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## IN THIS ISSUE

- Olga Chunakova, Federico Dragoni, Enrico Morano**  
A forgotten Manichaean Sogdian bifolio in Sogdian script 3
- Adam Benkato**  
Sogdian letter fragments in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts,  
St. Petersburg 26
- Peter Zieme**  
An Embryonic Saint. Interpretation of an Old Uighur Fragment in  
the Serindia Collection at the IOM, RAS 40
- Alexander Zorin**  
Fragments of Tibetan Texts Refound at the Dunhuang Collection Kept  
at the IOM, RAS: Eleven Identified Fragments of Buddhist Canonical  
Texts 49
- Hartmut Walravens**  
Symbolism of sovereignty in the context of the Dzungar campaigns  
of the Qianlong emperor 73
- Reviews**
- Joseph F. O'Callaghan. *The Last Crusade in the West: Castile and the  
Conquest of Granada*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press,  
2014, by **Anastasia Stepanova** 91
- Catalogue of Japanese Manuscripts and Rare Books. Merete Pedersen.  
The Royal Library, Copenhagen, Denmark. Catalogue of Oriental  
Manuscripts, Xylographs, etc. in Danish Collections (COMDC),  
by **Karine Marandjian** 95
- Anton Schiefner (1817–1879) und seine indologischen Freunde:  
seine Briefe an die Indologen Albrecht Weber (1825–1901), Rudolf  
Roth (1821–1895) und William D. Whitney (1827–1894) sowie den  
Indogermanisten Adalbert Kuhn (1812–1881) / Hartmut Walravens,  
Agnes Stache-Weiske [editors]. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen  
Akademie der Wissenschaften 2015. (Österreichische Akademie der  
Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse Sitzungsberichte,  
868. Bd.; Beiträge zur Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte Asiens, Nr. 89),  
by **Alexander Zorin** 98*
-

Peter Zieme

**An Embryonic Saint.  
Interpretation of an Old Uighur Fragment  
in the Serindia Collection at the IOM, RAS**

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*Abstract:* In this paper the author edits a fragment of the Oldenburg Collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts. The text is a unique story about a child in mother's womb attaining the *srota-āpanna*-ship by listening to Buddha's teaching.

*Key words:* Old Uighur Buddhism, Oldenburg Collection, dharma and *srota-āpanna*, Old Uighur words.

The fragment SI 4759 (O 99) of the Oldenburg Collection of the IOM, RAS is highly exceptional.<sup>1</sup> The recto side is part of a Chinese book scroll containing a complete text with the title at the beginning and the end: 佛說觀門經 *Foshuo guanmen jing*. This version corresponds to the 南天竺國菩提達摩禪師觀門 *Nantianzhuguo Putidamo chanshi guanmen*<sup>2</sup> a work of the Bodhidharma genre discussing the seven kinds of 觀門 *guanmen* ("gates of examining"): "Contemplation method of the South Indian *dhyāna* master Bodhidharma". The work is known from several Dunhuang copies.<sup>3</sup>

This manuscript was more probably among the finds Oldenburg made at Turfan than of Dunhuang. If this holds true, it is another indication of the strong relationship between the Buddhists of the two regions and of their adherence to Chan Buddhism as well.

Now let us turn to the verso side which is a peculiar fragment of an Old Uighur Buddhist text. As I have been unable to identify it with any other

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<sup>1</sup> In 2015, at Irina Popova's invitation, I had the pleasure of giving a lecture at the IOM, RAS about Old Uighur literature connected with the fragment from the Oldenburg Collection discussed here.

<sup>2</sup> T.LXXXV.2832.1270b03-c01. The text of four lines (c01–05) is missing in the St. Petersburg manuscript.

<sup>3</sup> Cp. Dunhuang concordance, 259: 1270b3–c1 = S.6958[1], 1270b3–c5 = S.2583V, 1270b3–c5 = S.2669V[2], 1270b11–16 = BD11164, 1270b13–17 = BD11164 中書 77.

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Buddhist text of the larger traditions,<sup>4</sup> I would also hope in introducing it here, that still some Buddhist scholar may yet come forward with a clue as to its identification or a similar version.

The surviving text is short, the script is rather well executed so that there are not many problems of reading and explication. It seems that after the end of line 25 the scribe changed his *kalam*, because the letters are bolder and a little larger.

