CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The thesis is titled “The Origin and Development of Sarvastivada School of Buddhism in Kashmir-Gandhara Regions”. The proposed work has been planned with the emphasis on regional studies, which has, of late, become a thrust area of discussion.

The Sarvastivada school of Buddhism was originated in Northern India especially in the Kashmir Gandhara regions and Mathura. The Kashmir-Gandhara regions provided a congenial environment for the origin and development of the Sarvastivada school of Buddhism. ¹ The Sarvastivada was an important school of Hinayana Buddhism. The Sarvastivada sect branched off from the Theravada, which was the most orthodox school of Buddhism. The Dipavamsa records that the Sarvastivada came off from the Mahisasaka, a branch of orthodox group called the Theravada, which was the most orthodox school of Buddhism. The Dipavamsa records that the Sarvastivada came off from the Mahisasaka, a branch of orthodox group called the Theravada. It was also known as the Vaibhasika on account of its relying on the Vibhasas - the fundamental works of the Sarvastivada School and specially the Mahavibhasastra, an encyclopedia of Buddhism philosophy. Yamakami Sogen opines that in later times the so called Vaibhasika came to be identified with the Sarvastivadins and the two names became mutually inter changeable.

According to the Sanskrit sources, the great Mauryan King Ashoka supported the Sarvastivada school of Buddhism. Emperor Ashoka got convened the Third Buddhist Council at Ashokarama Vihara in Pataliputra. ² In this Council, the monks who subscribed to the views of the Theravada were recognized as orthodox and the rest as unorthodox. The unorthodox monks left Magadha and went to the Kashmir-Gandhara regions. They


occupied a conspicuous position in the Kashmir-Gandhara regions and subsequently came to be known as the Sarvastivadins. The Abhidharmamahavibhasasastra and Yuan Chwang’s Si-Yu-Ki state that the monks migrated from Magadha to Kashmir was none other than Sarvastivadins. Thus, Kashmir became a great centre of Buddhist philosophical studies in northern India.

King Kaniska was a great patron of the Sarvastivada Buddhism. He was ruling over the Kashmir – Gandhara regions in the first century C.E. He convened a Buddhist Council at Kundalavana Vihara in Kashmir. In this council, the Sarvastivada school of Buddhism was more organized and systematized than ever before. The great works of the Sarvastivada Buddhism were complied, such as the Vinayamanhavibhasastra, Upadesamahavibhasastra and Abhidharmamahavibhasastra.

**Philosophical thought of Sarvastivada School of Buddhism**

The Sarvastivadins propagated new teachings, which had not existed in early Buddhism. The Concepts of early Buddhism were elaborated in the Abhidharma literature. ‘Non-permanence’ in the Abhidharma means, to be limited and conditioned by the four samskṛta-laksana. Enlightenment is finally attained by annulling Avidya, as in early Buddhism.

The knowledge by cognition, according to the doctrine of the Sarvastivadins, is based on existing objects (salambana), in contrast to the Darstantika’s view that the things (dharmas), which do not exist as substances (dravyasat). It can be objects of cognition. The Discriminative knowledge is possible with regard to non-existent objects.

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The Theravada and the Sarvastivada enied the possibility that the cognition of one moment (ksana) can know itself whereas the Mahasanghika admitted it, saying that the cognition which is the subject can also be the object of the same cognition. The Yogacara school inherited the latter’s opinion.

The sectarian theologians of the Sarvastivada adopted the theory of Non-ego (pudgalanairatmya) and of the existence of things as substances (dravyasat of dharma). The existence of things as substances can be predicated of only dharmas; it is distinguished from: (1) being in the natural world (prajnaptisat) (as can be said of men, women, jars, clothes, wheels, troops, woods and houses), (2) relative being (as can be said of ‘long and short’, ‘this and that’), (3) nominal being, i.e. a concept which includes a contradiction in itself (as can be said of ‘hair of a tortoise’, ‘a horn of a horse’, ‘a child of a barren woman’), and (4) conglomeration being (as can be said of an ‘individual person’, ‘pudgala’). Thus, dravyasat does not mean the existence of things in the ordinary sense, but their existence as transcendental substances which manifest themselves in the process of time. A substance in this sense was called dravya or vastu (vatthu).

Later Sarvastivadins made another distinction between two kinds of being, i.e. being in the ultimate sense (paramarthasat) and being in the conventional sense (samvrtisat). By accepting the double meaning of the term dharma, they teach that C.E. harma is an attribute, insofar as it has an owner (dharmin), and that it is at the same time a substance (dravya), insofar as the owner of the dharma is conventionally supposed (prajnapti). C.E. harma is called arthas or visaya, insofar as it is an object of knowledge.

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Dharmas as transcendental substances subsist throughout the lapse of time, i.e., the past, present and future. Their appearances change, but the essential nature (svabhava) of dharmas does not change.

Then what is it that appears and disappears in time? This problem was highly controversial among those Japanese monastic scholars who represented this scholarly tradition. The scholars of the Kofukuji Temple (Northern Temple) advocated the view that it is the essence of C.E.harma that appears and disappears, whereas the scholars of the Gangoji Temple (Southern Temple) held the view that it is the function of C.E.harma that appears and disappears.

Throughout the history of psychological thought in the Abhidharma literature there were two currents. One regarded mind (citta) as primary with mental functions (caittra) as subsidiary to it, whereas the order denied the primacy of kind.

The classification of all dharmas into the Five Skandhas was inherited by Abhidharma theologians, but they were termed as samsktas by the Sarvastivadins.

The classification of all the dharmas into five classes was brought about by the Sarvastivadins.

The Five Classes of Dharmas are:

1) Matter (rupa) Matter is divided into primary (bhuta-mahabhuta) and secondary (bhautika): 11
2) Consciousness (vijnana):1
3) Mental Forces (caittra-dharma, citta-samprayukta-samskaras): 46
4) Elements neither matter nor mental forces (cittaviprayukta-sasmskaras): 14
5) Immutable elements (asamskrta): 3

Total: 75
The first among these five, matter (rupa) has eight characteristics, according to the Sarvastivada; the unmanifested karma was thought to be a variety of matter.

