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A Sogdian Manichaean Parable

Abstract: The article is devoted to the first publication of the Sogdian fragment SI 5704 from the Serindia Collection at the IOM, RAS. The fragment contains an excerpt from the popular fable of the turtle and the two birds, widely known in the folklore and literature of different nations.

Key words: Sogdian, Sogdian Manichaean fable, migratory story, Panchatantra

Among the Sogdian Manichaean manuscripts written in both Manichaean and Sogdian scripts, around a hundred contain fables, fairy tales or parables with moralizing and edifying content whose personages are usually animals. The plots of these tales and fables are “migratory”: they are familiar to the folklore of various nations and have found reflection in many literatures of ancient, mediaeval and modern times. The best-known anthology of such works is the famous *Panchatantra*, which over the course of many centuries was rendered more than 200 times into over 60 different languages¹ and spread from India to China, Tibet, South-East Asia, Iran, the Middle East and Western Europe. The differences between its literary versions lie in the selection of parables included, their order and the didactic conclusions drawn.

The first publication of manuscript fragments containing Sogdian tales, including the well-known stories of the pearl-driller, the three fishes, and the monkey and the fox, was by Walter Bruno Henning.² Three fables, including the one about faith and the ocean and the tale of two snakes, were published by Werner Sundermann,³ two fragments of fables about a hare by Christiane

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¹ GRINTSER 1982:16.

² HENNING 1945: 465–487.

³ SUNDERMANN 1985.

Reck,⁴ and fragments of several Sogdian fables written in the Manichaean script by Enrico Morano.⁵ Key words in the fable plots are indicated in the catalogue of the Sogdian manuscripts with Manichaean content in the Berlin Turfan collection that was compiled by Dr. Reck.⁶

The Serindia Fund of the IOM, RAS (formerly the Asiatic Museum) includes a brief Sogdian fragment that also contains echoes of a well-known fable⁷ plot. This is the tale, not previously encountered in Sogdian manuscripts, of the turtle that two birds undertake to move from a pond that is going dry. The turtle is supposed to take firm hold with its mouth of the middle of a stick that the birds will carry through the air and to keep its mouth shut tight to avoid falling and being killed, but it proves unable to keep to that condition. This subject is first attested in Pali *Jātaka* tales and a few Buddhist sutras. Through Buddhist literature and folklore, it found its way into Chinese and Japanese poetry.⁸ The subject is present in the *Panchatantra* and its numerous retellings, as well as in the tales of peoples of South-East Asia and in the Middle East, most notably in *Kalila wa Dimna*. In the West, it is known from Aesop's fable *The Tortoise and the Eagle*, while in Russia the idea was reworked by Vsevolod Garshin in the short story *The Frog Who Travelled*.

This story is contained in fragment SI 5704, whose old reference number, SI 2 Kr 83, indicates that it comes from the collection of Nikolai Nikolaevich Krotkov (1869–1919). It is well known that stocktaking of the collections in the Asiatic Museum was very rarely carried out and the inventory books usually recorded not individual manuscripts but entire collections at once.⁹ Thus it is impossible to say which locality this particular document comes from. It is possible to assume that it belonged to Krotkov's second collection, which he donated to the Academy of Sciences in 1909.¹⁰ Fragment SI 5704 is pasted onto tracing paper. On the verso there are eight lines, four of which are incomplete, while on the recto, which carries a Chinese

⁴ RECK 2009: 218–224.

⁵ Morano 2009: 173–200.

⁶ RECK 2006: 333–335.

⁷ I call the plot a fable, rather than a fairy tale, because the personages are animals and compositionally it takes the form of a brief edifying tale about an intention that remained unaccomplished due to the incorrect behaviour of one of the personages.

⁸ GRINTSER 1982: 367.

⁹ RAGOZA 1972: 246f.

¹⁰ RAGOZA 1972: 255.

