

Arapacana Alphabet

Translation and notes by Jayarava, April 2011 (corrected 2018).

What follows is my translation of the Sanskrit edition of the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (PPS), or The Discourse on Perfect Wisdom in 25,000 lines, produced by Kimura (1986-2009).

In creating this translation I have also consulted the Sanskrit edition by Dutt (1934); the Chinese translations by Kumārajīva (T. 223) and Xuánzàng (T. 220)¹ as found in CBETA online version of the Taisho Ed. of the Chinese Tripiṭaka²; and Edward Conze's English translation (1975), particularly his notes on translation and ms. variants. Conze cites Mokshala [sic] which I take to be a reference to T.221, the translation of the PPS by Mokṣa (or Mokṣala); and Yüan-tsang [sic; i.e. Xuánzàng] which I take to be a reference to T.220.

I have also used Brough's (1977) discussion of the Arapacana in 普曜經 (*Pǔ yào jīng* = *The Lalitavistara Sūtra*; T. 186), translated by Dharmarakṣa in 308 CE, to shed light on Chinese translations. Brough himself also refers to Kumārajīva's translation of the *Mahā-prajñāpāramitopadeśa* (T. 1509³) a commentary on the PPS attributed to Nāgārjuna⁴ which appears not to coincide with T. 223 in every detail; and Xuánzàng's various translations of the large Perfection of Wisdom text contained within T. 220.⁵

In addition there is a very old Arapacana Alphabet in the Bajaur Collection which is mostly unpublished and I have consulted it where possible.⁶ Salomon (1990) is invaluable for understanding the alphabet in any script or language. The Sanskrit editions, and presumably the Sanskrit mss., contain several conflicts that are resolved by Conze – and in each case I have followed his example, but only after consulting some of the same sources (particularly the Chinese texts) and the secondary literature.⁷ The last few lines are very confused and show a great deal of variation in both the syllable and the keyword, not to mention the fact that the number of syllables varies from 41 – 43, while the text itself later refers to 42 letters 'dvācatvāriṃśad akṣarāṇi'.⁸

The Arapacana Alphabet

1. A the syllable a is an opening because of the primal quality of not arising (*anutpanna*) of all mental phenomena.

¹ Xuánzàng translates three versions of the Large Perfection of Wisdom text: in 18,000 (T. 220 p489b), 25,000 (T. 220 p.81c), and 100,000 lines (T. 220 p.302b).

² Transliteration of Chinese characters follows the Pinyin.

³ Correctly cited in the text of his article, but incorrectly as T. 1909 in his bibliography.

⁴ The attribution is disputed by some scholars – see Chou (2004)

⁵ Broughs list of abbreviations (p. 94) suggests that he mainly relied on the *Śatasāhasrika* version (T.220 302b)

⁶ Strauch (2008) has published a portion of this text (fragment no.5) which has an alphabet of 42 letters (though the first line containing 'a' is damaged, and only the first 2/3 of each line is preserved intact. Strauch (2008) has the Arapacana from position 16-17 "sa, ma, ga, tha, ja, śpa, dha, śa, kha, kṣam sta, ña". See Strauch, Ingo. (2008). *The Bajaur collection: A new collection of Kharoṣṭhī manuscripts. A preliminary catalogue and survey* (in progress). Online:

http://www.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/e/indologie/bajaur/publication/strauch_2008_1_1.pdf

⁷ I am grateful to readers of my Visible Mantra Facebook page for clarification of some Chinese phrases.

⁸ Kimura PSP_6-8:67-8. However, the Arapacana in Kimura has only 41 syllables!

2. RA the syllable ra is an opening because of absence of impurity (*rajas*) of all mental phenomena.⁹
3. PA the syllable pa is an opening because it points to the highest truth (*paramartha*) about all mental phenomena.¹⁰
4. CA the syllable ca is an opening because of the non-perception of the causes of falling (*cavana*) of any mental phenomena.¹¹
5. NA the syllable na is an opening because of the absence of names (*nāma*) of any mental phenomena.
6. LA the syllable la is an opening because the state of having escaped from the world (*lokottīrṇa*) of the senses, and the destruction of the causes and conditions of the creeper of craving (*tr̥ṣṇālatā-hetu-pratyaya*) in all mental phenomena.
7. DA the syllable da is an opening because of the restraint, self-control, and circumspection (*dānta-damatha-paricchinnā*) of all mental phenomena.
8. BA the syllable ba is an opening because of the bindings (*bandha*) of all mental phenomena are undone
9. ḌA the syllable ḍa is an opening because of the absence of tumult (*ḍama*) in all mental phenomena.
10. [ṢA] the syllable ṣa is an opening because of the absence of clinging (*saṃga*) in all mental phenomena.¹²
11. VA the syllable va is an opening because of the eradication of sounds suitable for speech (*vākpatha-ghoṣa*) from all mental phenomena.
12. TA the syllable ta is an opening because all mental phenomena don't deviate from Suchness (*tathatā*).
13. YA the syllable ya is an opening because of the non-arising of an essence (*yathāvat*) of all mental phenomena.¹³
14. [ṢṬA] the syllable ṣṭa is an opening because no support (*stambha*) of all mental phenomena can be perceived.¹⁴
15. KA the syllable ka is an opening because no 'doing' (*kāra*) is perceived in all mental phenomena.
16. SA the syllable sa is an opening because of non-apprehension of the sameness (*samatā*) of all mental phenomena.
17. MA the syllable ma is an opening because all mental phenomena lack a 'mine' maker (*mamakāra*).¹⁵

