

We are taken to a field of Buddhist propaganda much farther in the West by a number of rolls and Pothi fragments written in a script which, like that used later by the Uigurs, was derived from the Syriac alphabet but here serves for the record of a language undoubtedly Iranian (Fig. 192, 8). To Professor F. W. K. Müller, of the University of Berlin and one of the most learned of living Orientalists, belongs the merit of having first recognized in fragments of similar script brought back from Turfan by Prof. A. Grünwedel's expedition remnants of that Sogdian language which was a branch of Middle Persian spoken in ancient Sogdiana, corresponding roughly to the present Samarkand and Bokhara. We knew already from Chinese and other sources that Buddhism had penetrated early to that region from India through what is now Afghanistan, and that it flourished there until the Arab conquest in the eighth century A.D. The Turfan fragments deciphered by Professor F. W. K. Müller established the fact that people from Sogdiana, both Buddhists and Manichaeans, were widely spread through the northern portions of what is now Chinese Turkestan, and that they continued to use there Sogdian translations of their respective scriptures.

The Sogdian manuscripts discovered among the contents of the hidden library at the 'Thousand Buddhas' now prove that this Iranian influence spread much farther eastwards and into China proper. As far as Professor Müller has been able to examine them, they contain translations from the canonical literature of Buddhism. The close agreement in outward appearance and paper suggests that they were mostly written in a region where Chinese influence prevailed, perhaps at Tun-huang itself. The interpretation of Sogdian texts, owing to the inadequacy of the language material hitherto available and to other causes, still presents great difficulties. Hence the philological value of these new and more extensive materials—one of the well-preserved rolls measures over seventeen feet—is bound to prove considerable.

It is in connection with these texts in Sogdian language that I may conveniently mention the discovery,