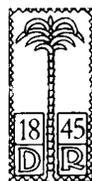


Turfan Revisited – The First Century of Research into the Arts and Cultures of the Silk Road

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DIETRICH REIMER VERLAG
BERLIN 2004

MONOGRAPHIEN ZUR INDISCHEN ARCHÄOLOGIE,
KUNST UND PHILOGIE

Herausgegeben
im Auftrag des Stiftungsrates der Stiftung Ernst Waldschmidt
von der Direktorin des Museums für Indische Kunst
der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

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BAND 17

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Buddhism along the Silk Road

On the Relationship between the Buddhist Sanskrit Texts from Northern Turkestan and those from Afghanistan

Jens-Uwe HARTMANN

During the first millennium of the Common Era, Buddhism was one of the most decisive factors in the cultural development of Central Asia. Yet we do not know when it reached Central Asia, and it is very unlikely that we will ever be able to draw a clear picture of its arrival and initial implantation. We can be fairly sure, however, how it came there: the first Buddhists descending into the Tarim basin would have been monks or merchants coming from the northwest of the Indian subcontinent and following the ancient system of trade routes commonly known as the Silk Road.

Since our knowledge is based mainly on artifacts and on literary remains of a predominantly religious nature, we know very little about the process by which Buddhism gained a footing among the many different peoples living in the area concerned and about what the actual religious practice of the Buddhists looked like. Still, the remains brought back by various Western expeditions revealed many interesting features of Central Asian Buddhism. One such point is the fact that texts continued to be preserved and transmitted in Indian languages, mostly in Sanskrit, although the people preserving and transmitting these texts did not belong to an Indian language-speaking population. We owe it to them that considerable parts of the original Buddhist literature, especially that of certain "Hīnayāna" schools, have been preserved and are available to us for study. In many parts of the Buddhist world, Indian languages evidently served a purpose very similar to that of Latin during the Middle Ages in Europe: those languages, and especially Sanskrit, gained the status of a *lingua franca* for religious specialists and for scholars, while elsewhere, e.g. in China and Tibet, Buddhists decided to translate the scriptures into their own languages, which sooner or later led to the disappearance of the ability to use and understand the Indian originals¹.

Buddhists in Central Asia made use of both possibilities side by side. One of the characteristics of Central Asian Buddhism is the coexistence of texts in Indian language and in the vernaculars, at least among the Tocharians, the Uigurs and the members of various ethnic groups speaking Iranian languages. That it really was Tocharians, Uigurs etc. who transmitted scriptures in Indian languages is proven by the existence of a considerable number of bilingual manuscripts and texts, manuscripts in which glosses in one of the local languages are added to a Sanskrit text between the lines, and texts in which Sanskrit original and vernacular translation alternate word by word or sentence by sentence in the same line.

All this has been well known for a hundred years, and by now it is possible to form a fairly clear picture of the Sanskrit literature preserved in Central Asia. Most of the manuscripts in the German Turfan Collection have been edited, and the remaining fragments are being made available thanks to the ongoing project of the *Katalogisierung der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland*². The holdings of most of the other collections are, to a large extent, still unpublished, among them the Pelliot Collection in Paris³, the Stein and Hoernle Collections in London⁴, that of Francke/Körber in Munich⁵, of Mannerheim in Helsinki⁶, of Otani in the Lüshun Museum⁷, of Crosby in Washington⁸, and the one in Istanbul⁹, to mention only the major ones. Although much of the material has yet to be published – which is especially regrettable in the case of the large collections in London and Paris –, we are more or less informed as to their contents. The only major collection of Sanskrit manuscripts from Central Asia still awaiting a closer inspection is the one in St. Petersburg; thanks to the efforts of M. VOROBYOVA-DESYATOVSKAYA, G. BONGARD-LEVIN and E. TYOMKIN a large number of fragments have been made available, but it is still impossible to know the whole extent of the collection, since no catalogue or hand-list of all the fragments is available¹⁰.

