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Sogdian Letter Fragments in the IOM, RAS

Abstract: Among the Sogdian fragments from Turfan preserved in the IOM collections are a handful of epistolary texts. A new edition of these fragments is presented here as part of the author's ongoing project on Sogdian letters from Turfan.

Key words: Sogdian, epistolary texts, Turfan, Manichaeism

Sogdian letter fragments

An important part of the Sogdian corpora which have come down to us are epistolary texts. Indeed, both the earliest substantial Sogdian documents, the so-called 'Ancient Letters' (dating from around the early 300s CE and found in modern-day western China), and the only substantial corpus found in Sogdiana itself, the Mugh documents (dating from around the 720s CE), consist largely of letters. The Turfan collections around the world also preserve a number of epistolary texts, mostly fragmentary: the long texts from Bezeklik are the most recent substantial Sogdian texts to have been found, while smaller fragments are located in the Berlin Turfan collection, in Japanese collections, and in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, St. Petersburg. Finally, eight epistolary fragments were recently found in Khotan. Altogether, these texts give us a look at Sogdian epistolary traditions over some seven centuries. The edition and analysis of even fragmentary texts can contribute to efforts to reconstruct parts of those traditions — and eventually connect them with those of Central Asia and Iran more broadly.

The fragments of the IOM

The exploration of ruins in the Turfan oasis, and subsequent obtaining of cultural artefacts, was in fact initiated by Russian scholars in the final

decades of the 1800s. Although by the turn of the century state funding for large-scale expeditions was not available, several Russian scholars and diplomats in Central Asia were nevertheless able to obtain manuscripts and objects, often through purchase from local people. Some of the letter fragments forming the subject of this paper seem to have been obtained in such a way: the first three in the table below belong to those fragments collected (probably before 1909) by the Russian council in Urumqi, Nikolai Krotkov. The last two fragments, however, were obtained by Sergei Oldenburg during his 1909–10 expedition in the northern Tarim Basin.¹ It is however not possible to state with more precision the locations from which these fragments may have been obtained.²

Reference number	New shelf number	Old shelf number	Edition	Description	Sogdian text
L44	SI 5387	SI Kr VI/706 No. 3453	Ragoza 1980, 36	26×25.5 cm	18 lines
L27	SI 1432	SI Kr IV/217 No. 2963	Ragoza 1980, 25–6	13.2×12.5 cm	9 lines
L63	SI 5532	SI Kr IV/806 No. 3553	Ragoza 1980, 44–5	7.5×11.2 cm	6 lines
L111	SI 4788	SI O/124 No. 4247	Ragoza 1980, 73	8×7 cm	5 lines
L118	SI 4797	SI O/134 No. 4257	Ragoza 1980, 76	8.5×27 cm	5 lines

The above letter fragments were initially edited by A.N. Ragoza in her *Sogdiiskie fragmenty central'noaziatskogo sobraniia Instituta vostokovedeniia* (“Sogdian fragments in the Central Asian collection of the Institute of Oriental Studies”, RAGOZA 1980), the editio princeps of the Sogdian fragments which were known at the time in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts (IOM). However, Ragoza’s edition contained a number of editorial and linguistic problems, several of which were pointed out by Sims-Williams (1981) in a review. Furthermore, the photographs included in that volume were not of good enough quality to facilitate further work. Thanks to

¹ RAGOZA 1980, 7–8

² For a useful summary of Russian work in Turfan and other oases, along with many references, see Sundermann’s entry in the *Encyclopedia Iranica* (SUNDERMANN 2004). For more details about the Sogdian fragments in particular and how they were obtained, see RAGOZA 1980, 4–11.

the new, high resolution photographs kindly provided to me by the IOM, a completely new edition of these fragments will be presented here, ordered according to the length and importance of their content.