The Sarvastivadins classified rupa ‘the visible’ into two: color (varna) and shape (samsthana), and admitted eight kinds of samsthana. The concept of the Ten Mahabhumik C.E.harmah was first advanced by the philosopher Vasumitra. It was propounded in the Dhatukayapada and the Prakaranapada. The word ‘citta’ (mental function) was not used in early Buddhism, but later in Buddhist sects. Mental defilements (klesa) were enumerated. The theory of caitta in the Abhidharma-kosa was the ingenious thought of Vasubandhu who set forth the anityabhumi dharma for the first time. Whereas the Sarvastivadins enumerated 46 caittas, the Visuddhimagga enumerated 53, and there are many other differences of this nature. The concept of cittaviparyukt C.E.harma came into existence for the first time in the Abhidharma of the Sarvastivadins.

Kumaralata, the philosopher, asserted that even pleasant feeling (sukha vedana) is nothing but unpleasant feeling, for the former gives rise to the latter (duhkha vedana). The theory was refuted by the Sarvastivadins.  

One of the most important factors, which distinguishes the Vaibhasika Abhidharma from the Theravada Abhidharma is a category called the viprayukta-samskaras. In this category, syllables, words and sentences are included, which were all admitted their own existence through time.

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Thinkers of Conservative Buddhism merely enumerated dharmas, but did not consistently systematize them. It was in China and Japan that all the dharmas mentioned in the Abhidharmakosa were fixed to 75.

The set of twenty-two indriyas was fixed in the period of the Hinayana Sects, or immediately before that.

All the dharmas are interrelated to each other by means of conditions or relations (pratyayas). In the Abhidharma literature various systems of pratyayas were formed. Relations between things can be viewed by means of twenty-four respects. This is called Patthana-naya in the Abhidhammatthasangaha VIII.

The concept of karmaE.C.iffers with sects. The problem of karma came to be discussed in Theravada. The karma of the Sarvastivadins was, so to speak, a sort of material substance. The Sarvastivadins admitted a kind of karma called “the karma not made known” (avijnapti-karma). It should be explained as ‘a kind of habit acquired under a vow. It is a link which connects an act and its fruition, lasting till the fruit becomes ripe. It has the function to prevent bad actions when it is of good character, and to annul its consequences when it is of bad character. This school admitted transmigration. The “Essence of Discipline” was a topic of heated debate among Hinayana theologians. The Essential Bodies of Precepts were regarded as something material by the Sarvastivadins. The Sarvastivadins acknowledged them to be a kind of avijnaptirupa, whereas the Sautrantikas refuted the theory.

The concept of ‘good’ was not made clear in early Buddhist but was discussed in fuller detail later on. The criteria by which to distinguish good and bad were much debated
by the Abhidharma theologians. As a whole, nirvana was regarded as good and anything contrary to it as bad.

Buddhist cosmology grew to be highly elaborate. The Sarvastivadins entertained the concept of atoms, but apparently it was refuted by Buddhist idealism. The theory of the Three World-Spheres took shape, not in the scriptures, but among the Hinayana sects. The theory of various hells developed in full details. Some Sanskrit manuscripts depicting the condition of hells have been preserved in Japan.

In the philosophy of the Sarvastivadins the meaning of *avidya* is not clear and not consistent. With the development of the system it came finally to mean “unreasonable application of mind” (*ayonisomanaskara*). Throughout Conservative Buddhism, faith (*sraddha*) was regarded as a gateway to the understanding of the Buddhist teaching.

Buddhist sects enjoined the practice of meditation. The process of the way of meditation was set forth in various ways by different schools. The differentiation in the three *samadhis* was minutely discussed by the Sarvastivadins. Meditation gives rise to wisdom (*prajna*). The *prajna* of the Mahasanghika School meant not knowing objects, but practicing. The steps *sravakas* (ascetic disciples) should take are called as a whole. “The Way of *Sravakas*”. The way to Enlightenment was formalized by way of synthesis by the Sarvastivadins. The final stage of their practice consists of two paths, i.e., *darsanamarga* and *bhavana-marga*. These two concepts were later introduced into Buddhist Idealism. Finally the ascetic becomes an arhat.

The Sarvastivadins and other schools admitted the Three Vehicles, i.e., the Vehicle of Buddhas, that of Pratyekabuddhas, and that of Sravakas; this idea played the key note in
the Lotus Sutra in later days. It was admitted by the Sarvastivadins that Sravakas, Pratyekabuddhas, and Bodhisattvas could change their ways (yanas) to observe other ways.

In early Buddhism “asamkhata” meant nirvana or the state of liberation, whereas in the Abhidharma literature of the Sarvastivadins it came to mean permanent, not-changing entities.

Since Buddhists embraced the theory of Non-ego, then what is the subject of liberation? What is liberated? It is one’s own Mind (Citta) that is liberated, and this citta is pure by itself according to the teaching of early Buddhism. In the age of Conservative Buddhism there were some who asserted that the fundamental principle of the individual existence was the one citta. The Sautrantikas admitted the existence of the eka-rasa-skandhas, which were interpreted as ‘bijas of one taste’.

This kind of thought especially that the Purity of Mind by Origin was current even up to later Buddhist Idealism. Anyhow, in one way or the other Hinayanists had to admit the existence of the subject of transmigration.

What is the subject of transmigration? The Sarvastivadins had to admit the intermediate existence (antarabhava). The Vatsiputriyas admitted the existence of pudgala as the subject of transmigration. The Sautrantika School denied the authority of Abhidharma and admitted only that of the Sutras. According to Non-Buddhist literature, the Sautrantikas are said to have admitted the existence of the external world. Yogasena (c. 650-700 C.E.), whose thoughts were cited by Kamalasila, probably belonged to the Sammitiya or Vatsiputriya school. This proves that even after Dharmakirti, some Hinayana
schools were still flourishing besides the Sarvastivadins and the Sautrantikas. These two major schools were severely criticized by Hindu orthodox scholar such as Sankara.

