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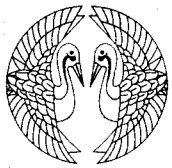

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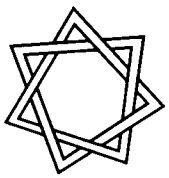

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TEXT AND ITS CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

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MANICHAEAN TEXT T II D AND *ÏRQ BITIG* XIX

Ïrq bitig, the "Book of Omens", is a literary work which drew attention of many scholars. Actually, in many respects it is a work imbued with cultural connotations which demand adequate scholarly interpretation. Until recently, however, many questions concerning the content, and even the exact date and provenance of *Ïrq bitig*, have remained rather obscure. Due to the brilliant investigation by J. R. Hamilton, it is now clear that the *Ïrq bitig* ("Book of Omens") was completed on 17 March 930 in the Manichaean monastery of the Great Cloud (*taygüntan manystan*, Chin. *tayung t'ang*). Its author or compiler, who was a junior cleric (*kičig di(n)tar*), dedicated this work to his elder brother, military commander It Ačuq [1]. Considering the place where the work was created, the confession of its author, and his social position, one could have expected to find in this book some Manichaean traces. However, there are no such traces or evident links to Manichaean literary tradition, except the presence in *Ïrq bitig* of certain descriptions, rather general though [2]. Nevertheless, one excerpt from *Ïrq bitig* may be of interest in this connection. I mean paragraph XIX of the "Book of Omens", which relates about the White Horse. The excerpt runs as follows:

> *aq (a)t q(a)rš(ï)sïn üč boluγta t(a)lulap(a)n (a)γ(ï)nka ötügkä ïdmiš tir. qorqma, (ä)dgüti ötün; (a)yïnma, (ä)dgüti y(a)lb(a)r tir. (a)nča biliŋ: (ä)dgü ol.*
>
> "A White Horse, having chosen its adversary in three states of existence, sent it to a dumb for praying, it says: 'fear not, pray well; do not be afraid, implore well'" [3].

One should admit that the mini-story looks rather senseless, which has led Sir Gerard Clauson to remark: "paragraph XIX is wholly obscure" [4]. More than twenty years ago I made an attempt to explain the meaning of this excerpt by suggesting a new reading for the name of its principal hero. Instead of *aq at*, "White Horse", I read *aq ata*, "White Father", that is, a Manichaean priest wearing white garments [5]. My assumption was that the second word had been written not clearly enough or we had here the scribe's error, but this assumption was rightfully rejected by Peter Zieme [6].

Thus, the question remained unsolved: neither in Turkic folklore, where a horse is only an attribute or a hero's assistant, nor in the Manichaean tradition does a horse appear in the quality of a wise spiritual guide or religious teacher. This made it difficult to provide any more or less persuasive interpretation of the whole episode cited here. Buddhist borrowings into Manichaean literature seem to be able to broaden the limits of possible interpretation: the story of the young prince Bodhisattva published by W. Bang is one of these borrowings made directly from the Buddhist tradition [7]. The story runs that the young prince leaves his palace to ride along the streets of the city on his white horse Kaṇṭaka (or Chandaka, another name appearing in the text). For the first time the prince sees there such things as illness, old age and death. He asks his horse to explain the meaning of these things, and the horse, acting in the quality of his spiritual guide and teacher, tells the prince about the vicissitudes of human life and the cycle of existence. Furthermore, we find the depiction of prince Bodhisattva riding on his white horse Kaṇṭaka on one of the mural paintings of the Manichaean temple of Khocho (see *fig. 2*). The investigation of this scene undertaken by H.-J. Klimkeit proves that the painting belongs to the Manichaean artistic tradition: the greeting gesture (*vitarqa-mudrā*) of Bodhisattva is made with his left hand in conformity with the Manichaean ritual [8].

One may suggest that the Buddhist image of prince Bodhisattva riding his white horse (and his spiritual guide) Kaṇṭaka, which came into the Manichaean literary and artistic tradition, was further developed in paragraph XIX of *Ïrq bitig*. In this story, the horse-teacher turns into an independent personage separated from the one he is supposed to teach, the one not specified in the text. The horse urges him to pray and repent, which is required to overcome the enemy (the dark forces?), and these admonitions and appeals merge in the novel with the common for Turkic cosmogony tripartite scheme of world-order, revealing the whole complicity of the development of Manichaean ideas within Turkic environment.

If the suggested interpretation of paragraph XIX of *Ïrq bitig* does not go beyond the framework of a probable hypothesis, then it is possible to trace the presence of a doubtless Manichaean motif in the Old Turkic "Book of Omens".

