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Recent Insights into a Manuscript of Ornate Poetry from Toyoq: A new Fragment of Mātṛceṭa’s Varṇārhavarṇa

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Abstracts: The article continues a series of publications of the Sanskrit manuscript fragments written in the Proto-Śāradā script, kept in the Serindia Collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The authors introduce into scientific circulation a fragment of the Varṇārhavarṇa, the work of the famous Buddhist thinker and poet Mātṛceṭa. The article provides the paleographic analysis of the manuscript fragment, as well as brief information about the author, his works, the Varṇārhavarṇa structure. The article provides transliteration and translation of the fragment.

Key words: Sanskrit manuscripts, Serindia, Turfan, Toyoq, Proto-Śāradā, Varṇārhavarṇa, stotra, Mātṛceṭa.

Provenience

The German Turfan Collection in Berlin preserves nearly forty fragments of an unusual Sanskrit manuscript originally found at Toyoq in the Turfan oasis. Although it is written on paper, the usual material of the manuscripts found in Central Asia, the script, a distinct variety of the so-called Gilgit/Bamiyan Type II in the terminology of Lore Sander,¹ rather points to northern India as its origin. There, paper is rarely used; the standard material is either palm leaf or birch bark. Among the thousands of folios preserved in

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¹ Sander 1968.
the famous Gilgit find in Northern Pakistan, there is only one birch-bark manuscript that contains also a number of paper folios. The combination of script and material makes the manuscript from Toyoq something special — and, as will be shown below, it greatly facilitates the attribution of further fragments! The surviving folios could be assigned to three famous works representing three different literary genres of Buddhist ornate poetry, Mātṛceṭa’s *Varṇārhavṛṇa* (a hymn on the Buddha), Āryaśūra’s *Jātakamālā* (a collection of birth stories) and Kumāralāta’s *Kalpanāmaṇḍītikā Drṣṭāntaṇākaṇki* (a collection of tales). In the German collection, the manuscript carries the modern number SHT 638, and it is described in the first of the catalogue volumes (SHT I: 286). According to this description, there are three fragments of the *Varnārhavṛṇa* (VAV), fourteen of the *Jātakamālā* (Jm) and thirteen of the *Kalpanāmaṇḍītikā* (KalpM). Once it must have been a very large manuscript; for the VAV the folio numbers 13 and 26 are preserved, for the Jm the number 120, and for the KalpM the numbers 294, 297, 421 and 422. Eight very small fragments had remained unidentified, but later three of them (2–4) could be shown to also belong to the VAV. Since folio 13 contains the verses 16–31 of the second chapter of the VAV and folio 26 already verses 9–23 of chapter 8, it is obvious that at least one more text must have preceded the VAV. All the fragments are edited (cf. SHT I: 286 for the details); Weller’s edition of the Jm folios and Lüders’ of the KalpM are accompanied by facsimiles, and for the VAV Schlingloff published a separate facsimile edition.

This was the state of affairs when in May 2021 a fragment of the VAV was found in the Serindia Collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IOM, RAS). After a close examination, two facts became quickly clear. First, Shin’ichirō Hori had identified the fragment already in 2011, but not edited, and second, it clearly belonged to the same manuscript as the fragments of SHT 638. As mentioned above, the script is very distinct and combined with material, number of lines, number of aksaras per line and presumable size of the folios it leaves no doubt that the fragments come from one and the same manuscript. This

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2 HARTMANN 2017 (Fs. HÖLLMANN): 290, note 3.
4 WELLER 1955, Tafel I–III (only the verso sides); LÜDERS 1926, Tafel I–XII; SCHLINGLOFF 1968, no. 227–232. Very good colour photographs of all fragments are nowadays available online (http://turfan.bbaw.de/idp-berlin/).
5 HORI 2011: 6 (SUP 152 1 = SI 3695).
was a surprise, but that was not yet all: The Petrovsky Collection also contains a fragment of the Jātakamālā and the Petrovsky and Krotkov Collection one each of the KalpM. Hori had not only identified the latter two (SI 2Kr/9 (4) = SI 2041/5 and SI 3695 = SI P/152 2), but also edited them.6 The Jātakamālā’s fragment (Kṣāntivādi-jātaka) (SI 2998) was published in 2022.7