⁹ Kumārajīva & Xuánzàng 垢 'dirt' = Skt. *rajas*.

¹⁰ Kumārajīva (T. 1509) 第一義 = Skt. *paramartha*.

¹¹ Kumārajīva (T. 1509) 行 = Skt. *caryā* 'conduct'.

¹² Sanskrit has SA and *saṃga*. Conze (1975) has ṢA here and spells this *saṅga*, which avoids the conflict at 16 where the key word is *samatā*. Kumārajīva (T. 223) transliterates the syllable with 沙 *shā* indicating he has an aspirated sibilant (*śa* or *ṣa*) in his original, and translates the keyword as 六自在王 = Skt. *ṣaḍāyatanā* (the six sense faculties). Brough's Old LV. (1977) has 信 = G. *śaddhā*, Skt. *śraddhā*.

¹³ Conze (1975) translations *yathāvat* as 'fact'.

¹⁴ Sanskrit has STA, but Conze has ṢṬA and *ṣṭambha* avoiding the conflict with 26 STA below. Kumārajīva (T. 223) transliterates 口宅 *Kōu*zhái* suggesting *kṣa* in his original, though *kṣa* occurs at 25. Brough observes that Xuánzàng transliterates 瑟吒 *ṣṭa*; while Kumārajīva's commentary (T. 1509) implies *ṣṭambha* with his 吒婆 *ṭa(m)bha* translated as 障礙 'obstruction' (p.89); I note that 婆 is used by Kumārajīva (T. 223) to transliterate *ba* above however. From here on each phrase uses the verbal noun *upalabdhi* with the negative prefix *an-*, in the adjectival ablative: *anupalabdhitāḥ* 'because of non-recognition' or 'from not understanding'

¹⁵ This usually refers to the mental act of identifying *dharmas* as 'mine'; c.f. the oft repeated Pāli phrase 'this is mine, I am this, this is my self' (*etaṃ mama, eso'haṃasmi, eso me attā*) e.g. M. i.135, M i.233 etc.

18. GA the syllable *ga* is an opening because we cannot apprehend the sky (*gagana*) of all mental phenomenon.¹⁶
19. STHA the syllable *stha* is an opening because we cannot comprehend the continued existence (*sthāna*) all mental phenomena.¹⁷
20. JA the syllable *ja* is an opening because the birth (*jāti*) of all mental phenomena is not recognised.
21. ŚVA the syllable *śva* is an opening because the ‘breath’ (*śvāsa* i.e. life) of all mental phenomena is not understood.
22. DHA the syllable *dha* is an opening because of the non-apprehension of the *dharmadhātu* of all mental phenomena.
23. ŚA the syllable *śa* is an opening because the serenity (*śamatha*) of all mental phenomenon is not cognised.
24. KHA the syllable *kha* is an opening because of the non-apprehension of the sameness of space (*kha-samata*) in all mental phenomena.¹⁸
25. KṢA the syllable is an opening because the destruction all mental phenomena is not perceived.
26. STA the syllable *sta* [means] all mental phenomena are openings because of not attaining ‘and that’.¹⁹
27. JÑA the syllable *jña* [means] all mental phenomena are openings because omniscience (*sarvajña*) is unobtainable.
28. HA the syllable *ha* [means] all mental phenomena are openings because the cause (*hetu*) is not perceived.²⁰
29. BHA [the syllable *bha* means all mental phenomena because breakdown (*bhaṅga*) is not perceived].²¹
30. [CHA] the syllable *cha* [means] all mental phenomena are openings because of the non-recognition of beauty (*chavi*).²²

