

Artiom Mesheznikov

Two Unpublished Fragments of the Sanskrit Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra in the Serindia Collection (IOM, RAS)

DOI: 10.55512/wmo121873

Abstract. Two newly identified fragments of the Sanskrit Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra from Central Asia are stored in the St. Petersburg's Serindia Collection of the IOM, RAS under the call numbers SI 3045 and SI 4646. The uniqueness of the Central Asian Sanskrit manuscript rarities lies in the fact that they represent the earliest known version of this popular Buddhist text of the Mahāyāna tradition. Found in the Southern oases of the Tarim Basin in a rather fragmented condition, the manuscripts of the Sanskrit Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra written in the Brāhmī script are currently scattered among various manuscript depositories of the world. Among the manuscripts of the Sanskrit part of the Serindia Collection eight fragments of this Sūtra have been identified so far, and this article aims to introduce two previously unpublished fragments. The fragments are parts of the pothi type folios of paper containing on both sides ten lines in Sanskrit recorded in the so-called Early Turkestan Brāhmī, and paleography permits to date these two manuscripts to the 5th c. AD. The set of codicological and paleographic features (the same number of lines and line spacing, identical writing style and form of Brāhmī akṣaras, similar paper characteristics and width of the fragments) allows to suggest that both fragments could belong to the folios of one and the same manuscript of Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra, or at least that they were created in one scriptorium. Moreover, these fragments also reveal similarities with other manuscripts of this sūtra in the Serindia Collection. The introduction of these newly identified Sanskrit fragments into scientific circulation will provide additional material for solving the problems related to the source studies of the Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra.

Key words: Central Asia, Khotan, Mahāyāna, Sanskrit manuscripts, Serindia Collection, Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra

Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra (“Sūtra of Golden Light”) is one of the most popular Buddhist sūtras of the Mahāyāna tradition throughout the history of Buddhism; it became widespread in Central Asia and the Far East in a large number of texts in various languages. Among them, certainly, of particular importance are Sanskrit manuscript rarities found in the oases of the Tarim Basin in the so-called Serindia area (the part of Central Asia currently spanning the Chinese province of XUAR) in the late 19th and early 20th cc. The Sanskrit originals of the Buddhist sūtras preserved in manuscripts from Central Asia are extremely valuable sources for studying and understanding the canonical period of the formation of Buddhist schools. This applies primarily to the Indian Mahāyāna. Sanskrit Buddhist canonical texts of the Mahāyāna tradition were being copied in monastic libraries of Serindia during the 1st millennium AD, and early versions of Buddhist sūtras, which in India itself were lost or replaced by newer variants, survived as manuscripts circulating in the oases of the Tarim Basin. In this regard, particularly the Sanskrit manuscripts discovered in the Southern oases of Serindia with its center in Khotan, preserved archaic versions of the fundamental texts of Mahāyāna, which may provide the keys to understanding the early Mahāyāna Buddhism and studying its textual heritage. The same is true for manuscripts containing passages from the Sanskrit Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra. Much remains uncertain about the origin and composition of the Sanskrit text of this Sūtra and the history of its different versions and their relationship. From this perspective, the Sanskrit texts that are extant as the manuscripts from the oases of the Tarim Basin are unique in the sense that the earliest parts of the currently available texts of Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra are found precisely in Central Asian manuscripts in Brāhmī dating from approximately the 5–6th cc. AD. This paper aims to introduce two previously unexplored fragments of the Sanskrit Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra kept in the St. Petersburg’s Serindia Collection of the IOM, RAS under the call numbers SI 3045 and SI 4646.

The text of Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra was being formed and modified over the 1st millennium AD and it has a complex history of redaction and transmission as evidenced by various versions known through translations into numerous languages. Initially, some time before the beginning of the 5th c. the text was composed in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit.¹ Subsequently,

¹ Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit combines some elements of Middle Indic languages and dialects along with Sanskrit and has stable deviations from the classical Sanskrit grammar. Originally Buddhist tradition functioned in heterogeneous Prakrits — Middle Indic local

the Sūtra was translated from Sanskrit into Chinese and Tibetan (at least three times into each of the two languages), and also into Japanese, Khotanese Saka, Sogdian, Old Uyghur, Mongol and Tangut. Moreover, several versions of *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra* were included in the Chinese Buddhist canon and based on their contents ranging from 18 to 31 chapters in length, these versions can be designated as short, medium, and extensive.

The earliest known Chinese translation dates from 420 AD and is attributed to the Central Asian monk Dharmakṣema. This translation represents a short version, it consists of 18 chapters, and is considered to be the closest to the Central Asian Sanskrit fragments. Despite some relatively minor differences, the Sanskrit manuscripts found in Serindia agree with this translation almost entirely.

During the 6–7th cc. several additional translations were made into Chinese, in which the text of the sūtra was occasionally changed and expanded. The next, chronologically the second Chinese canonical version of the text of *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra* is known to be a compilation of several translations made by the monk Baogui in 597. This “medium” version of the 18 chapters of the Dharmakṣema translation is supplemented with excerpts from the translations attributed to Paramārtha and Jñānagupta and includes additional chapters that are assumed to have been compiled and added in China.²

The most expanded version with 31 chapters is the third known Chinese translation completed in 703 by the Buddhist monk Yijing. This translation was subsequently highly influential in the process of spreading the Buddhist

languages and dialects. But subsequently with the strengthening of the role of Sanskrit for Buddhism, the texts in Prakrits were being gradually Sanskritised. Through transformations in the process of oral transmission Sanskrit elements were penetrating more and more into Prakrit texts. Sanskritization was increasing exponentially, however some Prakrit elements were also retained, and Middle Indic forms were not completely purged. As a result, a written codification of Buddhist texts in an incompletely Sanskritised Prakrit formed an array of texts containing various ratios of Sanskritisms and Prakritisms. As for the language of Buddhist manuscripts in the Serindia Collection, although these manuscripts contain texts which mostly underwent changes in the direction of greater Sanskritisation, their language is quite separate and distinct enough from standardised Sanskrit. Words, forms of expression, grammatical features specific to the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit and distinguishing it from the normative classical Sanskrit were stated in the seminal work “Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary” by Franklin Edgerton (EDGERTON 1953), the author of the concept of “hybrid” Sanskrit as a characteristic applied to the language used in a class of Buddhist written monuments.

² *Suvarṇabhāṣottamasūtra* 2015: 249–250.

teaching and served as the source text on which the Sogdian, Old Uyghur, Tangut, etc. translations were based.