Edition of Fragments³

L44

The most substantial of the letter fragments in the IOM, and perhaps, judging by its format, style of script, and use of numerous epistolary formulae, the only genuine (as opposed to draft) letter. Though it is incomplete and preserves only the, often hyperbolic, formalities which typically appear at the beginning of letters, a good deal of sense can be brought out of the text by comparison with other letter fragments, though unfortunately little in the way of content. It is at least clear that it is a letter from a queen of Ark ('rkc'nch x't'wnh) to a Manichaean 'teacher' (mwck').

- 1 [s](p)'s nk'βty-p'z'n δykh ZY ptškw'nh
- 2 [RBch 'nwt]y cnn wyspn'cyw 'nwtyh msy'tr ZY cnn
- 3 [wyspn'cw ''δy 'yw γ]w'ncykstr xyδ wyn ZY xyδ wyškyr 'xš'nky
ptβ'yšcnw
- 4 []mwck' γwβtk n'm kw
- 5 [](.)ry s'r
- 6 cnn xypδ wyn-nm'n šyr''γδch kštrh
- 7 'rkc'nch x't'wnh ptškw'nh cnn đwr (z'yh)
- 8 [rtβn](w)'n'kh pδkh w'βryδ nm'cyw βr'ym c'nw ZKn zwrny zwrny
- 9 cykt pwt'yšty s'r nm'cyw βr'nt • rtβγ kδ' šm'x trts'r pr
- 10 'sk' prn RB(kw ptβ)yw šyr'kk ZY βγ wrcy' 'skwδ' m'x
- 11 [xypδ γr'ywh nwšch my](n)ym (m'x) ms mδy nwr myδ prm zwk
- 12 ['skwym](.. p)tškw'nh βr'yš'ym p'rZY βγ pr
- 13 [](. 'n)w trts'r ''γtyt m't'ymn
- 14 []y 'xš'nkw'y βyrtδ'rm r'm'nt
- 15 [](.)'skwym yw'r βγ pr m'x w'xš
- 16 []s'r ''(γtym)n ZY [..](δ)[..] 'nt'wxcn''k
- 17 [](k)npy 'krty xw(ty) (m)[](.y)
- 18 *illegible traces*

³ Transliteration convention used are: (xyz) = partially legible letters, [xyz] = completely restored letters, [.] or (.) = one missing or illegible letter.

Translation

(Lines 1–5) [...in(?)] service (and) submissive, a letter and humble request [...(to the) great hope], greater than every hope, the sight (of whom) is more important than [(that of) every (other) person], excellent, reverend [...] Teacher whose name is praised, [So-and-so].

(Lines 6–7) From your well-wishing, humble Queen of Ark, hopeful (of seeing you), a message from far away.

(Lines 8–12) We pay homage to you just as one (pays homage) to the Buddhas of the various periods. If you, Sir, are well and at ease there, Sir, in high fortune and great honor, then we [consider ourselves immortal]. We are well up until the present day [...]

(Lines 12–17) We send a message because, Sir, [...] we had come there [...] excellence, I obtained. Always [...] we remain, but, Sir, the news at us [...] we came to [...] and worry [...] became less itself [...]

Commentary

1 *nk'βty-p'z'n* is a compound meaning ‘submissive’, literally ‘of bent (*nk'βty*) mind (*p'z'n*)’. That the corresponding abstract noun *nk'βtp'znky'* ‘submissiveness’ is a Manichaean technical term referring to the sixth part of the first cardinal virtue *fryt't* ‘love’ could perhaps be taken as another indicator of this document’s Manichaean context.

2–3 *ZY cnn [wyspn'cw ''δy 'yw γ]w'ncykstr xyδ wyn ZY xyδ wyskyr* was paraphrased differently —“seeing you and meeting you face to face is more necessary to me than (every other sight)” — by Sims-Williams (1981, 236), assuming a restoration of something like *[wyspn'cw wyn]*. Sims-Williams noted further that *wyskyr* must be the verbal noun of the verb *wyskyr* ‘to open the eyes’; also compare So 18162/v/5/ *ZKw cšmw wškyrym* ‘we open our eye(s)’ (unpublished fragment, my reading).

