

in an Indian language and script. In spite of the difficulties attending the decipherment and publication of the Kharoṣṭhī documents from the site, it seems safe to state that their early Prākṛit, like that of the Dhammapada version contained in the birch-bark fragments of the Dutreuil de Rhins MS., reveals close relationship in phonetic and other features to the dialects which can be shown to have prevailed in the extreme north-west of India from ancient times.⁹ As to the script it is certain that the type of its Kharoṣṭhī characters is very closely allied to that represented in north-western India by the inscriptions of the Kuṣāna period. But as long as the chronology of the latter remains beset by its present obscurities, it is rather Indian than Central-Asian historical research which benefits by the evidence implied in the palaeographic agreement.¹⁰

Language and palaeography of Kharoṣṭhī documents.

It still seems as tempting as before to recognize this use of Indian language and script for purposes of local administration as lending support to the old tradition, recorded by Hsüan-tsang, which tells of Khotan having received a large portion of its early population by immigration from Takṣaśilā, the Taxila of the Greeks, in the extreme north-west of India.¹¹ But it must be clear also that the aspects of the problem have been widened and to some extent changed by the results of my subsequent explorations which have proved the regular use of Kharoṣṭhī writing and an early Prākṛit for administrative purposes to have prevailed about the same period as far east as the Lop-nōr region.¹² We are thus faced by the question whether the far-spread use of these was not partly a result also of the political influence which the powerful Indo-Scythian dominion established both north and south of the Hindukush seems to have exercised for a time in the Tārīm Basin during the early centuries of our era,¹³ or of that even more important cultural influence which must have accompanied the Buddhist propaganda carried eastwards from the Oxus region about the same period. The time has not yet arrived for attempting a definite answer to this and kindred questions.

Far-spread use of Indian language.

In the Detailed Report on my former explorations I have already discussed at length the great change in physical conditions to which the ruined site bears such eloquent testimony, and which must interest the geographical student quite as much as the archaeologist.¹⁴ I have emphasized there the importance attaching to 'the shrinkage by a distance of at least fifteen miles of the river's final course, and of the belt it fertilizes'. The progress of general desiccation alone supplies an adequate explanation for this shrinkage. The evidence afforded by this feature appeared to me all the more conclusive because, in the case of the Niya Site, no question could possibly arise as to the source of its water-supply; moreover it was here possible to keep the comparison of the ancient and modern

Change of physical conditions proved by site.

⁹ Cf. J. Bloch, *Le dialecte des fragments Dutreuil de Rhins*, *J.A.*, 1912, xix. pp. 331 sqq.

¹⁰ These obscurities are sufficiently illustrated by the controversies still proceeding as to the relative grouping of the several Indo-Scythian rulers known to us in India by their coins and contemporary inscriptions, and as to the commencement of the era or eras in which the latter are dated (cf. e.g. Mr. Kennedy's articles, *The Secret of Kanishka*, *J.R.A.S.*, 1912, pp. 665 sqq.; Oldenberg, *Zur Frage nach der Aera des Kaniška*, *Nachrichten der K. Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*, Göttingen, 1911, pp. 427 sqq. = *The Era of Kaniška*, in *Journal of the Pali Text Society*, 1912, pp. 1-18).

I doubt whether in these discussions the chronological evidence afforded by the Kharoṣṭhī documents from Niya has received the attention it deserves. The exact dating, A. D. 269, of the contemporary Chinese record, N. xv. 326 (see *Ancient Khotan*, i. p. 370), definitely assigns them to the latter half of the third century of our era. It is obvious that

the close agreement which their writing shows with the characteristic palaeographic features of the inscriptions of Kaniška and his undoubted successors, must raise serious doubts as to the correctness of a recent theory which would make Kaniška's reign commence in the first half of the first century B. C. It is very unlikely that a script, cursive in its very character, should appear in written documents with practically the same features which it showed three centuries earlier in epigraphic records. This is not the place to indicate other reasons, chiefly archaeological, which make me inclined to accept a much later dating of Kuṣāna rule in India.

¹¹ Cf. for a critical analysis of this local tradition, *Ancient Khotan*, i. pp. 163 sqq.

¹² See below.

¹³ Cf. *Ancient Khotan*, i. pp. 55 sq. To the references there given must now be added M. Chavannes' translation of a notice in the Later Han Annals, *T'oung-pao*, 1907, p. 205.

¹⁴ See *Ancient Khotan*, i. pp. 383 sqq.