In its most complete condition, the Sanskrit text of *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra* is preserved not in Serindian written monuments, but in much later Nepalese manuscripts. For this reason, scientific studies of the Sanskrit *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra* were based primarily on the material of the Nepalese manuscript tradition. Two known Sanskrit manuscripts from Nepal attest to a relatively early stage in this tradition: the earliest, partially preserved palm-leaf manuscript held at the University of Cambridge dates from the 11th c. (so-called manuscript G), and the later one, the complete 1581 paper manuscript (manuscript J) kept in the Tōyō Bunkō Oriental Library.³ Manuscripts G and J are both probably descended from a common ancestor and represent an archaic stage of the text, frequently preserving readings found in the Central Asian Sanskrit manuscripts.⁴ By comparison with the bulk of later (late 17th — early 20th cc.) Nepalese manuscripts held in various collections, these two (mss. G and J) show a closer affinity to the more than 80 Central Asian Sanskrit fragments in Brāhmī, which roughly date from the second half of the 1st millennium AD.⁵

Manuscript G formed the basis of the most authoritative edition of the Sanskrit text of *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra* prepared by the German scholar J. Nobel in 1937.⁶ Two editions which were made prior to the publication of J. Nobel (the very first Indian edition of Ś.C. Dās and Ś.C. Śāstrī with only first fascicle being published in 1898 and Japanese edition prepared by B. Nanjio and published by H. Izumi in 1931) along with the edition by S. Bagchi (1967) were to some extent incomplete or less successful, so the researchers of the *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra* mainly focus their studies on the work of J. Nobel. However, the Nobel edition is not ultimately comprehensive either, because for obvious reasons, namely, due to lack of research of the Central Asian manuscripts at that time, J. Nobel could not take into account a bulk of Sanskrit fragments written in Brāhmī. In this context, special attention should be paid to the edition prepared by the Norwegian scholar P.O. Skjærvø.⁷ Relying on Nobel's work P.O. Skjærvø's edition is based on a much larger number of texts than that of J. Nobel, namely,

³ *Suvarṇabhāṣottamasūtra* 2015: 249.

⁴ SKJÆRVØ 2004: xxxvi.

⁵ *Suvarṇabhāṣottamasūtra* 2015: 249.

⁶ See: NOBEL 1937.

⁷ See: SKJÆRVØ 2004.

numerous Central Asian fragments and not only in Sanskrit, but also in Khotanese Saka. This language was spread in the Southern oases of the Tarim Basin, especially in Khotan — a major Serindian center of Mahāyāna, where many manuscripts of the Serindia Collection were discovered.

Unlike the manuscripts from Nepal preserved in a relatively complete form, Central Asian manuscripts of *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra* in Brāhmī script reached us fragmentarily, being scattered among various depositories of the world. In total, over 80 fragments are known now, most of them are stored in the British Library in London (more than 50 items).⁸ Eight fragments have been registered so far in the Sanskrit part of the Serindia Collection. They are stored in four subcollections named after those scholars and diplomats who contributed to the formation of the St. Petersburg's collection of Serindian written monuments: three items are kept in the Petrovsky Collection (SI 1895; SI 3034/1; SI 3045); the other three items in the Lavrov Collection (SI 3329–1, 2, 3); one item in the Malov Collection (SI 4524); and one item in the Oldenburg Collection (SI 4646). The fragments from the Lavrov Collection were published by E.N. Tyomkin.⁹ Two fragments under the call numbers SI 3045 and SI 4646, that appeared to contain excerpts from *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra*, have recently been identified by myself. At the same time, work on checking manuscripts of the Serindia Collection continues, and it is possible that some other fragments containing passages from *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra* will be found in the near future.

Description of the fragments SI 3045 and SI 4646

As has been established, two fragments kept in the Petrovsky and Oldenburg Collections respectively contain excerpts from *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra*. Moreover, judging by a similar set of codicological and paleographic characteristics, both fragments could be parts of a single Sanskrit manuscript of *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra* or at least could be copied in the same scriptorium. This is indicated by the similar number of lines and distance between them, by the features of paper material, by the same type of

⁸ Apart from a larger number of Central Asian manuscripts preserved in the British Library some fragments of the Sanskrit *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra* are kept in the following places in the world: Lüshun Museum, Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Ryukoku University, Helsinki University Library (SKJÆRVØ 2004: xxxiii–xxxv).

⁹ See: TYOMKIN 1995.

Brāhmī script (Early Turkestan Brāhmī (type 2), ca. 5–6th cc. AD)¹⁰ and ductus of writing (proved by the similar size and forms of akṣaras).

Fragment SI 3045 (Pl. 1, 2) measures 11.7×12.7 cm and represents the right edge of the pothi folio (right margin preserved: 0.7 cm). The text is put down in black ink on light brown paper, the fragment contains 10 lines on each side with the same line spacing (1.1 cm).

Fragment SI 4646 (Pl. 3, 4) 11.7×12.4 cm in size belongs to the left edge of the pothi folio, which is indicated by the decorative circle (diameter: 3 cm) marking a binding hole that is always put in the manuscripts of pothi type closer to the left side of the folio. As in the previous fragment, the text is written on light brown paper with 10 lines on both sides, the distance between the lines is 1.1 cm.

It is important to note one additional point, which proves the assumption that both fragments could belong to one and the same manuscript of *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra*. The following detail is of particular codicological interest: a gluing strip has been preserved on both fragments. Apparently, in order to make pothi folios of large size, they were glued together from several parts, which is confirmed by the presence of gluing lines. Most likely, folios of required size were first prepared by gluing, and after that the text was copied. Perhaps, after a while the glue dried up and parts of the folios separated from each other. In our two fragments, the gluing line is observed along the left edge of SI 3045 and in the case of SI 4646 this line can be seen on the right edge. In the course of work with the Sanskrit part of the Serindia Collection, similar cases were found, including relatively complete glued folios with gluing strips preserved in central parts of such manuscripts (strips are visible when folios are held up to a light). Although the Serindia Collection has rather few examples, but analyzing these samples, it can be assumed that this gluing procedure could be common for voluminous manuscripts with a large amount of text (for example, the folios containing *Prajñāpāramitā* texts in the Serindia Collection under the call numbers SI 2017 and SI 2019). Perhaps, this phenomenon was typical at a certain stage in the development of Serindian manuscript culture, and the production of large folios by gluing several parts was a necessary measure associated with the still insufficiently developed technology of producing paper material or with its shortage. At the same time, manuscripts of a later period (8–9th cc.) are written on completely preserved pothi folios of large

¹⁰ SANDER 2005: 135.

size without any glue. Taking into account this codicological detail in conjunction with the other abovementioned external features, the fragments SI 3045 and SI 4646 are not only similar to each other but could also belong to the same manuscript as the fragments published by E.N. Tyomkin. Although these fragments are not connected with each other directly and represent different parts and chapters of text, most likely they once composed a single copy of the Sanskrit *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra*.