5 Sundermann (1992, 80) suggested inserting *[ctβ'r-twγ]ry* into the gap at the beginning of the line. Besides there being no context to motivate the assumption that ‘Four Tughristan’ must be named, a place-name is not required in this part of the address, and as far as I can tell appears in no parallels.

6 The adj. *šyr''γδ'k* (f. *šyr''γδ'ch*). ‘well-wisher’ occurs in other letter fragments, sometimes in combination with *šyrxwzk* ‘friend’ or *šyrδrty / šyr-zyty* (on which see YOSHIDA 2000, 47).

7 *'rkc'nch* f.sg. of the adjective *'rkc'ny a.* 'of (the city) Ark' (*-c'ny* adjectival suffix). An alternative adjectival formation is *'rkeyk* (with *-cyk* suffix).

8–9 The formulation of these lines, as already noticed by Sims-Williams (1981, 235) is strikingly similar to that of a phrase in Ancient Letter 5, as follows:

L44/8–9/ [*rtβn*] (*w*) *'n'kh pδkh w'βryδ nm'cyw βr'ym c'nw ZKn zwrny zwrnycykt pwt'yšty s'r nm'cyw βr'nt*

'According to custom, we pay homage to you just as one pays homage to the Buddhas of various periods'.

AL5/3–4/ *'YKZYβn xwty [wyn'n 'PZY]tn 'c nztw nm'cyw βr'n 'Y[KZY] wyšnw βγ'nw*

'If I might see you myself and might pay homage to you from nearby [as] (homage is paid) to the gods'.⁴

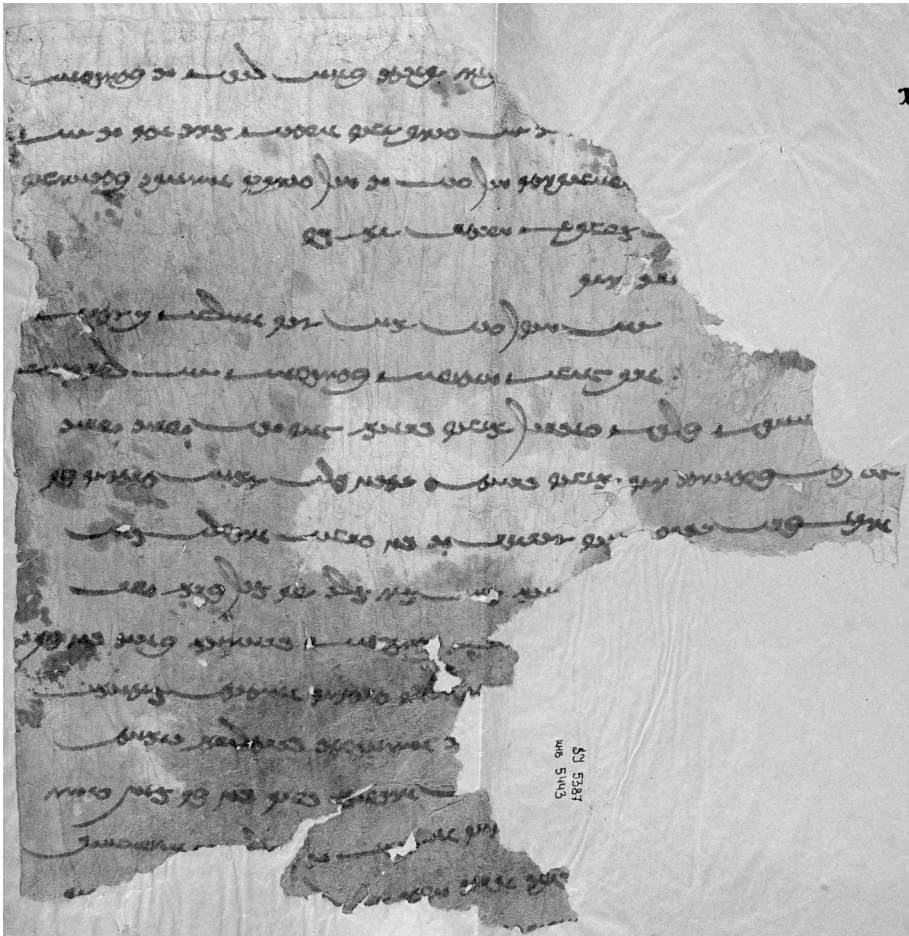
The main difference is that in L44 'Buddhas of various periods' are referred to, instead of the *βγ'nw* 'gods' of the Ancient Letter. Further references to these 'Buddhas of various periods' include M 134ii/v/8–9 *zwrnyy zwr[nyy p]wtyšt' 'γtnd* 'the ~ came' and L106/3 *wyspw zwrnycyktw pw[t'yšt]* 'all ~'. A very likely attestation of this phrase found in So 14187+/2–4/ [*zwrn*]y *zwr[ny]-cykt pwttyšty pš'[γ]ry[w]'k ZY pr[w] βr'yšt'k* '[I was waiting] for the paraclete of the Buddhas of the different periods and for the Apostle' makes it certain that it is a Manichaean reference to the prophets who appeared from time to time before the coming of Mani—what another text describes as *pty'mβrt ZY βγ'y 'zγ'nt* 'envoys and God's messengers'.⁵ The restoration of *rtβn* (where *-βn* is the 2pl. enclitic pronoun) at the beginning of /8/ is mine on the basis of the parallel with AL5.