¹⁶ Conze (1975) follows Mokṣala (T.221) in reading *grahaṇa* ‘seize’; other ms. including Tibetan have *gamana* ‘going, moving’. Both Kumārajīva and Xuánzàng transliterate 伽 jiā; Kumārajīva’s keyword is 去者 ‘that which goes’; whereas Xuánzàng has 行動取 ‘taking action’. Brough’s (1977) LV has 逝 ‘depart’ (or ‘die!’); The head word is absent from the explanation 於正法無憤亂 ‘going unperturbed in the saddharma’; and he notes Kumārajīva (T. 1509) explains as 伽陀 = Skt. *gata* – hence the Chinese versions probably had a Sanskrit word from √*gam*.

¹⁷ In Gāndhārī this was probably THA according to . Both Kumārajīva and Xuánzàng have 他 *tā* = Skt. *tha*?. Brough’s (1977) LV has 止 *zhī* ‘stop, stand’ = Skt. *sthāna*.

¹⁸ Conze (1975) notes that his Giligit ms. omits *samata*.

¹⁹ The Sanskrit in Kimura is *tac cānupalabdhitāḥ* “because ‘and this’ cannot be recognised” (?). Conze (1975) follows Mokṣala who has *astitva* or *stabdha* ‘fixed’ and notes that Xuánzàng “agrees to some extent with it.” What Xuánzàng says is: 入薩[多*頁]字門，悟一切法任持之性不可得故 (roughly) “The STA syllable is a gate because realising the nature of all dharmas he finds no support (持).” Kumārajīva’s 哆 *duō* is no help here. The syntax changes here and all the following lines, with *mukhaḥ* changing to the plural *mukhāḥ*, and genitive plural *sarvadharmāṇām* changing to the nominative plural *sarvadharmāḥ* - and since sandhi rules are applied we must assume it is intended.

²⁰ Kimura and Dutt have HA. Conze (1975) has RTA from *mārtya* here, and notes that Mokṣala has *artha*. Xuánzàng has 刺他 *Là tā* (= RTHA?), and translates 義 = Skt. *artha*. Brough (1977) says that Kumārajīva explains with 阿他 ‘*attha*’ = Skt *artha*. Salomon (1990) notes that RTHA, PHA and ITA also occur in this place (p.256). If not HA here, then it is absent altogether from the syllabary, but known to be used in Gāndhārī and all other Prakrits. Conze includes both RTA and HA giving 43 syllables in his syllabary.

²¹ Takaysu and Dutt omit this syllable. Conze (1975) has BHA here deriving from *bhaṅga* ‘breaking’ at 30. Kumārajīva has the syllable 婆 *Pó* and the keyword 破壞 = Skt *baṅga* (according to Brough 1977). Xuánzàng has 薄 *Bá* and 破壞 ‘destruction’ but at position 30. Brough’s Old LV (1977) translates the keyword as 有 = Sanskrit “bhava” supporting the reading of BHA.

²² Kimura has *ccha* as the syllable. Conze (1975) has CHA < *chaver api*; *chaveḥ* is ablative or genitive of f. *chavi* ‘beauty’. Sandhi makes *sarvadharmāḥ chaveḥ api* > *sarvadharmāc chaver apy*, hence perhaps the

31. SMA the syllable sma [means] all mental phenomena are openings because of the non-recognition of recollection (*smaraṇa*).²³
32. HVA the syllable hva [means] all mental phenomena are openings because of the non-recognition of the invocation (*āhvāna*).²⁴
33. TSA the syllable sa [means] all mental phenomena are openings because of the unattainability of the strength (*utsāha*).²⁵
34. GHA the syllable gha [means] all mental phenomena are openings because of the non-recognition of the killer (*ghana*).²⁶
35. ṬHA the syllable ṭha [means] all mental phenomena are openings because of the non-recognition of the illusory creations (*viṭhapana*).²⁷
36. ṆA the syllable ṇa [means] all mental phenomena are openings because of the cessation of pleasure/conflict (*raṇa*).²⁸
37. PHA the syllable pha [means] all mental phenomena are openings because of the nonattaining of fruit (*phala*).
38. SKA the syllable ska [means] all mental phenomena are openings because of the nonrecognition of masses (*skandha*).²⁹
39. [YSA] the syllable ysa [means] all mental phenomena are of the non-recognition of aging.³⁰
40. [ŚCA] the syllable śca [means] all mental phenomena are opening because of the non-recognition of moral behaviour.³¹

syllable is *ccha* in Sanskrit. Brough (1977) concludes that the Sanskrit mss. are corrupt. His Old LV has 棄 *qi* ‘discard’ corresponding to Prakrit *chadḍ-* which has the same sense. Brough notes that Mokṣala also has 棄, Dharmarakṣa (T.222?) has 焚燒 ‘burn, set fire to’ [burn with desire?]. while at 31 Xuánzàng has 綽 *Chuò* as the syllable and 欲樂 ‘desire’ [= Skt. *chanda?*]. Kumārajīva at position 30 has 車 *chē* as the syllable and 欲 ‘desire’ as the keyword [= Skt. *chanda?*].