As already mentioned, the fragments SI 3045 and SI 4646 belong to different subcollections of the Serindia Collection, which suggests different circumstances and sources of obtaining these written monuments. According to the inventory of the collections of Sanskrit manuscripts of the IOM, RAS,¹¹ the fragment SI 4646 was brought to St. Petersburg along with the materials discovered during the S.F. Oldenburg's First Russian Turkestan Expedition (1909–1910) in the caves of Kyzyl-Karga. Of particular significance is the fact that the fragment SI 4646 was written in Early Turkestan Brāhmī (type 2), which was used for recording texts in the Southern oases of Serindia. But this fragment somehow came along with the materials found in Kyzyl-Karga located near the Northern oasis of Kucha, where other types of Brāhmī script were in use.¹² During the First Russian Turkestan Expedition S.F. Oldenburg visited the Northern oases of Serindia, and the Northern types of Brāhmī prevail in the Sanskrit manuscripts of the Oldenburg collection. In this regard, the manuscript SI 4646 presents a rare exception as its text is copied in the type of script which is typical for the Southern oases. From the report of S.F. Oldenburg¹³ it is known that during the expedition he not only excavated, but also acquired manuscripts from local residents. It is impossible to say exactly how our fragment was found and ended up among the materials collected in Kyzyl-Karga. Most likely it was bought from locals or presented to S.F. Oldenburg during his expedition, but by its origin this manuscript belongs to the Southern oases of Serindia. This assumption is supported not only by the type of script, but also by the contents of the text. Mahāyāna sūtras including the Sanskrit manuscripts of the *Suvarṇabhā-*

¹¹ See: Spisok kollektsii Kokhanovskogo, Lavrova, Ol'denburga, Kolokolova, Berezovskogo, Klements, Kozlova (rukopisi Tsentral'noaziatskogo fonda na sanskrite) [List of the collections of Kohanovsky, Lavrov, Oldenburg, Kolokolov, Berezovsky, Clements, Kozlov (Sanskrit manuscripts of the Central Asian Collection)]. The Archives of the Department of Manuscripts and Documents of the IOM, RAS. Access number — Arch. 60. Inventory 1929.

¹² On Northern and Southern branches of Turkestan Brāhmī script see: SANDER 2005: 135.

¹³ See: OLDENBURG 1914.

sottama-sūtra were intensively copied in the Southern Serindia, especially in Khotan, where the Mahāyāna was the dominating tradition, in contrast to the Northern oases, where the Hīnayāna predominated. Thus, even though the fragment SI 4646 was brought to St. Petersburg from the Northern Serindia, it is quite permissible to assume, judging by its script and contents, that this manuscript originates from the Southern oases.

The fragment SI 3045 belongs to the Petrovsky subcollection, which was accumulated through acquisitions of manuscripts in Khotan and Kashgar. It is noteworthy that being the Russian Consul General in Kashgar N.F. Petrovsky (1837–1908) played a significant role in collecting Sanskrit written monuments of Buddhism from the Southern oases of the Tarim Basin. N.F. Petrovsky acquired manuscripts through agents from among local treasure hunters and merchants, who obtained them mainly near Khotan, particularly, in the ancient Buddhist site at Khādalik. A bulk of Sanskrit manuscripts of the Serindia Collection had been found there and, presumably, our fragment SI 3045 was also discovered in Khotan.

When the fragments SI 3045 and SI 4646 were compared with the corresponding text of the well-known Nobel edition, it became clear that our fragments do not differ very noticeably from the published text, they show many similarities, and even verbatim coincidence in some places. Central Asian fragments have some differences from Sanskrit Nepalese texts mainly due to discrepancies between the standard Sanskrit of the Nepalese manuscripts and the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit of the Serindian manuscripts. These differences, however, did not hinder identification of our fragments with certain passages from the chapters of *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra* and reconstruction of the approximate appearance of the entire pothi folios to which the fragments belonged. Based on overlaps with the text most fully presented in the edition of J. Nobel, I was able to determine the approximate number of missing akṣaras on the lines of our fragments and to estimate the probable length of lines of complete folios. As a result, the average number of akṣaras per line was defined and, in both cases, almost similar figures were obtained (from 50 to 60 akṣaras per line). Considering the number of akṣaras per line, I managed to calculate the size of the entire folio: the average number and size of akṣaras along with the size of margins make it clear that the dimensions of the folios were originally roughly 11.7×40 cm.

Contents of the fragments

Upon comparing the text of our fragments with the Nobel edition, it became clear that the fragment SI 3045 follows the Nobel's text on pages 78–81, and the fragment SI 4646 corresponds to pages 209–215. Thus, our fragments contain text from two different chapters of *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra*, namely, from the sixth chapter “*Caturmahārāja-parivarta*” (“The Four Great Kings”) and the eighteenth chapter “*Vyāghrī-parivarta*” (“The Tigress”).

Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra has a wide appeal due to a variety of useful teachings and richness of its contents. Probably it is the diversity of contents that makes this sūtra so popular. The sūtra's text covers such topics as basic tenets of Buddhist philosophical doctrines (*śūnyatā* “emptiness”, *pratītyasamutpāda* “the chain of causes and effects” etc.), the confession of sins (*uposatha*), considered as the core around which the sūtra was constructed, the praise of Buddhas, instructions for kings, stories about the early rebirths of Buddha Śākyamuni (*jātakas*) etc. *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra* emphasizes tremendous benefits that derive from hearing, upholding, honoring this sūtra and protecting the sūtra's preacher. In this regard, in our fragment SI 3045 of the sixth chapter “*Caturmahārāja-parivarta*” the Four Great Kings (*Vaiśravaṇa*, *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*, *Virūdhaka*, *Virūpākṣa*)¹⁴ have a dialogue with the Buddha, talking about reverence to the sūtra and its preaching in relation to the world's welfare, and explaining the benefits for a human king and his kingdom accrued from honoring *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra* and the preacher of the Law.

