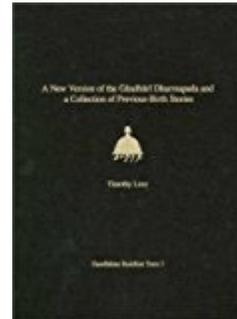


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Timothy Lenz. *A New Version of the Gāndhārī Dharmapada and a Collection of Previous-Birth Stories: British Library Kharoṣṭhī Fragments 16 + 25.* Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2003. xxii + 265 pp. \$85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-295-98308-0.



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This volume by Timothy Lenz is the third installment in the Gandhāran Buddhist Texts series, whose project it is to present “text editions and studies of the birch bark scrolls in the British Library’s Kharoṣṭhī manuscript collection, dating from about the first century A.D.” (p. ii). This is a collection of immense importance. It contains some of the earliest Buddhist manuscripts from India—or from anywhere else, for that matter—and it offers great insight into the early history of Buddhism in north India. Lenz’s contribution to the series is an excellent model of textual reconstruction, critical philology, engaging translation, and historical sleuthing. His volume also includes some fantastic material for those interested in the development of Buddhist narrative traditions in India, and in the transition in India from oral to written modes of textual production.

In the present volume, Lenz considers fragments of the Gandhāran London Dharmapada (Dhp-GL), which is similar in many ways to the Khotan Dharmapada (Dhp-GK) previously edited by John Brough (1962), as well as fragments from a series of stories that concern the previous lives of the Buddha and some of his disciples. In each case, Lenz explains the paleography, orthography, phonology, and morphology of the materials, and then offers the reconstructed text with a translation and commentary. Lenz’s skills in these endeavors are ex-

tremely impressive, and he writes in a clear and direct manner, transforming linguistic and philological discussions into compelling reading. In addition, Lenz offers a wide range of instructive glosses, comparing words and phrases in the manuscript remains with parallels from Buddhist texts across a variety of languages.

Lenz also uses the manuscript fragments to address important sociological questions about the practice of Buddhism in India in the first centuries of the Common Era. In his analysis of the Gandhāran London Dharmapada, for example, he tries to answer a particularly vexing question: “Why do the Dhp-GL and the Dhp-GK, which are apparently versions of essentially the same text, differ so widely in their presentation of individual verses” (p. 23)? Lenz concludes that the differences in verse order in the two Gandhāran Dharmapadas suggest “less-than-meticulous practices of oral transmission” (p. 18). Thus prompted to consider practices of textual memorization and the use of mnemonic devices in ancient Gandhāra, Lenz concludes that the numerical mnemonics in Gandhāran texts “may have been developed to ensure that written and oral traditions were mutually consistent, and therefore, they could provide important evidence concerning the transition in Indian Buddhism from a fundamentally oral tradition to a fundamentally written one” (p. 19). While this is a valuable insight, I was

left wanting more.

Lenz likewise considers the possibility that DhP-GL is “an independent translation of the Dharmapada in G?ndh?r?” (p. 23), signaling perhaps that the two G?ndh?r? Dharmapadas “might originally have been written in different parts of the G?ndh?r?-speaking region, although not necessarily in the ones in which they were found (Hadda and Khotan respectively)” (p. 24). Earlier, however, Lenz had suggested that the existence of a second G?ndh?r? Dharmapada “opens up the possibility of reconsidering Brough’s hypothesis that different Dharmapada-type texts represent collections that were independently compiled and preserved by different sectarian orders from a common fund of Buddhist verse” (p. 14). But does an independent translation necessarily indicate a separate sectarian affiliation? What kind of evidence would be needed to make this determination? Once again I was left wanting more, though I recognize that these questions are outside of the purview of Lenz’s work.

Perhaps even more intriguing is Lenz’s analysis of a series of p?rvayogas. Unlike Gandh?ran avad?nas, which focus on a story of the present, Gandh?ran p?rvayogas focus on a story of the past, recounting the actions performed by a person in a previous life. The manuscript contains approximately eleven such stories, though only the first six are preserved well enough for analysis. These stories, however, are more like summaries than narratives. For example, p?rvayoga no. 2 offers a hyper-abbreviated version of the well-known Vessantara story. Lenz (who helpfully provides texts and translations of a number of Sanskrit and Chinese parallels in the appendices) translates the p?rvayoga as follows:

“[23] Suda?a. This should be done by [way of] example. Since the prince was a giver of all, [24] the great royal elephant was given to a Brahman. The (*carriage) was abandoned by the prince, and the children were [25] forsaken. Indra, king of the gods, arrived (*by way of the sky) and spoke in verse: [26] ‘Certainly this evil man (*eats) vile food.’ Expansion. All should be done.[27] (*Story number) 2.”

While one might conclude from the schematic nature of these p?rvayogas that they were used as memory aids or mnemonic devices for storytellers, Lenz poses a more compelling alternative. Noting the lack of organization, the marginalia, and the cryptic abbreviation formulae (which could only be expanded with extensive knowledge of Buddhist story literature), Lenz concludes that the “scribes are probably the authors of the texts rather

than the copyists of previously written documents” (p. 102), and that they “were apparently no ordinary authors, but rather specialists in this literature” (p. 104). Lenz then suggests the possibility that these story scribes were “scavengers” (p. 108), making use of the empty portions of scrolls that remained after a primary text had been transcribed, and that these texts may represent some sort of pedagogical exercise. As Lenz notes, “The author may have written the p?rvayoga text, either at the behest of a teacher or by his own volition, as an exercise to test or reinforce his memory and training” (p. 110).

But what would have been tested by such an exercise? One need not know the Vessantara story well to recount it in this form. Would it not have been better to test would-be “specialists in this literature” by having them write out stories in full, in the way they would be told? Despite such questions, Lenz’s conjecture suggests intriguing lines of inquiry concerning story specialists and their training, and concerning the connection between the written and oral creation and transmission of literature. This also offers an intriguing context for the first story in the series. It is, as Lenz notes, “problematic and may be an abandoned story from an unsuccessful attempt at writing a series of p?rvayoga or avad?nas” (p. 145). But where did the writer go wrong? What makes it unsuccessful? A failed story by a story specialist in training offers unique insight into the logic and practice of Buddhist lore. These are materials that other scholars will no doubt want to revisit.

As a work of textual reconstruction, analysis, and translation, Lenz’s work is certainly a success, and will interest a wide variety of linguists, Indologists, and Buddhologists. Yet Lenz’s work is also successful as a whodunit. Much of his investigation of these manuscript fragments reads like a kind of Buddhist Sherlock Holmes. The technical expertise involved in his reconstruction of these texts, such as using digital photography to create images that are then flipped and realigned (pp. 4-5), necessitates a blending of forensics and Buddhist linguistics. I was particularly impressed in this regard with Lenz’s analysis of verse 3 of DhP-GL (pp. 54-55), which is completely missing from the manuscript. If only the television networks were willing, one could imagine the piecing together of these fragments and the stories they can tell as a kind of Gandh?ra CSI. While I wouldn’t count on television careers for the members of the British Library/University of Washington Early Buddhist Manuscript Project, I do anxiously await their next publication.

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