How is this distribution over three collections to be explained? The fragments now kept in Berlin were collected by the members of the second so-called Prussian Turfan expedition that visited the Turfan oasis from November 1904 until November 1905.8 It was headed by Albert von Le Coq, and it is known that on several occasions Le Coq gave manuscript fragments as a gift to researchers and officials from other countries. Therefore it is quite plausible that the fragments now in Russia were originally also found by Le Coq and his team and on fitting occasions handed over to the Russian consul in Ghulja Nikolay Krotkov and the Russian consul in Kashgar Nikolay Petrovsky.

Mātṛceṭa and his works

As mentioned above, fragment SI 3695/1 is an excerpt from the work of the famous Buddhist thinker and poet Mātṛceṭa, the Varnāravavarna, “The Praise of the Praiseworthy” (another name is Catuḥśataka since it consists of nearly 400 verses). A late version of his biography says that, being a brahmin, Mātṛceṭa came to the Nālandā monastery and won a philosophical debate over many learned monks. Nāgārjuna sent Āryadeva to dispute with Mātṛceṭa, who was able to defeat the brahmin. The defeated Mātṛceṭa converted to Buddhism. Information on Mātṛceṭa’s biography is very fragmentary and is contained in Chinese and Tibetan texts.9 The most complete description of the life of Mātṛceṭa is presented in the “History of Buddhism in India” by Tāranātha (1575–634). Apparently, Tāranātha brought together several scattered traditions about the life of Mātṛceṭa.10

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7 Shomakhmadow 2022.
8 For a brief introduction into the history of the German expeditions, their manuscript finds and the first decades of editorial work see SHT I: xi–xxvi.
9 VAV (UH): 12–22.
So, according to one of the legends, Mātṛceṭa lived during the time of Vindusāra Maurya (3rd c. BC), the son of Candragupta Maurya, the dynasty founder and the father of Emperor Aśoka. Mātṛceṭa lived in the city of Kusumapura in the monastery of Kusuma-alaṃkāra, where he preached the teachings of both the Mahāyāna and the Hiṃayāna. Subsequently, Mātṛceṭa erected a temple dedicated to Avalokiteśvara, where a thousand monks — followers of the Mahāyāna — lived.

Particularly, “The History of Buddhism in India” mentions names associated with Mātṛceṭa. According to Tāranātha, Mātṛceṭa is also known by the following names: brāhmaṇa Durdharṣakāla, (Ārya)Śūra, Aśvaghoṣa, Mātṛceṭa, Pitṛceṭa, Durdharṣa, Dhārmika Subhūti. Maticitra, etc.

A number of facts speak against the assertion that Aśvaghoṣa and Mātṛceṭa are one person. First of all, from the analysis of the works of both authors, it becomes obvious that the audience for both authors was different. Aśvaghoṣa’s writings were addressed to the educated elites of Indian society, not necessarily Buddhist. Mātṛceṭa’s poems were exclusively for Buddhist followers. Therefore, the sources of creativity of both poets differed: Aśvaghoṣa relied on various written monuments, of both Buddhist and non-Buddhist content. The basis of Mātṛceṭa’s works were exclusively Buddhist texts.¹¹

According to another version of the biography recorded in Tāranātha’s text, Mātṛceṭa was born into a brāhmaṇa family called Saṃghaguhya, and his maternal grandfather was a lay Buddhist. Having received the name Kāla at birth, the young Mātṛceṭa perfectly studied the Vedas, mantras, tantra and the art of debate. According to legend, the god Mahādeva was his mentor. For his devotion to his parents, he received the name ‘Dedicated to mother / father’ — Māṭr- or Pitṛceṭa.