Being connected with everyday life, the *jātaka* stories attracted listeners and made preaching much easier. *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra* comprises several such stories. Our second fragment SI 4646 presents an excerpt from the 18th chapter “*Vyāghrī-parivarta*”, which contains the well-known *jātaka* tale of the tigress. The story is about the Buddha's past life as prince *Mahāsattva*, the youngest of three princes. The story exemplifies the great compassion and self-sacrifice that are required of would-be bodhisattvas. According to the plot, in order to feed a hungry tigress and prevent her from eating her own cubs, prince *Mahāsattva* sacrificed his own body.

¹⁴ These four eminent Guardian Kings are celestial guardians, protecting the four cardinal points of the world (*lokapāla*).

Conclusion

Publication of Serindian Sanskrit manuscripts seems to be exceedingly important, since investigation of Sanskrit Buddhist texts can reveal new facts that will advance the study of the history of Buddhism and the cultural processes that took place in Ancient and Early Medieval India and Central Asia. As already noted, Serindian Sanskrit written monuments are valuable sources for studying the history of Buddhism in general and the tradition of Indian Mahāyāna in particular. Sanskrit manuscripts containing Mahāyāna sūtras are particularly important for advancing research on the period of time when Mahāyāna went beyond the boundaries of India and extended its influence to Central Asian countries. Scattered all over the world, Central Asian Sanskrit manuscripts of Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra contribute substantially to the study of the history of composition and functioning of the text of this sūtra. And in this article we add two new fragments presumably belonging to a single copy. Each new fragment deserves special attention, primarily because there are no complete extant Central Asian manuscripts of the Sanskrit Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra. In such circumstances, the fragments SI 3045 and SI 4646 are undoubtedly exceptionally unique materials for solving the problems related to the source studies of the Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra.

Transliteration of the fragments, English translation, comparison with the corresponding text from the Nobel edition and facsimile are provided below.

Transliteration, correspondences, and English translation

Symbols used in the transliteration:

()	restored akṣara(s)
[]	akṣara(s) with uncertain reading(s)
+	one lost akṣara
..	one illegible akṣara
.	illegible part of an akṣara
///	beginning or end of a fragment when damaged
	daṇḍa – punctuation mark
	double daṇḍa — punctuation mark
*	virāma
‘	avagraha
:	visarga used as punctuation
○	decorative circle

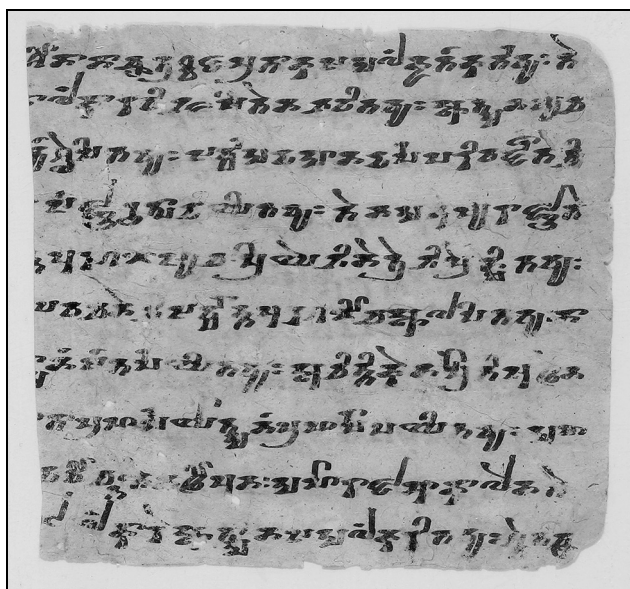
SI 3045 (Nobel 1937: 78.3–79.13, 79.14–81.2)

Recto

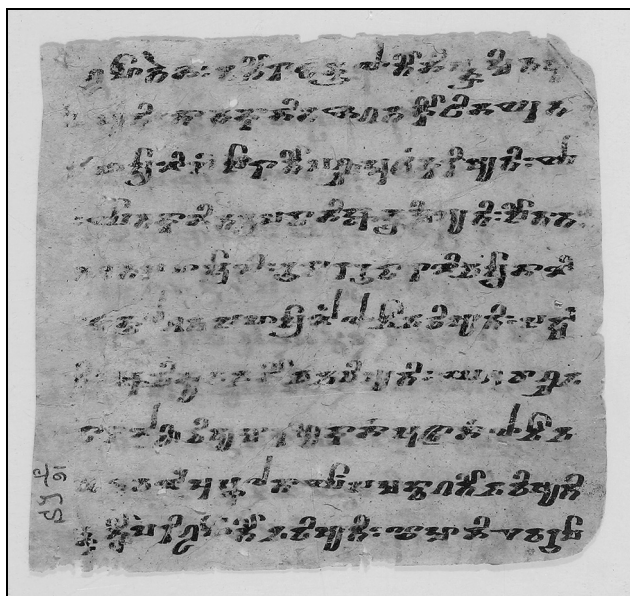
1. /// śo nānācchatradhvajapatāka samalaṃkṛtaṃ kartavyaḥ te-
2. /// (n)ālaṃkāravibhūṣitena bhavitavyaḥ ātmanasya ca
3. /// [r]yaṃ śleṣitavyaḥ sarvvamadamānadarpaparivarjite ci-
4. /// saṃjñā utpādayitavyaḥ tena manuṣyarājñā ta-
5. /// [t]a puragaṇasya ca priyebhi netrebhi prekṣitavyāḥ
6. /// [ya]vacane[bhi] sarvvāntapuragaṇo ca ālapitavyaḥ nā-
7. /// (t)[mā]naṃ saṃtarpayitavyaḥ acintikena prītisukhena
8. /// ..tā praharṣayātmanam praharṣāpayitavyaḥ maha-
9. /// d avocat* t[e][na] kho p(u)naḥ mahārājāhu kālena te
10. /// [ṇ]ālaṃkāre ātmāna samalaṃkaritavyaḥ [ś][v]etaccha-

