

Preface

The aim of the present work is to provide a sound introduction to the Khotanese language. Experience has shown that this can most easily be obtained by beginning with the oldest stages of the language and by reading texts written in consistent orthography. The emphasis here has accordingly been laid on Old Khotanese, the later stages of the language being introduced only towards the end of the course.

On the whole students prefer to tackle the original texts as soon as possible rather than work through a long textbook. This course has therefore been limited to thirty chapters so that it can be covered in two terms of fifteen weeks each by completing one chapter a week. For convenience it has been provided with indexes and glossaries, but it is not intended to be a comprehensive manual of the language. Nevertheless, much information concerning Khotanese grammar is not available elsewhere, and it may serve as a work of reference for some matters.

Although Khotanese is attested by a substantial corpus of material, what survives represents various chronological stages in the development of Khotanese as well as a variety of orthographical conventions. The great variety of spelling exhibited by Khotanese texts has been found to be the main cause of difficulty for learners. An attempt has accordingly been made here to present a uniform chronological stage of Khotanese in a largely uniform system of orthography. This means that the kind of Khotanese presented here does not correspond to that of any actually surviving Khotanese text. It represents a compromise between the oldest attested forms and those most frequently occurring. Thus the use of *gg*, *śś*, and *ṣṣ* as in the *Book of Zambasta* but not in the *Śūraṅgamasamādhisūtra* (The sūtra on the concentration of heroic progress) has been adopted here as well as the distinction between *ä* and *i* found in the *Śūraṅgamasamādhisūtra* but not in the *Book of Zambasta*.

The orthographical conventions used in Khotanese are somewhat unusual and tend to obscure the phonetic reality behind the written forms. I have accordingly given a phonetic transcription of all words occurring in the first thirteen chapters. This I have provided with some reluctance in view of the uncertainty about the likely pronunciation of Khotanese. However, most learners appreciate some guidance as to the possible pronunciation and have found it an advantage to have a phonetic transcription until the language loses its unfamiliarity. In most cases regular users of the course are ready to dispense with the phonetic transcriptions after about ten chapters.

No linguistic theory lies behind the presentation adopted for the present work. Free use has been made of historical and descriptive methodology according as the one or the other seemed to be of pedagogical advantage. I have tried to make it possible for anyone with a knowledge of English to learn Khotanese with the help of this course.

In order to provide complete paradigms for the sake of an overview it has been necessary to include reconstructed or rare forms. Reconstructed forms are not exercised and rare forms are on the whole avoided. Forms in the paradigms that are not marked as reconstructions are actually attested forms although they are sometimes attested only in still unpublished material. Where information given here differs from that contained in my *Saka grammatical studies*, it can be assumed that the present work represents the result of subsequent research.

Much effort has been devoted to providing a graduated introduction to Khotanese that can be used for private study. Vocabulary used for the examples in the chapters has either been given already in earlier chapters or is contained in the vocabulary for the chapter in question. Only in special cases reference is made to following chapters. Great pains have been taken to ensure that features of grammar used in examples and exercises do not anticipate subsequent chapters since this is one of the most unsettling aspects of many works used for learning languages. References in the form of whole numbers are to the vocabularies e.g. 4 means Vocabulary 4 in Chapter 4. Other references are to the sections of chapters e.g. 4.I means Chapter 4, Section I.

It did not prove possible to confine the exercises to sentences actually occurring in the extant texts. However, in a very large proportion of cases the sentences used are based on extant sentences. The words of the extant sentences have been placed where necessary in the standard prose word order and transposed into the uniform orthography required. Where necessary sentences have been shortened to avoid grammatical features not yet explained or simpler vocabulary items have been substituted for those in the original.

When translating English sentences into Khotanese it is expected that the grammar taught in the immediately preceding chapter will be used even though in many cases alternative renderings based on the grammar in earlier chapters would be grammatically acceptable. English words placed within brackets are not to be translated.

To many people interested in Khotanese this course is not new. It has already stood the test of practice. The first person to work through a substantial portion of this course was Doug Hitch in 1984. Since then it has been used in Hamburg, Berlin, Bonn, London, and Paris, and it has been made available to scholars in many other places as well. Many parts of it have been reformulated or corrected as a result of comments made by users. To all who have contributed suggestions I would like to express my gratitude. I am especially grateful to Giotto Canevascini, Mauro Maggi, David Rimmer, and Nicholas Sims-Williams, who made the most extensive and helpful comments.

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