One can assume that the first preserved section mentions Buddha (or someone else?) preaching the *dharma* to a child in a womb because of which it immediately attained the state of a *srota-āpanna*. The mother, who heard the child saying: “I have attained the state of a *srota-āpanna*” expresses her gratitude and joy. Nevertheless she is characterised as *busušlug* “sorrowful”. Probably in the lost text that precedes it was written that the child suffered somehow because of something for some reason. An essential point is that the mother argues that the child attained sainthood because she herself always listened to the *dharma* or caused the child to listen to the *dharma*.<sup>5</sup>

The text continues with some short phrases on the later life of this child as a sort of interlude. Finally, it becomes evident that the story was used by the Buddha as a parable to his pupils or listeners, when he calls on them to listen faithfully to the *dharma*. The fragment ends in a short reverence to the phase of Buddha’s life when he set out to live as an ascetic.

R. Ohnuma has studied five “metaphorical pregnancies”,<sup>6</sup> not a rare topic in Buddhist literature. Inter alia she refers to the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra* in which the eighth of nine similes for the inner beauty as opposed to outward ugliness is expounded. She writes: “The simile asks its audience to imagine ‘a woman who is impoverished, vile, ugly, and hated by others’ yet ‘bears a noble son in her womb’. The son ‘will become a universal monarch, replete with seven treasures and all virtues’, who will one day ‘possess as king the four quarters of the earth’. But his mother ‘is incapable of knowing this and conceives only thoughts of inferiority’, constantly thinking of him ‘as a base-born, impoverished child’ ”.<sup>7</sup> I am well aware of the different context because the author uses the simile “only to draw a contrast, once again,

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<sup>4</sup> I express my gratitude to Reiko Ohnuma, Gergely Hidas, and Paul Nietupski who responded to my inquiry about a possible Vorlage for the Old Uighur story of the saint in the womb and gave me useful advice.

<sup>5</sup> This reminds one of the psychic and other influences a mother exerts on the child in her womb during the pregnancy. Some scientific examinations have been made, but the whole matter is still under debate.

<sup>6</sup> OHNUMA 2012, chapter 6.

<sup>7</sup> OHNUMA 2012, 156.

between a suffering mother and a noble, liberated son, and to encourage the ‘son’ within each of us to deny our descent from the mother’s womb”.<sup>8</sup>

It seems to be worth mentioning also the *Pusa chu tai jing* (T. 384) extensively studied by E. Legittimo. In one passage there “the Buddha shows himself within his mother’s body”.<sup>9</sup>

What a contrast to the Old Uighur text, here the mother is not only described as being sorrowful, but she also supports and encourages her son to listen to the *dharmā*.

### Transliteration and transcription of the fragment

(missing)

- (01) ’[ ]k kwynklynk’ y’r’sy nwm nwml’p ’nt’  
 (01) [ ]k köŋliŋä yaraşı nom nomlap anta  
 (02) qy ’ ’wq ’wlrwr yyrynt’ swrwt’p’n qwt q’  
 (02) -k(1)y-a ok olurur yerintä sortapan<sup>10</sup> kut-ka  
 (03) t’kwrw yrlyq’dy . ’wl psws lwq qwncwy l’r ym’ pylty  
 (03) tägürü y(a)rlıkadı . ol busuş-lug kunčuy-lar y(ä)mä bilti  
 (04) mn . swrt’p’n qwtynk’ t’kdym typ ’wytrw kwynkwlyn  
 (04) m(ä)n . sortapan kutıŋa tägdım tep ötrü köŋülin  
 (05) tyn ’wytkwrw ’ ’qmys y’sy ’wl ’wqwl qy ’nynk  
 (05) -tin ötgürü akmiş yaşı ol ogul-k(1)y-a-nıŋ  
 (06) ’t’wyzynk’ t’mtwq t’ ’nt’ qy ’ ’wq ’ ’qw tyny k’typ  
 (06) ät’ öziŋä tamtuk-ta anta-k(1)y-a ok agu tını kitip  
 (07) s’sylyp p’rdy . ’ync’ q’lty ’wtyywr kysy <deleted word>  
 (07) şaşılp bardı . inčä kaltı udiyur kişi  
 (08) <deleted word> ’wvsyntyn p’lynkl’p twrwr ’rs’r ’ ’ncwl’yw  
 (08) uusıntın<sup>11</sup> bälınlöp turur ärsär ančulayu  
 (09) ym’ ’wl ’wqwl ’wqwl qy ’ swcyyw sykryyw twrwp k’ldy  
 (09) y(ä)mä ol ogul ogul-k(1)y-a suçıyu sikriyü turup kaldi  
 (10) ’wl ’wqwl qy ’nynk ’ ’n’sy pyr + ’rs’r + swrt’p’n qwtyn  
 (10) ol ogul-k(1)y-a-nıŋ anası bir (ärsär) sortapan kutın  
 (11) pwlmys s’vync k’ ’ykynty ’wqly tyrylmys s’vync k’  
 (11) bulmış sävinč-kä ikinti oglı tirilmiş sävinč-kä

<sup>8</sup> OHNUMA 2012, 159.