Nobel 1937, 78.3–79.13:¹⁵ sa pradeśo **nānācchatradhvajapatākaiḥ samalaṃkartavyaḥ** | tena ca manuṣyarājñā susnātagātreṇa bhavitavyam sugandhavasanaadhāriṇā navaruciravastraprāvṛtena nānā**ālaṃkāravibhūṣitena bhavitavyam** | **ātmanaś ca** nīcataram āsanam prajñāpayitavyam | tatrāsane niṣīditvā rājyamadamattena na bhavitavyam | tatra rājyaīśvaryaṛāgeṇa na bhavitavyam | **sarvamānamadadarpavivarjitena cittenāyam** suvarṇabhāṣottamaḥ sūtreṇdrarājāḥ śrotavyaḥ | tasya ca dharmabhāṇakasya bhikṣor antike śāstr**saṃjñā utpādayitavyā** | **tena manuṣyarājñā** tasmin kāle tasmin samaye agramahiṣī rājaputrāś ca rājaduhitaraś ca sarvāntaḥ**puragaṇāś ca priyahitābhyām prekṣitavyāḥ** | priyavacanaiś cāgramahiṣī rājaputrāś ca rājaduhitaraś cālāpayitavyāḥ | **priyavacanaiś ca sarvāntaḥpuragaṇā ālāpayitavyāḥ** | **nānāvicitraś ca** dharmāśravaṇapūjā ājñāpayitavyāḥ | acintyayā atulyayā prītyā**tmānaṃ saṃtarpayitavyam** | **acintyena prītisukhena** sukhāpayitavyam | sukhendriyeṇa ca bhavitavyam | ātmanaś ca mahābalena bhavitavyam | mahatā **praharṣeṇātmā praharṣayitavyaḥ** | mahatā premajātena dharmabhāṇakaḥ pratyutthātavyaḥ || evam ukte bhagavāṃś caturo mahārājña etad **avocat** || tasmimś ca khalu **punaḥ mahārājānaḥ kāle** tasmin samaye tena manuṣyarājñā sarvaśvetāni paṇḍarāṇi navaruciravastrāṇi prāvaritavyāni nānāvibhūṣaṇā**laṃkāraiḥ ātmā samalaṃkartavyaḥ** | śvetacchatrāṇi pariṅhītavyāni |

¹⁵ Hereinafter the text in bold letters shows the correspondences of the text from the Nobel edition to our fragments.



Pl. 1: A fragment of *Suvarṇabhāsottama-sūtra* from the Serindia Collection, Petrovsky Sub-Collection. The Institute of Oriental Manuscripts RAS. SI 3045 *recto*



Pl. 2: A fragment of *Suvarṇabhāsottama-sūtra* from the Serindia Collection, Petrovsky Sub-Collection. The Institute of Oriental Manuscripts RAS. SI 3045 *verso*

Translation

“...That place should be adorned with various umbrellas, banners and flags. That king of men should have his body well-bathed, should wear perfumed garments, should put on new, brilliant clothes, and should be adorned with various ornaments. A lower seat should be prepared for him. When sitting on that seat, he must not be drunk with the sovereign power. There he should not be lusting for royal supremacy. With a mind removed from all arrogance, lust, haughtiness he should listen to this Suvarṇabhā-sottama, king of kings of sūtras. He should produce the notion of that preacher of the Law as his teacher. At that time, at that moment the king of men should look with his eyes full of pleasance and kindness at the queen, the princes and princesses, and the entire harem. With loving speech he should speak to his queen, the princes and princesses, and the entire harem. For listening to the Law he should order honors to be done. He should satisfy himself with inconceivable, unequalled contentment, should please himself with unimaginable love and happiness. He should possess happy senses and great power. He should rejoice himself with great joy. With great kindness he should stand up before the preacher of the Law.” When this had been spoken, Bhagavan said to the great kings: “Oh, great kings, furthermore, at that time, at that moment that king of men should be dressed in fully white-colored, new, brilliant clothes, should be adorned with many kinds of ornaments, should take white umbrellas...”

Verso

1. /// grhītena tato rājakulāto niṣkramitavya
2. /// [ṣya]ti tāvakāni tathāgatakoṭīnayuta-
3. /// (sa)hasrāṇi saṃsārāto paścāmukhaṃ kariṣyati : yā-
4. /// ..yātakāni ta[tra] padāni ākkramaṣyati : so tāta-
5. /// [ta](śa)[ta][sa][ha]srāṇi : udāra udārāni ca sthānāṇi
6. /// (rā)[ja]kulaśatasahasrāṇāṃ lābhī bhaviṣyati : sarvva-
7. /// .. āci.. vacano ca bhaviṣyati : yaśavāścā-
8. /// [d]ā[rā][ṇ]āñca divyamānuṣyakānāṃ sukhānāṃ lābhī bha-
9. /// [śu][bha]varṇapuṣkalatāyāṃ samanvāgato bhaviṣyati
10. /// [s]kandho parigrhīto bhaviṣyati : imāni eva rūpā-

Nobel 1937, 79.14–81.2: mahatā rājānubhāvena mahatyā rājavyūhayā nānāvicitramaṅgalaparigṛhītais **tato rājakulād abhiniṣkramitavyam** | tasya dharmabhāṇakasya bhikṣoḥ pratyudgamanāya gantavyam | tat kasya hetoḥ | yāvanti manuṣyarājā tatra padāny atikramiṣyati | tāvanti kalpakoṭīniyutaśatasahasrāṇi **samsārāt** parān**mukhāni** bhaviṣyati | tāvatām cakravartirājakulakoṭīniyutaśatasahasrāṇām lābhī bhaviṣyati | yāvanti sa **tatra padāny atikramiṣyati** tāvatām caiva dṛṣṭadhārmikāṇām acintyena mahatā rājayaiśvaryeṇa vivardhayiṣyate | anekāni kalpakoṭīniyutaśatasahasrāṇi **udārodārāṇām cāvasthānānām** saptaratnamayānām divyavimānānām lābhī bhaviṣyati | anekeṣām ca divyodārāṇām mānuṣyakāṇām **rājaputraśatasahasrāṇām**¹⁶ **lābhī bhaviṣyati** | sarvatra ca jātiṣu mahaiśvaryam prāptam bhaviṣyati | dīrghāyuskaś ca bhaviṣyati | cirajīvī ca bhaviṣyati | pratibhāṇavāms ca bhaviṣyati | ādeyavacanaś **ca bhaviṣyati** | yaśasvī ca bhaviṣyati | suviśālakīrtiś ca bhaviṣyati | praśamsanīyaś ca bhaviṣyati | sadevamānuṣāsurasya lokasya suhitaś ca bhaviṣyati | **udārodārāṇām ca divyamānuṣyakāṇām sukhānām lābhī bhaviṣyati** | mahābalaś ca bhaviṣyati | mahāvargabalavegadhārī abhirūpaś ca bhaviṣyati | prāsādiko darśanīyaś ca bhaviṣyati | paramayā **śubhavarṇapuṣkalatayā samanvāgato bhaviṣyati** | sarvatra ca jātiṣu tathāgatasamavadhānagato bhaviṣyati | sarvakalyāṇamitrāṇi ca pratilapsyate | aparimitaś ca **puṇyaskandhaḥ parigṛhīto bhaviṣyati** | **imāny evaṃ rūpāni** mahārājaguṇānuśamsāni sampaśyamānena tena rājñā dharmabhāṇako yojanāt pratyutthātavyaḥ |

Translation

With great royal dignity and great royal appearance, having taken various auspicious items he should depart from that royal palace and approach the preacher of the Law. Why should he act this way? How many steps that king of men walks there, that great a number of hundred thousands of millions of Tathāgatas he propitiates.¹⁷ That great a number of hundred thousands of millions of eons he will avoid the cycle of existence. That great a number of

¹⁶ Read *rājakula-* for *rājaputra-* (NOBEL 1937: 80; SKJÆRVØ 2004: 122).

