

A TALE OF ASOKA

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Asoka has been interpreted in the speculations of historians for his public acts authenticated by his own inscriptions; to those inscriptions long known new inscriptions have been added from Afghanistan.¹ But another side is displayed in the legendary record. Here he is the great patron of Buddhism. The cycle of his acts fills an avadana, a narrative, of his religious career. Two of the episodes of this religious epic of Asoka were translated into the language of Gostana-desa, that is, modern Khotan, and have survived in two copies, both incomplete, now in the Bibliotheque nationale, Paris. They have been published in transcription in my *Khotanese Buddhist Text* (1951, =KBT), pp. 40-44. Here I offer a first attempt to render the text in English. Asoka is also the subject of a legend in Tibetan. In the Tanjur, in the Lihi yul lung-bstan-pa, the origin of the Khotan Saka kingship is traced to a son of Asoka who is here called Dharma 'Asoka.² Allusion to this genealogy in a Saka text from Ch'ien-fo-tung is made in my book *Khotanese Texts* 2.53. Here we read in a panegyric that Visa' Darma king of Gostana-desa derives from the anciant family: *vasve guttera rrvī mahasamma rramda hye gutira jsa narada* issued from the family of royal Mahasammata the king of pure family. This is followed by reference in a list to *Vaisramana* the deva *Asum* (=Asoka) and *Ca-yam* the king, who is called in Tibetan *Ca-yan* and *Cha-yan*.³

A Sogdian reference to Asoka occurs in a Manichean texts in a list of evil-doers: *swk MLKy ky prw s'kmnw pwt'y ps'y'pw wxtw d'rt* the king Asoka who slandered the Buddha Sakyamuni.⁴ In the tenth century vocabulary⁵ in Sanskrit and Tibetan the name Bud. Skt *Darmasogaradza* is given as *rgyal-po Darma 'Asoga* in Tibetan. This is near to the Prakrit

1. *Journal asiatique* 1958. 1-48; 1964, 137-157.
2. Translated in F. W. Thomas, *Tibetan Literary Texts and documents Concerning Chinese Turkestan*, 198 ff.; a new translation has been made by R. E. Emmerick, and will shortly be printed with a transliterated text.
3. A translation of this text is in preparation in the Text Volume to be joined to my four portfolios of facsimiles of Saka Documents. See earlier *BSOAS* 10,918-9.
4. W. B. Henning, *JRAS*, 1944,141.
5. J. Hackin, *Formulaire sanskrit-tibetain*, p. 17.

form which has given in Khotan Saka *Asu* (indicating the sound *Azu*) and *Isu*, here the *-oga-* has been replaced by *-u* as usual in Saka dialects. From this same Prakrit came the older Chinese *A-yu* for an older *A-zu*, now pronounced in Japanese *A-iku*, showing the older *-k-*. The Bud. Skt *Asoka-* is written in Saka *Asaukau* as the name of four Buddhas of the Bhadrakalpika-sutra.⁶ In *KT* 3,116, 10v4 occurs *namau asaukau nama tathagatau*, the revered Asoka, by name, the tathagata.

The other names occurring in the Saka text are *Pattmava*. Bud. Skt *Padmavati*. *Ttisl'raksya*, older E 20.45 (*KT* 3, 25,5v3) *Ttisarakasata*, Bud. Skt *Tisarakasita* *Varmavardam*, Bud. Skt *Dharmavivardhana*, *Kuuala*, *Upagupta*, *Yasas*, *Senevaka* the acarya, not found in Bud. Skt; and the place names *Gomdhamayam*, Bud. Skt *Gandhamandana*, and *Ttahikasa'-silai*. Bud. Skt *Taksasila*.

The whole avadana of Asoka is preserved in a Chinese translation from Sanskrit, from which J. Przyluski made his rendering into French with an introductory essay.⁷ The Buddhist story is told in Sanskrit in the Divyavadana (pp. 382-434) and has recently been studied again by Sujitkumar Mukhopadhyaya in his book *The Asokavadana*, 1963. The Kunala episode of the avadana is published with a facsimile of a Buddhist Sanskrit manuscript by G. M. Bongard and O. F. Volkova in their *Legenda o Kunale* in Moscow 1963, reviewed by J. de Jong, in the *Indo-Iranian Journal* 8,233-240. The tale of the man's head is told in the *Sutralamkara* (French translation by Ed. Huber, p. 90 ff.). The Tibetan version is in the *Kunalavadana* (Tanjur Mdo, facsimile Pekin 127, 294-302).

The Saka avadana reads in English translation as follows.

TRANSLATION

Siddham, So I have heard. When this reverend dasabalacakravartin Sakyamuni, deva of devas, the Buddha had completed the work of bodhi, there also the present vaiveśya were taught and delivered, the time (of death) arrived for him. Then he drew near to the bank of the Nairanjana river under the yamaka-sala trees he entered upon the samadhi called Mahaparinirvana when over him the first watch of the night had passed.

6. *Khotanese Buddhist Texts* 77-85, 234,314,401,552.

7. *La legende de Pemereur Asoka*.

