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Peter Zieme

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

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.¹ The recto side is part of a Chinese book scroll containing a complete text with the title at the beginning and the end: 佛説觀門經 Foshuo guanmen jing. This version corresponds to the 南天竺國菩提達摩禪師觀門 Nantianzhuguo Putidamo chanshi guanmen² 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.³ 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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¹ 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.
² T.LXXXV.2832.1270b03-c01. The text of four lines (c01–c05) is missing in the St. Petersburg manuscript.
Buddhist text of the larger traditions, 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.

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”, 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’”. 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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4 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.

5 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.

6 OHNUMA 2012, chapter 6.

7 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”.

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”.  

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 *dharma*.

Transliteration and transcription of the fragment

(missing)

(01) ’[k kwynklynk’ y’r’ sy nwml p ’nt’
(01) ’[k köŋlini yaraši nom nomlap anta
(02) qy ’wq ’wlwrwr yyynt’ swrwtp n qwt q
(02) -k(i)y-a ok olurur yerintä sortapan kut-ka
(03) t’kwrr yrlq’dy . ’wl psrsws lwq qwnecwy l’r ym’ pylty
(03) tägürü y(ar)likadi . ol busuš-lug kunčuy-lar y(ā)mba bilti
(04) mn . swrt’ p n qwtynk t’kdym typ wyrtr kwynkwllyn
(04) m(ā)n . sortapan kutiŋa tägdim tep ötrü köŋülin
(05) tym wytkwrrw ’qmys y sy ’wl ’wqwql qy ’ynnk
(05) -tin ötgürü akımš yaši ol ogul-k(i)y-a-nn
(06) ’t wyynk t mtwq t ’nt’ qy ’wq ’qw tyn k’typ
(06) ät’ özinä tamtuk-ta anta-k(i)y-a ok agu tını kitip
(07) s sylp p’rdy . ync’ q’ lty wyttwkr ksysy <deleted word>
(07) şasılıp bardı . inčä kälti udıyur kiši
(08) <deleted word> wsvsyntyp p’lynkl p twrwr rs r ‘nclw’yw
(08) uusmntn bălinja turur ársär ančulayu
(09) ym’ ’wl ’wqwql ’wqwql qy ’swcyyw sykryyw twrwp k’ldy
(09) y(ā)mā ol ogul ogul-k(i)y-a sučiyu sikriač turup kaldi
(10) ’w ’wqwql qy ’ynnk ’n sy pyr + ’rs’r + swrt p n qwtyr
(10) ol ogul-k(i)y-a-nn anası bir (ársär) sortapan kutun
(11) pwlmys s’ynvc k ’yknty ’wqly tryrlmys s’ynvc k’
(11) bulmiš sävinč-kä ikinti oghi tirilmiš sävinč-kä

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8 OHNUMA 2012, 159.
9 LEGITTIMO 2005, 9 (T.XII.384.1015c8).
10 swrwtp p n.
11 The third letter looks like v, but it should be w.
(12) ʾwykrwp sʾvypnyp ’wzd’y nwm ʾsydmʾk kʾ tʾwyzyn
(12) ögůrůl12 sävinip uzati nom išidmā-kā ʾt ṭźn
(13) ʾwykrʾtyk qylty wʾwl wʾq ʾwykwš nwm ʾsydmwš tsylʾqyntʾ
(13) ögrātig külti ol ok ükûš nom išidmiš tiltagunta
(14) ʾwykwswz ʾwykwš kʾlp Iʾrtʾ wṣtywn tʾnkry yyryntʾ
(14) iģûšûz ükûš kalp-larta üstûn tâŋri yerintā
(15) ’lty nłkwq ’žwnyntʾ mʾnky twnkʾ tʾkynyp ’nk
(15) altun yalhuq azûnta mājī tona tāginip āŋ
(16) kynyntʾ sʾnsʾr tyn ʾwzw refresh newʾlq yncwkwkʾ
(16) kenintā sansar-tin ozup nirvan-lğ ençgûkā
(17) tʾkdy Iʾr ʾny kwyrwntkʾr twyzwn Iʾr ʾnk nyntyn tʾs
(17) tägdî-lār anî kûrûnlâr tûzn-lâr-ā ʾāŋ mîntun tâś
(18) tʾ tyyʾqw tʾ ʾyqʾnqʾ pwlmys kʾnc kycykʾ wqwlʾq yʾ
ta(18) -ta tiyagu-ta tnga bolmûs kânc kîçig ogul-k(ī)ya
(19) nwm ’sydmʾk tyltʾq itʾyyl yw tyyrlkwkʾ tʾnk[ ]
(19) nom išidmāk tiltagunta ikiłâyû tîrlîgûcû tâŋ[ig]
(20) rsʾr tʾqy nʾ ʾyytmys krkʾk syz Iʾr ny tʾk
(20) ârsâr . taka naï aytımîs k(ā)rgâk sîzlâr-nî tâg
(21) ʾlyktyn swynkwtktn p rmys kyrkwyncwkw swyzkwk
(21) ilîktîn sînąjktîn barmûs kertgînîlûg sîzûk
(22) kwynkwlwntkwz ʾkʾ ’wyzʾ nwm ’sydxp ʾdkw twys kʾ ’wtyl
(22) kögülûjûl-lâr üzâ nom isîdîp âgdû tûšt-kâ utlî
(23) qʾ tʾkm kykʾ nyn qwp tʾ qwp swyzkwk
(23) -ka tägmûkî anîn kop-ta kop sîzûk
(24) kyrkwnc kwynkwlyjn pw nwm ʾrdynkʾy ʾsydjkwkwkʾ
(24) kertgînû kögûlîn bo nom ârdînîg išîdgûkâ
(25) ʾnwq pwlwp ʾwlwrmysynkz lʾr kʾrkʾk pw nwm ʾrdynšk
(25) anuk bolup olurmûşîńj-lar kârgûk bo nom ârdînî
From bo nom ârdînî till the end of the leaf the text was written by a
different hand or with a different kalam:
(26) pw mwntʾq yykʾ wṣtywnkyʾ wlwq twys kʾ
(26) bo mûntag yeg üstûnî ulug tûšt-kâ
(27) ’wtyl qʾ tʾkwrd cy ’wyclwʾ nyn pw pry
(27) utl-ka tâgûrdâčî üčûn anûn bo biz
(28) nynk pʾqymz twykʾ lpylkʾ tnyk tnyksry
(28) -nîn baxšîm(ī)z tûkîl bilîg turno t(ā)ngri t(ā)ngrisi
(29) pwrqʾnʾ sʾnky łyqʾ wzw znw ywl Iʾrtʾ