13 *'γtyt m't'yymn* is the so-called periphrastic perfect, formed by the pp. *'γtyt* (here pl.) and auxiliary verb *m't'yymn* (1pl.itr.pret.).

14 Yoshida (p.c.) suggests that *'xš'nkwy' βyrtδ'rm* may mean something like 'I obtained magnificence', where *'xš'nkwy'* refers to a rank or honorable title of some sort. He draws my attention to the Mugh document B-17 where in /11/ one finds the expression *RB pδβrw ZY 'γr'n'wkw 'βr'nt* 'they brought (me) a high rank and honor'.

⁴ From the edition of SIMS-WILLIAMS et al. 2001, 92–3.

⁵ See RECK 2009, 248–9.



L44 (SI 5387)

The Manichaean Context of L44

Although L44 is rich in epistolary formulae and relatively clearly written, it is rather poor in content, as the body of the letter is hardly preserved. Nevertheless, the sender's title (*rkc' nch x't' wnh* 'Queen of Ark') and recipient's (*mwck'* 'teacher') may be the most important words of the fragment, and the latter together with the phrase *zwrny zwrnycykt pwt' yšty* '(to the) Buddhas of the various periods' make it certain that L44 originates from a Manichaean context.

It is already known that there was at one point a Manichaean community in Ark itself, to be identified with modern-day Qarashahr to the west of Turfan, according to Henning's arguments (1938, 564–71). Indeed, the hymnbook *Mahrnāmag* was begun there in 762 CE, as its colophon states, before being taken to Qocho and completed some decades later:

M1/186–9/ *pd m'nyst'n 'y 'rk 'wft'dg w: nyh'dg bwd*

‘(This hymnbook) lay about and was deposited in the monastery of Ark’.⁶

Furthermore, in M1 (lines 88–9) a king of Ark (*'rkyq xw't'w*) is mentioned among the many dignitaries who provided support for the Manichaean activities that resulted in the hymnbook's completion after 800. That a Manichaean community existed in Ark during the 8th–9th cc. is also attested in a hymn fragment which praises the Manichaean leader (whose name and title are missing) ‘of the famous blissful, prosperous country of Ark’ (*'y n'mwrng frwx' [h]w'b'd šhr 'y 'rq*).⁷ It is therefore quite certain that the letter stems from a genuine Manichaean context. A date, however, cannot be ascertained since the end of the letter where dating formulae typically appear is lost and because this queen may have reigned in Ark, or been the wife of a reigning king, at any essentially time during the Manichaean presence in the area.