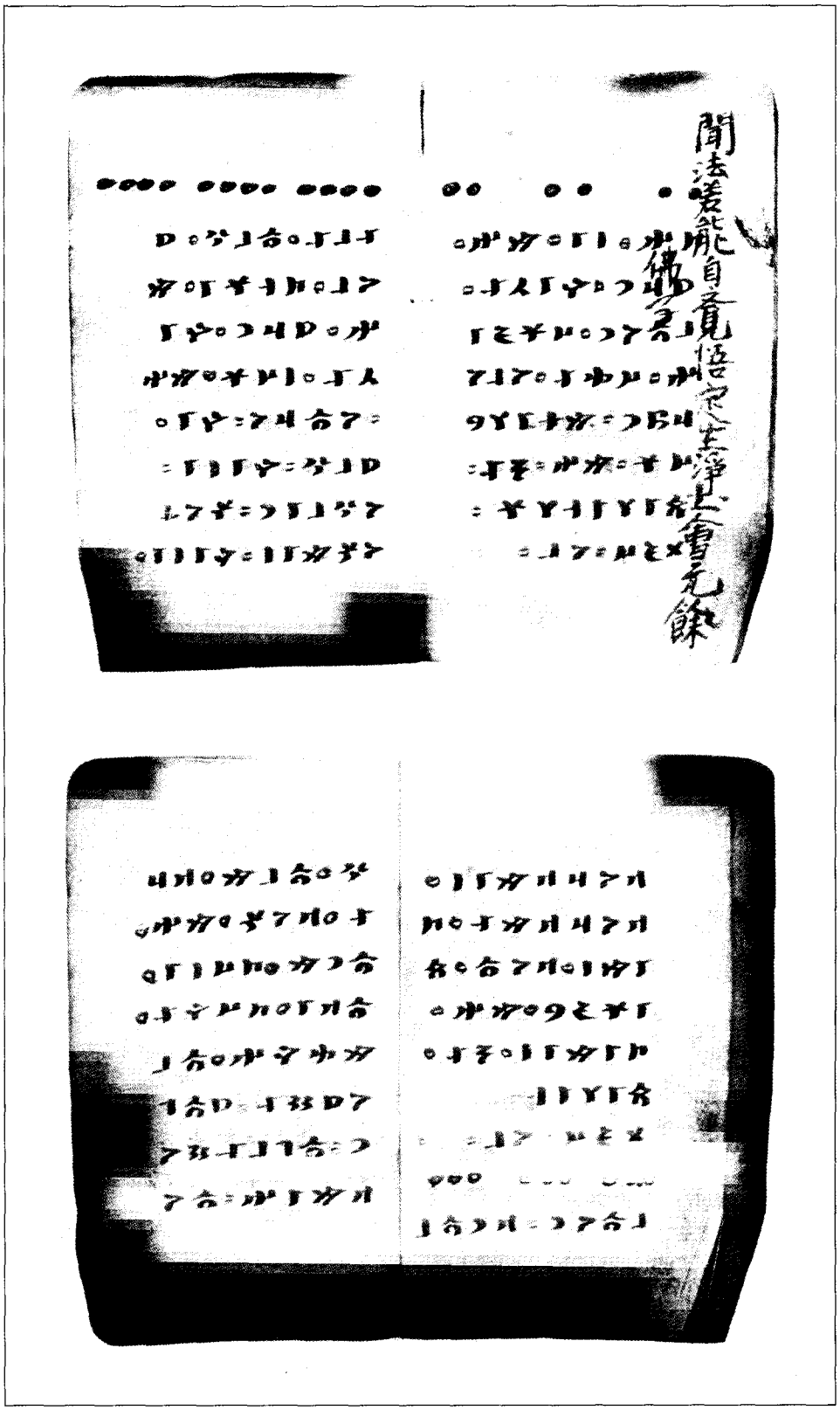

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Notes

1. J. Hamilton, "Le colophon de l'Ïrq bitig", *Turcica. Revue d'étude turques*, t. VII (1975), pp. 7—19.
2. A. von Gabain, "Die alttürkische Literatur", *Philologiae Turcicae Fundamenta* (1964), ii, pp. 215—6.
3. T. Tekin, *Ïrq Bitig. The Book of Omens* (Wiesbaden, 1993), pp. 12—3.
4. G. Clauson, "Notes on the 'Ïrq Bitig'", *Ural Altaische Jahrbucher*, XXXIII/3—4 (1961), p. 221.
5. S. G. Kliashtornyĭ (Klyashtorny), "Mifologicheskie siuzhety v drevnetiurkskikh pamiatnikakh" ("Mythological subjects in Old Turkic literary works"), *Tiurkologicheskiĭ sbornik. 1977* (Moscow, 1981), pp. 129—31.
6. P. Zieme's review in *Orientalistische Literatur Zeitung*, 79/4 (1984), pp. 378—9.
7. W. Bang, "Manichäische Erzähler", *Le Muséon*, t. XLIV (1931), pp. 7—9.
8. H.-J. Klimkeit, "Das Pferd Kaṇṭaka — Symbol buddhistischer Erzähl — und Kunstelemente im zentralasiatischen Manichäismus", *Aus dem Osten des Alexanderzeits. Festschrift für Klaus Fischer* (Köln, 1984), pp. 91—5.

Illustrations

Fig. 1. *Ïrq bitig* ("Book of Omens"), folios from a manuscript in Turkic runic script from Dunhuang (call number Ch. 0033), the A. Stein collection, the British Library (the illustration borrowed from Vilh. Tomsen, *Samlede Afhandlinger*, tredje bind, København, 1922, Pl. III).

Fig. 2. "Prince Bodhisattva riding on his white horse Kaṇṭaka", fragment of a mural painting in Khocho, Turfan, East Turkestan, 9th century, height — 27 cm (borrowed from B. Rowland, *Zentralasien*, Baden-Baden, 1970, p. 194).