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Re-examination of the Tangut Fragment Or. 12380/3495 from the Collection of the British Library

Among all discovered Tangut written monuments there are known to be 31 fragments (including five very small pieces that are broken off from larger fragments) of Tangut texts where Tangut characters are supplemented by their phonological transcription in Tibetan writing. The Tibetan transcription provides straightforward information on the pronunciation of Tangut characters, and hence plays a key role in the phonological reconstruction of Tangut.

The fragments in question are now preserved in two collections, 19 fragments and five small pieces of them are in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences at St. Petersburg, and five fragments are in the British Library at London. As we have already reported in 2009, two fragments which were originally in the Russian collection have been lost, and only photographs of them belonging to Nikolai Aleksandrovich Nevsky (1892–1937) are preserved among his archive materials kept in the Archive of Orientalists of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts (copies of these photographs are preserved in the British Library as well).

The aim of this paper is to provide a re-examination and new description of one of these fragments, preserved at the British Library with pressmark Or. 12380/3495. This fragment has been studied in detail by several Tangut scholars (Arakawa 2008, Tai 2008, West 2011), but some of the questions concerning it, like meaning of the Tibetan writing at the top left edge, remain unsolved and have become the focus of our research.

Description of the fragment Or. 12380/3495. Size: 9.8 × 15.3 cm. 5 lines. Yellowed undyed thick cotton paper. Starts with: “*𑖦𑖧𑖨𑖩𑖪𑖫*...”, ends with: “*...𑖬𑖭𑖮𑖯𑖰*”. This fragment is the left leaf of a page from a book which is possibly bound in butterfly-format. The page is framed in hand-drawn double lines 1.2 to 1.6 cm away from the edge. Tangut characters in the fragment are handwritten in black ink. The Tibetan syllables are handwritten to the right

fragment cannot join with other Tangut fragments with Tibetan transcription. The current preservation status of this fragment is unclear. The image of this fragment was published in “Documents from Khara-Khoto in the British Library” (Vol. IV, p. 198), quoted before in Tai (2008), and is now available on the International Dunhuang Project (IDP) website. The content of this fragment is collated in Tai (2008) as Cánpiàn 18, in Arakawa (2008), and in West (2011).

Reconstruction of the damaged characters at line 5.

0501	0502	0503	0504	0505	0506	0507	0508	0509
L1543	L2373	L5306	L1329	L3830	L1139	L4531	L0752	L5771
								
mjor ¹	ljij ²	dzjwi ¹	džjow ¹	njij ²	•jij ¹	•jow ²	tšja ¹	tshwew ¹
□					—	—	—	—
□					—	—	—	—
□	l d e	ˈdzwar	ˈjo	nye	—	—	—	—
如	來	帝	幢	王	之	讚	敬	禮
true	come	ruler	banner	king	ANTIERG	praise	pay.homage	
Tathāgata		Indraketudhvarājā						
<i>Translation:</i> “Praise and pay homage to Tathāgata Indraketudhvarājā”								

Reconstruction of the first two damaged characters at line 5 as 𐞀𐞁 (Chinese *rúlái* 如來) “Tathāgata” is proposed by S. Arakawa (2008) (now it can be indirectly confirmed by the Tibetan transcription of the second character). Reconstruction of the third damaged character at line 5 as 𐞂 (Chinese *dì* 帝) “ruler; king; emperor” is proposed by us in accordance with available Tibetan transcriptions, the visible part of the damaged Tangut character, and the sense of the text itself. The Tangut name of Buddha (Tathāgata) Indraketudhvarājā mentioned in this part of the text appears in the fragment of the Tangut translation of the “Upāli’s Questions Regarding Determination of the Vinaya sūtra” (*Fóshuō Juédìng pīnī jīng* 佛說決定毗尼經) preserved as pressmark 6721 in Wuwei Museum: 𐞀𐞁𐞂𐞃𐞄𐞅𐞆𐞇𐞈 (in reverse Chinese translation from Tangut: 南無焰紅帝幢王佛) “Homage to Indraketudhvarājā Buddha” (see: Yu Guangjian and Xu Yuping 2011). The appearance of the character 𐞂 before 𐞃𐞄 here confirms our reconstruction.

(Russian “знаменитый” субурган) excavated by the Mongolia and Sichuan Expedition (1907–1909) of Pyotr Kuzmich Kozlov during the end of May and beginning of June, 1909.

The source of the Tangut text has not yet been identified. S. Arakawa (2008) thinks that it could be part of an ode (*sòng* 頌) or prayer (*yuànwén* 願文) translated into Tangut from a Tibetan Buddhist scripture. However, based on philological and linguistic evidence we think that it was probably translated from Chinese (but from a text pertinent to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition).

We should note that above-mentioned fragment of a sūtra from Wuwei Museum also contains the name of the Buddha Suparikīrtitanāmagheyaśrī: 𑖑𑖔𑖕𑖖𑖗𑖘𑖙𑖚𑖛𑖜𑖝𑖞𑖟𑖠𑖡 (in reverse Chinese translation from Tangut: 南無善名稱功德佛) “Homage to Suparikīrtitanāmagheyaśrī Buddha” which appears on the first line of the described fragment as well: 𑖑𑖔𑖕𑖖𑖗𑖘𑖙𑖚𑖛𑖜𑖝𑖞𑖟𑖠𑖡 “the Tathāgata, the Arhat, the Samyaksambuddha Suparikīrtitanāmagheyaśrī Buddha” (this line would correspond to the following pattern in a hypothetical Chinese scripture if it was a source for the Tangut translation: 如來、應供、正等覺善名稱功德佛). The appearance of both names in the described fragment, as well as its order, which is similar to the order of names in the list of thirty five Buddhas, shows that the text is possibly connected with the their cult, which could be used as clue to the further identification (not only the source for the translation, if it was translated, but also a full text or its parts as well).

Key words: Tangut script, Tangut language, Tangut characters, Tibetan transcription, Tangut fragment, phonological reconstruction.

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