

## Beijing Forum 2019

### Writing Practice in Early Civilizations: Origins, Formation and Circulation (IV)

On the afternoon of November 2nd, the fourth part of panel session 5, “Writing Practice in Early Civilizations: Origins, Formation and Circulation”, was inaugurated in Meeting Room No. 2, Yingjie Exchange Center, PKU. Eight speakers gave presentations.

The first speaker was Nicholas Sims-Williams, Emeritus Professor (SOAS). His presentation title was “A Sogdian Irk Bitig”. The famous Old Turkish Irk Bitig (‘Book of Omens’) from Dunhuang was a collection of 65 omens which was apparently meant to be consulted by rolling three four-sided dice or, more likely, one four-sided dice three times. In general, the omens consisted of a very short and somewhat enigmatic story or description followed by the statement “it is good” or “it is bad”. In this presentation, Prof. Sims-Williams presented a well-preserved but so far unpublished folio from a Sogdian manuscript in the Berlin Turfan collection (So 14410), which contains a series of omens and was clearly intended to be consulted in the same way. The twelve surviving omens, presumably almost one fifth of the whole text, are enough to give a clear idea of its nature and to allow a comparison with the Old Turkish Irk Bitig.

The second speaker was professor Yoshida Yutaka, from Kyoto University. His presentation title was “Training of Scribes along the Silk Road: A Case from Manichaean Sogdian”. Most of the ancient manuscripts discovered in Central Asia were likely to have been copied or written by professional scribes, who had been trained to copy and compose various kinds of texts. Yoshida presented an interesting case: one where a novice tried to write a letter to his father and he seemed to have copied the model letter provided by his teacher. However, this letter appears hardly comprehensible, possibly because he was not trained enough. And comparison was also made between Dunhuang Khotanese texts and Sogdian manuscripts. The Sogdian and Uighur alphabets were also compared in connection with exercises.

The third speaker was professor Jonathan Silk, from Leiden University. His presentation title was “A Tibetan Window on Chinese Pure Land Buddhism at Dunhuang”. During and after the period of Tibetan control of Dunhuang in roughly the 8th century, some Tibetans both translated from Chinese into Tibetan and wrote originally in the Tibetan language works best associated

with Chinese Pure Land Buddhism. This presentation introduced those works and discussed their importance and some hypotheses regarding their production and what it might tell us about the practice of Buddhism in Dunhuang.

The fourth speaker was assistant professor Michaël Peyrot, from Leiden University. His presentation title was “The Tocharian So-called ‘Fremdvokal’ ä”. The extinct Tocharian languages A and B, also referred to as “Agnean”, from ancient Yānqí, and “Kucuan”, from ancient Qiūzǐ, were written in a local variety of the Brāhmī script that was characterized by the use of an additional vowel diacritic transliterated as <ä>. In the scholarly literature, this vowel is often referred to with the German term “fremdvokal”. The same vowel may alternatively be spelled with special consonantal signs, the so-called “fremdzeichen”. In this talk, Peyrot explored different linguistic arguments for the pronunciation and the phonological behavior of this vowel, as well as arguments drawn from palaeography, to explore its development and origins. Similar diacritics in use elsewhere in the Tarim Basin were also considered.

The fifth speaker was Lead Researcher Stefan Baums, from Ludwig- Maximilians- Universität München. His presentation title was “Gāndhārī and Kharoṣṭhī on the Silk Roads”. The Gāndhārī language and Kharoṣṭhī script originated in the Peshawar area (the ancient region of Gandhāra) around the year 300 BCE, and soon became the carrier of an extensive and important body of regional Buddhist and administrative texts. This presentation discussed how Gāndhārī and Kharoṣṭhī came to be used for administrative purposes on the Silk Roads, apparently first in the kingdom of Khotan, but with most extant documents from the kingdoms of Krorayina and Kucha (all in modern Xinjiang, China). And it discussed the peculiar features of Gāndhārī as used in central Asia in interaction with Chinese and various local languages. Finally, these features were illustrated using a selection of documents, including three previously unpublished tablets from Niya.

The sixth speaker was associate professor Bi Bo, from Renmin University of China. Her presentation title was “A Chinese-Sogdian Bronze Seal from Tongwancheng, Jingbian, Shaanxi”. In her presentation, a bronze seal published in the catalogue *Wide Marsh, Clear Rivulet: The Cultural Relics and Site of Tongwan Town – Xiongnu Capital* in January 2019 was discussed. On the surface of the seal two lines of inscriptions were soldered: the left line is clearly a name “Shi Foyan 史佛延” in Chinese formal script, and the right line starts with a cross followed by inscription in Sogdian script. Bi Bo discussed several different readings of the inscription, then analyzed the function of

the seal and the inconsistencies between the bearer's Buddhist background talking by his Chinese name and the cross sign of the Christian belief on the top of his Sogdian name. A discussion about the date of the seal was also provided based on the form of the Chinese character, some historical sources, and the shape of the seal.

The seventh speaker was postdoctoral researcher Zhang Zhan, from Ardashir Culture and Media Center. His presentation title was "From Gāndhārī to Khotanese: the Continuity of the Writing Practice in Ancient Khotan". The Gāndhārī documents from Niya and the Khotanese ones from Khotan are two major groups of administrative documents from the southern Tarim Basin. Though both groups contain documents of the same genres, such as orders, petitions, contracts, and so on, their difference in language, date, and location seems to signal a break in the writing practice of the region, and the links between them have seldom been explored. In this presentation it was discussed that these two groups display remarkable similarities in terms of forms, formulae, and terminologies, which in turn point to their common origin, namely, the Indian tradition, as detailed in Yajñavalkya's Dharmasāstra. It shows that the scribal convention along the southern route of the Silk Road continued across the boundary of languages.

The eighth speaker was professor Duan Qing, from Peking University. Her presentation title was "A Sogdian Text for Abhiṣeka". The presentation was based on a newly found manuscript that contained three different languages. The dhāraṇī in Brāhmī script and the Abhiṣeka Ritual of Vajraśekhara in Sogdian script are on the recto side, meanwhile some paragraphs from the third chapter of Saddharmapuṇḍarītikasūtra, the Aupamyaparivarta, are on the verso side written in Chinese. Based on a clear interpretation of the Sogdian dhāraṇī's content, Duan Qing analyzed the date of the manuscript through the paleography and the lexicology study of Sogdian. The whole historical background was also considered.