12 Usually the verb is ögîr-.
(29) burhan asanki-lıg uzun yol-larta
(30) qʾtyqlʾnwrʾrkʾntwwtwypwpʿqrw
(30) katıglanur ārkān tüß tüpi bag(a)ru(?)
(31) (missing)
(32) (missing)
(33) (missing)
(on verso side)
(34) twrqw tʾkʾʾcyqʾʾmkʾkʾmknwyrlyqdyntʾk
(34) turgu täg açığ ämgäk ämg(ä)nü y(a)ʾrlikadi nätäg
(35)ʾrkʾn
(35)ārkān(?)

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 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 saṃsāra 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

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13 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.
14 Only in small letters.
15 “His body”.

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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 dharma.

[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”.16

(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.17 The state of a srota-āpanna is expressed by sortapan kut, but more often sortapan kuti18 is encountered with, although already in the early text of the Maitrisimit nom bitig the former type is recorded: sordapan [ku]tika tūg-.19

(04) The sentence m(ā)jn sortapan kutıŋa tägdim is direct speech by the child. The dot after m(ā)jn seems to mark the pronoun as the theme.

(06) agu tını “her poisonous breath”.20 There is another example in the famous story of Kalyāṇakaṃkāra and Pāpaṇkāra,21 where we read of a poisonous snake: al altunka tagka tägsärşiz kök lenhua körgäysiz ol lenhua sayu birär agulug yılan bar agu tını ıraktın ančulayu közünür 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 text22 there is no mention about snakes, it mentions only the blue lotus. Thus it is

16 RÖHRBORN 2015, 188–189 “plötzlich, mit einem Male, auf der Stelle, spontan”.
17 BT XXVIII 285.
18 Suv 144 (III.9b.) 05 swrwdp’n qwtywn.
19 BT IX, vol. 1, 177.
20 RÖHRBORN 2015, 74
21 KP XXXVIII.4 “ihr giftiger Atem”.
22 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.

when he arrived at a mountain with gold, he passed it for another week.

其地純，是青蓮華.

When he reached a place where there were only blue lotuses.

“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”.

(07) šašilip bardu. Here the verb bar- “to go” is used as an auxiliary verb whose function M. Erdal sees as “describing processes approaching a crisis”.

(08) baliŋlap “suddenly”.

(09) The verb suči- “to move to one side, shy away from something” appears here in conjunction with sikri- “to jump”.

(09) turup käldi, kä- “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”. 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 ençgü, the same expression but in reverse order is attested in a colophon edited by G. Hazai.

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

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

(18) ınga “worthless, vile”, as such it is the first example in Old Uighur. The verb derived from it, ıngala- “to regard as worthless”, is attested as isig özin ıngalap “he regarded his life as worthless” in HT VI and in SI 4906

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23 T.III.0156.144b19-21
24 CHAVANNES 1914, 483.
25 GOT 250.
26 ED 795.
27 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”.
28 GOT 253.
29 HAZAI 1976, 273, l.5 ençgülig mążilig nirvan.
30 ED 183a.
(K 22), ll. 06–08 tîtdî ātʾözin tilâdi nomug . ingaladi isig özin kûsâdi äntkâk [elin] “he gave up his body, he longed for the dharma; he regarded his life as worthless, he wanted the Indian [country]”. A further derivative form written in Brâhmî script is ingalâtimiś which is explained by D. Maue.32 Thus the word inga and its derivatives have recently become rather well attested.

(19) -güčä täŋlig. M. Erdal writes: “Attributive -gU+čA expresses accordance, degree or limit”33, here the degree is emphasised by täŋlig “with the measure”.

(21) iliktin süŋüktin. The first member of this word group is more often attested with an initial y-: yilik34. A good example is known from the Altun Yaruk Sudur, also quoted by G. Clauson: yilikimizdin süŋükümdizin bärü “right from our marrow and bones”,35

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

(29) asânkîlig uzun yol “the long asaṃkhyeya way”. Several examples are given in the UW,37 of which some refer to the three asaṃkhyeya periods.

(34) ačıg 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: Uygurca Altun Yaruk
T.: Taishô Buddhist Canon
UW: Uigurisches Wörterbuch

References

33 GOT 390.
34 ED 927–928.
35 ED 928a.
36 GOT 372.
37 UW 225b–226a; repeated in RÖHRBORN 2015, 292. The manuscript Mainz 777 noted as “unpubl. [unpublished]” was published in ZIEME 1984.
CHAVANNES E. 1914: “Une version chinoise du conte bouddhique du Kalyâṇamkara et Pâpamkara”. In: *T'oung Pao* XV, 469–500.