We are now quite well informed about the whole range of Buddhist Sanskrit literature in Eastern Turkestan, about the dogmatic preferences revealed therein, and about the predilections for certain texts in certain areas; we know that Mahāyāna texts prevailed along the southern Silk Route, while so-called Hīnayāna scriptures dominated in the monasteries on the northern route; as regards school affiliation, we know that most of the canonical scriptures can be assigned to one school only, i.e. the (Mūla-)Sārvāstivādins; we know hundreds of texts, a number of which were completely unknown before, since they had not been translated into any other language when they disappeared in India. However, we know practically none of those texts in its complete form, since we are left with fragments. In many cases a lengthy work is attested by only one or two fragments, and even for the most popular works like the *Udānavarga*, the *Prātimokṣasūtra* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* it has not been possible to reconstruct their original text without any gaps. This is a rather deplorable state of affairs, especially in all those cases where no parallel version is preserved, be it in Chinese or Tibetan translation or even in the form of another Sanskrit text, for instance from Nepal or from the Gilgit finds.

There were no indications, and therefore little hope, that this state of affairs would ever change significantly. Although the historical sites in Eastern Turkestan now belonging to the Peoples' Republic of China still yield further manuscript finds and some new Sanskrit fragments have come to light, nothing has ever surfaced there which really changed the existing picture and – regarding Indian texts – nothing even remotely as spectacular as the famous Hami manuscript of the Uigur *Maitrisimit* with its 293 folios, which was found in 1959.

A dramatic change in this situation seemed about to occur when less than ten years ago the first manuscripts from Afghanistan appeared on the market. On its way to Turfan, Buddhism had passed through the area of "Greater Gandhāra", and it was an obvious expectation that there was a close connection and that the new finds from Afghanistan might supplement the fragments from Central Asia. The following part of the paper will deal with the question of how far that hope has been fulfilled to date. Before that, however, a few general remarks about the finds from Afghanistan will be necessary:

1) The Kharoṣṭhi material, i.e. the birch-bark scrolls in the British Library and in the Senior Collection and the palm-leaf fragments in the Schøyen Collection, will not be taken into account. All these manuscripts, important as they are, have little bearing on the Buddhist literature in Central Asia, the only point of contact being the famous Dharmapada scroll, a very isolated find. It was bought in Khotan in 1892, but nothing is known about its previous history. In the following, only the manuscripts in Brāhmī script will be considered. So far, four collections are known, the Schøyen Collection in Oslo, the Adams Collection in Baltimore, the Hirayama Collection in Kamakura and the Hayashidera Collection in Toyama prefecture; all of them are related to each other in the sense that there are several cases where fragments of the same manuscript, and even of the same folio, are found in two collections.

2) By now several thousand fragments have reached Japan and the West, but it is not known where they originally came from. Reports transmitted by the dealers point to a cave in the Bamiyan area, while some other manuscripts are said to have come from Gilgit in northern Pakistan. These reports may be true, but presently there is no means of corroborating them, and therefore the question of provenance should be left open for the time being. A few of those fragments reportedly coming from Bamiyan were identified as having previously belonged to the museum in Kabul which was looted and destroyed during the civil war. They were found by J. HACKIN more than seventy years ago in a cave close to the smaller of the two monumental Buddha statues in the Bamiyan Valley, and it cannot be excluded that knowledge of such facts has helped to shape the present reports.

3) The state of preservation of the Brāhmī fragments from Afghanistan is very similar to that of the Sanskrit manuscripts from Central Asia. Completely preserved leaves are the exception, fragments are the rule.

However, compared to Central Asia there are a few more manuscripts of which a significant number of folios is preserved. Among the Turfan finds, there is only one complete book; it consists of roughly 50 pages and has been discussed by L. SANDER¹¹.