¹⁷ This sentence is missing in the Nobel's text, but it is partially preserved in the third line of our fragment SI 3045 and is restored for translation according to P.O. Skjærvø's edition: *yāvanti manuṣyarājā tatra padāny atikramiṣyati tāvanti buddhakalpakoṭīniyutaśatasahasrāṇi ārāgayiṣyati* (SKJÆRVØ 2004: 122).

hundred thousands of millions of royal palaces of Cakravartin he will obtain. How many steps he goes, over that great a number of rulers he will increase in inconceivable royal power. And for numerous hundred thousands of millions of eons he will obtain exalted residences, and aerial cars made of the seven jewels. He will obtain numerous hundred thousands of exalted divine and human palaces. In all his births he will acquire great royal power. He will be long-lived. His life will be long. He will possess eloquence, his speech will be agreeable. He will be famous, his fame will be widespread everywhere. He will be praiseworthy. He will be blessed in the world of gods, men, and demons. He will get the highest blessings of gods and men. He will possess great powers. He will be handsome and will hold the strength and power of great crowds. He will be kind and good-looking. He will be endowed with supreme, fully splendid appearance. In all his births he will meet with Tathāgatas. He will obtain all good counsellors. He will obtain an unmeasurable heap of merit. Because of seeing these, such great royal virtues and privileges, that king should pass a whole *yojana*¹⁸ to meet that preacher of the Law.

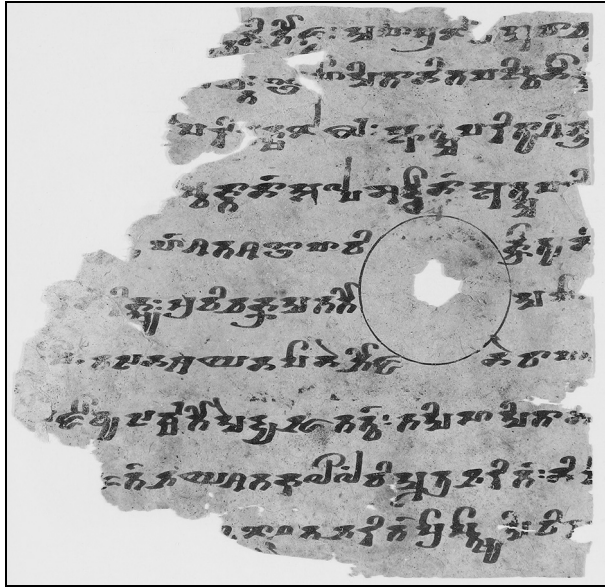
SI 4646 (Nobel 1937, 209.2–212.2; 212.3–215.7)

Recto

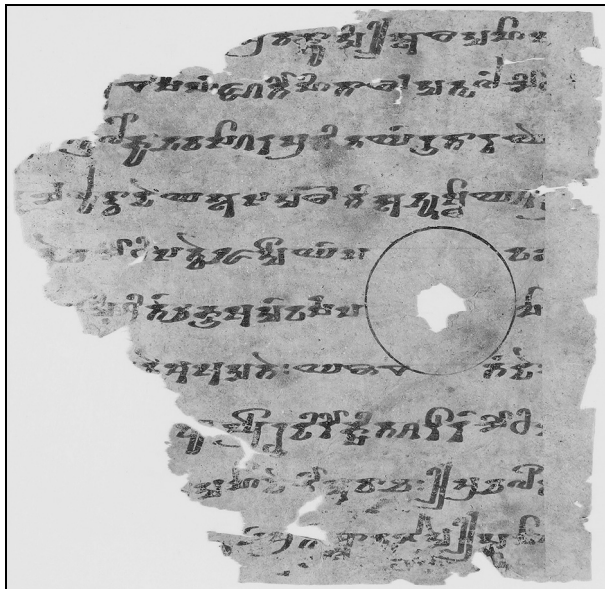
1. /// (s)v(i)ni bhoja : mahāpraṇ[ā]d[o]-m¹⁹-uvāca .. ///
2. /// ..c(a)t* ih[ai]ṣā tāni tapasvīnī [kṣ] ///
3. /// pari[r]akṣaṇārtha : ātmaparityāgaṃ ku ///
4. /// śvaktānām alpabuddhīnām atmapari ///
5. /// ..haṃ śataśa iha vi○kkṛīya[n].. ///
6. /// [nu][ni]rikṣya : pravacakkrama tato ○ ma[h]ā ///
7. /// ..[ṣī] : vasanaśayanapāne bhoja○ne vāha ///
8. /// ..[pa]jīvyā sarvvato medya bhūtatvaṃ : tam iha-m itā[n]+ ///
9. /// (bh)[ū]taṃ bhayaśatakalilaṃ vimūtrabhāritaṃ : ni.. ///
10. /// [gu]ṇaśatabharitaṃ prāpsyāmi vi[r]+ ///

¹⁸ *Yojana* is a distance which is regarded according to some calculations to be equal to 4–5 miles; based on other calculations it is equal to 2 miles or even to 9 miles (MONIER-WILLIAMS 1899: 858).

¹⁹ In Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit such use of consonants inserted between separate words (commonly -m-; -r-; more rarely -d-; -n-; -y-) Edgerton defines as ‘inorganic’ sandhi-consonants or ‘Hiatus-bridgers’ (EDGERTON 1953: 35).