So, the Brahmin Mātṛceṭa defeated many Buddhist thinkers in the art of debate, turning them away from the Dharma and making them Non-Buddhists (tīrthika). However, Mātṛceṭa’s mother, wishing to guide her son on the Dharma Path, told him that victory cannot be considered absolute until the Magadha Buddhists are defeated. And Mātṛceṭa went to Nālandā. His meeting with Āryadeva was mentioned earlier. After converting to Buddhism, according to the legend, Mātṛceṭa saw the bodhisattva Tārā, who ordered him, in atonement for sins, when he was a brahmin, to create many stotras praising the Buddha.

¹¹ VAV (UH): 14.
So, among the works attributed to Mātṛceṭa, the following are known: Prasāda-pratibhodhavā (Śatapaṅcāsātka = Adhyārthaśatka), Anaparāddha-stotra, Samyaksambuddhalakṣaṇa-stotra, Ekottarika-stotra, Triratnamāṅgala-stotra, Triratna-stotra, Sugatapancatirimśat-stotra, Prani-dhānasaptati, Catuviparyakathā, Kaliyugaparikathā, Mahārājakaniṣka-lekha, Āryatārā-stotra, Āryatārādevī-stotra-sarvārthasādhana-nāma-stotrarāja, Mātṛcetāgī and others.

And, of course, “Praise for the Praiseworthy”. The Chinese monk Yijing (635–713) who went as a pilgrim to India highly appreciated the artistic and religious qualities of VAV.12

**Varṇāravāraṇa’s structure**

The text of VAV consists of 12 chapters:

1. *Aśakyastava* (“The Praise to the Incomparable (He who is above all praises)”). The chapter is an introduction to the whole work, especially the introduction to the Second chapter. This chapter raises the important question of the futility of expressing aspects of the Buddha in the ‘conventional (common) language’.

2. *Mūrdhābhiseka* (“The Head Sprinkling”, i.e. “Consecration”). Although of the previous chapter about the impossibility of describing the qualities of the Buddha through human language, in this chapter Mātṛceṭa praises the individual qualities of the Bhagavān through such epithets as śrāmaṇa, brāhmaṇa, lokācārya, snātaka, nṛśimha, mahānāga.

3. *Sarvajñāsāriddhi* (“The Fullness of Omniscience”). The chapter is devoted to describing both the bodily appearance of the Buddha and aspects of gaining Omniscience.

4. *Balavaiśaradāyastava* (“The Praise to the Powers and the Confidences (Fearlessness)”). The chapter characterizes the ten Powers of the Tathāgata (dāsa tathāgatabalāṇi) and four ‘fearlessnesses’ (vaiśāradya) as factors in the Omniscience manifestation.

5. *Vaiśvīṣuddhi* (“The Speech Purification”). The chapter describes the properties of Buddha’s speech, the concept of two truths — the relative truth (saṁvṛtisatya) and the absolute one (paramārtha-satya), as well as idea of the Single Utterance (ekasvara).

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6. *Avivādastava* (“The Praise to the Indisputability [of the Teaching]”). The chapter substantiates the indisputability and truth of the Dharma; the topic of conducting a public dispute (*vivāda*) is touched upon.

7. *Brahmānvāda* (“The Explanation of Brahma”). In this chapter, the Buddhist teaching is explained through the Brahmanical terms. Thus, the Buddha is described as Brahma and the Dharma — as Brahman.

8. *Upakārastava* (“The Praise of the [Buddha’s] Blessings”). The chapter describes the benefits that the Buddha's Teaching brings to people — liberation from afflictions (*kleśas*), the achievement of Nirvāṇa, the practice of arhat, pratyekabuddha, bodhisattva, ‘four analytical knowledge’ (*catvāri pratisamvidaḥ*).

9. *Apratikārastava* (“The Praise of the impossibility of repaying [the Buddha for his beneficence]”). The chapter says that it is impossible to thank the Buddha for his immeasurable deeds aimed at saving all sentient beings.

10. *Śarīraikadeśastava* (“The Praise of the parts of the [Buddha’s] Body”). The chapter describes the iconic marks (special characteristics of the body’s parts) of the Great Person (*Mahāpuruṣa*).