Then here in Jambudvipa in Pataliputra a king named Asu' sat in sovereignty. He brought under his own control the whole continent of Jambudvips as far as the verge of ocean; all who were kings in Jambudvipa acclaimed him and did his commands. In Jambudvipa he made 18000 caityas, in all of them he placed sariras (relics) of the Buddha. This king had two queens, and 8000 in his antahpura—Of the first queen the name was Padmavati and the name of the second Tisyarakṣita.

Then at another time the queen Padmavati became pregnant and after the passing of ten months she bore a king's son like a devaputra. The queen took him up in a wrapping and gave him to the king. The king received him in his arms. To the queen he spoke delightedly, saying, To the measure of a hundred years forward may you live with this prince as in the clear akasa the graha (planets), the naksatra (constellations), and the moon and sun shine out. At the time of Jatimaha (birthday feast) they named a name for him and they gave the name prince Varmavardhana.

Then at another time the king Asu' deigned to look at the eyes of the prince Varmavardhana. And he ordered his amatyas, saying, You should look at the prince's eyes, whether anything on earth resembles such eyes which are his. The amatyas spoke with respect, saying, Deva, in a rumour we have heard on Mount Gandhamadana there is a bird by name kunala and his eye is so fine that if he should not resemble it, on earth no being exists who resembles it. Deva, the prince's eyes are such eyes as if one put two chacedony jewels upon a blue lotus leaf. If he looks straight at us suddenly, it seems that amṛta flows into our throat, or that in it are brilliant jewels lying there. Then the king ordered, saying, Bring, here a kunala bird from Gandhamadana. When they had brought it for comparison, saying, The eyes are like one another, then they gave to prince Varmavardhana the name Kunala.

Then the prince Kunala quickly grew up and became adult as in cool water the celestial utpala lotuses grow.

Then at another time the king Asu' conducted the prince Kunala to a samgharama. Kunala was a delight to the sthavira Upagupta. When the sthavira had finished the dharma desana, then the king returned again. There at another samgharama he met with the acarya Senevaka and with his forehead he went with homage to his feet. In his following was an amatya. He was exceedingly devoid of faith. He reproved

the king, he spoke so, saying, Deign not to make the sovereignty contemptible; To every red-clad person that you may see, you go with homage. A king is necessarily fierce and bold with exalted punyas (merits). It is not fitting, Deva, for the sovereignty that he (the king) should roll on the earth. Then the king returned to the palace. Thereupon he issued an order, saying, All amatyas, you shall assemble. Thereupon 7000 amatyas gathered. The king ordered this, saying, Every amatya is to bring a head, Yasa for his part will bring a man's head, but do not in any way cause pranatipata (death to breathing beings). Early next morning they all brought before the king a head. The king ordered this saying, Take them to the market, and sell them at a price. When they brought them to the market, they sold all of them at a price. When they saw that the amatya Yasa on his part carried a man's head, horror was felt. In all ways they fled. With abuse they spoke to him, saying, Do not a second time deign to offer that, such a disgusting thing, stuffed with worms as is this head. If indeed he orders, saying, Take it into your hand, indeed, he will suffer great trouble, who buys that at a price. Then the amatyas returned to the palace and they made a report, saying All other heads we could sell at a price, but the man's head the amatya Yasa has been unable to sell at a price. Then the king ordered him, saying, What fault do you see in it which you deigned to search out? Yasa the amatya spoke, saying, In every one are the same faults. Deva. it is in no one because of peculiar qualities; disgusting it is, stinking, inauspicious, the same. The king ordered him, Is only that one disgusting, or are all disgusting? Yasa the amatya spoke to him, saying, All in fact have the same marks, Deva. The king ordered him, saying, This my head which possesses exalted punyas, how is it to be thought of? Speak truly. Yasa the amatya spoke, saying, This too is precisely like the other heads, Deva. Then the king ordered him, saying, It is such a disgusting thing as this man's head is, for which not even a place can be found where you may put it. Then, amatya, does it not please you when with it I revere the deva Buddha's pupil who actually appears with the asaya- (mind) of the foremost gotra- (family) of the acars? These good qualities of all kinds, approved, have, they not become subjects recognisable by you? If one can know the number of the drops of water in the ocean, then they will know the good qualities possessed by the pravrajitas (wanderers). Then Yasa the amatya begged pardon of the king Asu', and he spoke, saying, I have not done well, I did not understand that the many good qualities are possessed by the pravrajitas.

And then at another time the inhabitants of Taksasila rebelled

against the king Isu,' his command they did not obey, and they withheld his taxes. Then Isu' the king in Pataliputra mounted and led an army to Taksasila. He brought the people of Gandhara back to his command. Long time he remained there. Then here in Pataliputra the queen Tisyaraksita deigned to call prince Kunala. When the prince came before her, he greeted her with his forehead, humbly he sat, and the queen spoke to him so, saying, When your father went away, he placed the country and the land in your hand, but a month passes for you, you do not come to the palace. The prince spoke to her, saying, As much as is my love to my own mother, so much is it to the devi queen. Because here in the palace there is gossip and talk, I dared not enter. These are those whom you draw to come to the palace, and still more that the king is now not present. Then the queen Tisyaraksita tried the fortitude of the prince Kunala by way of love sports, but the prince refused to agree, and he went out from them. Then the queen felt fierce displeasure, she thereupon sough, revenge against him. Then Isu' the king returned from Taksasila. When he came to Pataliputra there Padmavati, and Tisyaraksita the queen, the prince Kunala asked after his health and the fatigues of the road. They spoke (each) to him, saying, My heart is greatly pleased here, that you have come to your throne. We see the Deva in good state, calm, in health and fortune.

