

SUVARNAVARNĀVADĀNA: DECIPHERMENT AND HISTORICAL STUDY OF A PALM-LEAF SANSKRIT MANUSCRIPT—AN UNKNOWN MAHĀYĀNA (AVADĀNA) TEXT FROM TIBET. By SITA RAM ROY. (Historical Research Series, Vol. 7.) pp. xvii, 356, 5 pl. Patna, K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1971. Rs. 18.

This book makes available a hitherto unpublished Buddhist Sanskrit text. The text is reconstructed, or rather copied with small emendations, from two sets of photographs made from one set of negatives of a single palm-leaf manuscript, which now lies inaccessible in a Tibetan monastery. Dr. Roy explains his reconstruction in the first chapter. A plate showing several folia is, alas, hopelessly indistinct. On palaeographic grounds Dr. Roy dates the MS. to the 11th century; in his lengthy ch. ii he illustrates and discusses its script, which falls between *kuṭīla* and modern Maithilī. This chapter is usefully supplemented—one might even say summarized—by a chart of alphabets at the back of the book. In ch. iii Dr. Roy dates the anonymous text (on slender grounds, but there are also no counter-indications) to the 4th or 5th century A.D. Ch. iv is rather too modestly entitled "A survey of the contents of the text"; it is virtually a paraphrase of the prose narrative, followed by brief remarks on the didactic verses with which the narrative is interspersed. Occasionally the paraphrase supplies more than the original: on p. 67 the merchant longing for a son "tortured himself by practising penance", which seems an over-translation of *paritapyate*, "was distressed". This chapter is the most useful to those who merely wish to get a rapid impression of the text. There are two stories, one of the present (i.e. soon after the Buddha's death), the other, shorter, of a previous existence of the main character. The story of the present recalls the main plot of the *Mṛcchakaṭikā*, which would fit Dr. Roy's dating. Ch. v-ix attempt to extract historical information from the text; but as it consistently reflects the conditions neither of the 5th century B.C. nor of its own (presumed) time, little emerges from this painstaking work but generalities and unoriginal minutiae. Dr. Roy considers the text typically Mahāyāna, but it seems to be of a piece with other *avadāna* literature, and might just as well be, e.g. Sarvāstivāda. Finally ch. x presents the text, 101 pages of *devanāgarī*. There are a few lacunae due to defects in the photographs (pp. 252, 292, 301); the most serious is the loss of four pages of the original (pp. 226-7), presumably omitted by the photographer's carelessness (see pp. 1-2). The book is clearly printed but poorly bound. Scholars will be grateful to Dr. Roy for his labours.

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