<sup>9</sup> LEGITTIMO 2005, 9 (T.XII.384.1015c8).

<sup>10</sup> swrwt’p’n.

<sup>11</sup> The third letter looks like v, but it should be w.

- (12) 'wykwrwp s'vynyp 'wz'dy nwm 'ysydm'k k' 't'wyzyn  
 (12) ögürüp<sup>12</sup> sävinip uzatı nom işidmāk-kā āt'özin  
 (13) 'wykr'tyk qylty 'wl'wq 'wykws nwm 'ysydmys tylt'qynt'  
 (13) ögrätig kıltı ol ok üküš nom işidmiš tıltagınta  
 (14) 'wylkwszw 'wykws k'lp l'rt' 'wystwn t'nkry yyrynt'  
 (14) ülgüsüz üküš kalp-larta üstün täñri yerintä  
 (15) ''ltyn ylnkwq ''žwnynt' m'nkry twnk' t'kynyp ''nk  
 (15) altın yalñuk ažunınta mäñi toña täginip äñ  
 (16) kynynt' s'ns'r tyn 'wzwp nyrv'n lyq 'ynckwk'  
 (16) kenintä sansar-tın ozup nirvan-lig ençgükä  
 (17) t'kdy l'r ''ny kwyrwnkl'r twyzwn l'r ''nk myntyn t's  
 (17) tägdı-lär anı körüñlär tözün-lär-ä äñ mıntın taš  
 (18) t' ty'qw t' 'ynq' pwlmys k'nc kycyk 'wqwl qy'  
 (18) -ta tıyagu-ta inga bolmiš känç kiçig ogul-k(ı)ya  
 (19) nwm 'ysydm'k tylt'q'nt' 'ykyl'yw tyrylkwc' t'nkl[ ]  
 (19) nom işidmāk tıltagınta ikiläyü tirilgüçä täñl[ig]  
 (20) 'rs'r . t'qy n' ''yytmys krk'k syz l'r ny t'k  
 (20) ärsär . takı nä ayıtmıš k(ä)rgäk sizlär-ni täg  
 (21) 'ylyktyn swynkwktyn p'rmys kyrtkwynclwk swyzwk  
 (21) iliktin süñüktin barmıš kertgünçlüg süzük  
 (22) kwynkwlnkwz l'r 'wyz' nwm 'ysydyp 'dkw twys k' 'wtly  
 (22) köñülünüz-lär üzä nom işidip ädgü tüš-kä utlı  
 (23) q' t'km'kyk ''nyn qwp t' qwp swyzwk  
 (23) -ka tägmäkig anın kop-ta kop süzük  
 (24) kyrtkwnc kwynkwlyn pw nwm 'rdynyk 'ysydkwk'  
 (24) kertgünç köñülin bo nom ärdinig işidgükä  
 (25) ''nwq pwlwp 'wlwrmysynkyz l'r k'rk'k pw nwm 'rdyny  
 (25) anuk bolup olurmišñız-lar kärgäk bo nom ärdini

From *bo nom ärdini* till the end of the leaf the text was written by a different hand or with a different *kalam*:

- (26) pw mwnt'q yyk 'wystwnky 'wlwq twys k'  
 (26) bo muntag yeg üstünki ulug tüš-kä  
 (27) 'wtly q' t'kwrd'cy 'wycwn ''nyn pw pyz  
 (27) utlı-ka tägürdäçi üçün anın bo biz  
 (28) nynk p'qsymz twyk'l pylk' tkry tkrysy  
 (28) -niñ baxšım(ı)z tükäl bilgä t(ä)ñri t(ä)ñrisi  
 (29) pwrq'n 's'nkry lyq 'wzwn ywl l'rt'

<sup>12</sup> Usually the verb is *ögir-*.

- (29) burhan asanki-lig uzun yol-larta  
 (30) q'tyql'nwr 'rk'n tww twypw p'qrw  
 (30) katıglanur ärkän tüü tüpi bag(a)ru(?)  
 (31) (missing)  
 (32)<sup>13</sup> (missing)  
 (33) (missing)  
 (on verso side)  
 (34) twrqw t'k ''cyq 'mk'k 'mknw yrlyqdy n't'k  
 (34) turgu täg açıg ämgäk ämg(ä)nü y(a)rlikadı nätäg  
 (35) 'rk'n  
 (35)<sup>14</sup> ärkän(?)