4) The two finds cover partly the same period. In both cases the oldest manuscripts are written in Kuṣāṇa Brāhmī of approximately the 2nd and 3rd centuries, and from that time onward the development of the various scripts is rather well attested. The last manuscripts in Afghanistan may be dated to the 8th century, when Buddhism came to an end, while in Central Asia Sanskrit manuscripts were still being produced after the turn of the millennium.¹²

At the end of 1997 I first had occasion to inspect the new manuscripts from Afghanistan, and I did so with the hope of finding material similar to the Central Asian manuscripts which would permit us to fill the gaps in the Turfan texts. My expectations could not have been more wrong. Only in rare cases do the new fragments contribute some words or *akṣaras* lost in the Sanskrit texts from the Tarim Basin, and very soon it became obvious that the manuscripts from Afghanistan contained a selection of Buddhist literature quite different from that preserved in Central Asia.

The situation is fittingly illustrated with the first and the last fragment identified so far among the manuscripts of the Schøyen Collection. The first was a piece from the *Ajātaśatrukaukṛyaṇinodanāsūtra*, the *Discourse on Dispelling the Remorse of King Ajātaśatru*, a well-known Mahāyāna *sūtra* hitherto available only in Chinese and Tibetan translations¹³. No traces of the text have come to light in any of the languages of Eastern Turkestan. The fragment most recently identified, in August 2002, belongs to the *Maitreyavyākaraṇa*, a prophecy about the future Buddha Maitreya. This is a composition of about a hundred verses, the Tibetan translation of which was placed among the Hīnayāna *sūtras* by the compilers of the Tibetan canon. The Sanskrit text is only partly available, in a Nepalese manuscript of the 10th century and in a manuscript from Gilgit which may be roughly dated to the 7th or 8th centuries¹⁴. Although texts concerned with Maitreya were very popular in Central Asia, as documented for instance by the different versions of the *Maitreyasamiti*, no remains of the *Maitreyavyākaraṇa* have been found there.

Perhaps this difference between the finds from Afghanistan and those from Central Asia should not have been such a surprise. Looking at the particular scripts used in both areas, one finds the whole range of scripts from the northwest of the Indian subcontinent represented in Afghanistan; it begins with Kuṣāṇa Brāhmī, followed by Gupta types, and it ends with the so-called Gilgit/Bamiyan Type II. As mentioned before, scripts in Central Asia also start with Kuṣāṇa Brāhmī, followed by Gupta types, and during that early period the scripts are practically identical in both regions. This points to a close relationship, and there is yet another indication of such a relationship. In her study of the earliest Sanskrit manuscripts from Central Asia, L. SANDER observed that there was a considerable number of *Abhidharma*-like commentaries¹⁵. This appears also to be the case among the manuscripts from Afghanistan, but it has not yet been possible to identify fragments of the same text in both areas.

Yet, from the 5th century onward, local script developments in the Tarim basin led to the creation of two specific Central Asian varieties, the Southern and the Northern Turkestan Brāhmī, one typical for the southern route, the other for manuscripts from the northern region. Among the manuscripts from Afghanistan, not a single fragment written in one of the Central Asian Brāhmī varieties has been found so far, and among the finds from Central Asia, manuscripts written in the later scripts used in Greater Gandhāra are rare exceptions. As far as I know there is not a single example of the so-called Gilgit/Bamiyan Type I script in Central Asia, which was a very common script in Greater Gandhāra in the 6th and 7th centuries, and I know only of some 20 manuscripts written in Gilgit/Bamiyan Type II, nearly all in the German Turfan Collection¹⁶. Birch-bark manuscripts abound in Afghanistan, while in Central Asia they are rare, although not unknown¹⁷. Following the Chinese example, in Eastern Turkestan paper became the standard material for writing. From Af-

ghanistan only one paper fragment is known so far, an unpublished fragment in the Schøyen Collection (MS 2380/34). All this suggests that the exchange of manuscripts between the two regions was rare, at least after the 4th century. Of course this does not at all mean that there was no contact as such or no exchange of ideas.