11. *Prabhūtastava* (“The Praise of the Great [Buddha’s tongue]”). The chapter describes the Buddha’s tongue; epithets for beautiful women are actively used. At the end of the chapter, a comparison is made with the goddess Sarasvatī.

12. *Bhavodvejaka* (“The Creation of Fear of Existence”). The chapter says that, despite the impeccability of the Buddha’s teaching, after his Parinirvāṇa, the world is gradually moving towards the “Age of the Dharma’s End”.

The fragment we are studying contains the end of the 7th chapter (*Brahmānvāda*) — stanzas 17–22, its colophon, and the beginning of the 8th chapter (*Upakārastava*) – stanzas 1–7.

**The manuscript description**

Description of the German fragments: SHT I: 286 (and SHT VI: 218 with the identification of the fragments 2–4 as belonging to one folio and covering the verses VAV 6.25–40); the manuscript contains VAV, Jm, KalpM.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{13} For a survey of fragments in the German collection written in Proto-Śārada cf. HARTMANN 2017: 79–82.
Facsimiles: folio 421 (= dd) of the KalpM as plate 37 in SHT 1.\footnote{Folios 13, 26 and 31 (all VAV) in SCHLINGLOFF 1968: no. 227–232; facsimiles of all fragments available on http://turfan.bbaw.de/idp-berlin/}

Although the folio number is lost, our fragment must belong to folio 25, since the text immediately precedes the verses preserved in SHT 638 b. This is a fragment from the left part of the folio, where the folio number 26 is preserved.\footnote{See: SCHLINGLOFF 1968: no. 230.}

Since the edition of VAV, one fragment has been published which confirms text reconstructed in 7.17c. This is Or.15007/189 (published by Klaus Wille in BLSF III: 59) which adds two vowels: recto \( \text{d} /// \text{ā} .\text{e} + + /// \) for \((\text{sugat})\text{ā}(\text{v})e(\text{n})[\text{ī}]\text{kaivaiṣā}.\) Together with SI 3696/1 r2 the gap is closed.

Symbols used in the transliteration

+ — a lost glyph(s)
[ ] — glyph(s) whose reading(s) is (are) uncertain
.. — one illegible glyph
। — illegible part of a glyph
/// — beginning or end of a fragment when damaged
|| — the double daṇḍa — punctuation mark

Transliteration of the fragment

SI 3695/1 recto: VAV 7.17b–colophon

1 /// ++ .. + + + + .. + + + ++ + ///
2 /// nāt* suga[t]. veni .. .. ++ + ///
3 /// [kt]. vi ○ ghasāśīnah || ito [bā] ++ ///
4 /// sya ○ ti taṃ tasmiṃ pūrvāpa ++ ///
5 /// + ni yah śraddadhyaṭ tanmayānīti sa bā[ḥ].e ///
6 /// + + s[t]i sambhavaḥ || brahmān[u].ā[d]o + + ///
r2: cf. VAV 7.17b–c sarvam tat tava sūṣanāt | sugatāvenikaivaśāda;

r3: cf. VAV 7.18d–19a tvatsūktavighasāśīnaḥ || 18 ito bāhyesu yat sūktam;

r4: cf. VAV 7.20a–b kāḥ śraddhāṣyati tat tasmin pūrṇāparāratam |

r5: cf. VAV 7.21b–d sahaκāraphalāni yāḥ | śraddhāyāt tanmayāni tī sa

bāhyesu subḥāṣītam |;

r6: cf. VAV 7.22d–colophon tvadanyatraṣtī saṃbhavaḥ || 22 varṇāhavane

buddhastotre brahmānuvāda nāma saptamaḥ paricchedaḥ 7 ||; in this

manuscript the colophon is abbreviated to the chapter title.