**Kashmir: The Fountainhead of Indian Culture**

From the time of the beginning of the formation of the present Asian continent, Kashmir has remained as inseparable part of Indian Peninsula. This unchallengeable geographical truth has been expressed by Kalidasa in the first verse in Kumara Sambhava giving the description of the northern boundary of Indian thus:

Verses

“The paramount Himalayas in the North extending from the East to West stands unshakable in its glory”.

After the coming of Aryans to India, this geographical unity has been transformed into a cultural unity. The Nadi Sukta of Rig Veda (7th Sukta of 10th Mandal) gives a clue to almost all the rivers, which flow in the present Afghanistan and Kashmir viz., Kuma (Kabul), Trushtama (tributary of Chitral), Vipasha (Vyasa) Shutudri (Sutlej), etc. The Rig Veda also mentions of Gandhara which was a part of Kashmir. The Aryans were impressed by the breed of cattle found in this region. ⁶

Kashmir had a Republican system of Government for many years. It is an indisputable fact that Kamboj ruled over this State. Later, Panchal established its rule and a part of Kashmir, Peer Panjal is a witness to this fact. Panjal is C.E.istorted form of the word Panchal. Later, the Muslims prefixed the word “Peer” to this, in memory of one Siddha Fakir.

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In the Epic period, this truth became clearer. Kashmir has been given a prominent place in the Mahabharata. In the Vana Parva of Mahabharata, there is a description of Pandava’s journey to the Vrashaparva Ashram. It says that during this journey towards China they crossed Kashmir. Addressing Janamejaya, it says that before the Ajnatavasa, the dethroned Pandavas were wandering for 12 years in these regions. They traveled over Gandhamandan mountains, Kailash, Bhadri Ashram, and other different hermitages and at the end reached Subhahu region.

Though it may seem to be a poetic imagination that Pandavas visited China, it proves that Aryans were familiar with the regions in and around Kashmir.

Around 700 B.C.E. in India, Panini’s Sanskrit grammar played a great role in the spread of Sanskrit literature. In his “Ashtadhyayi” dealing with history, literature and culture, the geographical details of India are given. So this book has contributed to the geographical knowledge of India after Rig Veda and Mahabharata Panini is called by the people as Kashmiri, as he belonged to this region and hence was able to describe this region in great details in his book. But there is no ample proof for this. Generally, the historians say that he was born at Shalatur village formerly known as Lahu village (in Campbalpur district) near Takshashila. But from Ashtadhyayi it can be said that he had traveled in various parts of the country including Kashmir. In one of his sutras, there is a word ‘Pandukambali’ which is also found in the ‘Jatak’: verses meaning “Indragopa coloured blanked produced in Gandhar”. The art of dyeing blankets from various colours extracted from forest plants is in vogue even today in Kashmir and Peshawar. Even in ancient times, Gandhar was an integral part of Kashmir. Later, even during the time of Huan Chawang Kabul, Punjab and the entire mountain range of Gandhar was under the reign of a Hindu
King. Kalidasa has depicted a picturesque journey of Raghu through this land in the 4th sarga of Raghuvamsa. There is a mention of his horses rolling the stands of Sindhu banks and leaving marks of Saffron. In Persian language Saffron is called “Kafishi” and that is why Kashmir is also known as “Kafishi”. Saffron has been cultivated in Kashmir since a long time and has always been famous in the Asian and European market. Kashmir Saffron has also been mentioned in Sanskrit Encyclopedia of China. According to Chinese records, in 647 AD, the king of Kashmir had presented this to the Chinese emperor. It was exported to Cambodia too. In 519 AD the king of Cambodia had sent a consignment of saffron to China. Kashmir has been described in Amarkosh with reference to saffron.

Kalidasa’s description of the Himalyan region is in the form of the best poetry in this world. The latter section of Meghdoot, the 4th section of Vikramaurvashiya, the 7th part of Shakuntalam and the 2nd and 4th Sargas of Raghuvamsha and the whole of Kumara-Sambhavam describe the beauty of these ranges. From the description of the flora and fauna, it is observed that Kalidasa was for a long time involved in this region.

MARTAND RUINS

Kashmir has the privilege of giving birth to two great sons Matrucheshta and Jagaddhar Bhat. Matrucheshta was a contemporary of Kanishka. They are considred as eminent poets in the entire Buddhistic world because of their contribution of hymns in the religious texts – “Chatushataka” and “Adharvashataka”.

It was from Kashmir that Indian culture along with Sanskrit Literature and Buddhism traveled to various countries of Asia and merged with their cultures. Even today, this is visible in the cultures of Indonesia, Philippines, Malaya, Kamboj and Siam. Kashmir has acted as a launch-medium to spread the Indian culture all over Asia. It was not only a
medium but also a central point from which Indian culture spread from Sri Lanka to Central Asia and from Egypt to Japan.

He has given such a strong blow to the Arishadvargas that it produces cheer even in the gloomiest of hearts. Sri Harsha, author of “Naishadha’ has been blessed by Devi Saraswati. He was the nephew of Rajanak Mammat. Sri Harsha was famous not only as a great poet but also as a philosopher and a Yogi. In reality, the contribution of poetry and philosophy is very rare in Sanskrit literature. Naishadha contains all the best aspects of literature and poetry.

Kalhana, a great poet and historian too lived in Kashmir. He was the pioneer in having written the historic book “Rajatarangini” after his scientific research in Indian history and for this Sanskrit lovers will always be indebted to him. This book emerged as a result of his experience and knowledge which was not based on any historical literature. To write historical works he gave his own idea as follows: “That scholar is praiseworthy whose words do not ring of any jealousy or hatred while narrating past history”.

