

Buddhist Studies through the Side Door

To begin with a confession: I have always felt a little uncomfortable with calling myself a Buddhist scholar. I was trained as a traditional Sanskritist and philologist focusing on Hindu/Brahmanical texts and traditions, and only gradually drifted into Buddhist studies over the course of the forty-odd years of my professional career. I am still often troubled by the gaps – some of them embarrassing large – in my knowledge of Buddhism in general, especially beyond the early Indian tradition. I also feel at times a nagging regret that I did not study Chinese and Tibetan when I was a student and had the time and energy to focus on them. In the years since I begin to drift into the Buddhist field I have tried to make up these and other deficiencies, desultorily and with limited and often unsatisfactory results. As all academics know, once one enters into a professional career with its multiple demands and endless distractions, it becomes very difficult to find the time and concentration needed to achieve a deep command of an unfamiliar and difficult language.

But when I find myself in such a mood, I console myself by remembering that in my roundabout path into Buddhist studies I have followed in the footsteps of such great scholars of earlier generations as Franklin Edgerton and John Brough. These and others who rose to prominence in Buddhist studies also began as traditional Indologists, working on such quintessentially Hindu topics as, respectively, the Pañcatantra and the study of the Brahmanical lineage systems of *gotra* and *pravara*. But many Indologists with philological and linguistic inclinations are prone to drift into the Buddhist world, where the complexities of language and dialect and the manifold manuscript and text traditions – not to mention the profundity, subtlety, and beauty of many of the texts themselves – in some respects outdo even the great charms of Hindu literature and tradition. This, in any event, is what happened to me. In what follows, I will summarize some of the formative influences, the fateful turning points, and the odd twists and turns of my lifelong journey in Indology and Buddhist Studies.

My initial exposure to Buddhism came at the tender age of nineteen, during my first semester of college at Columbia University in September 1966. After only a days there, I met another freshman, Harold Hodes, a Brooklyn boy who was to become my roommate and a lifelong friend, and is now a professor of philosophy at Cornell University. Harold introduced me to a wonderful new world of weird geniuses, where I met working class kids from the outer boroughs of New York, who seemed to be – and in most cases really were – far more sophisticated, worldly, and knowledgeable than my contemporaries in the posh but intellectually superficial suburbs where I went to high school. Among Harold’s crowd were a couple of older boys (well into their twenties!), Mike Sweet and Lenny Zwilling, who at the time were hippie gurus who held court nightly in a tenement in the East Village, teaching and discussing Buddhism. Mike and Lenny later went on to get PhD-s in Buddhist Studies at the University of Wisconsin under the lamented Richard Robinson and pursued brilliant para-academic careers in Tibetan Studies. Like Harold, they have remained lifelong personal friends.

My curiosity aroused by these conversations, in my sophomore year I enrolled in what was then called “Oriental Humanities,” a sort of shadow program to Columbia’s traditional, and by then rather stale, Contemporary Civilizations curriculum. Among the readings for these classes, my interest was particularly piqued by R.E. Hume’s old translation of the Upaniṣads. Reading this and other translations of Sanskrit literature under the guidance of the venerable, and recently deceased Ainslee Embree, planted in my as yet unformed mind a whim to study Sanskrit. At the time I had intended to major in classics, but I was less than inspired by my courses there. Latin seemed to me like too well-trodden a path; I have always had an inclination toward whatever seems off the beaten track, on the edge of, or preferably even beyond the limits of common knowledge. Sanskrit, of course, fit this description, especially in those days when even fewer people than now had any awareness of India and Indian civilization.

I had to wait until the beginning of my junior year to enroll in a formal Sanskrit class, but in the meantime, during the remainder of my sophomore year, I began to dabble on in it my own. The first step was a trip to “Orientalia,” one of the dozens of wonderfully eccentric used book shops that lined lower Fourth Avenue in Manhattan in those days. There I picked up, among other treasures, a copy of W.D. Whitney’s *Sanskrit*

Grammar, and I was immediately and acutely infected by what the late Sanskritist Walter Maurer called “Bacillus Sanskriticus, an incurable affliction which is notably conducive to further study.”¹ In India, I have been told that my fascination with Sanskrit mean that I must have been a brahmin in a previous life; Jewish friends suggest that it was the long-hidden genes of a Talmudic scholar that attracted me to what is, in some ways, a parallel culture. However this may be, there was something about Sanskrit’s lush complexity, its endless variety and flexibility, its sheer majesty and beauty, that captured my mind and that still now, fifty years later, continues to engage it more or less constantly.

In any case, almost overnight – or so it seems, at least, in my fifty-years distant memory of that year – I found direction and meaning in life, ceased to be an aimless hippie and began to turn into a scholar. I soon formed the ambition to become a Sanskrit scholar and never seriously entertained any other goal in life. That year was truly my *annus mirabilis*, for not only was it when I discovered the purpose of my life, but also when I met my future wife Carol Goldberg, who was to become my constant companion until her untimely death in 2009.