## Translation

[Because the Buddha(?)] preached the *dharma* appropriately to the heart [of the little child], he immediately on the spot where he was sitting graciously let him reach the *srota-āpanna*-ship.

[woman — child in the womb]

The sorrowful woman realised it (when the little child spoke): ‘I reached the *srota-āpanna*-ship’. Then, as soon as the tears from her heart were shed on the body of the little child, the poisonous breath dissolved and disappeared. Like a sleeping man suddenly awakes and arises from his sleep, in just that manner the little child came to life (again) while jumping and bouncing. The mother of the little child rejoiced first that it had reached the *srota-āpanna*-ship and secondly that her child was alive. For a long time she had taught the child<sup>15</sup> to listen to the *dharma*.

[Later story of the child]

On account his listening to the *dharma* so much, he enjoyed in numberless and many *kalpas* above in heaven’s land and beneath in the state of a human being joy, happiness and welfare, in the end he was released from *samsāra* and reached the *nirvāṇa* peace.

[Address to the pupils]

O noble men, look at this! If a young and little child (in the womb) worth less than a stone or a piece of loam through listening to the *dharma* once

<sup>13</sup> Or more missing lines. The scribe first used the empty verso side and then continued writing after turning the sheet over as there was empty space at the end of the recto side.

<sup>14</sup> Only *ḥ* in small letters.

<sup>15</sup> “His body”.

more becomes alive, what is to be said about you, who are made of marrow and bones being and able to listen to the teaching with belief and thus to reach the good fruit! Therefore you should in great and full belief sit and be ready to listen to the *dharmā*.

[Reference to the life of the Buddha]

Because the dharma jewel leads one to this incomparable great fruit, therefore the body hair stood straight when our master, the completely wise god of gods Buddha, was striving on the *asaṃkhyeya* long ways (...) as if (...) he graciously suffered great pain like (...)

### Some notes

(01) One can only conjecture that the missing part contained some information about the child.

(01–02) *antak(i)ya ok* “suddenly”.<sup>16</sup>

(02) *sortapan* = Skt. *srota-āpanna* “stream-winner” is the first stage of the *śrāvaka* way that leads to the stage of an *arhat* (DDB). Cp. several instances in the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts in BT XXVIII where *sortapan* is attested only once while more often it is *srotapan*.<sup>17</sup> The state of a *srota-āpanna* is expressed by *sortapan kut*, but more often *sortapan kuti*<sup>18</sup> is encountered with, although already in the early text of the *Maitrisimit nom bitig* the former type is recorded: *sordapan [ku]tka tæg*.<sup>19</sup>

(04) The sentence *m(ä)n sortapan kutuḡa tægdim* is direct speech by the child. The dot after *m(ä)n* seems to mark the pronoun as the theme.

(06) *agu tum* “her poisonous breath”.<sup>20</sup> There is another example in the famous story of Kalyāṇakaṃkāra and Pāpaṃkāra,<sup>21</sup> where we read of a poisonous snake: *al altunka tagka tægšärsiz kök lenhua körgäysiz ol lenhua sayu birär agulug yılan bar agu tum iraktin ančulayu közüniür kaltı lenhua sayu tütün tütärčä* “When you reach this golden mountain you will see a blue lotus with a poisonous snake on each leaf, and their poisonous breath looks as if smoke arises from each leaf”. In the Chinese original text<sup>22</sup> there is no mention about snakes, it mentions only the blue lotus. Thus it is

<sup>16</sup> RÖHRBORN 2015, 188–189 “plötzlich, mit einem Male, auf der Stelle, spontan”.

<sup>17</sup> BT XXVIII 285.

<sup>18</sup> Suv 144 (III.9b.) 05 swrwdp`n qwtyn.

<sup>19</sup> BT IX, vol. 1, 177.

<sup>20</sup> RÖHRBORN 2015, 74

<sup>21</sup> KP XXXVIII.4 “ihr giftiger Atem”.