The specialty found in Kalhana, which distinguishes him from the Western scholars of the 19th Century is his view of considering the kings and commoners as equals. His book Rajatarangini gives equal importance to both the glory of kings and common men’s life. After the peak of glory, the further development of Sanskrit was done by Kashmiri Pandits. The bright stars in the sky of Kashmir literature are Acharya Bhamaha, Udbhata, Rudrata, Acharya Kutanka, Vamana, Anandavardhana, Abhinavagupta, Mammata and Kshemendra. Kashmir has not only been the source for the development of Sanskrit literature but the stories of Mahabharata, Ramayana and Buddha spread throughout Asia, China and Japan from this region only Nagarjuna, Aryashura, Dingnaga, SiddhasenC.E.ivakara and
Acharaya Hemachandra have followed Matrucheshta’s style in writing their religious texts. In the 7th century, when the Chinese pilgrim I-tsing was traveling all over India the hymns of Matrucheshta were very popular. The extent of their popularity can be judged from this story of Itsing:

“One day Bhagwan Buddha was taking rest in a garden. Accidentally a nightingale started singing sweetly. He felt very happy and told his disciples that this sweet singing bird would take birth as Matrucheshta in his next birth”.

Because of his belonging to Buddhism, Matrucheshta did not receive as much respect in his motherland as Kalidasa got. But in countries like China, Japan, Korea and Indonesia, every one remembers and considers him as the only poet who deserves utmost respect in the world.

In one of his stutis, Matrucheshta escribes the weakness of human mind thus:

“Just as it is difficult to catch a tortoise by its neck by throwing a line at it, it is difficult to be borne as a human being with a religious bent of mind”.

A second stutikar was Jagaddhar Bhat whose period of authorship was during 14th Century. “Stuti Kusumanjali” is his famous poetical work. In this book in praise of his favourite God Shiva, he offers himself to Him in such a soul-stirring style that it wets one’s eyes with tears and heart warms up with ecstasy.

Jagaddhar Bhat’s name is unique – in Kashmir’s Sanskrit literature because of his poetic renditions and moving figures of speech.

In Kushan period, Kashmir had become the centre of Buddhistic culture. At that time, Kashmir was a part of Kanishka Empire. To spread the glory of Buddhist principles, he arranged at Kashmir a conference which was attended by various national and international scholars. Then Kashmir was the centre of Mahayana cult, whence Buddhist
monks spread their religion in Kabul, China and Tibet. The new Buddhist philosophy “Sarvastivada” originated in Kashmir. This was propounded by Nagarjuna. Great scholars like Ashvaghosh, Vasumitra and Sugatamitra also participated in this conference. This lasted for six months during which period various Buddhist philosophies were discussed, reinterpreted and were rewritten in Sanskrit because at that time Sanskrit was in full swing in Kashmir. On the contrary, Ashoka’s Buddhist edicts and literature were in Pali language. Though all over India, Pali and Prakrit were pre-dominant Kashmir scholars helped to preserve the glory of Sanskrit.

Even though the atmosphere favoured Buddhism, it could not remain so for ever. The name of BhagavatC.E.harma had spread to Kashmir also. During the region of Lalitaditya and his subsequent dynasty, not only Bhagavata religion but also the literature and art blossomed. Later, Buddhism was replaced by Shaivism. At that time, Gita was also interpreted in various ways by different scholars of Kashmir. Of these, only two, one Vasugupta, founder of Shaivism and another by name Anandavardhana were most important. The Gita in use now is also based on their interpretation.

The encouragement given to the scholars at that time had been unique in the history of the world. From 8th to 15th Century, Kashmir produced about 10-12 great scholars whose contribution has been more than half of the whole Sanskrit literature. In the 8th century, Ratnakar wrote a great epic “Hari Vijay”. This grand Epic containing 50 sargas was a successful outcome of the competition to “Kanya Kaumidi” of the great poet Magha.

Kshemendra, the Veda Vyasa of Kashmir was so worried about the duality in the society that he decided to sacrifice his life for its upliftment. Based on the Ramayana and Mahabharata he composed Ramayana Manjari and Bharat Manjari. He did a poetic translation of Brihatkatha Manjari from Sanskrit into Paisachi language. This book became a source of inspiration to other authors. This literature work has a humourous touch to the
morals preached. His humorous literature ‘Deshopdesha’ and ‘Narmamala’ succeed in making even the hard-hearted soften.  

Before understand the origin and development of Sarvastivada school of Buddhism in Kashmir: Gandhara regions. It is important to understand the background Gandhara and Gandharan Buddhism.

**Gandhara: Geographic Setting and Early History**

Gandhara, strictly speaking, is the ancient name of the Peshawar Valley region in what is now the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan, between the Suleiman Mountains along the Afghanistan border in the west and the Indus River in the east. The term Gandhara is, however, also often used in a broader sense to refer to what be called “Greater Gandhara”, comprising, besides Gandhara proper, several neighboring regions, particularly the Swat and other river valleys to the north, the region around the great city of Taxila to the east, and the eastern edge of Afghanistan to the west. These, and later on other, more distant with which we are concerned, namely, the first few centuries before and after the beginning of the Christian era, mainly as a result of being incorporated into the several Indo-Greek, Indo-Scythian, Indo-Parthian, and Kushana empires that were centered in Gandhara proper. The Gandharan character of the culture of these regions is most clearly attested by their adoption of the distinctive electric styles of Gandharan art and by their use of the Gandhari language.

Gandhari is one of the Prakrit, or Middle Indo-Aryan (MIA), vernacular languages derived from Sanskrit, or, more precisely, from the Old Indo-Aryan (OIA) dialect group. As

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such, it is closely related, historically and linguistically, to the other Indo-Aryan languages of India, yet it has distinct character which sets it off from the rest of them. This special character of Gandhari, or of “Northwestern Prakrit” as it is also sometimes called, was conditioned by several factors: by its geographical isolation, on the western fringe of the Indo-Aryan linguistic and cultural area; by its dialectal peculiarities, several of which are unique among the MIA group; and by the fact that it was out of the mainstream of the classical Indian literary tradition, which did not recognize it as one of the principle Prakrit dialects.

But what most effectively sets off Gandhari from all other Indo-Aryan and other languages is the fact that it was written in the Kharosthi script, whereas all the others have been written, from the earliest times, in the Brahmi script or its several local variants and derivatives. The Kharosthi script, which developed as an adaptation for an Indian language of the Aramaic script used by the Achaemenian Empire of ancient Iran, is visually very distinct from the pan-Indian Brahmi script group, especially because it is written from right to left, instead of left to rights as are the Brahmi-derived scripts. Although this and many of the other differences between these scripts are essentially superficial, they are nonetheless emblematic of the distinct flavor of the Gandharan culture, which, though very much part of the greater Indian cultural sphere, always retained a separate and special identity within it.