My systematic study of Sanskrit began the following fall, when I took elementary Sanskrit under the Iranianist Martin Schwartz. Here was another weird genius from the Bronx, who outdid in brilliance and eccentricity the ones I had met to date. His classes were a dazzling mixture of arcane linguistic details and bizarre multilingual puns, only occasionally comprehensible; but from this sometimes bewildering combination I gradually began to understand the study of linguistics and the nature of languages. A creature of the night, Marty scheduled his classes at 5 PM, and his office hours were held at the legendary West End bar on Broadway, from 11 PM to 1 AM. Marty – another lifelong friend – was a memorable figure from an academia that has passed into time by now, when brilliance alone is no longer enough for success and when excessive eccentricity is more prone to arouse suspicion than amusement.

But at the time – it was, after all, the sixties – Marty Schwartz was the perfect role model for me. Given his focus on Iranian linguistics and philology, his presentation

¹ Walter Harding Maurer, *The Sanskrit Language: An Introductory Grammar and Reader* (Curzon Press, 1995), p. [v].

of Sanskrit was mainly oriented toward Vedic, so my prior, casual exposure to Buddhism remained on hold and continued to do so during the rest of my undergraduate studies. In my senior year at Columbia I took second-year Sanskrit with the late Barbara Stoler Miller, whose work focused on classical poetry, of which she was a master translator. Her classes were a far cry from Marty Schwartz's; as serious and intensely focused as Marty's were amusing and unpredictable, she provided an alternative role model that was well suited to my gradually maturing mind.

But still no Buddhism. At that time, second year Sanskrit at Columbia was normally taught by the Buddhologist Alex Wayman, but that year he was on leave. Had that not been the case, my career might have taken a less circuitous direction, and I might have gone directly into Buddhism instead of skating a path around it for many years before finally diving in. But fate had a more complex plan for me.

Besides my major in Oriental Studies, as an undergraduate I minored in religion, with a concentration on Asian religions. But I had only one course in Buddhism, a general survey in which I derived no particular inspiration; the most influential experience in my minor sequence was a pair of courses on Old and New Testament, taught by Walter Wink (also recently deceased) and Javier Teixidor respectively, then young assistant professors who were to go on to distinguished careers. These courses were among the most inspiring ones that I had at Columbia, and had I not already committed to Sanskrit and Indology, I might have landed in Biblical studies. Indeed, much later in my life, since spending a year in Jerusalem in 1989-90, Old Testament and northwest Semitic studies resurfaced as a secondary, para-professional field which I dabble in with what little spare time I can find; I hope to go deeper in my retirement years.

But by my senior college year I was totally committed to the study of Sanskrit and Indology. But in my youthful naïveté (and in the carefree and careless spirit of the sixties) I had no clear idea of the practical problems and difficulties that await one who chooses the path less followed. Later in my career, between finishing my PhD in 1975 and finally landing a permanent job at the University of Washington in 1981, I paid a high price for my innocence, struggling from year to year on temporary fill-in jobs and research grants, with a young family and next to no money. But I am glad that I had no premonition of this when I began my career. Had I known what I was going to face, I might have

hesitated or perhaps even pursued another career; and that would have been a disaster, because I would have been regretted it for the rest of my life. In a word, my naïveté did me a great favor, and in this, as in many things, I have learned that doing the right thing for the wrong reason is good enough, and indeed, is often the best one can aspire to.

So, in my senior year I applied to three or four of the leading graduate programs in Sanskrit at the time. I ended up going to Penn, largely at the advice of Barbara Miller, who had studied there under W. Norman Brown. Had I known at the time more about the in and outs of academia and academic politics, I might have chosen another program; but in the end Penn proved to be the perfect place for me. Once again, I got away with doing the right thing for the wrong reason.

So, in the fall of 1970 I started graduate work at Penn, where my main teacher was Ludo Rocher, who had recently joined the faculty there, having immigrated from his native Belgium. One could not imagine a better teacher than Ludo; a kindly, gentle man with a complete and undistracted passion for his subject, and a mind as sharp as his personality was gentle. When I hear students, old and young, bemoaning the dramas and traumas of their graduate school years, I have to thank my stars that I ended as a student of Ludo Rocher. The five years I spent at Penn, working mainly with Ludo, but also with his wife and colleague Rosane Rocher, as well as with George Cardona and various others, were in many ways the best years of my life. Never before and never again was I able to focus so exclusively and undistractedly on studying; in one delightful semester, for example, nothing but five Sanskrit courses.

Over the years at Penn and thereafter, Ludo and Rosane became “family” – or I should rather say, Carol and I became their family. They had (by choice) no children of their own, and we became, in effect, their adopted children. Indeed, for us the German custom of calling one’s PhD advisor “Doktorvater” became literally accurate. For when our son Jesse was born during our last year at Penn, the metaphorical familial ties became official, as Ludo and Rosane agreed to be his godparents.

But still no Buddhism to speak of! In my five years at Penn, I had only one class with significant Buddhist content. This was taught by Christopher George, who had just earned his PhD there and was holding a temporary teaching position. In his class we studied the Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa-tantra, which he had just edited for his dissertation,

reading the text directly from Nepali manuscripts. Although this experience did not lead me any further into Buddhist studies at the time, it indirectly laid a foundation of my future work in Buddhist manuscripts.