SI 3695/1 verso: VAV 8.1d–8c

1 /// + + .v. [y]. + [vaḥ]. r. + + + + +
2 /// + .v.ram api kṣuṇṇaḥ kumārak.ḥ [st].r. + ///
3 /// deśanāprāthihāryasya vy. śti .. ///
4 /// [pr]. ti ○pakṣāgatākaraḥ || [k]. + + ///
5 /// [t]ā mārggasambhāraṃ dharmāṃ [k]. śalasā[sr]. ///
6 /// + [t]ā[di]lāḥ |+ [t]. rija[no] + + + + + + ///

v1: cf. VAV 8.1d–2a svaṃbhuvah | 1 praṇāśapathabāhulyāt;

v2: cf. VAV 8.3a–c mahānāgair i va svairam api kṣuṇṇaḥ kumārakaiḥ |

strījanenāpi;

v3: cf. VAV 8.4c–d deśanāprāthihāryasya vyuṣṭi vyuṣṭimatāṃ vara ||;

v4: cf. VAV 8.5d–6a -pratipakṣāgadākaraḥ || 5 kāmarāgādidadadhānāṃ;

-āgātā- against the well-attested -āgadā- must be a scribal error;

v5: cf. VAV 8.7a–b bruvata mārgasambhāraṇa dharmān kuśalasāstravān |;

here (mārga-) and in the next line (saṃtarjjano-) the manuscript shows
gemination, a rather typical phenomenon in later manuscripts from the

northwest of the subcontinent.

v6: cf. VAV 8.8b–c sāmāṇyākārataḍitāḥ | saṃtarjanolmukāṇīva.
Pl. 1.
A fragment of Varṇārhavāma from the Serindia Collection, Petrovsky Sub-Collection.
The Institute of Oriental Manuscripts RAS.
SI 3695/1 recto

Pl. 2.
A fragment of Varṇārhavāma from the Serindia Collection, Petrovsky Sub-Collection.
The Institute of Oriental Manuscripts RAS.
SI 3695/1 verso
Translation

7. Brahmānavāda

17. Everything that is beautifully spoken in the world is said in your Teaching; [ability to] speak beautifully is Sugata’s exceptional ability.

18. But all the Dharma scholars who, apart from you, are seen in an impeccable practice of speech, are devourers of the remnants of what [you] said beautifully.

19. The ‘beautiful speech’ of those who are outside [Dharma] is also [similar to the Buddha’s words], as are the footprints of the woodworm [similar to] writing: their nature is unequal, as are gold and iron.

20. How can one believe this [‘beautiful speech’] of that [non-Buddhist teaching], contradictory before and after? [This is also ridiculous] as if the Gośīrṣa sandalwood tree was growing in the Castor-oil plant.16

21. Whoever believes that ‘beautiful speech’ can come from external [teachings] is [like] those who believe that ripe mango fruits grow on the Neem tree.17

22. There is no other ‘birth place’ for the pearls of ‘beautiful speech’ except for you. As well as for sandalwood, there is no other place of growth than the Malaya Mountains.18

8. Upakārastava

1. [The Path] by which ‘Rhinoceroses’19 sometimes walk at some point in a mighty, silent, carefree, self-arising step,

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16 Gośīrṣa Sandalwood has a great value in the Indian religious tradition. Castor-oil (Ricinus) is poisonous to living beings.

17 Fruits of Neem tree is bitter and its leaves are chewed at funeral ceremonies.

18 The Malaya Mountains are a range of mountains, mentioned in Indian sacred texts.

19 Here the one of two types of Pratyekabuddhas are meant. According to Vasubandhu, the author of Abhidharmakośa (5 c.), Pratyekabuddhas are of two kinds: ‘those who live in communities’ (varga-cārināḥ), and ‘rhinoceros-like’ ones (khaḍgavīśāna-kalpaḥ), i.e. living alone, not needing others (AKB: 181–183). According to Yaśomitra, the author of Sphuṭārthā Abhidharmakośavyākhyā, the varga-cārināḥ are the first śravakas to attain arhatship on their own as early as the Buddha’s time (SAKV: 337). According to another point of view, ‘Those who live in communities’ cannot be included in the category of the first śravakas. These are ‘ordinary people’ (prthāg-jana) who in previous births realized the dharma leading to the four stages of the ‘deep penetration’ (nirvedhabhāgīya), and in the present birth, following their own path, have reached Awakening. The status of ‘Those who are like a rhinoceros’ is acquired within one hundred Great Kalpas through the special practice of achieving the conditions of Awakening (bodhisamābhāra). The conditions are as follows: moral behavior (śīla), the practice of concentration of consciousness (samādhi), wisdom (prajñā). Just like
2. this path to Nirvāṇa, which is so extremely difficult to achieve because of the many paths [leading] to the loss of [achieved progress in the religious practice], you turned into the Great Royal Path.