Viewing the contents of the approximately 20 manuscripts written in Gilgit/Bamiyan Type II and found in Central Asia, a few aspects become apparent which may be significant. First, all the manuscripts come from the Turfan oasis, with one exception. They contain medical texts, Mahāyāna *sūtras*, spells and *dhāraṇīs*, and in one case (SHT 638) a collection of poetical works. In other words, they preserve texts which do not belong to Buddhist literature proper, like the medical texts or, if they are Buddhist, do not, like the Mahāyāna *sūtras*, belong to the mainstream literature in Northern Turkestan. It appears that only such manuscripts in foreign scripts were imported or kept which contained texts not readily available in Central Asia itself. The one exception is SHT 14, a manuscript of the *Udānavarga*, the most common text in the northern part of Turkestan. However, this manuscript was not found in Turfan, but, perhaps significantly, in Tumšūq far to the west. The obvious conclusion is that all those 20 or so manuscripts in a foreign script were imported; however, to complicate the matter, most of them are not written on birch bark, but on paper which strongly suggests local production. At present, it is difficult to explain this state of affairs.

More than thirty years ago, D. SCHLINGLOFF calculated the frequency of texts in the German Turfan Collection¹⁸. He found that the text represented by the largest number of manuscripts is the *Udānavarga*, followed – at a considerable distance – by the *Bhikṣuprātimokṣasūtra*, which is closely followed by Mātṛceṭa's *Buddhastotras*, and then, again at a considerable distance, by the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*. In 1992, K. WILLE and I found a similar ratio among the 594 fragments in the Hoernle Collection which come from the northern Silk Route; the figures correspond very well to the distribution of texts in the German collection¹⁹. Five years later, we again found a very similar distribution when we studied the corresponding fragments in the Pelliot Collection²⁰. Thus, a fairly clear picture evolves of the preference for certain texts in the northern part of Turkestan: for whatever reasons, the *Udānavarga* was the text copied most often, followed by the *Bhikṣuprātimokṣasūtra*, then the two hymns composed by Mātṛceṭa, and then a certain group of *sūtras* with the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* as its most prominent representative. The *Bhikṣuprātimokṣasūtra* can be shown to belong to the school of the Sarvāstivādins, while the *Udānavarga* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* represent versions used by both Sarvāstivādins and Mūlasarvāstivādins, and the *Buddhastotras* are independent of any school affiliation.

When this predilection for certain texts is compared with the manuscripts from Afghanistan, we encounter a strikingly different situation. So far, not a single fragment of the *Udānavarga* has come to light. There are some fragments of *Dharmapada*-like story collections, but none of such verses alone. Regarding the *Prātimokṣasūtra* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* the situation is very similar: although a number of fragments from the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādins have been identified, all the *Prātimokṣasūtra* fragments belong to the school of the Mahāśāṃghika-Lokottaravādins; there is nothing of the Sarvāstivādins. There are a few fragments of the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* (BM II, 17–24), and there are quite a few more fragments from the various *āgamas* of the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivādins, notably a manuscript of the whole *Dirghāgama*, but in general the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* does not appear to have enjoyed a popularity even remotely resembling the one in Turfan. The only point of contact is made by the poetical texts: there are a number of manuscripts of the *Buddhastotras* among the Afghanistan finds (BM II, 305–311), and this attests once more to their ubiquitous popularity in the Buddhist world, so aptly described at the end of the 7th century by the Chinese pilgrim Yijing in his travel account.

In part, these differences can be explained in terms of school affiliation. Apparently the overwhelming majority of Central Asian manuscripts be-

longs to the school of the Sarvāstivādins, with the *Prātimokṣasūtra* as the decisive criterion, since school names never appear in the manuscripts²¹. There is one fragment supposedly from the *Sūtrapīṭaka* of the Dharmaguptakas²² and one from the *Prātimokṣasūtra* of the same school²³, and there are some fragments from the *Vinaya* of the Mūlasarvāstivādins, but nothing from the scriptures of the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādins. In the Afghanistan finds, this is quite different: a number of fragments from the *vinayas* of the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādins and of the Mūlasarvāstivādins have been identified with certainty, but none of the Sarvāstivādins. The situation among the *āgama* texts is less clear, since for many fragments we do not seem to find close correspondences in the Chinese translations, and without the help of these it is nearly impossible to identify a fragment and its school affiliation with any degree of certainty.