Despite the lack of detailed content from which historical arguments could be made, Tremblay, in his book on the history of Manichaeism in Central Asia, nevertheless attempts a much more specific interpretation. Claiming that the sender of L44 was the spouse of a certain Yen-t'u-fu-yen (who reigned in Ark around the year 719, according to the Chinese *T'ang-chou*), Tremblay states that therefore the letter must have been written before 719.⁸ He restates these points on another page, saying “Yen-t'u-fu-yen, king of Agni in 719, was perhaps named *Altun Bodun; his wife, author of the Sogdian letter L44, was in any case a Turkic qatun”,⁹ and goes even further

⁶ My English translation of the Middle Persian. Original edition and German translation by MÜLLER 1913.

⁷ Edited in DURKIN-MEISTERERNST 2014, 282–3. The adjective ‘of Ark’ is also listed in the Sogdian *n'βn'm'k* ‘Book of Nations’ which exists in two slightly different versions: Ch/So 20166 (published in HENNING 1940, 8–11) and O 7466 (published in KUDARA et al. 1997, 143); in the former it follows ‘Kuchean’ while in the latter it follows *'βš'wy[...]*, an unknown word.

⁸ TREMBLAY 2001, 92.

⁹ “Yen-t'u-fu-yen, roi d'Agni en 719, se nommait peut-être *Altun Bodun; son épouse, auteur de la lettre sogdienne L44, était en tout cas une qatun turque” (TREMBLAY 2001, 38n58), my translation.

at another point, stating that “the sole fact that [L44] was written by a queen of Agni to a mozak before 694[!?] makes it a valuable historical document”.¹⁰ To emphasize this relatively early dating, Tremblay goes on to describe the language of L44 as an “archaic linguistic stratum” to be dated to the sixth century CE—presumably an over-interpretation of Sims-Williams’ comment that “[L44’s] phraseology strikingly resembles that of the ‘Ancient Letters’ and of the more formal and archaic of the Mugh letters”.¹¹ It seems that Sims-Williams rather intended to highlight the fact that L44 contains a number of epistolary formulae which are also present in the Mugh documents and Ancient Letters, and are archaic in the sense that they were maintained in Sogdian letter writing over several centuries and in places far away from Sogdiana. The process by which Tremblay arrives at either date, however, is completely opaque and he offers no proof to support his claim that the sender of L44 was the spouse of a sovereign named Yen-t’u-fu-yen. This is at best a guess: with neither personal names nor dates in the fragment, there is nothing concrete to link it with a particular person or place known from other historical sources.

A different tack is taken by Moriyasu in his work on the history of Uighur Manichaeism, in which he argues that Ark was the capital of the west-Uighur empire from around the third quarter of the 9th c. on (2004:165). Regarding L44, Moriyasu refrains from attempting to spin details out of its meager content, but notes that as the *xātūn* (OTk. *qatun*) would have been the spouse of the *qagan*, the fact that she was the *xātūn* of Ark supports the argument that the *qagan*’s seat was in Ark (2004:166). This would mean that a *terminus post quem* for the writing of L44 would be the 850s. Though Moriyasu’s arguments are more convincing in terms of locating the letter within a rough chronology, I refrain from attempting to refine it any further until new information comes to light.

As for the Queen of Ark’s interlocutor, there are two possibilities. At first glance, one might assume that *mwck*’ refers to the Manichaean title *Možak* ‘Teacher’, that is, the second-highest rank of the Manichaean church hierarchy after the head of the entire Church. As one of only twelve distributed throughout the world, this ‘Teacher’ would have therefore been

¹⁰ “Le seul fait qu’elle ait été écrite par une reine d’Agni à un mozak avant 694 en fait un document historique précieux” (TREMBLAY 2001, 218), my translation.