Another event that led me, indirectly but decisively, to my Buddhist career was an interview I had with Ludo during my second year. He informed me that the time had come to settle on a specialty, but I still was finding it hard to decide on a particular area. So Ludo casually suggested, “Nobody’s doing epigraphy these days; why don’t you try it?” With that, I began studying Indian inscriptions, at first by reading through every word of the first volume of the great D.C. Sircar’s anthology of *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History* during the summer of 1972 in Hawaii, where Carol had gone for a summer intensive course in Bengali. In this, as in so many things, Ludo was right: epigraphy was the perfect specialty for me. On one level, the very materiality of inscriptions – the direct contact, as it were, with antiquity – excited and inspired me.² At another level, the vast variety of genres, languages, and scripts of Indian inscriptions, not to mention the sheer volume of them – estimated by Sircar at over 100,000 – still provides me with endless food for thought, 45 years later.

Another feature of epigraphic study that held out a special appeal to me – one which indirectly pointed me towards Buddhist studies – was the frequent grammatical “errors” found in Sanskrit inscriptions. The initial fascination of Sanskrit for me, as for so many others who have fallen under its spell, was the strictly regulated system which provides the beautiful illusion of a vastly complex, yet perfect and inviolable structure. But studying inscriptions – especially Buddhist inscriptions – opened my eyes to a wider, messier, and ultimately more interesting reality. The initially disturbing and confusing violations of the supposedly monolithic laws of Sanskrit grammar, attested among other places in the corpus of inscriptions which have come to be known (after the work of T. Damsteegt) as “Epigraphical Hybrid Sanskrit,” gradually led me to realize that the Sanskrit of the normative books – whether the traditional grammar of Pāṇini or

² Even as a child, I had a fascination with objects that carried that stamp of time. In those days, one would still occasionally find an old Indian-head penny (minted until 1909) in one’s pocket change, and such objects seemed to me – in the perspective of a young boy – a direct connection with the distant past. I can now see how this instinctive attraction to antiquity was the first step in the true direction of my life’s journey.

Whitney's *Sanskrit Grammar* of the modern Euro-American school – were far from representing the entire linguistic reality of ancient India. I came to understand – as always, under Ludo's tutelage – that the neat definitional compartments of water-tight categories of "Sanskrit" and the various dialects of "Prakrit" were actually only after-the-fact rationalizations of a far more complex and more interesting linguistic reality, in which a vast array of languages and dialects developed and lived side by side in constant interaction and mutual influence. Little by little, the "wrong" forms Sanskrit forms which I encountered, not only in inscriptions but occasionally also in more formal and canonical literatures (though often censored by both ancient and modern editors) ceased to be disturbing problems and turned into precious clues in a search for the linguistic reality of ancient India, and ultimately for the underlying cultural reality which they reveal. On an even wider level, this approach humanized the entire field, at least according to my notion of humanity. I gradually came to see in this linguistic situation a manifestation of the eternal tension between tradition and change, between norms authoritatively imposed from above and the naturally creative, rebellious, even anarchic human spirit – the tension, in my view, which lies at the very heart of human culture.

This liberal point of view with regard to linguistic "correctness" in the classical Indian field led me, some years later, to publish an article entitled "A Linguistic Analysis of the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad,"³ in which I pointed out that this and other Upaniṣads contained numerous examples of non-standard Sanskrit, to which both traditional and modern critics had mostly turned a blind eye. I mention this article because, although it had no Buddhist content, it prefigured a similar dialectal study, published two years later, of "The Buddhist Sanskrit of Aśvaghōṣa's Saundarananda,"⁴ which was my first publication in the Buddhist area. Here I studied the great Buddhist poet's vocabulary and grammar, pointing out numerous example of which I think of as his "Buddhist accent," showing that he strategically sprinkles various Buddhist idioms and usages into his generally "correct" Brahmanical Sanskrit.

³ *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 25, 1981.

⁴ *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 27, 1983.

So it was at this point that I began to apply my previous interests in Sanskrit poetry on the one hand and the dialectology and sociolinguistics of ancient Indian languages on the other to the study of Buddhist literature, initially in the form of Aśvaghōṣa's poetry – to which I had first been introduced years ago by my *ādiguru*, Lenny Zwillig. But this, my first “Buddhist turn,” did not happen until several years after I had finished graduate school, and I now return to those days. When it came time, in 1974, for me to choose a dissertation topic, I had originally planned to study the history of the Western Kṣātrapa dynasty which ruled western India from the first to fourth centuries CE, and which left a particularly rich and interesting body of epigraphic and numismatic data. For various reasons, however, this project did not turn out to be practically advisable, and I ended up with an entirely different dissertation topic in the field of Hindu ritual law (dharmaśāstra), which was, not coincidentally, Ludo Rocher's principal area of research. The specific subject was a textual study of a sixteenth-century Hindu pilgrimage manual entitled “Bridge to the Three Holy Cities” (*Tristhalīsetu*), which I happened upon while rummaging through the University of Pennsylvania's collection of Sanskrit manuscripts.⁵

Thus my dissertation topic was about as far away from Buddhist studies as one could go within the field of Indology. Yet this too, like my early work in inscriptions, provided a foundation of philological skills that would serve me well when, many years later, I would drift into Buddhist manuscript studies. The experience of reading, collating, and interpreting Sanskrit manuscripts showed me how much information about the details, variations and complications of the text is suppressed, or at best relegated to terse and often cryptic footnotes, in printed text editions. As a result, I still insist to my students that only those who have studied manuscripts can fully understand the subtleties of a Sanskrit text.

