

The character of the writing sufficed to connect these manuscripts with one or more of the 'unknown' languages once used in Eastern Turkestan, the study of which was commenced by my friend, Dr. A. F. Rudolf Hoernle, C.I.E., fully twenty years ago, after the first acquisition of ancient manuscript fragments from Kuchar and Khotan. It was, therefore, a special satisfaction to me to be able to place the new materials at the disposal of that veteran scholar, the true pioneer in this field of research. They are so abundant that even a preliminary analysis cannot be completed as yet. But the succinct notices so far published by Dr. Hoernle indicate a number of philologically important results and give every hope of further elucidations.

Most, if not all, of the texts so far examined have proved to be written in that 'unknown' language which, as previous researches seemed to show, was current in the Khotan region and the southern oases of the Tarim Basin both for religious literature and for secular record. Though the Indo-European character of this language had gradually come to be recognized, it could not be interpreted nor even its relation towards the Indian and Iranian language groups determined. It was hence a discovery of far-reaching importance when Dr. Hoernle was able to identify two well-preserved and practically complete books as literal translations of well-known Buddhist texts available in their Sanskrit originals, the Vajracchedika and the Aparamitayuh-sutra. So here were at last found the eagerly-hoped-for 'bilingual' texts, without which it seemed practically impossible to expect any real decipherment of the 'Southern unknown language.'

Even the elaborate tables of alphabet and syllabaries which are often found inserted before such Central-Asian texts written on the back of Chinese rolls, and which I was first inclined to treat lightly, have under Dr. Hoernle's expert examination proved of considerable palaeographical value. They have settled once for all the true readings of difficult ligatures, in the very cursive form of Central-Asian Brahmi script which was adopted with particular frequency for texts of that language.