¹¹ In Sims-Williams’ review of Ragoza’s original edition (1981, 235). Tremblay neither cites Sims-Williams nor offers any argument for his idea that the language of L44 has something to do with the 6th c.

the highest-ranking Manichaean clergyman in the area.¹² This assumption is perhaps commensurate with the fact that a Queen is the sender of the letter. However, it is not clear whether *mwck* actually means the same thing as the word *mwj'k* or *mwz'k*, since the latter is a Parthian loan (as typical for many Manichaean titles and technical terms in Sogdian) while *mwck* is the inherited Sogdian form.¹³ In at least one Sogdian fragment, *mwck* should be understood as the common noun ‘teacher’ and not the rank ‘Teacher’: M 483+/11/ *šm'x frnyy 'ft'r mwck 'ty xwštyy nyy γwt* ‘many teachers and masters are not necessary for Your Honor’.¹⁴ This being the case, it is then unclear how *mwck* is used here in L44.

Finally, it is worth noting how the queen’s status relative to the addressee is represented. For example, the formulae used to name the sender of a letter begins in practically every other attestation with the words *cn xypδ βntk* ‘from your servant’. In L44, however, the word ‘servant’ is avoided, no doubt unsuitable for a queen addressing anyone else. Furthermore, where long, hyperbolic phrases are sometimes composed to convey humility on the part of the sender, the queen of Ark simply adds a few pleasantries, describing herself as ‘hopeful (of seeing you)’, a ‘well-wisher’, and ‘humble’. Other letters fill this out with phrases such as *kštr 100 RYPW myk βntk* ‘(your) hundred-thousand (times) insignificant servant’ (i.e. Mugh B-16) or *n'-'sp'xštw ZY kw 'sp's n' pr'γtw* ‘(the one who) has not served (you) and not arrived at (your) service’ (i.e. Bezeklik B).

L27

This small fragment is written in a thick hand described by Sims-Williams as a “particularly repulsive, unpractised cursive” (SIMS-WILLIAMS 1981, 235 with accompanying translation). Indeed, the letters are not carefully formed, with for example *r* and *β* having practically identical shapes. Although the

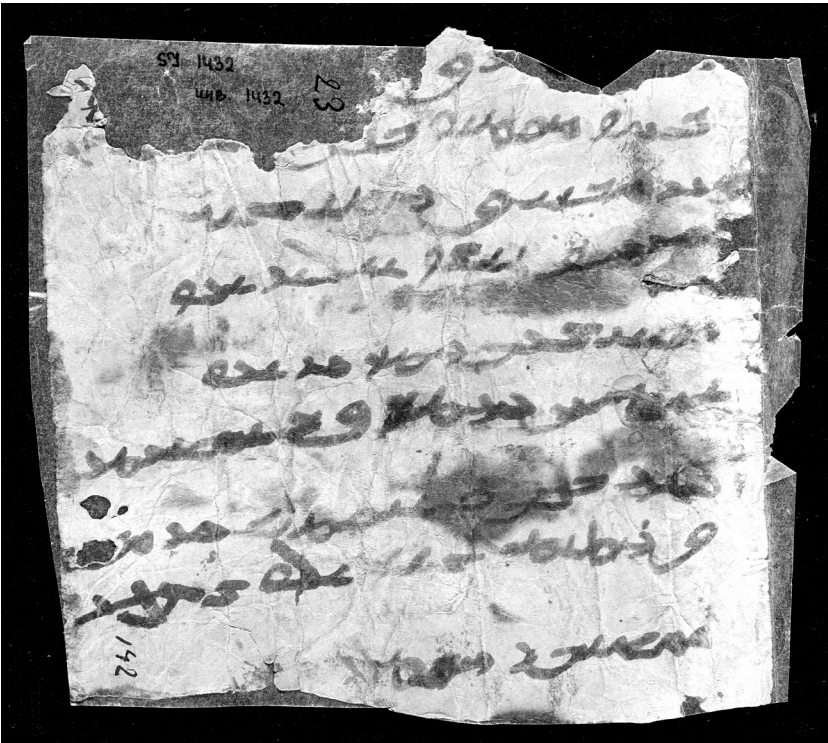
¹² Bezeklik letter B, for example, is addressed to *mr 'ry'm'nw pwxr* ‘Mar Aryaman-puhr’ whose rank is given as *xwrsncykw mwz' kw* ‘Teacher of the East’. For more on the rank of ‘Teacher’ see LEURINI 2013, 187–9, and *eadem*, 159–220 for more on the hierarchy of the Manichaean Church in general. Note that some scholars prefer to render the title with ‘Docteur (de l’Eglise)’ as it is less ambiguous with the common noun ‘teacher’ and more comparable with the Latin equivalent *magister*.

