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N. Odani

Transfer of Merit in Gandhāran Buddhism

THE BRITISH LIBRARY KHAROŠTHĪ FRAGMENTS

In September 1994, the British Library acquired twenty-nine birch bark scrolls containing Gandhāri Buddhist texts in Kharoṣṭhī script. Associated with the manuscripts, five clay pots and twenty-six potsherds, all bearing dedicatory inscriptions, were acquired by the Library at the same time. The manuscripts were said to have been originally inside one of the clay pots (Pot D). No reliable information is so far available as to the circumstance of the discovery. All that were known is that the relics were brought from Afghanistan, probably in the neighbourhood of Haḍḍa. There are abundant Buddhist ruins in the area of Haḍḍa and Jalalabad. In 1965 the Japanese Archaeological Mission carried out a survey at Basawal Caves, located about 50 km east of Jalalabad and we found several pieces of inscribed potsherds in ink like those of the British Library (Mizuno 1971, 108).

In 1999 R. Salomon who is leading a project for study of the oldest manuscripts ever known published *"Ancient Buddhist Scrolls from Gandhāra: The British Library Kharoṣṭhī Fragments"* as an introductory volume, which provided us a general description of the content and an overall significance of these new finds. The detailed studies of particular texts are to appear in a series of *"Gandhāran Buddhist texts"*, among which three volumes were already published between 2000 and 2002. However, it seems we have been given a sufficient account of the associated five pots and potsherds, together of their dedicatory inscriptions in that introductory volume (Salomon 1999, 183 ff.).

Pot D which probably contained twenty-nine birch bark scrolls is a globular, round-bottomed vessel 34.8 cm in height and with a rim of 12.8 cm in diameter, resembling an ordinary waterpot used for carrying and storage of water in Afghanistan and Pakistan today. The dedicatory inscription is written in ink around the shoulder and the translation by Salomon is as follows (Salomon 1999, 214):

Saghami caūdiṣami dhamaūteṇa parigrahami
[Given] to the universal community, in the possession of the Dharmaguptakas.

It is thus possible to believe that these Gandhāri manuscripts might have belonged to the school of Dharmaguptakas as the pot inscriptions suggest.

The other four pots (Pot A, B, C, and E) in the British Library were all empty when they reached the Library. But another similar pot acquired by the Ashmolean Museum in the same way has contained some human bones inside. Summing up this and the other information provided by R. Salomon, we can assume these pots have been used as funeral jars as a general, while some have been used in order to store Buddhist manuscripts of birch barks. These pots, in both cases, seem to have been interred after all as a sort of relics inside the Buddhist monastery or in its vicinity¹.

TRANSFER OF MERIT

I would like to take Pot A and its inscriptions into consideration for more study in a religious context. Pot A has lost the rim and neck, and in overall form is similar to Pot D, but a little larger, measuring 37.6 cm in height in the present condition (without the neck) and 40.5 cm in the maximum diameter. The inscriptions of the pot have been written in black ink in two lines. The first line runs below the lost neck and the second one runs around the shoulder. A thick red ochre line runs between them, rather bordering to the second line of the inscriptions.

According to R. Salomon, the transcription and the translation of the inscriptions of Pot A as follows (Salomon 1999, 193, 198):

¹ Recently R. Salomon has reported the existence of the second collection of Gandhāran Buddhist manuscripts from Afghanistan (Salomon 2003).



Fig. 1. Details of the inscription of Pot A with missing letters apparent.

1. *bhadamta catulasa saghapriya sadhamviharisa pratigraha*
The possession of the Reverend Catula, pupil of Saṃghapriya
2. *ayampānaya ghadedeyamdharme vasavadatae susomabharyae*
atmanasa arogadakṣinae svamiasa suhasomasa saṃmepratyaśae
madapitrina saṃmepratya ++ +++++ saṃmepratyaśae
mitrañatisa lobitana saṃmepratyaśae bhavatu

This waterpot is the pious gift of Vasavadata, wife of Suhasoma, for the benefit of her own health. May it be for a proper share on the part of her husband Suhasoma, for a proper share on the part her mother and father, for a proper share on the part of [all beings], for a proper share on the part of her friends, kinsmen, and blood relatives.

Pot A has been reconstructed from the surviving fragments. I hear it was done not in the laboratory of the British Library but somewhere else before it was brought to the Library. They composed most of its body, but one of the pieces was missing which was about 9.5 cm in length and should have contained part of the inscription of the second line. R. Salomon reconstructed as above from formulaic parallels (Salomon 1999, 198 no. 14).

Fortunately it so happened that I had got several pictures of Pot A, which had been photographed before it was broken into pieces, and I found the missing letters among them (fig. 1)². Soon I sent the photograph to R. Salomon with my tentative interpretation, which he kindly reviewed. The number of the missing letters is eight

in total and can be read as (*saṃmepratya*)śae *putradhitarāna*, meaning as “for a proper share on the part of (her) sons and daughters”.

