्थो ऽयमर्थितसमाप्तिमलब्ध नूनम् ॥

After taking into consideration the Buddhist Indus script together with a portion of sacred texts, as well as the well-known collection of *Dharmapada* or «Words of the Doctrine», Śānti-priya composed here by means of his wit this work which has now come to a desired end.



*Bauddhasya Sindhulipim āgamakhaṇḍasārdham
sukhyātaDharmapadasaṃgraham apy avekṣya |
Śāntipriyena racito 'tra cito balena
grantho 'yam arthitasamāptim alabdha nūnam ||*