¹³ The word for *Možak* is written variously as *mwj'k*, and *mwz'k(')* in Manichean sources (cf. SIMS-WILLIAMS and DURKIN-MEISTERERNST 2012, 116b for attestations). Thanks to Yutaka Yoshida for drawing this problem to my attention.

¹⁴ The entire fragment is edited in Benkato (2016) along with commentary.

full width of the fragment is preserved, it would be difficult to make sense of the handwriting if it were not for the fact that the fragment contains an otherwise well-known salutation formula.

1	[.]p [. . . . 't]	[... To]
2	βγw xwt'w R(Bkw ' nwth)	the noble Lord, (my) great hope
3	ZY (γ)r'n pst'(t c)nn	and firm support,
4	(wys)pn'cw ''δ'y 'yw	the most necessary
5	(γw)'ncykstr ZY 'yw	and excellent of
6	'(xšn)kystr pr '(zw)'nty	everyone in the living
7	δ'm RBkw 'nwth ZY γ(r'n)	world, great hope and firm
8	pst't cnn 'δw cym'	support, more excellent
9	'xšnky-st(r)	than (my own) two eyes.



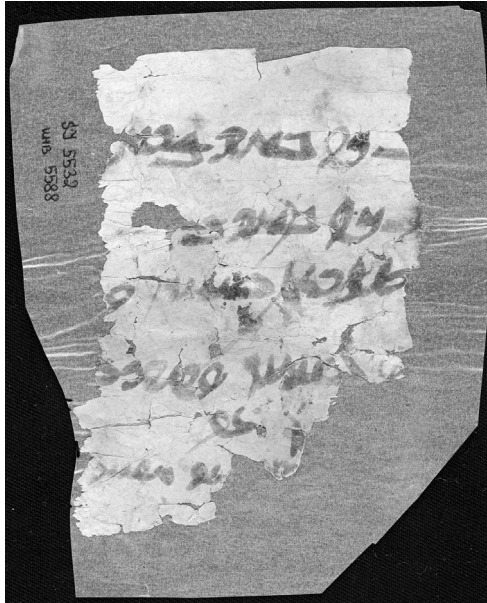
L27 (SI 1432)

L63

A fragment in a relatively regular hand, though poorly preserved. Its classification as a letter is based on the words *kw βγγ* ‘to the Lord’ and *ptβyw* ‘reverence’, which occur in a number of such fragments.¹⁵

1](.) kw βγγ my(.)[...to the lord...
2] kw βγγ m[.] [...to the lord...
3 'pr]tmy'n (w'x)š p[...Afartamyān's news...
4 'p](t')ycs'r ptwy(δ)[...in front, offer...
6]'w xw('r)y [...to the sister ¹⁶ ...
V ptβyw	reverence

3 Sims-Williams and Durkin-Meisterernst (2012, 16a) suggest reading [*'pr]tmy'n*, a personal name attested once otherwise, in Buddhist Sogdian. According to Lurje (2010, 95), the name means ‘first boon’.



L63 (SI 5532)

¹⁵ See SIMS-WILLIAMS and HALÉN 1980, 7.

¹⁶ Suggestion of SIMS-WILLIAMS and DURKIN-MEISTERERNST 2012, 219a.

L111

No new photograph for this fragment is available, as its condition is too poor to allow for digitization work. However, Ragoza's readings may be improved as the fragment contains parts of the epistolary formula used to indicate the addressee and the image given in her catalogue is relatively clear.¹⁷

1	'tkw [pry]w ('x)	To the dear, excellent,
2	šnky p'šc'n	respected
3	βr't š(mγ)wn s'r	brother Šim'on
4	MN δwr z'yh	from far away
5	'(xš'nky)	excellent...

