Timothy Lenz


This volume continues the laborious, but meritorious task to reconstruct Avadānas preserved in the collections of Kharoṣṭhī manuscripts in the British Library. Although the Avadānas edited and commented upon in this volume originally belonged to four or five different scrolls, they are all written by the same scribe, named “Big Hand” by the author because of his forceful characters (p. 17). Fragment 1 is found on the lower part of a scroll, which also contained the Anavataptagāthās. This text is followed by a set of ten Avadānas, which are numbered by the scribe, who erroneously counted Avadāna 4 again as Avadāna 3.

The content of Fragment 2 was made accessible, if only in part, in 1999 already by R. Salomon. As only the bottom of this scroll is extant, it is impossible to guess either the original length of the scroll itself or the title of the text, which should have preceded the nine Avadānas preserved in part sometimes including some of their numberings. Although Fragment 3 contains only tiny remains, it is interesting that here Avadānas and Pūrvayogas are mixed in one text for the first time. Parts of these fragments are discussed already in volume three of the Gandhāran Buddhist Texts by the author.

Although Fragment 21 is very poorly preserved, it contains a reference to Zadamitra and to the disappearance of the Law (atarahido sadharmo, p. 119). Fragments A–C consist of single words or akṣaras out of context.

The book begins with a general introduction followed, as usual in this series, by descriptions of palaeography, phonology and morphology. The main body of the book is devoted to an edition and a very detailed discussion of all the

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3 Here the “likhidago Notations” meaning “all written” and the like and found in several manu-
many problems involved including possible parallels helping to understand the content of these abbreviated Avadānas. Appendices 1–3 contain possible parallel texts, and some supplementary fragments from the British Library (Appendix 4–6), before the book concludes with references and a complete index of the vocabulary.

None of the three collections treated here were previously known, and they are still more fragmentary than those presented in the previous volume on the Dhammapada and Pūrvayogas. Therefore, only very few Avadānas can be reconstructed in such a way that the content, or rather an outline of the development of the story, is recovered. Even so, they still contain interesting information on literary, religious and cultural history and even links to political history. For the names Zadamitra, Aśpavaraman and Jihonika, all known from inscriptions or coins, are mentioned in these texts together with the geographical terms Gandhāra (gadharami) and Kaśmir (kaspira) (p. 15).

In his introduction the author discusses at length the definitions of the literary term Avadāna as proposed by Léon Feer (1830–1902) and developed by John Strong, and confronts them with the new material from Gandhāra. The interesting point is that these early Gandhāran Avadānas (the date of the fragments is roughly mid-first to second century, p. 13) show a greater freedom in choosing a topic than the “classical” Avadānas. For they encompass also stories, which are not necessarily concerned with “karmic tales” as it seems (p. 13 foll.). Rather, some unusual event or deed stands in the centre of the story. Therefore, this glimpse into their early history helps to understand why these texts are called avadāna “great deed,” a term without any immediate connections to karmic forces at work, in contrast to jātaka or pūrvayoga, both referring the reader to events effected by (previous) birth(s).

scripts are discussed and re-evaluated: It is no longer to be assumed that all these notes were necessarily written by scribes different from the one of the respective manuscript (p. 21).

4 These texts accompanied by a translation are the Macchariyakosiyasetṭhivatthu from the Dhammapaṭṭhakathā, Śāriputra and the Tirthas from the Samghahedavastu of the Mūla-sarvāstivādavinaya and the Punyavantajātaka form the Mahāvastu. The Tocharian version of the last text, which enjoyed some popularity also in Central Asia, was recently discussed by Tatsushi Tamai, Tocharian Punyavantajātaka. *Arirab* 15. 2012, pp. 161–187.