In the dedicatory pot inscriptions, the donor Vasavadata, wife of Suhasoma, wished to share her religious merit on the part of somebody else. I wonder that she should have wished for too much in proportion of her tiny contribution such as offering a waterpot (*pānighaḍa*) towards the Buddhist community, even if the text of the inscriptions followed a dedicatory formulae. Recently I had an opportunity to observe Pot A at the British Library. I was much impressed with its massive size and the elaborate finishing with the surface of a light creamy slip. It was more splendid than I had supposed it through the photographs before. Such impression made me convince that it could not be the reuse of an ordinary waterpot but that it must have been originally intended for a funeral jar of pious donation (on the discussion, cf. Salomon 1999, 243 ff.).

Thus I would like to deduce an overall meaning of the inscriptions of Pot A as follows: Vasavadata, wife of Suhasoma dedicated a waterpot in the possession of Reverend Catula, pupil of Saṃghapriya. The waterpot was to be intended for the funeral jar of the dead Saṃghapriya. Catula conducted his teacher's funeral rite and constructed his stupa-tomb and installed his funeral jar inside, probably with Vasavadata's cooperation. She, for her part, obtained a great merit for doing so and solemnly wished to share her merit with her husband, mother and father, sons and daughters as well as with her friends and blood relatives.

² Mr. I. Kurita kindly gave me those pictures for my study.

A general term of "transfer of merit" is *pariṇāma* (transformation, evolution) in Sanskrit. In the inscriptions of Pot A, it is expressed as *saṃmepratyā(m)śae*, which means "for a proper share on the part of someone else". I can give another example from the stone inscriptions found in our excavations at Rānigāt in Pakistan (Odani 2000, 832):

Vasudeva maharaja devaputrasya agrabhaga parihamśadae bhavatu

May it be for the sharing in principal lot of the mahārāja devaputra Vāsudeva!

The "*parihamśadae*" is almost equivalent to "*parihamśae*" in Pot A. So we can see that the ritual practice of merit transference was prevalent in Gandhāra at least from the first century AD³.

VOTIVE STUPAS OR STUPA-TOMBS?

As a rule, the dead were to be cremated in India and Gandhāra in the Buddhist times. A Chinese monk, Yijing who visited and studied in India in the last quarter of the 7th century (AD 671–695) informs us on the rules concerning the funeral rites of the dead monks (Takakusu 1896, 81f.):

According to the Buddha's teaching, when a priest is dead, after one has recognized him to be really dead, on the same day his corpse is sent on a bier to a cremation-place, and is there burnt. While the corpus is burning, all his friends assemble and sit on one side. They sit either on grass bound together, or on elevations of earth, or on bricks or stones. The 'Sūtra on Impermanence' ('Anita-sūtra') is recited by a skilled man, as short as a page or a leaf, so that it may not become tiresome . . .

Then they all meditate on the impermanency (of all conditions). On returning to their residence they bathe together, in their clothes, in the pond outside the monastery. If there is no pond, they go to a well and wash themselves. They wear old clothes, so that they may not injure new ones. Then they put on dry clothes. On returning to their apartments, they cleanse the floor with powdered cow-dung. All other things remain as usual. There is no custom as to putting on a mourning-dress. They sometimes build a thing like a stūpa for the dead, to contain his Śarīra (or relics). It is called a 'Kula', which is like a small stūpa, but without the cupola on it.

But there is some difference between the stūpas of an ordinary man and an exalted person, as is minutely described in Vinaya text.

As for the relevant codes in the *Mūlasarvāstivādivinaya*, A. Bareau translated it in French from the Chinese text (Bareau 1960, 236)⁴. And recently G. Schopen did it in English from the Tibetan text (Schopen 2004, 112. 303f.). According to the

Vinaya text, a stupa for the Buddha has all its parts – the parts are the double terraces, the base, the dome, the *Harmikā*, the crowning pole, the thirteen umbrellas, and the rain receptacle. On the other hand, for disciples worthy of a stupa there are placed from four to one umbrellas depending on the measure of their achievement (*arhat*, *anāgāmin*, *sakṛd-āgāmin*, *srota-āpanna*). While A. Bareau seemed to be not so much interested in the other stupas except the Buddha, G. Schopen, on the other hand, collecting and analysing abundant epigraphic and archaeological evidence, pointed out that so called votive stupas extant round the main stupa all should have been stupa-tombs for the local dead monks (Schopen 1994b, 273 ff.).

After the cremations, the reverend monks would have their stupas constructed and worshipped inside the monastery. Meanwhile, the funeral jars of ordinary monks were to be buried outside of the monastic complex, though it is not known if they would be annexed with a stupa-tomb or without. The laity also would wish to have their funeral jars buried somewhere in a holy place such as in the vicinity of the monastery. So far we have no accurate knowledge about funeral rites or burial places of the laity in Gandhāra of the Buddhist age⁵. In the 19th century, C. Masson found a large number of funeral jars in a mound behind the village of Haḍḍa, near Tapa Kalan. Masson said,

"Arround the necks [of the funeral jars], in almost all, it is easy to distinguish a green verdigris-coloured patch, proving that coins have been deposited with them" (Wilson 1841, 113). Moreover, Masson said, "Some of the structures have yielded coins, – others none. Those in the former condition I have judged may claim to be considered secular monuments; those in the latter, the more sacred monuments of the hierarchs and saints . . . I have conjectured the topes [stupas] enclosing coins to be due to monarchs" (Wilson 1841, 90).