By 1975, I had substantially finished my dissertation and was ready to type and submit it. In those pre-computer times, I had to type the Sanskrit text in transliterated form with a custom-modified electric typewriter which my father had given me as a college graduation present. We had taken the typewriter to the office of the legendary

⁵ The dissertation was eventually published as *The Bridge to the Three Holy Cities* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass) in 1985.

“typewriter wizard” Martin Tytell on Nassau Street in lower Manhattan, whom my father had somehow (in pre-internet days) tracked down.⁶ At my request, Mr. Tytell cut the heads off the two most dispensable keys (1/! at the upper left, +/- at the top right), substituted hand-forged keys with the special diacritic marks needed for transcribing Sanskrit, welded them onto the decapitated shafts, and converted them to “dead” keys that did not move the carriage. This meant that to write, for example, the character “ā,” I had to first type the macron indicating the long vowel, then the standard “a” key. After getting used to this slightly counterintuitive system, I plunged into the job and over the space of a few weeks typed the entire dissertation, which had grown to over 900 pages, in a sort of inspired frenzy.

My dissertation was accepted without any major changes required, which was a blessing, since if I had had to retype I might have gone mad. New degree in hand, I was offered a temporary position teaching Sanskrit and related subjects at Penn for the following 1975-76 academic year. The year went well; the experience of teaching was inspiring, and at the end of the year my first and only child, Jesse, was born. But at that point, after a rather sheltered experience, the harsher realities of an academic career slapped me in the face. Suddenly I found myself with a PhD degree, an infant son, no job prospects, and a very small bank account; this, at an inauspicious time when the long postwar boom in academia was finally grinding to a halt. For the next five years, I found myself wandering in a desert of temporary jobs, research grants, and other forms of hand-to-mouth existence. The three of us had to move annually for five years, stuffing our meager worldly possessions into the cavernous trunk of our rusty 1967 Plymouth or shoving them into friends or parents’ attics: from Philadelphia to India on a research fellowship; to Chicago, where Carol had a one-year position teaching Bangla; to Seattle for a one-year appointment at the University of Washington; to Minnesota for another fill-in job at the University of Minnesota; then back to India on a research grant.

Then, while in India in 1981, my ship finally came in, in the form of a telegraph message taped on tattered pink Indian postal service paper, offering me a tenure-track appointment in the Department of Asian Languages and Literature in Seattle. During my

⁶ Martin Tytell died in 2008 at the age of 94; his obituary was published in the New York Times on September 12 of that year.

visiting year there in 1977-78 I had established good relations with members of the department, and when a permanent position in Sanskrit came open it was offered to me without the requirement of an interview, as could be done in those less bureaucratic days. The timing of the offer was auspicious in that it came a few months before my father finally succumbed to a long illness. I suspect that, as any good parent would do, he worried more than I did over my career prospects, and it was a blessing that he was able to see me at least at the beginning of a secure career. Although my parents were never thrilled about my choice of careers, they were supportive of it (as the typewriter story attests), if a little reluctantly. I doubt that any parents are exactly thrilled to hear their child announce Sanskrit as a career choice, with the possible exception of traditional-minded Indian parents – and perhaps not even them in this modern era. Although, due to the difficult circumstances of his early life my father was not able to pursue an academic career, he was by nature a deeply philological-minded man, and therefore understood and accepted my determination to take this route. My mother was a practical woman who had less instinctive understanding of my interests, but who was wise enough to see that I was my father's son ("a real Salomon," as she would have put it), and so never stood in my way.

Stressful as they were, the "years in the desert" were by no means wasted time. Indeed, one small incident while I was at the University of Minnesota in 1980 was to have an unexpected effect that in the end determined the future direction of my career. While rummaging through the excellent Ames Library of South Asian materials there, I happened on a recent article by the Pakistani epigraphist A.H. Dani about a recently discovered Kharoṣṭhī inscription from Spinwam in the North Waziristan Territory of Pakistan. After studying the article carefully, I felt that I was able to offer some improvements on Dani's original edition, and published a revised version of the Spinwam inscription in 1981.⁷ This was to be the first of many articles and books on Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions and, later, on Kharoṣṭhī manuscripts, which were to become the central focus of the last two decades of my career. In retrospect, I can see two factors which

⁷ *Studien zur Indologie and Iranistik* 7, 1981.

drew me to the study of documents in Kharoṣṭhī script from the far northwestern fringe of the Indian subcontinent. On the one hand, the same attraction toward the fringes of common knowledge which had originally drawn me into Sanskrit now led me into an obscure corner – or at least what was then seen as an obscure corner – of Indological studies. On the other hand, the northwestern borderlands of the Indian subcontinent appealed to my interest in the interactions of cultural zones in antiquity; Gandhāra, where the worlds of India, Iran, Central Asia, and the Hellenism came together with world-changing results in the early centuries of the Common Era, has proved to be a perfect laboratory for such studies.