<sup>22</sup> T.III.0156.



obvious that the following passage about the snakes is an addition to give some impression about the blue colour of the lotus: 太子於是東行一七. 當有金山. 從山復更前進一七. 其地純, 是青蓮華<sup>23</sup> “O prince, vous marcherez vers l’Est pendant une semaine et vous devrez trouver une montagne d’or; à partir de cette montagne, continuant à marcher pendant une semaine, vous arriverez à un endroit où il n’y a rien que des lotus bleus”.<sup>24</sup>

(07) *šašılıp bardı*. Here the verb *bar-* “to go” is used as an auxiliary verb whose function M. Erdal sees as “describing processes approaching a crisis”.<sup>25</sup>

(08) *bäliñläp* “suddenly”.

(09) The verb *suči-* “to move to one side, shy away from something”<sup>26</sup> appears here in conjunction with *sikri-* “to jump”.<sup>27</sup>

(09) *turup kälđi, käl-* “to come” as an auxiliary verb is “indicating that the action described by the lexical verb has been going on for some time before reaching the state it is at when being narrated”.<sup>28</sup> Even though there is only a slight difference in the medial shapes of the letters -r- and -y- I adopted the reading *twrwp* here, as one can conclude from the missing initial part that the child in the womb was somehow in danger of its life. Such situations were of course more frequent in earlier times. There are many texts that were claimed to assist in ensuring an easy birth, especially ones connected with Avalokiteśvara who was considered a Bodhisattva specialising in this field.

(16) *nirvanlıg enčgü*, the same expression but in reverse order is attested in a colophon edited by G. Hazai.<sup>29</sup>

(17) *tägdilär* refers to the child, the *pluralis majestatis* is used on account of its sainthood.

(17–18) *tašta tyaguta* “stone or piece of loam”. The latter word is usually recorded as *toyagu*.

(18) *inga* “worthless, vile”<sup>30</sup>, as such it is the first example in Old Uighur. The verb derived from it, *ingala-* “to regard as worthless”, is attested as *isig özin ingalap*<sup>31</sup> “he regarded his life as worthless” in HT VI and in SI 4906

<sup>23</sup> T.III.0156.144b19-21

<sup>24</sup> CHAVANNES 1914, 483.

<sup>25</sup> GOT 250.

<sup>26</sup> ED 795.

<sup>27</sup> Cp. Lk. 1:41: “And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, **the babe leaped in her womb**; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost”.

<sup>28</sup> GOT 253.

<sup>29</sup> HAZAI 1976, 273, 1.5 *enčgülig mänjilig nirvan*.

<sup>30</sup> ED 183a.

<sup>31</sup> MAUE 2009, 20.

(K 22), ll. 06–08 *tidi ät'özin tilädi nomug . ingaladı isig özin küsädi äntkäk [elin]* “he gave up his body, he longed for the *dharmā*; he regarded his life as worthless, he wanted the Indian [country]”. A further derivative form written in Brāhmī script is *ingalatılmıš* which is explained by D. Maue.<sup>32</sup> Thus the word *inga* and its derivatives have recently become rather well attested.

(19) *-güčä täñlig*. M. Erdal writes: “Attributive *-gU+čA* expresses accordance, degree or limit”<sup>33</sup>, here the degree is emphasized by *täñlig* “with the measure”.

(21) *iliktin süñüktin*. The first member of this word group is more often attested with an initial *y-*: *yilik*<sup>34</sup>. A good example is known from the *Altun Yaruk Sudur*, also quoted by G. Clauson: *yilikimizdin süñükümüzdin bärü* “right from our marrow and bones”.<sup>35</sup>

(23) *kopta kop* “most” belongs to a special type of the superlative,<sup>36</sup> one other example is *artokta artok* “very much”.

(29) *asankilig uzun yol* “the long *asamkhyeya* way”. Several examples are given in the UW,<sup>37</sup> of which some refer to the three *asamkhyeya* periods.

(34) *ačig ämgäk*, cp. RÖHRBORN 2015, 11.

## Abbreviations

BT III: Berliner Turfantexte III  
 BT IX: Berliner Turfantexte IX  
 ED: Etymological Dictionary  
 GOT: Grammar of Old Turkic  
 OTWF: Old Turkic Word Formation  
 Suv: Uyğurca Altun Yaruk  
 T.: Taishō Buddhist Canon  
 UW: Uigurisches Wörterbuch

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<sup>32</sup> MAUE 2009, 20.

<sup>33</sup> GOT 390.

<sup>34</sup> ED 927–928.

<sup>35</sup> ED 928a.

<sup>36</sup> GOT 372.

<sup>37</sup> UW 225b–226a; repeated in RÖHRBORN 2015, 292. The manuscript Mainz 777 noted as “unpubl. [unpublished]” was published in ZIEME 1984.

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