3 The personal name šmγwn was, as Sims-Williams (1981, 235) already noted, one of the few Semitic names in use by the Manichaeans of Central Asia. See Lurje (2010, 371) for further discussion.

L118 + Dx 09961

L118 is very long, mostly blank fragment, the top of which joins with Dx 09961, together containing only seven partially-preserved lines of Sogdian text on the verso of a Chinese scroll. This text most likely contains simply a writing exercise, as no content beyond a few epistolary formulae is preserved and the placeholder *t'nm'n* 'so-and-so' for the addressee's name is used. Some of the text can be confidently restored based on several parallels. The two fragments join at lines 3–5 where indicated. I thank Yutaka Yoshida for sharing his identification of the join; the reading and translation is mine based on new photos.¹⁸

1	['t βγ'nw] 'nywn[To the godlike [...]
2	[](p)tβyw c(n)[w	[...] reverence [...]
3	[](t)'nm'n[] s'r pyšt	[...] So-and-so. Sent

¹⁷ RAGOZA 1980, 178, top.

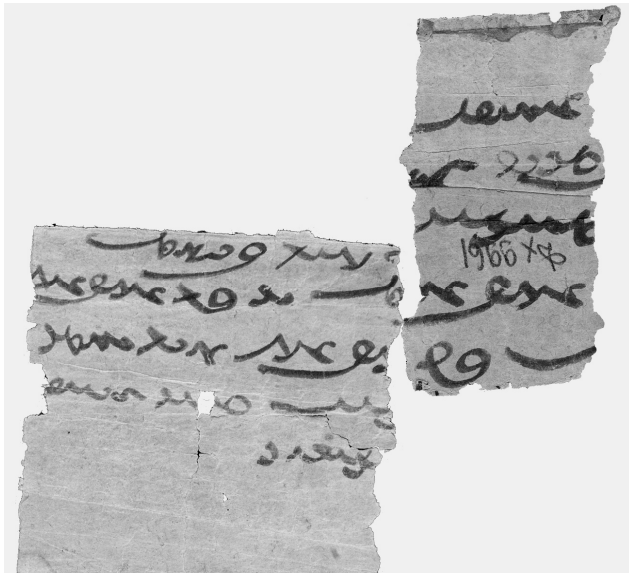
¹⁸ Yoshida is preparing editions of a number of unpublished texts from St. Petersburg, including Dx 09961. His work should be consulted for more details about the fragment. It bears mentioning that although Chinese fragments with Dx signatures should have been found in Dunhuang, Yoshida (2001:115n11) points out that a number of them must have been found in Turfan. As Dx 09961 joins with a fragment bearing an O (for Oldenburg) signature, it is likely that both come from Turfan, as Oldenburg did not obtain fragments from Dunhuang.

- 4 [MN xypδ L']'sp'(x)[š]t ZY pr [by your (servant who) has not
'sp's served] and
- 5 [L' pr'γ]t pw |['](s)p's šyr-zγty [has not reached] service [and is
without] service, a friend
- 6 [šyr'γδy n](m)'n w[y]ny cyn'w[t] [and well wisher, hope]ful and
desirous of seeing (you),
- 7 []m'rz-y [...] attendant

3 As can be seen in the image, the words *s'r pyšt* are written somewhat below the line of the preceding word, but seemingly not low enough to themselves form an entirely different line.

4 My restoration based on parallels. Lines /5–6/ restored by Yoshida (2000, 48).

7 'j m'rz-y, though unclear, may be connected with 'mrzy in Bezeklik letter C, according to Yoshida (2000, 124-5). In the Dictionary of Manichaean Texts it is suggested that both may be connected with the Parthian word *h'mhyrz* 'attendant' (Sims-Williams & Durkin-Meisterernst 2012, 9a), as in both attestations it forms part of the epithets used to indicate the humility of a letter's sender with respect to the addressee.



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