3. [The path is so easy] that the ‘crown princes’-kumārakāḥ walk leisurely along it like the ‘Great Nāgas’, even women whose strength and insight are two fingers wider;

4. it results from the miracle of your Teaching, which has immeasurable power (and) belongs only to the Buddha, the best of those who have beauty.

5. For those bitten by various venomous vipers, you are the source of specific and general antidotes.

6. For those who are burned by the passion of desire, etc., you offer a cure for this disease by proclaiming the dharmas that begin with the meditation on impurity.

real rhinos live alone, the Khadgaviśāna-kalpāḥ avoid other people, do not preach the Dharma, because they are afraid to be distracted from the state of deep concentration of mind.

20 According to Vasubandhu, it is necessary to distinguish three kinds of falling away: the loss of what was gained; the loss of the unacquired and the loss of the object of pleasure. The first type of loss occurs when an arhat falls away from previously gained spiritual or good qualities. The second is if he does not gain any of those good qualities that should be gained. The third, losing the object of pleasure — if the arhat can no longer realize the previously gained qualities (AKB: 345–346).

21 Kumāra(ka) (‘crown prince’) is the bodhisattva who will become a Buddha because of the Buddha is the Dharmarāja (‘King of Dharma’).

22 ‘Great Nāgas’ (muhānāgāḥ) is the epithet of great śravakas (MV: 82), i.e. arhats.

23 Navāśūṣṭāḥ samijñāḥ — ‘nine realizations of the abominable’. This practice of yogic concentration is necessary for ascetics, whose main opponent is their own passionate attraction to color, form, touch, vanity. So, someone who is seduced by color should contemplate figuratively or, in reality (in a cemetery, in places of cremation, blue or blackened corpses; those who are attracted by the form should meditate on a corpse whose integrity is broken — cut into pieces, gnawed by animals, etc.; those subject to a passion for pleasant tactile sensations should observe corpses at various stages of decomposition — infested with worms, overflowing with pus, etc. The contemplation of any corpse contributes to getting rid of vanity. With figurative (only in one’s own mind) contemplation of repulsive objects, one should subject to mental ‘corpse decomposition’ first a part of one’s body, then the whole body; after that, the ‘procedure’ should be repeated on third-party objects, expanding the area of contemplation to the ‘sea of skeletons’. There are three stages of cultivation in this practice: ‘beginner’, ‘having mastered the skill’, ‘having outstanding mental concentration’ (AKB: 337; Mppu: 1314–1316, 1320–1326).

The Mahāyāna ‘innovation’ consists in the observation that, unlike the śravakas, whom, according to Mahāprajñāpāramitā-upadeśa (Mppu), the practice of contemplation of repulsive objects should turn away from color, form, etc. and bring them closer to attaining Nirvāṇa, bodhisattvas comprehend this type of concentration in order to teach it to other people. In addition, the concept of śūnyavāda prescribes to treat the type of decaying corpses
7. **By speaking of the good and (at the same time) impure dharmas**²⁴ that make up the Path, you have created an inner and mutual distinction of things.

**Abbreviations**


**References**


neutrally, without a feeling of disgust and the color of a decaying corpse (a blue-colored corpse, yellow, decaying sludge, red blood and muscles, white bones of the skeleton) to contemplate only as colors — blue, yellow, red, white. (Mppu: 1327–1328).

²⁴ It means good dharmas but ‘with afflictions’ (sāśrava) and ‘causal’ (saṃskṛta), for example, the dharma of the ‘Truth of Path’ (mārgasatya) (AKB: 3).