Buddhist text, there is one full Sogdian line and two incomplete ones. The paper is light grey, the ink black. The fragment measures 13.2¹¹×12.6 cm. The handwriting is cursive, large and careless. On the verso, the letters are about half a centimetre high, with roughly one centimetre between the lines. There are traces of ruling. The unmarked margin on the right is about 0.5 cm. On the recto, there are seven columns of Chinese characters, eight in each. The three Sogdian lines on this side have been added by an owner and were made in a different, larger, hand to that on the verso.

SI 5704 V

*Transliteration and translation*¹²

1] kyšph	1] turtle
2](1)kt	2], that:
3	tyw my'δ(')ny kwc'kδ δ'rwkw	3	“You in the middle with mouth of the stick
4	xns *ny'z -'y m'x 'δw	4	take tight hold, and we two
5	z(n)wš ZY 'δw kyr(')n kwc'kδ	5	falcons at both ends (the stick) with our mouths
6	xns *ny'z'm k'm frwz-'ny(m)	6	will hold tight, we shall fly,
7	šwym k''m tw' cy(my)[(2-4)	7	shall set off, you (from this) [
8	(p)]tw'ty z'yh ny(m)[8] dried up place (having taken)[....”

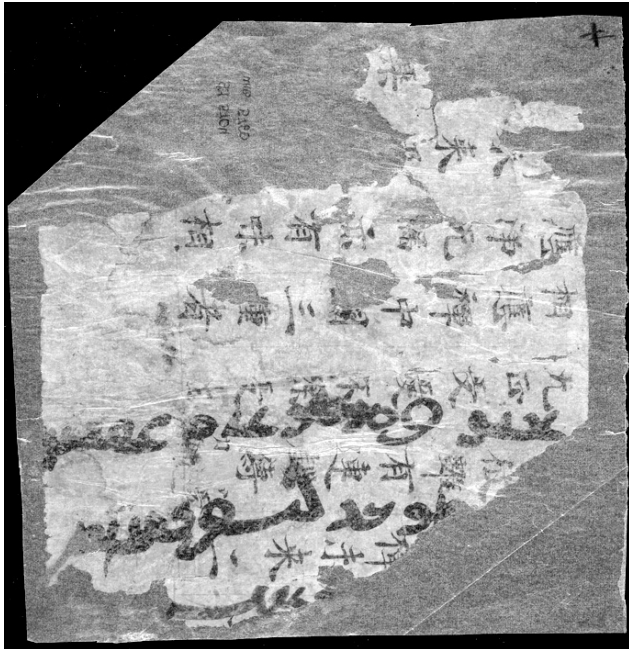
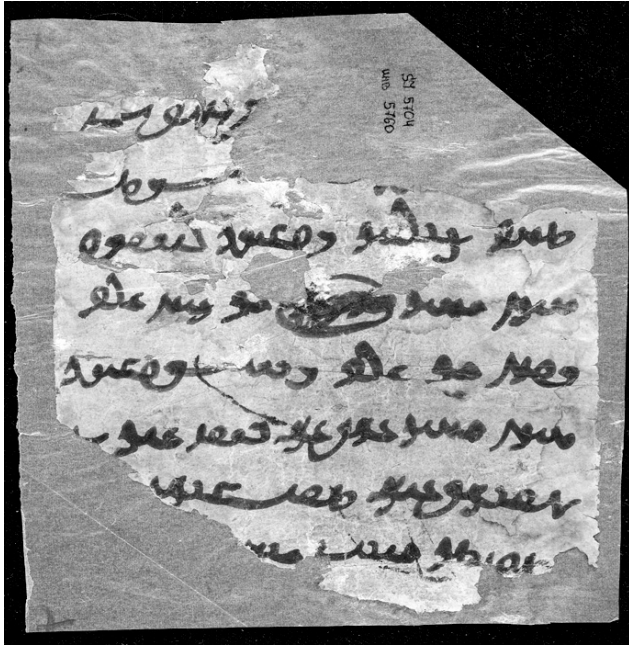
*Notes*¹³

4. The reading of the verb *ny'z -'y is tentative, although in meaning (“to accept, receive, grasp”) and grammatical form (2nd person sing. present or optative — GERSHEVITCH 1954: § 692) it fits the context. The first Sogdian

¹¹ As Christiane Reck, who published the Sogdian fragment Ch/U 7115, which is also 13.2 cm in height, observed, this measurement is half that of a traditional Chinese scroll. The Sogdians preferred small-format scrolls, “pocket books” of a sort (RECK 2009: 219).