Pl. 3: A fragment of Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra from the Serindia Collection, Oldenburg Sub-Collection. The Institute of Oriental Manuscripts RAS. SI 4646 *recto*



Pl. 4: A fragment of Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra from the Serindia Collection, Oldenburg Sub-Collection. The Institute of Oriental Manuscripts RAS. SI 4646 *verso*

Nobel 1937, 209.2–212.2: kim asyās tapasvinyā bhojanam | mahāpraṇāda uvāca | māmsāny uṣṇāni rudhiram ca saṃtaptam bhaved yad iha etad bhojanam uktam vyāghrainatarkṣurkṣagrdhrasimhānām | mahādeva uvāca | **ihaiśa tapasvīnī kṣuttarṣaparigataśarīrā alpaprāṇāvaśeṣā paramadurbalā** na śakyam anayā sthāne bhojanam anveṣṭum | ko ‘syāḥ prāṇaparirakṣaṇārtham ātmaparityāgaṃ kuryād iti | mahāpraṇāda uvāca | bho duṣkara ātmaparityāgaḥ | mahāsattva uvāca | asmadvidhānām duṣkaro jīvitaśarīrābhiṣvaktānām **alpabuddhīnām** eṣa nayaḥ | anyeṣāṃ punar ātmaparityāgābhirūdhānām parahitābhiyuktānām satpuruṣāṇām na duṣkaraḥ | api ca || kṛpākaruṇasamudgatāryasattvā divi bhuvi ceha ca labhyante svadeham | **śataśa iha** karonti nirvikāram muditamanāḥ parajīvitārtham || 5 || atha te rājakumārāḥ paramasaṃvignās tām vyāghrīm ciram animiṣam **anunirīkṣya pracakramuḥ** | **tato mahāsattvasy**aitad abhūt | ayam idānīm kāla ātmaparityāgasya | kutaḥ || suciram api dhṛto ‘yaṃ pūṭikāyo mahārhaiḥ **śayanavasānpānair bhojanair vāhanaiś ca** | śatanapatanadharmo bhedanānto duranto na vijahati apūrvaṃ svaṃ svabhāvaṃ kṛtaghnaḥ || 6 || api ca || nāstī tasyopajīvyam **sarvato mīḍhabhūt**atvāt | **tam aham** idānīm satkarmaṇi saṃniyokṣye | tan me janmamaraṇasamudrottaraṇapotabhūto bhaviṣyati || api ca || tyaktvāham gaṇḍabhūtaṃ **bhavaśatakalitaṃ vidmūtrabharitaṃ niḥsāraṃ** phenakalpaṃ kṛmiśatabharitaṃ kāyam kṛtanudam | niḥśokaṃ nirvikāram nirupadhim amalaṃ dhyānādibhi guṇaiḥ sampūrṇaṃ dharmakāyam **guṇaśatabharitaṃ prāpsyāmi virajam** || 7 || sa khalv evaṃ kṛtavavyavasāyaḥ paramakaruṇāparigatahṛdayaḥ taylor vikṣepaṃ cakāra |

Translation

“What kind of food would be suitable for this poor creature?” Mahāpraṇāda replied: “It is said that fresh meat and hot blood are the food of tigers, hyenas, bears, vultures and lions.” Mahādeva said: “The body of this wretch is afflicted with hunger and thirst, and life is barely glimmering in her. She is too weak and cannot search for food. Who would dare to give his life to save her?” Mahāpraṇāda said: “Self-sacrifice is a difficult thing.” Mahāsattva said: “For people like us, weak-minded and attached to life and body, such an act is difficult. But that is not difficult for noble men immersed in self-sacrifice, devoted to the welfare of others. Moreover, moved by pity and compassion, noble beings attain their bodies in heaven

and on earth, and their joyful minds work hundredfold and unwaveringly for the benefit of life of others.” The depressed princes gave the tigress a long look without blinking and walked away. But then Mahāsattva thought: “Now is the time to sacrifice myself. Why? Although I maintained this impure body for a long time with expensive food, luxurious clothes, beds and chariots, finally being bound to collapse, decay, splitting and evil end, this ungrateful body never gives up its nature. This body is of no use, it is covered with impurities, and now I will sacrifice it to a good cause. It will serve me as a boat for crossing the ocean of birth and death. Moreover, by sacrificing this body, which is like an abscess, abounding with a hundred existences, filled with urine and feces, like foam containing no essence, teemed with hundreds of worms, consuming its acts, I will obtain a sorrowless, changeless, incorrupt, flawless, fully endowed with meditation and hundreds of other good qualities pure body of the Law.” Then having made a mental resolve and with the great compassion spread in his heart he asked his brothers to leave him...

Verso

1. /// [p]ravekṣyāmī || atha mahā[s](a) ///
2. /// (l)[] eṣo ‘haṃ jagato hitārtham atulāṃ bo.. ///
3. /// tr(ai)lokyabhavasāgarapratibhayāṃ utāraye ///
4. /// .[o] durbalyad vādeya asamartheti abhyūsthāya śa(st)[r] ///
5. /// [t](r)[e] ca bodhisatve bhūmīyaṃ pa○va[n] ///
6. /// ..miśritaṃ ca kusumaṃ varṣa pa○pā ///
7. /// [t](v)eṣu sumate : yathā e○taṃ de.. ///
8. /// vy[ā]ghrī rudi-rokṣitaśarīraṃ bodhi.. ///
9. /// mahādevo-m-uvāca : || pracali.. ///
10. /// .. [s]aṃpra[t](aṃ) bhrā[tṛ][n]ā me || mahā ///

Nobel 1937, 212.2–215.11: gacchatāṃ bhavantau svakāryeṇāhaṃ dvādaśavanagulmaṃ **pravekṣyāmi** || **atha mahāsattvo** rājakumāras tasmād upavanāt pratinivṛtya vyāghryā ālayam upagamyā vanalatāyāṃ prāvaraṇam utsrjya praṇidhānaṃ cakāra || **eṣo ‘haṃ jagato hitārtham atulāṃ bodhim** bubhutsuḥ śivāṃ kāruṇyāt pradadāmi niścalamatir dehaṃ parair dustyajam | labhye bodhim anāmayaṃ jinasutair abhyarcitāṃ nirjvarāṃ **trailokyam bhavasāgarāt pratibhayād uttārayeyam** aham || 8 || iti || atha vyāghryā abhimukhaṃ mahāsāttvaḥ prapatitaḥ | tato vyāghrī maitrīvato bodhisattvasya na kiṃcic cakre | tato bodhisattvo **durbalā vateyam asamarthety utthāya**