²³ Salomon (1990) notes that in some mss. this syllable is SVA.

²⁴ Conze translates *āhvāna* as ‘true appellations’, c.f. MW ‘calling, invitation, invocation’. Kumārajīva has keyword 喚 ‘call to’. In position 33 Xuánzàng has 嚙縛 *Kè fù* (which is closer to the Sanskrit pronunciation of *hva* than it might look) and keyword 呼召 ‘calling, called to’.

²⁵ Kimura has *sakāra* indicating SA, but Conze treats this as TSA without comment. Xuánzàng has 蹉 *cuō* which sounds similar to *tsa*, and Kumārajīva transliterates 伽 *jiā*. Salomon (1990) says that *tsa* probably reflects an actual Gāndhārī phoneme. (p.268) Brough adopts 妬 (*dù*) from the Taisho footnote over 垢 (*gòu*) from the text of T. 186; he notes the explanation given by Kumārajīva is 末蹉羅 (*mò cuō luó*) = Skt *matsara* ‘intoxicated, greedy’ translated 慳 ‘stingy’; and says Xuánzàng has 勇健 (*yǒng jiàn*) though I cannot find this combination in any of the Xuánzàng texts.

²⁶ Note there is a typo in Conze which prints BHA as the syllable but agrees with *ghana* as the term; though he translates it “things and persons are not apprehended each as one solid mass” (p.161), reading *ghana* as ‘solid compact’. Kumārajīva and Xuánzàng translate the keyword as 厚 ‘thick’.

²⁷ BHSD lists this as an alternate spelling of *viṣṭhapana*.

²⁸ I.e. *raṇa-vigatavāt*: *raṇa* is both pleasure and delight; *vigata* ‘disappearance’

²⁹ Conze takes *skandha* here in its technical sense, what Hamilton calls “the apparatus of experience”.

³⁰ Kimura and Dutt both have JA, but this conflicts with 20 JA. According to Salomon (1990) some mss. give this syllable as YSA. Cf Xuánzàng 逸娑 (*yì suō*). The explanation seems to be that *ysa* represents a Central Asian form of *ja* that was also used in Gāndhārī to represent Persian *za* (c.f. Devanāgarī ja ज्ञ and za ज्ञ). This identification and earlier conjectures are confirmed by Salomon (1990; p.257 and 269). Brough’s old LV provides no help here (or in subsequent lines).

³¹ Kimura and Dutt have CA creating a conflict with 4 CA. Conze solves this by spelling the keyword *ścaraṇa*. As he notes this seems to be supported by Kumārajīva’s 口*宅 (*Kōu*zhái*), though he uses this same combination to transliterate 14 ŚṬA, and Conze used this as his reason for choosing *ṣta* over *sta*. Salomon (1990) explains that in Gāndhārī *śca* is written using a modified *ca* (same character but with a horizontal bar above) which may explain the confusion. Kumārajīva’s keyword is 偈 = Skt. *caryā*(?); and Conze’s Tibetan ms. had *spyod-pa* = Skt. *caryā*. Xuánzàng on the other hand has 酌 (*zhuó*) also indicating an aspirated sibilant; with 足跡 ‘footprint’ as keyword, which may also suggest Skt. *caryā* (or similar). However c.f. my

41. ṬA the syllable ṭa [means] all mental phenomena are openings because of the nonrecognition of the syllable *ṭa*.³²
42. ḌHA the syllable ḍha [means] all mental phenomena are openings because of the nonrecognition of the syllable ḍha (*ḍhaṃkāra*).³³

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note on 4 CA where Kumārajīva has 行 = Skt. *caryā* 'conduct'. Conze notes that his Giligit ms. simply has *caṃkārānupalabdhitāḥ* 'because the letter ca is not recognised'. The same pattern of saying that the letter doesn't exist is seen in the final two lines as well. This is intriguing since 42 is much too large a number of sounds for the Gāndhārī alphabet if we take the vowels as one (the Kharoṣṭhī script had only one character for initial vowels equivalent to 'a' and was modified with diacritics to indicate other vowels). Sanskrit would only require 34 syllables for instance, and Pāli 32.