Especially in the latter part of the historical period in question, that is, around the second and third centuries C.E., the Gandhari language and its constant companion, the Kharosthi script, spread far beyond even the reaches of Greater Gandhara as defined above, into the territories of ancient Bacteria (comprising modern northern Afghanistan and
southern Uzbekistan and Tajan) and the oasis cities of the silk routes around the Tarim Basin in Central Asia, in what is now the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region of China. This far-reaching influence of Gandhara in ancient times is directly attributable to its strategic location at the primary gateway to the Indian subcontinent, a location that has enabled it to play, over and over throughout history, the role of a crossroads and melting pot of cultures. Until relatively modern times, Gandhara was the principal point of encounter of the Indian world to the east with the Iranian world to the west, and thence with the ever-shifting cultural mosaic of central Asia. On an even broader scale, through these connections Gandhara has also been the contact zone, usually indirectly but at certain points in history directly as well, with the Western world, including both the Middle East and Europe.

Three great waves of migration and invasion from central Asia that fundamentally shaped the history of the Indian world passed through the gateway of Gandhara: first, the Indo-Aryan immigration in, probably, the second millennium B.C; next, the conquests by the Bactrian Greeks, Scythians, Kushanas, and associated ethnic groups around the beginning of the Christian era; and finally the serried of Afghan, Turkish, and Mongol incursions-the so-called Muslim invasions-between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries C.E. As a result of the first of these three waves, Gandhara and adjoining regions were for a time a center of Vedic and Brahmanical culture; in ancient times, for example, the Sanskrit spoken in Gandhara was held to be the purest and most refined form of the sacred language. After the Vedic period, Gandhara became a rich prize for the great empire builders of the first millennium B.C., being first incorporated into the Achaemenian Empire of Iran by King Darius in the sixty century B.C, then falling briefly into the hands of Alexander the Great in 327-326 B.C. These events set the stage for the succeeding series of cosmopolitan
kingdoms whose diverse ethnic origins seem to have made them particularly receptive to the Buddhist religion, which was ever ready to accept sympathizers, converts, and patrons regardless of their ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

**Buddhism in Gandhara**

It is generally assumed (though this remains to be confirmed historically and archeologically) that Buddhism was first introduced to Gandhara around the middle of the third century CE, under the sponsorship of Asoka, the great emperor of the Mauryan dynasty and patron of Buddhism, whose control of the region is attested by the sets of his rock edicts engraved in Kharosthi script at Shahbazgarhi and Mansehra. A second testimony to an early presence of Buddhism in the northwestern edge of the Indian subcontinent is the famous “Questions of Milinda”, which purports to record a philosophical dialogue between King Menander, the greatest of the Indo-Greek rulers in the second century B.C.E and a Buddhist monk named Nagasena. Although the presumed Gandhari original of this text is lost, it survives in various Pali and Chinese versions and stands as the earliest explicit testimony of the encounter of Buddhism with the cosmopolitan cultures of Gandhara- an encounter which, in later centuries, is vividly and abundantly illustrated in Gandharan sculpture with its unique combination of Indian and Hellenistic or Roman themes and styles.

But other than these two sources, we have little direct evidence for this early phase of Gandharan Buddhism, for it is not until the first century B.C.E. that we begin to find abundant physical remains, in the form of stupas and other structural remains, figural and

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narrative sculpture, and especially, Buddhist ritual and dedicatory inscriptions. From this point on we can begin to trace the history of Gandharan Buddhism in relative detail, as Buddhist institutions grew, flourished, and expanded under the patronage of the successive “foreign” dynasties. By the first two centuries of the Christian era Gandhara had become one of the major centers of Buddhism in India, and it was apparently at some point during this period that Buddhism began to make its way beyond the borders of its Indian homeland and establish footholds in parts of Iran and China.

There is compelling evidence that Gandharan monks in particular were instrumental in the early expansion of Buddhism beyond India. For example, two Buddhist inscriptions in the Kharosthi script and the Gandhari language, which must have been written by monks from Gandhara, have been found near the cities of Lo-yang and Chang-an, which were major early centers of Buddhism in China. Furthermore, the Abhidharma literature of the influential Sarvastivadin school, which for the most part survives only in Chinese translations, frequently refers to a Gandharan tradition, and it is generally agreed by modern scholars that some of the important Abhidharma treatises extant in Chinese translations, such as the Abhidharma-hṛdaya, were originally composed in Gandhara. And finally, linguistic analysis indicates that at least some of the early Buddhist texts rendered into Chinese were translated from originals in, or at least derived from prototypes in, the Gandhari language. Thus it was specifically the Gandharan form (or forms) of Buddhism that was first encountered by other parts of Asia, and here once again Gandhara’s strategic location enabled it to pay a pivotal role in the cultural history of Asia, serving, as it were, as

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the geographical springboard from which Buddhism made the great leaps that enabled it to transform itself from an Indian religion into a pan-Asian and ultimately a world tradition.

But our knowledge of Gandharan Buddhism has been, until now, curiously skewed. Its archeological remains are very abundant, and these have enabled scholars to reconstruct, in broad outline at least, the historic, artistic, and architectural manifestations of Gandharan Buddhism. For example, it is primarily the hundreds of dedicatory Kharosthi inscriptions, which are often dated and sometimes mention the names of contemporary kings and officials that have made it possible to reconstruct the skeleton of the political and cultural history of this period. But the textual, and hence the doctrinal, content of Gandharan Buddhism has, until now, remained mostly obscure. Although the aforementioned Chinese translations of Abhidhāma texts give us some sense of the important doctrinal issues and positions in Gandharan Buddhism (and in the process prove that Gandhara was a vital center of Buddhist intellectual activity), we have had virtually no direct, primary records of these matters. Only one specimen of an original Gandharan Buddhist text has been available to date, namely, the famous “Gandhari Dharmapada” scroll, which was, however, found, not in Gandhara itself, but near Khotan in the Xinjiang region of China. For lack of anything to compare it to, it has until now been difficult to assess the significance of this unique manuscript with regard to the textual and doctrinal character of Gandharan Buddhism.