Then at another time the queen Tisyaraksita remembered the grief against prince Kunala. Yasa the amatya she deigned to call, to him she deigned to disclose that earlier hostility against him. Yasa the amatya spoke, saying, The prince formerly put me to shame before men. My hat fell off and he struck me six strokes upon the head. This hatred therefore is not yet forgotten. Together they formed a plot against him. And they worked upon the king Isu' so that they induced him to send prince Kunala to Taksasila to rule in his own native land. (The rest is missing).

COMMENTARY

These Saka text are still full of difficulties. A short commentary is therefore necessary.

Line 7. *simaham simavase* he entered into *samadhana*; the same time is mentioned in *KT V 137, 1r2 parinirvana-kala-samaye*, but with the *madhyame yame* the middle watch

19. *hadikana*, loc. sg. only here, is from the context the cloth in which the child is carried; in form it is *hada*-with suffix *ika*-connected

with *hada*-clothing, see *Transactions of the Philological Society* 1954, 155, and the *Barr Festschrift*; Georgian loan-word *ardag* mantle, and Armenian *arta*-are likely to be the same word.

22. *jvam*, B text 139 *jva* 2 sg. conjunctive, may you live, to *juta* he lives.

24. *such*-to name, call from a base *sauk*-,familiar in Baltic Lithuanian *saukiu*, *saukti*, Lettish *saukt* to name, see *Indo Iranian Journal* 2,156-7.

36. *karakiyin*, *raman* B text 153 *karakiyina*, chacedony stone, Siddhasara 137v1 *kirkiyam* for Bud. Skt *ambu-mani*. elsewhere Skt *karketana*-, Zoroastrian Pahlavi *karkehan*, Arab. *karkuhan*, see *Asiatica, Festschrift Weller*, 14-5.

37. *visam vi*, B text 37 *visa vi* in the throat, here only. from the base *vis*-to turn, older **vrtsa*-to *vart*-to turn, see *Asia N'ajor*, new series' 11,114.

42. *parbutta* he became adult, as Bud. Skt Divyavadana 3,17 *mahan samyrttāh*.

48. *isada* infidel, from Prakrit Gandhari *asadhā*-,Bud. Skt *asraddha*-.

53. *bith*- to turn, twist, from older **vre-ya*-, attested in Siddhasara 121v4 *bithana*-,Bud. Skt *udavartin*-,Tibetan *dril-ba* be twisted, with proverb Sid 18v2 *hambithe*, Bud. Skt *grahi*-, Tib. *sri-bar byed*.

53. *kusda*-palace, Bud, Skt *rajakula-pajusda*-capital, Bud, Skt *rajadhani*, from older **kauzda*-as in Avestan *kaozda*-, and with suffix *-ka*- in Middle Persian *kosk*,

65. *pisaraviyc*- renders Bud, Skt *jusupsita*-in Divy 382,25.

73. *kusa*. infinitive to *kuys*-, Bud. Skt *a rimargana* seeking.

75. *sima* has been taken as Bud Skt *sama*- equal, same.

85. *piysina*. B text 203 *piysinni*, is derived from *paysan*-to know, hence *paysan-ya*-recognition.

104. *spasti* is elsewhere *vispasti*, from Prakrit; Bud, Skt *visvasta*-with suffix *-ya*-, occurring also Jataka-stava.

104. *cakyam* play, sport, gen, plural for older *tcarka*-, which renders Bud. Skt *rati*-.

104. *ha ni anavarttya aurye* he did not approve of agreeing, he refused to consent.

106. *ttana vaska* then for him, with *ttana*-abjective from *ta*-belonging

to that time or place, in loc. sg. *ttana* with pronoun *yi*.

113. *gachanai* grief trouble, Siddhasara 125v2 *gachanam jsd*, Tib. *gdungs* misery.

117. *bauci vichuste* the hat fell down, in the Chinese version *k'i kuan jun ti* his hat fell to the ground.

117. *ragyi bimda*. Chinese *t'ou* head, found also in *KT* (=Khotonese Texts) 2, 1,11 *ramgya baida tcamjsa* rendering Chinese *t'ou fa* hair on the head.

117. *ksi palai hvaste* he struck six light strokes, in Chinese *p'ai* he struck lightly.

118. *sambaji bastada* they bound an agreement. Here *sambaja* is from Prakrit to Bud. Skt *sam-vad-ya*-planning together, not the more usual Saka *samboj*-to be successful, prosper from *sam-padyate*.

120. *rruste* rule, sovereignty, acc. sg. to older *rrusta* acc. sg. *rrustu*, abstract to *rrund*-king.