So, in the autumn of 1981, a new and more stable life began to take shape. In those early years at the University of Washington, my colleagues included David Seyfort Ruegg, then the professor of Buddhist Studies, and Turrell Wylie, professor of Tibetan. So here I found myself, for the first time, in a strongly Buddhist-oriented program, and this was one of the strongest factors which pushed me, gradually and at times almost unconsciously, toward Buddhist studies. But during my first years at Washington, before I received tenure, I more or less single-handedly ran a full-service Sanskrit program, fueled by youthful enthusiasm and energy as well as by the naïveté which kept me from realizing that I was doing far more than was normally expected of an Assistant Professor. This all changed, very much for the better, with two developments in 1985: I was granted tenure, and Collett Cox was appointed as Assistant Professor of Buddhist Studies, replacing David Ruegg. Collett and I quickly established a smooth relationship, characterized by a cooperative spirit and mutual respect; a relationship which has persisted and deepened for over thirty years. Collett's influence, on multiple levels, was perhaps the single strongest factor in my gradual Buddhist turn. Working together over the years, we gradually shaped a completely integrated program of Sanskrit/Indological and Buddhist studies. In the process, my teaching and research turned more and more toward Buddhist subjects, even though my primary research agenda during this period

remained a general handbook of Indian epigraphy, not specifically oriented toward Buddhist inscriptions, which was finally published in 1998.⁸

Meanwhile, during the early 1980's important new Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions continued to turn up, and I studied and published several of them. An important step was my first collaboration with Gregory Schopen, then a rising young star in Buddhist studies, in which we discussed the textual sources and significance of the expression “established in a previously unestablished place” in relic dedication inscriptions,⁹ a topic whose implications have since been addressed in other publications by us and many others. This project led me toward further studies of the relations between inscriptions and Buddhist texts and motivated me to begin to remedially study in a more systematic manner Buddhist literature in Pali and Sanskrit, in which I had until then somewhat randomly dabbled.

A revealing example of the development of Buddhist epigraphic studies in recent decades, as well as a classic illustration of the incremental growth of knowledge, involves the gold leaf inscription of Senavarma, who ruled as King of Oḍi (in the Swat Valley of northern Pakistan) in the early first century CE. This, at the time the longest known Kharoṣṭhī inscription, was first published by H.W. Bailey in 1980. Bailey was by any measure a great polyglot, among whose many achievements was the invention of the name “Gāndhārī,” now widely accepted, for the northwestern dialect of Prakrit used in Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions and manuscripts. But he was no master of Gāndhārī, and his first edition of the Senavarman inscription, while valuable in and of itself, was riddled with errors and misunderstanding. Improved editions followed in short order, by Gérard Fussman (then the reigning master of Gandhāran studies) in 1982, by B.N. Mukherjee in 1984, and by myself in 1986. Gradually a much-improved version of the inscription took place, but the most important step was Oskar von Hinüber's monograph of 2003,¹⁰ in

⁸ *Indian Epigraphy: A Guide to the Study of Inscriptions in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and the Other Indo-Aryan Languages* (New York: Oxford University Press).

⁹ “The Indravarman (Avaca) Casket Inscription Reconsidered: Further Evidence for Canonical Passages in Buddhist Inscriptions.” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 7, 1984.

¹⁰ *Beiträge zur Erklärung der Senavarma-Inschrift* (Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, Mainz).

which he brought his encyclopedic knowledge of Pali and other Buddhist literature to bear on, and in many cases to finally solve, several of the lingering problems. But even this was not the last step; some further suggestions were added in reviews of von Hinüber's monograph by Harry Falk, Gérard Fussman, and myself, and finally a complete new edition was published in 2012 by my former student Stefan Baums.¹¹

As a result of the combined labors of these several scholars – which, I am happy to add, were carried out in spirit of friendly collaboration rather than the jealous rivalry that can arise in such situations – we now have a vastly improved understanding of the reception and spread of Buddhism in the kingdoms of the northwest around the beginning of the Common Era.¹²

Around the same time, another excursion into some obscure corners of Buddhist epigraphy led me into the study of the Arapacana alphabet. This began with a new look at two well-known Gandhāran sculptures depicting the story of the Bodhisattva's first day at school, when, as narrated in the Lalitavistara, he demonstrated his knowledge of sixty-four different scripts. In these two pieces, the young Bodhisattva is shown holding a writing tablet bearing some Kharoṣṭhī syllables, but no convincing interpretation of the inscription had been offered. After pondering the texts for some time, I realized that they contained the syllables *a-ra-pa-ca-na-la-ḍa-ba*, the first five of which corresponded exactly to the mnemonic sequence known as Arapacana which is frequently mentioned in later Buddhist literature. This led to the discovery that the Arapacana sequence was derived from the original alphabetic order of the Kharoṣṭhī alphabet.¹³ Until then, it had been assumed that the order of characters in Kharoṣṭhī was the usual "*ka-kha-ga-gha*"

¹¹ In D. Jongeward et al., *Gandhāran Buddhist Reliquaries* (Seattle: Early Buddhist Manuscripts Project), pp. 227-233.