I recall the similar funeral custom found in the ancient tombs of central Asia and Northern Afghanistan between 1st and 7th centuries AD. Why do the dead need money? The coins deposited alongside with the dead were intended to pay each fare for when they would be ferried to another world after death. A short story in the Buddhist *sūtras* alludes to the same custom of Charon's obol

³ R. Allchin thinks that probable dates of the pots and the potsherds in the British Library are typologically in the early and middle Kushan period, but R. Salomon thinks that they may be a little earlier, because of the appearance of the historical figures in the inscriptions of Pot A (Salomon 1999, 151 ff.; 187).

⁴ Taishō-shinshū-daizōkyō, vol. 24 [T.1451], 291c; Bareau 1960, 234 ff.

⁵ Recent discoveries of 'Gandhāran Grave Culture' (c. 1400–300 BC) have provided a rich documentation of burial ritual practices of pre-Buddhism in Gandhāra and Swat.

prevailed in Buddhist India (Huber 1908, 84ff.; Odani 1996, 418f.). Such cases in Haḍḍa also reminds me a unique evidence of coin offering found in our excavations at Rānigāt in 1984. Some of slab stones used for pavement in the pathway around the main stupa had a number of small hollows on the surface. Almost all hollows were found empty, but a few still have retained copper coins, inset with a coin in each hollow. We found about forty small stupas around the main Stupa (St.101) in Rānigāt (Odani 2000, figs. 4–6). It is thus possible that it seemed to have been concerned with the same ritual practice of Charon's obol in Gandhāra. Such ritual practices as transfer of merit and Charon's obol would help us to visualize the way of religious life among monks and laity in Gandhāra.

A FUNERAL RITE FOR CHINESE MONK ZHI-YAN

In conclusion, I would like to add a biographical record of Chinese monk, Zhi-yan, who died and was cremated in Gandhāra⁶. Zhi-yan for the first time left China for Gandhāra in 399 AD, and stayed at a Buddhist monastery in Gandhāra called "Mo-tian-tuo-uo (Sky reaching ridge) Monastery", which I would incline to identify with our excavation site, Rānigāt (Queen's Rock) somewhat for the similarity of the appellation. There Zhi-yan learned the practice of *dhyāna* (meditation) under a master Buddhasena for three years and made much progress. On return to China, he took his college Buddhādra as a teacher of *dhyāna*, returning to Chang-an in c. 405 AD.

Becoming old, Zhi-yan was oppressed by a sense of doubt, if he was able to have received the ordination (*upasampadā*) truly, because he had offended against the five precepts in his initiate time. He could not settle the matter for himself and so again he travelled to India, accompanied by

two young disciples. In India, on his request an Arhat entered in concentration (*samādhi*) to see and ask Bodhisattva Maitrya in the *tusita* Heaven about Zhi-yan's affairs. Maitrya's reply was that Zhi-yan had obtained the true ordination. Then Zhi-yan tried to go home through Gandhāra, but there died a natural death at seventy-eight years old, that was in c. 420 AD. How did they hold a funeral rite for him? I will cite the relevant lines from a literal French translation of Zhi-yan's biography by R. Shih (Shih 1968, 123):

"Selon la loi du pays, les moines ordinaires et les saints étaient incinérés en des endroits différents. Bien que la vertu de Tche-yen [Zhi-yan] fût haute et manifeste, ses actes n'étaient pas distingués. D'abord, on amena sa dépouille mortelle au cimetière des moines ordinaires. Mais elle était si lourde qu'on ne pouvait la soulever. On la transféra alors au cimetière des saints. Là elle devint aussi légère qu'une plume emportée par le vent.

Les disciples de Tche-yen, Tche-yu et Tche-yuan, venus exprès de l'Ouest, relatèrent ce prodige. Puis tous deux retournèrent à l'étranger. Nous en déduisons que Tche-yen était vraiment un saint, mais nous ne savons pas quel fruit de sainteté il avait obtenu."

Zhi-yan performed a miracle after his death, in process of his funeral service, and proved himself as a saint. Therefore his funeral jar might have been interred within a certain monastic complex. As a matter of fact, we do not know where it was or whether a stupa was erected for him or not. If it happened that his stupa-tomb had been placed in our Rānigāt site, it might be found among those small stupas clustered round the main stupa, above all among the small stupas super-imposed on the older ones. According our observations, those stupas were to be assigned to a last phase of the Buddhist activities in Rānigāt site.

⁶ Taishō-shinshū-daizōkyō, vol. 50, 339a–c and vol. 55, 112b–113a.

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