To sum up, with regard to the *āgamas* and the *vinayas*, the two regions do not seem to have too much in common, always with the caveat that we do not know if the Afghanistan finds offer a profile of the Buddhist literature of the area or if they represent just one monastic library. As regards Mahāyāna *sūtra* literature, the agreement between the finds becomes much closer. There are the “usual suspects” among the Afghanistan manuscripts, first of all the *Saddharmapundarikāsūtra* (BS II, 69–95), then the *Vajracchedikā* (unpublished), the *Samādhirājasūtra* (BS II, 97–177), and the *Ramaketurparivarta* (unpublished), all of them also known from Central Asia. Those apart, there are quite a few *sūtras* which have not been found in Eastern Turkestan so far, among them the *Ajātaśatrukaukṛtyavinodanāsūtra* already mentioned, the *Śrīmālādevī-siṃhanādasūtra* (BM I, 65–76), the *Bodhisattvapīṭaka* (unpublished), the *Candrottarādārikāvyaḥaraṇa* (BM II, 51–68), the *Larger Sukhāvattīvyūha* (BM II, 179–214) and some others, but this may be due to historical accident and not to systematical differences.

To come back to the expectations mentioned before: Although a few gaps in Mātṛceṭa's *Varṇārhavarṇa* could be filled with the help of the new manuscripts from Afghanistan (BM II, 305–311) and K. WILLE is presently using the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* in the new *Dīrghāgama* manuscript for his re-edition of its Central Asian version, these are rather singular cases. The hope of reconstructing many of the gaps in the texts of the Turfan finds with the new material has evidently to be relinquished, at least in view of the manuscripts known so far. In one sense, this is regrettable, but in another it should be welcome. It becomes increasingly clear, first, that the Afghanistan finds have opened another window for us on the incredible amount of Buddhist literature which once existed in India, and second, that the Turfan finds have retained their singular importance.

Appendix: Survey of the manuscripts in the so-called Sonderschriften I-II in the German Turfan Collection²⁴

SHT	Script	Material	Place	Contents
14	SI	birch bark	Tumšūq	<i>Udānavarga</i> (together with SHT 1601)
638	SI	paper	Toyoq	<i>Varṇārhavarṇa</i> , <i>Jātakamālā</i> , <i>Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā</i>
640	SI	paper	Toyoq	magic charm
641	SI	paper	Toyoq	<i>Bhedasamhitā</i> (medical)
642	SI	paper	Toyoq	medical
643	SI	paper	Toyoq	medical
644	SII	paper	Murtuq	<i>Kātantra</i>
795	SI	paper		writing exercise (?)
1195	SI	paper	Toyoq	<i>Vajracchedikā</i>
1196	SI	paper	Toyoq	Mahāyāna text
1197	SI	paper	Toyoq	Mahāyāna <i>sūtra</i>
1198	SI	paper	Toyoq	remains of <i>dhāraṇīs</i>
1199	SI	paper	Toyoq	magic charm

1200	SII	paper	Sängim	iconographical details of a Tantric deity
1601	SI	birch bark	Tumšūq	verses of a didactic character, resembling the <i>Udānavarga</i> (together with SHT 14)
1995	SI	paper		<i>Varṇārhavarṇa</i>
1996	SI	paper		not identified, possibly medical
2018	SI	birch bark		<i>Daśabalasūtra</i> and two non-identified fragments
2020	SI	birch bark		not identified
2021	SI	birch bark		not identified
2022	SI	birch bark		not identified
2023	SI	birch bark		not identified
2024	SI	birch bark		not identified
2025	SI-III	birch bark		not identified