In particular, it has been a matter of controversy whether or not the Khotan scroll should be taken to imply the existence of a hypothetical “Gandhari canon” resulting from an organized and concerted project of rendering Buddhist texts into the local language. This notion of a Gandhari canon was a priori plausible in light of the traditionally liberal
Buddhist attitude toward translation, which encouraged the use of local vernaculars in spreading the dharma, and the new discoveries that are the subject of this book prove the Buddhist texts were indeed translated into, and sometimes also originally composed in, Gandhari. Thus it is now becoming clear that the abundant physical remains of Gandharan Buddhism were matched by what was probably a similarly vast corpus of written texts in the local language, of which we now have at least an intriguing sample, if only still a tiny fraction of what must have been the whole.

**Textual Sources and the Modern Academic Study of Buddhism**

For some two centuries, scholars have been striving to understand the history of Buddhism, primarily by studying its texts on the one hand, and by observing its modern practice in various parts of Asia on the other. For scholars principally interested in the origins and earlier history of Buddhism, the value of the latter approach is seriously circumscribed, not only because of the obvious difficulties in interpreting the past-nearly two and a half millennia back-on the basis of present practice, but also because Buddhism died out in its Indian homeland many centuries ago. Thus they have tried to seek out the origins of Buddhism mainly from its textual remains, that is, ultimately, from manuscripts. Early modern investigations concentrated on the Pali textual tradition of the Theravada school, largely because Theravada Buddhism had survived down to modern times in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and other parts of Southeast Asia, and so the texts of the Pali canon, or Tripitaka, were readily available there. This gave some early scholars the impression, which has since turned out to illusory, that the Pali Tripitaka comprised and represented the sole original textual corpus of Buddhism, preserved more or less intact in its original form and language.
Gradually, however, other approaches and discoveries, and a consequent broadening of the point of view of academic scholars of Buddhism, showed that this was by no means the whole story and that the total picture of the history of Indian Buddhism was far more complex and varied than it had seemed at first. In particular, the discovery, first in Nepal in the later part of the nineteenth century and then in central Asia (mainly in Xinjiang) at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, of vast numbers of Buddhism manuscripts in Sanskrit or by bird Sanskrit representing the textual corpus of previously little-known sectarian and doctrinal groups showed that the Pali tradition was by no means the sole authentic representative of Indian Buddhism.

Meanwhile, a gradually increasing awareness of the vast canons of East Asian Buddhism in Chinese, Tibetan, and other East Asian and central Asian languages had a similar effect. In particular, the Chinese translations of Indian Buddhist texts were found to preserve large portions of all three of the main divisions of the canons (Sutra, Vinaya, and Abhidharma) of the various early Indian sectarian traditions such as the Sarvastivadin, Dharmaguptaka, and Mahasanghika, among others. Despite the fact that most of these sectarian canons did not survive in any of their original Indian languages, their Chinese versions have in principle an equal claim to authority and originality to that of the Pali canon of the Theravadins, and therefore in this connection it has gradually become clear that the primacy accorded to that tradition by early modern scholars was exaggerated. It was only because Theravada Buddhism happened to have survived in a more or less uniform and continuous tradition in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia that it loomed so much larger than other regional, sectarian, and linguistic traditions of Indian Buddhism, particularly the lost traditions of northern India and its heirs in central and East Asia. In short, scholars gradually began to understand Indian Buddhism a complex of local
traditions, none of which could in and of itself be seen as the “original” or “true” form of the religion.

**Previous Discoveries of Early Buddhist Manuscripts and their significance for the Study of Buddhism.**

Original manuscripts naturally provide the best, and in many cases the only, testimony to the earlier stages of development of these various local Buddhist traditions, at least as far as their textual and doctrinal corpora are concerned (though these, admittedly, are by no means completely representative of the traditions’ historical reality). In most cases, however, such manuscripts are not of great antiquity, mainly because Indian manuscripts, which are normally written on palm leaf or, in the far north, on birch bark, tend not to survive very long in the hot and humid monsoon climate that prevails throughout the subcontinent.

Thus, written text traditions only survive when the manuscripts are copied and recopied with frequency and regularity and are carefully stored and preserved. Such was the case, for example, in the Theravada tradition of Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia; in these regions, Pali manuscripts survive in very large numbers, but relatively few of them are more than a few centuries old. But in Indian proper, where Buddhism effectively died out by around the thirteenth century C.E., the tradition of preserving and copying manuscripts died out with it, and relatively few Buddhist manuscripts survive. In Nepal, where Buddhism remained vital, large number of Buddhist manuscripts do survive, but there too, the majority are relatively recent, with only a very few specimens more than one thousand years old known.
But in the Tarim Basin in modern Xinjiang, which, as we now know, was an important center of Buddhism in the first millennium C.E., a very different situation prevailed, for there the desert climate was highly conducive to the survival of manuscripts on organic materials such as palm leaf, birch bark, or paper. Thus the explorations undertaken by European, Japanese, and American scholars in this region around the beginning of this century yielded a massive corpus of unprecedentedly early manuscripts from a previously unknown major phase of Buddhism. As mentioned in the previous section, this discovery of thousands of fragments of manuscripts in Sanskrit and various local languages, mostly dating from about the seventh century or later but in a very few cases as old as the second or third century, had a major influence on scholarly views of the history of Buddhism, undermining the old Pali centered attitudes and precipitating a gradual revision of attitudes which is still continuing today.