¹² But there is also a tragic side to the story of the Senavarma inscription: it disappeared in the course of shipment from England to the United States in 1985. Although suspicions were naturally aroused – especially since the inscription was written on a gold leaf – in the end it appeared that someone involved in opening the shipment mistook the small plaque, carefully wrapped in protective materials, for packing material and threw it away. As a result, all studies of the inscription have had to be based on the photograph printed with Bailey's original article, and no doubt a significant amount of information has been lost.

¹³ "New Evidence for a Gāndhārī Origin of the Arapacana Syllabary." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 110, 1990.

system used in all other Indian scripts, but now it became clear that Kharoṣṭhī had its own distinct order, which had been preserved in later literature even though its original original meaning had been entirely forgotten.

Following up on this discovery, I noticed that many other Gandhāran sculptures bore one or two Kharoṣṭhī letters on an inconspicuous spot on the base or edge, most of which had been entirely ignored or casually dismissed as “mason’s marks.” After a survey of a large number of such marked objects, it became obvious that these letters were actually location markers, arranged in the Arapacana order, indicating where each sculptural element was to be affixed to the stūpa or other structure to which it belonged. With this discovery, it became possible to clarify various issues about the construction of stūpas and about the sequence of images in series of narrative reliefs depicting the Buddha’s life.¹⁴ This was one of my most enjoyable projects, combining philological adventure with the study of cultural realia, with coherent and satisfying results.

These and other excursions into Buddhist epigraphy, archaeology, and literature of the northwest culminated in a life-changing development in 1995, when the British Library acquired a collection of twenty-eight birch bark scrolls bearing texts in Kharoṣṭhī script and Gāndhārī language. This was an amazing, yet not totally unexpected discovery, because one – and only one – similar artifact had been known for over one hundred years. This was the Khotan Dharmapada, a similar scroll which was discovered in Chinese Central Asia in 1893, containing a text in Gāndhārī that broadly corresponded to the famous Pāli Dhammapada. This text was not definitively edited until 1962 by John Brough,¹⁵ but in the meantime, for just over a century, Buddhist scholars had wondered whether the Khotan Dharmapada was some unique oddity of Buddhist tradition or rather a single surviving specimen of an otherwise lost literature. With the discovery of the British Library scrolls, it immediately became clear that the latter was the case –

¹⁴ “Kharoṣṭhī Syllables Used as Location Markers in Gandhāran Stūpa Architecture.” In Pierfrancesco Callieri, ed., *Architetti, Capomastri, Artigiani: L’organizzazione dei cantieri e della produzione artistica nell’asia ellenistica* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente, 2006), pp. 181-224.

¹⁵ *The Gāndhārī Dharmapada* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

although at this point it no one expected that this was merely the beginning of a series of discoveries¹⁶ of similar materials in the following decades, with the result that now well over two hundred such documents are known.

At the time that the British Library acquired the scrolls, there were literally only a handful of scholars in the world who were familiar enough with Kharoṣṭhī and Gāndhārī to study them. Because I had recently published several Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions, I was lucky enough to be called upon by the British Library to authenticate and identify the new scrolls. On my first trip to the British Library in 1995, I was easily able to certify beyond any doubt their authenticity and to make some preliminary suggestions about their nature and content. Those first days were spent scanning the scrolls, which had already been unrolled and sealed between large glass plates, for some familiar words or phrases that would give clues as to their contents. The first breakthrough came in connection with a very fragmentary scroll in which I noticed, amidst a bewildering jumble of small fragments, a recurring word which seemed to read *kharga*. At that time I was staying in the home of an old friend and former student, Tom Lowenstein, and as I was scanning his shelves that evening, my eye fell on K.R. Norman's translation of the Pali Sutta-nipāta, published under the title *The Rhinoceros Horn and Other Early Buddhist Poems*. At that moment, I realized that the word *kharga* in the scroll should be the Gāndhārī equivalent of Pali *khagga* and Sanskrit *khaḍga*, "rhinoceros," and therefore that the manuscript I had been studying that day might be a Gāndhārī version of the famous "Rhinoceros Sūtra" (or "Rhinoceros' Horn Sūtra"), each verse of which concludes with the refrain "Wander alone like the rhinoceros."

The next day's work at the British Library confirmed my guess as to the contents of that scroll, and this first successful identification was soon followed by another. In one of the other scrolls, I noticed a recurrent word *anodata*. This rang a faint memory bell in the back of my mind, until I finally realized that this could be the Gāndhārī equivalent of

¹⁶ The circumstances of nearly all of these discoveries are unfortunately unknown, as they have come to light in the international antiquities market. Most of them seem to have been found by unknown parties in eastern Afghanistan or northwestern Pakistan. The dream of scholars working on Gāndhārī manuscripts is that some of them may someday be found in the course of documented archaeological excavations; but given the unstable situation in the areas concerned, this seems unlikely to happen any time soon.