³² Kimura clearly has *ṭa* as syllable by *ṣṭaṃkāra* in the explanation; while Dutt has *ṭa* and *ṭha*. Here Conze speculates that *ṭa* stands for *ṭalo* (=sthalā?) and translates Kumārajīva as saying that "the other shore of Dharmas does not exist" (邊竟處故不終不生 = literally: 'for the reason that the final place does not live'). However reading *ṣṭa* would create a conflict with 14 which following Conze we read as ṢṬA. Kumārajīva has 茶 which he has used for 9 ḌA previously.

³³ This is the most speculative of Conze's translations. He says the text cannot easily be reconstituted and each of his manuscripts appears to have something different.

Comparative chart of the Alphabets

Xuan Zang		Kumārajīva				Conze	Kimura	Dutt
T. 220 302.07b (100k) T. 220 490.081c (25k) T. 220 490.489b (18k)		T. 223 (25k)		T. 1509				
褒-保+可	Bāo-bǎo +kě	阿	Ā	阿	Ā	a	a	a
洛	Luò	羅	Luó	羅	Luó	ra	ra	ra
跋	Bō	波	Bō	波	Bō	pa	pa	pa
者	Zhě	遮	Zhē	遮	Zhē	ca	ca	ca
娜	Nuó	那	Nà	那	Nà	na	na	na
𡵓	Luó	邏	Luó	邏	Luó	la	la	la
陀	Duò	陀	Tuó	陀	Tuó	da	da	da
婆	Pó	婆	Pó	婆	Pó	ba	ba	ba
茶	Chá	茶	Tú	茶	Tú	ḍa	ḍa	ḍa
沙	Shā	沙	Shā	沙	Shā	ṣa	sa	sa
縛	Fù	和	Hé	和	Hé	va	va	va
多*頁	Duō*yè	多	Duō	多	Duō	ta	ta	ta
也	Yě	夜	Yè	夜	Yè	ya	ya	ya
瑟吒	Sè zhà	口*宅	Kǒu*zhái	吒	Zhà	ṣṭa	sta	sta
迦	Jiā	迦	Jiā	迦	Jiā	ka	ka	ka
娑	Suō	娑	Suō	婆	Pó	sa	sa	sa
磨	Mó	磨	Mó	磨	Mó	ma	ma	ma
伽	Jiā	伽	Jiā	伽	Jiā	ga	ga	ga
他	Tā	他	Tā	他	Tā	stha	stha	stha
闍	Dū	闍	Dū	闍	Dū	ja	ja	ja
濕縛	Shī fù	其*皮	Qí*pí	簸	Bō	śva	śva	śva
達	Dá	馱	Tuó	馱	Tuó	dha	dha	dha
捨	Shě	賒	Shē	賒	Shē	śa	śa	śa
佉	Qū	佉	Qū	佉	Qū	kha	kha	kha
麁	Chàn	叉	Cha	叉	Cha	kṣa	kṣa	kṣa
薩[多*頁]	Sà[duō*yè]	哆	Duō	哆	Duō	sta	sta	ta
若	Ruò	若	Ruò	若	Ruò	jña	jña	jña
刺他	Là tā	拖	Tuō	拖	Tuō	rta	ha	ha
呵	Ā	婆	Pó	婆	Pó	ha	ccha	ccha
薄	Báo	車	Chē	車	Chē	bha	sma	sma
縛	Fù	摩	Mó	魔	Mó	ccha	hva	ddha
颯磨	Sà mó	火	Huǒ	火	Huǒ	sma	sa	sa
嗑縛	Kè fù	嗟	Jiē	蹉	Cuō	hva	gha	gha
蹉	Cuō	伽	Jiā	伽	Jiā	tṣa	ṭha	ṭha
鍵	Jiàn	他	Tā	口*他	Kǒu*tā	gha	ṇa	ṇa
拏	Chī	拏	Ná	拏	Ná	ṭha	pha	pha
拏	Ná	頗	Pō	頗	Pō	ṇa	ska	ska
頗	Pō	歌	Gē	歌	Gē	pha	ja	ja
塞迦	Sāi jiā	醯	Cuó	醯	Cuó	ska	ca	ca
逸娑	Yì suō	遮	Zhē	遮	Zhē	ysa	ṭa	ṭa
酌	Zhuó	口*宅	Kǒu*zhái	口*宅	Kǒu*zhái	śca	ḍa	ḍha
吒	Zhà	茶	Tú	茶	Tú	ṭa		
擇	Zé					ḍha		