Now it is true that older manuscripts are not always or automatically more valuable, authentic, or revealing than later ones. Nevertheless, early manuscripts are always potentially, and usually in practice, or extraordinary value, not only because they tend to preserve more accurate versions of texts, less corrupted by the changes that they inevitably undergo in the course of long-term transmission, but also, and more important, because they provide direct testimony of the textual material that was in use at a remote period. Especially in the case of very early manuscripts such as the ones described in this book, we may find not only forms of previously known texts that may be significantly different from those we know from the later and modern traditions but also texts, and even entire genres and classes of texts, that were previously wholly unknown.
This is particularly important because in Buddhism, as in most institutionalized religious traditions, canons of authoritative texts were eventually established that in effect defined the textual corpora of the various local and linguistic groups, as happened, for example, in the Pali and Tibetan traditions. Such standardized canons inevitably have the effect of obscuring and even completely suppressing earlier texts or even entire bodies of literature. They present, in effect, a censored version of the textual and doctrinal history of their tradition, with the old variations, controversies, and heresies neatly excised from the record. For this reason, in most cases it is only through the discovery and interpretation of old manuscripts that historical scholars can peak behind an established religious tradition’s official façade and uncover the complex history that inevitably underlies it. A case in point, from the Western world, is the dramatically altered picture of early Christianity that has been provided by the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls and the Nag Hammadi manuscripts.

The British Library Kharosthi Fragments and Gandharan Buddhism: A Preview of the Potential Significance of the New Discovery

Although the British Library fragments are comparable to the Dead Sea scrolls and the Nag Hammadi manuscripts in that they give actual samples of the textual corpus of a much earlier phase of Buddhist tradition than had been previously available, they are unlikely to contain anything as radically unfamiliar as appeared in their Christian counterparts. The survey of the new fragments carried out to date, the results of which are summarized in the rest of this book, has revealed nothing that is startlingly at odds with early Buddhist doctrine as previously understood, nor is there much reason to expect that further analysis will turn up anything that will be. The importance of the new collection is on a different and perhaps less spectacular level, though this does not diminish its importance. These fragments give us an unprecedented direct glimpse into the contents of
what appears to have been a monastic collection or library of the Dharmaguptaka school in or around the first half of the first century C.E., and they are by far the earliest such sampling of a Buddhist textual corpus that has ever been found. It is likely, though not quite certain, that the British Library fragments are the oldest Buddhist manuscripts yet known, and in any case they are definitely the oldest coherent set of manuscript material.

An important feature of the new manuscripts is the inclusion in some of them of local Gandharan lore and traditions, which suggests that early Gandharan Buddhism and, by implication, perhaps the other early regional centers of Indian Buddhism as well were more distinct and localized in their character than has previously been apparent. In particular, the references in some of the new texts to at least two members of the contemporary Indo-Scythian ruling houses of the early first century C.E., who were previously known from coins and inscriptions, are a remarkable and unexpected discovery which enhances the texts historical value. These references enable us to place the textual tradition of the new manuscripts in a historical context and thereby open up to us the previously obscure formative stage of Gandharan Buddhism during the Indo-Scythian period. Our view of Gandharan Buddhism has up to now been colored largely by the dominating effect of the Kushana Empire (mid-first to third century C.E.), which, begins to suspect, over shadowed and obscured the preceding Indo-Scythian period in later north Indian Buddhist tradition, wherein the Kushana period, and especially the reign of Kaniska, were portrayed as a sort of golden age. The new manuscripts now bring to light a forgotten but crucial earlier phase in which the Indo-Scythian dynasties played a role in promoting

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Buddhism and Buddhist institutions around the beginning of the Christian era that was comparable to the better-known activities of the Kusanas in the succeeding two centuries.

This historical background may be significantly related to another major point of interest about the new manuscripts—namely, their probable connection with the Dharmaguptaka sect. The Dharmaguptakas have until now been a shadowy presence within Indian Buddhism, despite the fact that they are known to have played a leading role in the early dissemination of Indian Buddhism in central Asia and China. The collection therefore promises to provide the missing link, or at least one of the missing links, between Indian Buddhism and its early manifestations in central and East Asia. Moreover, the new material, combined with other recent epigraphical discoveries, suggests that the early success and subsequent decline of the Dharmaguptakas could have been the result of shifting patterns of patronage as their Indo-Scythian supporters were replaced by the Kusanas, who were evidently more favourable inclined to the better-known Sarvastivadin sect.

Another important and surprising feature of the new manuscripts is the amount of unfamiliar material in them. In general, much, though by no means all, of the textual material found in the various later manuscript traditions that have been briefly described above is more or less common to, or at least broadly familiar from, one or more of the extant canonical traditions. For example, many of the central Asian Sanskrit manuscripts contain texts that are essentially variant versions of ones already known in Pali and/or other languages. To some extent this is true of the new Gandhari manuscripts as well, but, somewhat unexpectedly, a substantial majority of the approximately two dozen distinct texts represented in them have so far not been identified with known texts in other Buddhist
languages and traditions. If this pattern continues to hold as more detailed studies of the individuals texts are carried out, it would mean that the textual corpus of the Gandharan monastery from which they came, and presumably, by extension, of early Gandharan Buddhism generally, may be considerably more different from the extant corpora than might have been expected. In other words, although the doctrinal positions presented in the new materials are not radically at odds with what is familiar from other traditions, the modes and forms of their presentation and study may be different indeed from what has been known to date.

If this pattern holds true, it has wider, perhaps profound implications for our understanding of the notion of a “Buddhist canon” in general. For example, we may well be dealing here with a stage of development which is still pre-or proto-canonical, that is, stage at which the contents, arrangement, and delimitation of a canon in the strict sense of the term were not yet fully formed. It is also important to note that these manuscripts come from a time when, if traditional accounts can be accepted, writing had only recently been adopted as a substitute for, or rather as a supplement to, the older techniques of memorization and oral recitation of Buddhist texts. If this is true, we may be dealing with materials from the early phase of an extended period of gradual transition from a primarily oral tradition to what eventually became a largely written one, and examination of this material is likely to clarify the complex issues of the interrelation of these modes of text transmission and of the patterns of canon formation that grew out of them.