Sanskrit Anavatapta, the name of a sacred lake in the Himalayas which was the setting and title word of a popular poem, the Songs of Lake Anavatapta (*Anavatapta-gāthā*), which was then known in Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan versions. On comparing the definitive 1961 edition of the Sanskrit version by Heinz Bechert, my hunch was confirmed: the manuscript was indeed a Gāndhārī version of the Songs of Lake Anavatapta, which was much older than and probably the predecessor of the Sanskrit text and its Tibetan and Chinese translations.

In the months and years that followed, various other manuscripts in the British Library collection were successfully identified, including another Gāndhārī version of the Dharmapada. But many others proved to have no parallels in any other Buddhist literature. These unparalleled and fragmentary texts presented greater challenges to interpretation, but they also are in some ways even more valuable than the Gāndhārī versions of previously known books, revealing a branch of Buddhist literature that was hitherto entirely unknown.

Some of the earliest and most important discoveries in this group involved a series of tantalizingly laconic and frustratingly fragmentary avadāna-like legends, two of which contained – to my amazement – the names of familiar historical figures from the history of Gandhāra in the early first century, King Jihonika and the satrap Aśpavarma, who were previously known to me from their coins and inscriptions. This surprising discovery confirmed what had been apparent from the scrolls' linguistic and graphic features, namely that they dated from in or around the first century CE. In the years to follow, other Gandhāran scrolls have been dated by radiocarbon tests to as early as the first century BCE – the time when, according to the chronicles of the Theravāda tradition of Sri Lanka, Buddhist scriptures were first set down in writing. Thus, in the Gandhāran scrolls, we have not only the oldest Buddhist texts that have been found, but also, in all probability, some of the oldest Buddhist manuscripts that were ever written down.

As I continued my preliminary studies on the British Library scrolls in 1996, it dawned on me that this was not a one-man job. In retrospect – when, twenty years later an international squad of specialists is still poring over the mysteries of many of these manuscripts – this conclusion seems ridiculously obvious, but back then it only became clear to me gradually, especially while examining the many texts for which I could not

locate parallels in other Buddhist literatures. The majority of this class fell into the broad category of “scholastic texts,” including technical commentaries on sūtras and polemic works of the abhidharma class; and here I was blessed with another stroke of luck. For my long-standing colleague and collaborator Collett Cox happened to be a prominent expert in this kind of literature, and it was only natural that we soon became partners in the British Library manuscripts project.

This two-person team led in short order to the establishment of a cooperative project between the British Library and the University of Washington, formally known as the Early Buddhist Manuscripts Project. This project quickly grew to include two of our then-graduate students, Tim Lenz and Jason Neelis, who came to be among the founding fathers of what somehow came to be, and still is known as the “Kharoṣṭhī Klub.” Tim, who had been working on Jaina Apabhraṃśa literature, soon switched his specialty to Gandhāran studies, and in 1999 completed an outstanding dissertation consisting of an edition of the British Library scroll containing a fragmentary text of the Dharmapada and a particularly interesting set of avadāna-like stories. This was subsequently published in 2003 as the third volume of the Gandhāran Buddhist Text series,¹⁷ which we had contracted with the University of Washington Press as the primary vehicle for the publication of editions of the British Library manuscripts.

In the meantime, Mark Allon (now of the University of Sydney), had recently completed a PhD in Pāli studies at Cambridge under K.R. Norman, and expressed an interest in the project. We managed to procure funding for him to come to the University of Washington as a post-doctoral scholar, and he rapidly mastered the basics of Gāndhārī and re-tooled himself into one of the world’s leading Gāndhārī specialists. While at Washington he completed a masterful study of a British Library manuscript containing three Gāndhārī sūtras, which was published in 2001 as the second volume of Gandhāran Buddhist Texts.¹⁸

¹⁷ *A New Version of the Gāndhārī Dharmapada and a Collection of Previous-Birth Stories* (Seattle: University of Washington Press).

¹⁸ *Three Gāndhārī Ekottarikāgama-Type Sūtras* (Seattle: University of Washington Press).

In the meantime I had published two books on the British Library scrolls. The first one, *Ancient Buddhist Scrolls from Gandhāra*,¹⁹ published in 1999, presented a survey, introduction, and preliminary analysis of the scrolls. While it succeeded in its main aim, namely to introduce the newly discovered Gandhāran literature to the attention of Buddhist scholars in general and to set the agenda for their further study, it contains, in retrospect, a number of incorrect conclusions and inaccurate descriptions. But I am not too troubled by these defects, as one can legitimately claim that such errors are inevitable at the early stages of study of previously unknown material. During these early years I also completed my edition of the Rhinoceros (Horn) Sūtra, published as the first volume of Gandhāran Buddhist Texts in 2000.²⁰

In the following years, the enterprise of publishing Gandhāran manuscripts continued to grow, in more than one respect. On the one hand, the cadre of Gandhāran specialists grew to include new young scholars who got their PhD's at Washington involving the study and editing of Gandhāran manuscripts: Andrew Glass in 2006, Tien-chang Shih (Meihuang Lee) in 2008, Stefan Baums in 2009, and Joseph Marino in 2016. On the other hand, new Gandhāran manuscripts, including several large collections, came to light and fell under the purview of the University of Washington manuscripts project. These included the Robert Senior collection of Gandhāran sūtra texts, one important member of which was edited in Andrew Glass' dissertation and published as volume 4 of Gandhāran Buddhist Texts.²¹

Meanwhile, a huge collection of Buddhist manuscripts fragments from the region of Bamiyan, Afghanistan, numbering in the thousands, came under the purview of a scholarly team led by Jens Braarvig of the University of Oslo. While the vast majority of the Bamiyan fragments are in Sanskrit, the earliest specimens, comprising some 250 small fragments, were in Gāndhārī, and these were subcontracted for publication to the UW team. To date, seven articles by EBMP researchers and their affiliates have been

¹⁹ *Ancient Buddhist Scrolls from Gandhāra: The British Library Kharoṣṭhī Fragments* (Seattle: University of Washington Press).