Notes

- ¹ For the relationship between “church language” and vernacular languages in Central Asia cf. NATTIER 1990, and for the term Central Asia itself in this context, *id.*, note 1.
- ² So far, eight volumes have appeared in the series of the *Sanskrit-handschriften aus den Turfanfunden* (SHT) covering catalogue nos. 1–1999.
- ³ Cf. INOKUCHI/IRISAWA/AZUMA/UNO/AOHARA 1989 and HARTMANN/WILLE 1997.
- ⁴ A comprehensive catalogue of the Sanskrit manuscripts in the Stein Collection is still a desideratum, since at present the information is scattered in various publications, notably in the voluminous books of M.A. STEIN himself. My friend K. MATSUDA (Kyoto) informs me that a few years ago he was invited to prepare such a catalogue, but he is still waiting for the necessary microfilms. For the manuscripts in Northern Turkestan Brāhmī of the Hoernle collection cf. HARTMANN/WILLE 1992.
- ⁵ Not yet catalogued, but see EMMERICK 1984; cf. also WILLE 2000, 2 f. and 6.
- ⁶ Cf. WILLE 2001, 43–45, with further bibliographical references.
- ⁷ No catalogue available, but cf. the introduction in JIANG 1997, 15 ff., and especially the report mentioned in note 5.
- ⁸ EMMERICK 1992.
- ⁹ Cf. the contribution of K. WILLE below.
- ¹⁰ BONGARD-LEVIN/VOROBYOVA-DESYATOVSKAYA 1985, 1986, 1990; cf. also the regular contributions in *Manuscripta Orientalia*.
- ¹¹ SANDER 1994.
- ¹² Cf. the manuscript I.U. No. 23 + I.U. No. 29 edited by K. WILLE below, which was not written before the 12th century.
- ¹³ BM I, 167–216.
- ¹⁴ LÉVI 1932, 384–389; MAJUMDER 1959.
- ¹⁵ SANDER 1991.
- ¹⁶ There are four small birch-bark fragments written in Gilgit/Bamiyan Type II in the Pelliot Collection, cf. HARTMANN/WILLE 1997, 168 (section I in K).
- ¹⁷ SCHLINGLOFF 1956.
- ¹⁸ SCHLINGLOFF 1968, 5.
- ¹⁹ HARTMANN/WILLE 1992, 22–24.
- ²⁰ HARTMANN/WILLE 1997, 135.
- ²¹ With one exception: the *vinaya* part in the famous birch-bark manuscript from Bairam Ali in the Merv oasis was written for Mitraśreṣṭhin, “a vinaya expert and Sarvāstivādin” (*likhāvitam mitraśreṣṭhinas vinayadharena sarvāstivādina*, fol. 81v2), cf. VOROBYOVA-DESYATOVSKAYA 2000, 15.
- ²² Cf. WALDSCHMIDT 1980, 167–169.
- ²³ Cf. WALDSCHMIDT 1980, 164–167, and BOUCHER 2000, 66; for the problematic case of three fragments from the *Bhikṣuṇīprātimokṣasūtra* cf. WILLE 1997.

²⁴ Sonderschrift I (SI) refers to Gilgit/Bamiyan Type II, Sonderschrift II (SII) to Śāradā.

Abbreviations

- AAWG *Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften, Göttingen.*
 BM I *Buddhist Manuscripts*. Vol. I, ed. J. BRAARVIG, J.-U. HARTMANN, K. MATSUDA, L. SANDER, Oslo 2000. (Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection 1).
 BM II *Buddhist Manuscripts*. Vol. II, ed. J. BRAARVIG, P. HARRISON, J.-U. HARTMANN, K. MATSUDA, L. SANDER, Oslo 2002. (Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection 3).
 SHT *Sanskrihandschriften aus den Turfanfunden*. Vols. 1–8, ed. L. SANDER, E. WALDSCHMIDT, K. WILLE, Wiesbaden/Stuttgart 1965–2000. (Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland X, 1–8).
 SWTF *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch der buddhistischen Texte aus den Turfanfunden.*
 ZDMG *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft.*

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