One major class of texts which seems to imply structures and genres different from those of the more familiar Buddhist corpora are the commentaries on sets of verses, which are very prominently represented among the British Library fragments. Although the
individual verses explicated in these commentaries are for the most part Gandhari translations of material well known in other traditions, the nature, organizational principles, and function of the texts as a whole remain largely obscure. Presumably, they represent local modes of instruction and preaching in the fundamentals of Buddhist teachings, which should provide an interesting counterpart to the well-known Pali commentaries, whose archetypes, now lost, were said to have been composed in the local Sinhalese vernacular language. We may therefore have in these new fragments the earliest surviving original specimens of an ancient tradition of vernacular commentaries.

Such texts and others as well, may also give us unprecedented insights into the methods of preaching and instruction that were employed in Gandharan monasteries, and the texts that were preferred for such purposes. For example, a particular subset of texts within the new collection has an intriguing similarity to a list of texts recommended for study by novice monks in a Vinaya text preserved in Chinese translation. In view of such indications as these, it seems that the British Library collection provides a representative selection of the works of various types and classes that were studied in the monastery where they were kept, including basic texts, commentaries and explanatory works, and technical treatises. What we have, in other words, is not a set of fragments from a comprehensive, systematized canon of the sort that is often found in later, more developed and standardized traditions but rather a random sampling of texts that were actively used for study and recitation.

Among the more technical texts in the new collection are several Abhidharma or Abhidharma-related fragments which are likely to be of great interest for the study of the development of Buddhist doctrine. As noted above, we already knew from later traditions,
mostly preserved in Chinese, that Gandhara was an important early center of Abhidharma studies. Now, for the first time, we have original and early specimens of Gandharan Abhidharma texts, which are likely to represent a crucial formative period and which therefore have the potential to fundamentally alter and improve our understanding of the history of Buddhist scholastic thought.

Notably absent from the new material is any significant reference to or indication of Mahayana concepts and ideals. The origins-historical, geographical, and doctrinal – of the Mahayana have long been a matter of fundamental concern and intense controversy in Buddhist studies, and it is believed by many that the Gandhara region had a crucial role in its development. But it appears that if these new documents are to have any effect at all on this issue, it will be a negative, or at best an indirect, one.

Finally, on a broader scale, the unprecedented discovery of a significant body of Buddhist texts in Gandhari may ultimately provide a new standard for evaluating and comparing the previously known corpora of early Indian Buddhist texts in Pali and Sanskrit, as well as in Chinese and other translations. Just as the discovery and analysis of early Sanskrit manuscripts contributed to a correction of the prevailing Pali-centered view of Buddhism, the new Gandhari texts can be expected to shift the balance by providing a new point of reference with which to compare the previously known traditions. In short, although it is impossible to predict at this point the full ramifications of this discovery over the long run, it is probably safe to say that it will open an entirely new chapter in Buddhist studies.
GANDHARA AS A CENTER OF BUDDHIST INTELLECTUAL ACTIVITY

Even before the discovery of the new Kharosthi manuscripts, there was no doubt that Gandhara had been an important center of Buddhist scholarship at various periods. Hsuan-tsang, for example, reports, “From old times until now this border-land of India has produced many authors of Sastras” and the Abhidharma tradition preserved in Chinese translation also testifies to the extensive intellectual activity there. Nevertheless, direct evidence of original Gandharan texts has until now been lacking, and this has led to skepticism on the part of some scholars about the intellectual originality and regional distinctiveness of Gandharan Buddhism in the early centuries of the Christian era. Fussman, for instance, remarks: “The list of sects active in Gandhara and the epigraphical attestations assure, in any case, of the nonexistence in Gandhara of texts truly specific to that region. The same texts were studied there as elsewhere in north India. On the level of ideology, the Buddhism of Gandhara is not distinguished at all from Gangetic Buddhism.” Such skepticism may have been justified on the basis of the previously known textual evidence, mainly inscriptions, whose “doctrinal content contains nothing but the most banal” (Fussman 1994:22). But the new discoveries reveal—not surprisingly, in hindsight— that the inscriptions gave us a very incomplete and therefore misleading picture.

They reflect, for the most part, ritual activities concerned with the relic cult and pious donations to monasteries, and as such there is no reason to expect them to contain much more than stereotyped formulae, or to be surprised that such “textual” passages as they do contain are no more than “a collection of clichés” or “an anthology of more or less

12 Samuel Beal, (ed.) The Romantic Legend of Shakyamuni Buddha, 1884, p. 98.
13 Ibid, p. 43.
accurate citations, not extracted from any particular text” (Fussman 1982:37). But we now know that the absence of regionally distinctive textual materials in the inscriptions did not mean that they did not exist, merely that they were not expressed therein. With the benefit of hindsight, it seems only natural that Gandharan Buddhism of the first and second centuries C.E. should have developed an extensive and distinctive textual and intellectual tradition to match its tremendous achievements in the material expression of its beliefs in the form of sculpture, architecture, etc. Indeed, it would have been surprising if this period of Gandharan Buddhism had not had a rich intellectual tradition of its own—though this too is easier to say in hindsight.

Of course, it still remains to be determined exactly how much of the new textual material is in fact original to Gandhara. As mentioned above, the scholastic texts, which are the most important in this respect, happen also to be the type of material whose origins are most difficult to pin down on linguistic and stylistic criteria. If it can be provisionally assumed that those texts for which no parallels have been found in other Buddhist traditions are of Gandharan origin, the amount of such distinctive material is quite large in proportion to the total extent of the fragments. But this is a dangerous assumption, since it is quite possible that parallels for at least some of these texts will eventually be identified, and moreover, even if they are not, this may mean only that they happen not to have survived in those other traditions, not that they were never known to them.

There is at least one important class of textual materials, however, for which a local Gandharan origin is nearly certain: this is the Avadana texts, whose local character is indicated by references to historical figures of the region and by their marked contrasts with the Avadana traditions attested in Buddhist schools of other regions. This in itself is enough
to compel a modification of the view, quoted above, that “the same texts were studied there as elsewhere in north India”. To what degree the new manuscripts will prove to represent C.E. distinct intellectual tradition will become clear only gradually as they are studied in detail, but there is every reason to expect that they will confirm that the material richness of Gandharan Buddhism was matched by its scholastic achievements.  

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