²⁰ *A Gāndhārī Version of the Rhinoceros Sūtra* (Seattle: University of Washington Press).

²¹ *Four Gāndhārī Saṃyuktāgama Sūtras* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007).

published in the four volumes of the *Buddhist Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection* series, edited by Jens Braavig.²² Among the major discoveries among this material are several Mahāyāna sūtras in Gāndhārī, which have had revolutionary effects on our knowledge of the early history of the Mahāyāna. Ten Mahāyāna sūtras in Gāndhārī from the Bamiyan and other groups are now known; these include texts that were well-known in other languages, such as the Bhadrakalpika Sūtra and the Bodhisattvapiṭaka Sūtra, as well as others that were previously unknown. Another important Bamiyan find was some twenty-five small fragments of what seems to have been a complete manuscript of the Ekottarikāgama in Gāndhārī, illustrating an important step in the formation of comprehensive written canons.²³

I will spare the reader the details of the many other Gandhāran manuscript discoveries and the various projects involved in studying them. These are discussed in detail in a book that, as this is being written, is about to be published as a volume of Wisdom Press' Classics of Indian Buddhism series under the title *Ancient Buddhist Literature of Gandhāra: A Selected Anthology with Translations*. This book presents an overall summary of what has been achieved over the past twenty years of study of Gandhāran manuscripts and an (re-)evaluation of their significance for the history of Buddhism. It differs from virtually all previous publications on the Gandhāran material, which were directed towards a specialist academic audience, in that it is intended for a more general readership. My main goal in this book is to “mainstream” Gandhāran literature and Gandhāran Buddhism; that is to say, to gain for Gandhāran Buddhism its now-deserved place in the general knowledge of Buddhism, both within the academy and beyond it.

Time will tell – soon enough – whether the book will achieve its goal, but I am at least comfortable that I have done my duty toward the overall project, at least insofar as I have summarized what my colleagues and I have been up to for the last twenty years. This is not to say, though, that my work is finished – far from it. Even as I am on the

²² Oslo: Hermes Publishing, 2000-2016.

²³ C. Jantrasrisalai, T. Lenz, LIN Qian, and R. Salomon, “Fragments of an Ekottarikāgama Manuscript in Gāndhārī,” in *Buddhist Manuscripts. Volume IV* (Oslo: Hermes Publishing, 2016).

verge of retirement from my professorship at the University of Washington, I have every intention to continue, as long as my health, energy, and other circumstances permit, to study and publish Gandhāran texts. I have in mind, and to a considerable extent on paper, at least three more major projects involving further editions of Gāndhārī manuscripts as well as a textbook of the Gāndhārī language.

Whether I will be granted the opportunity to finish all, or some, or any of these projects remains to be seen. As I enter a new stage of my life and career, I find myself increasingly torn between the advice of two figures who have always loomed large in my set of personal values and principles. On one shoulder sits, as it were, the ghost of my paternal grandfather (of whom I am the namesake), a German professor of the old school whose motto – which he lived out to the letter – was “A scholar should die at his desk,”²⁴ and to whom scholarship was not much less than a sacred duty which took preference over all other activities. But whispering in my other ear is the voice of the mysterious sage Ecclesiastes – traditionally believed to be the voice of my other namesake, King Solomon – who warns (Ecclesiastes 12.12) that “Of writing many books there is no end,” and that there is a deeper meaning and purpose to life – although he is tantalizingly vague about what exactly that higher purpose is.

So much for the future. Before concluding this memoir, I return to fill in some gaps in the previous account of the last twenty or so years. Although I spent the majority of my research time during this period on editing Gāndhārī manuscripts, I also continued to pursue other subjects – including non-Buddhist matters – from time to time. In particular, over this period I published various articles on classical Sanskrit literature, including the works of the quintessentially Brahmanical authors Māgha and Kālidāsa, while also continuing to study the works of my old Buddhist friend Aśvaghoṣa. As throughout my years at Washington, I have been trying to maintain a balance in my teaching and research between my two passions, Buddhist studies and classical Indology. I still take great pleasure in reading and teaching Sanskrit kāvya literature, and I feel that I have, in the end, managed not only to find some sort of balance between my two careers, but to integrate them in a fruitful manner. Yes, if I had to do it all over again,

²⁴ “Ein Gelehrter soll an seinem Schreibtisch sterben.”

I would have done some things differently, but such regrets are inevitable, and everyone must have them. In the end, it has been a rich and fulfilling career. I can't complain.

Richard Salomon

Seattle, February 24, 2018