śastraṃ paryeṣate | kṛpāmatir na kvacic chastram alabhat | so ‘tibalāṃ
varṣasatikāṃ vaṃśalatāṃ grhītvā tayā svagalam utkrītya vyāghrīsamīpe
papāta | prapatitamātre **ca bodhisattve bhūmir iyaṃ pavanavihateva** nauḥ
salilamadhye gatā ṣaḍvikāraṃ pracacāla | rāhugrasta iva divākaraḥ kiraṇair
na vibhrājate | divyagandhacūrṇasaṃmiśritaś **ca kusumavarṣaḥ papāta** ||
athānyatarā vismayāvarjitamānasā devatā bodhisattvaṃ tuṣṭāva ||

yathā kāruṇyaṃ te viśṛtam iha **sattveṣu sumate yathā** vai tad **dehaṃ** tyajasi
naravīra pramuditāḥ | śivaṃ śreṣṭhaṃ sthānaṃ jananamaraṇārthair virahitaṃ
nirāyāsaḥ śāntas tvam iha nacirāt prāpsyasi śubham || 9 || atha khalu sā
vyāghrī rudhiramrakṣitaśarīraṃ bodhisattvaṃ avekṣya muhūrtamātreṇa
nirmāṃsarudhiram aśthyavaśeṣaṃ cakāra || atha mahāpraṇādas taṃ
bhūmikampam anuśīmya **mahādevam** idam avocat || **pracalati** sasamudrā
sāgarāntā yatheyam

vasumati daśadikṣu luptaraśmīś **ca sūryaḥ** | patati kusumavarṣaṃ vyākulaṃ
vā mano me

svatanur iha viśṛtaḥ **sāmprataṃ bhrātṛṇā me** || 10 || **mahādeva** uvāca |
yathā **ca** sa karuṇavaco hy avocata samīkṣya tām svatanayabhakṣaṇodyatām |
kṣudhānvitām vyasanaśataiḥ pratāpitaṃ sudurbalāṃ matir iha saṃśayālu me
|| 11 ||

Translation

“Go away, you brothers, and I will enter upon my own business in the
Dvadashavanagulma forest.” Then Prince Mahāsattva returned from that part
of the forest and set out for the lair of the tigress, hung his clothes on a forest
creeper and took a vow: “For the benefit of the world desirous of obtaining
the peace of excellent enlightenment, with compassion and unwavering
mind, I offer my body as a sacrifice, so difficult for others to make. May I
obtain enlightenment, free from disease, so revered by the Buddha-sons,
feverless and convey the triple world across the fearful ocean of births.”
Then Mahāsattva lay down before the tigress, but she did nothing to the
compassionate Bodhisattva. Filled with compassion, he considered that the
tigress was too weak and incapacitated, so he got up and sought all around
for a weapon. But mercy-minded could not find any. Then he took a hundred
years old, strong bamboo stick, pierced his throat with it and fell down
before the tigress. As soon as the Bodhisattva had fallen down, the earth like
a boat tossed by winds in the midst of the ocean, shook in six ways. The sun,

as if caught by the demon Rāhu, no longer shone with its rays. Flowers mixed with divine perfumed powders rained down. Then the goddess, with a mind filled with amazement, praised the Bodhisattva: “Oh, noble-minded one, as your compassion here has embraced all living beings, as you gladly sacrifice your body, the best among men, soon trouble-free and peaceful you will obtain the serene, supreme, fair place, free from the meanings of birth and death. Then the tigress saw the bloodied body of the Bodhisattva and immediately swallowed his flesh and blood with only bones left. Mahāprañāda perceived the earthquake and said to Mahādeva: “As the earth with the seas as far as the ocean shook in the ten directions, the sun lost its rays, a rain of flowers has fallen from the sky, my mind is disturbed, my brother has now sacrificed his body here.” Mahādeva said: “With what a compassionate voice he spoke when seeing the tigress ready to devour her own cubs, afflicted with hunger and innumerable troubles. My mind is weak, I have doubt here”.

References

- EDGERTON, Franklin 1953: *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*. Vol. 1–2: New Haven: Yale University Press; London: Cumberlege, Oxford University Press. Vol. 1. Grammar, XXX, 239 p.; vol. 2. Dictionary: 627 p.
- MONIER-WILLIAMS, Monier 1899: *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.
- NOBEL, Johannes 1937: *Suvarṇabhāṣottamasūtra. Das Gold-Glanz Sūtra: ein Sanskrittext des Mahāyāna-Buddhismus*. Nach den Handschriften und mit Hilfe der tibetischen und chinesischen Übertragungen. Leipzig: Harrassowitz.
- OLDENBURG, Serguei F. 1914: *Russkaia Turkestanskaia ekspeditsiia 1909–1910 goda, snariazhennaia po Vysochaishemu povelenniu sostoiashchim pod Vysochaishim Ego Imperatorskogo Velichestva pokrovitel'stvom Russkim Komitetom dlia izucheniia Srednei i Vostochnoi Azii. Kratkii predvaritel'nyi otchet. Sostavil S.F. Ol'denburg. S 53 tablitsami, 1 planom vne teksta i 73 risunkami i planami v tekste. Po fotografiiam i risunkam khudozhnika S.M. Dudina i planam inzhenera D.A. Smirnova* [Russian Turkestan Expedition (1909–1910) organised by the Russian Committee for the Study of Middle and East Asia acting under His Imperial Majesty's Highest patronage according to the Highest Command. Short preliminary report. Compiled by S.F. Ol'denburg. With 53 tables, 1 plan out of the text, and 73 pictures and plans in the text made using the artist S.M. Dudin's photographs and drawings and the engineer D.A. Smirnov's plans]. St. Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences.
- SANDER, Lore 2005: “Remarks on the Formal Brāhmī Script from the Southern Silk Route”. *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 19, New Series, Iranian and Zoroastrian Studies in Honor of Profs Oktor Skjærvø: 133–144.
- SKJÆRVØ, Profs Oktor 2004: *This most excellent shine of gold, king of kings of sutras: the Khotanese Suvarṇabhāṣottamasūtra*. Vol. 1. The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University.
-

Suvarṇabhāṣottamasūtra 2015: *Suvarṇabhāṣottamasūtra*. Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism, Volume One: Literature and Languages. Ed. by Jonathan Silk, Oskar von Hinüber, and Vincent Eltschinger. Leiden: Brill.

TYOMKIN, Eduard N. 1995: "Unique Sanskrit Fragments of the "Sutra of Golden Light" in the manuscript collection of St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences". *Manuscripta Orientalia* 1(1), July: 29–38.
