

The Arapacana Alphabet of Gandhāra in Buddhist Texts:
A Study of Alphabetic Passages in Gandhari and Sanskrit Texts as well as in Chinese and
Tibetan Translations

Gudrun Melzer

The Arapacana alphabet was the original alphabet of the Kharoṣṭhī script and is also well-known from Buddhist texts, especially Mahāyāna and early esoteric texts. Even after the Kharoṣṭhī script ceased to be used, it continued to serve as a source of inspiration for alphabetical text passages. Such passages typically consist of alphabetically ordered words that are treated in a specific manner. This talk will examine their origin in comparison with an early Kharoṣṭhī manuscript from Gandhāra, which contains an alphabetical acrostic poem or hymn. Additionally, a few observations from preparing critical and synoptic editions will be discussed, concerning both the content and specific translations and transmission issues. Some independent developments among the many repetitive and interdependent passages will also be considered.