¹² In the transliteration here and elsewhere the dash indicates that a letter is written separately from the next in the manuscript. Round brackets are used in the transliteration and translation for tentative readings; square brackets indicate lacunae; while the numbers in them indicate the presumed number of missing symbols.

¹³ In the notes here and below, the initial figure refers to the line number.



letter can represent the consonant *n* or *z*, i.e. to convey the preverb *ni-* (<иран. **ni-*) or (*ə*)*z-* (<**us-*, **uz-*). It would seem that semantically the former goes better this particular verb. In the verb it is possible to assume the root *γ'z-*. Compare the same root in the Sogdian Buddhist noun *pcγ'z-* “receipt, acceptance”.¹⁴ The ending of the verb is written after the crossed-out, but nonetheless unambiguously legible, word *k'm*. Compare the same on line 6.

5. The reading of the first noun is tentative, as the initial symbol can represent both *z* and *n*. The meaning has been determined from the Sogdian translation of the Chinese version “The Sūtra of the Causes and Effects of Actions”.¹⁵

7. I assume *k'm* to be the particle *k'm*, the indicator of the future tense. My tentative reading of the last surviving word on the line is as a prefixal form of a demonstrative pronoun — *cymy(δδy)*.

8. The last surviving word in the line is, most probably, *nynty* — the past participle of the verb *ny's-* “to take”.

SI 5704 R

1 'yny pwstk 'z-w cw(r'k)	1 This book I, Chorak(?)
2 (4–5)](t)y ky L' pyr'nt	2] who do not believe,
3 (7–9)](1)'(yh) [3] ...[

Notes

1. *cwr'kk* is a proper noun that occurs in other Sogdian documents.¹⁶

2. The loss of the start of the line makes it impossible to reconstruct what was written. In any event, the surviving syllable (*t*)*y* cannot be a verb ending with a subject expressed by the 1st person singular personal pronoun in the direct case. Perhaps it is the copulative conjunction (*rt*)*y* “then”? A comparison with similar colophons (additions) surviving in other manuscripts¹⁷ does not help to reconstruct what has been lost either. In the opinion of Yutaka

¹⁴ HENNING 1936: 94.

¹⁵ MACKENZIE 1970: 62.

¹⁶ LURJE 2010: 168.

¹⁷ HENNING 1945: 486; SUNDERMANN 1985: 34; SIMS-WILLIAMS 1976: 66.

Yoshida, who has made a study of such colophons, the missing verb in them is *ywɣytym* (*//ywɣxtym*) “I have learnt”,¹⁸ but in that case, with a transitive verb in the past tense, the logical subject should be in the genitive case and take the form *mn*’. The corresponding verb form with a subject in the direct case should rather be *ywɣtδ’r’m* “I have learnt”, while the form *ywɣytym* literally means “I was learnt”,¹⁹ but there are not enough symbols in the missing part of the line for that. It is possible to suggest that the missing word is the reflexive possessive pronoun *xypδ* “one’s own”, so the text becomes “This book is my, Chorak’s, property”. Compare the colophon to manuscript S.4083 in the British collection *’yn’k pwt’s’k pw’y yypδ* “This book belongs to *pw’y*”,²⁰ but it is not clear whether a name denoting the logical subject can be in the direct case. Yoshida pointed to the similarity between colophons of this sort — constructed along the lines of “This book I, X., have learnt; let those who do not believe go and ask Y.” — and Uyghur ones.²¹

As has already been said, the plot of this fable can be found in many works of folklore and literature, differing only in the details. In the majority of the texts the personages are geese or ducks, but other birds do sometimes appear: herons (a Vietnamese tale, see *Skazki narodov Mira* 1988: 248–251), storks (a Sinhalese version, see *Singal’skie skazki* 1985: 59–61). In the present case, it is falcons that intend to carry the turtle from a dried-up lake to another with plenty of water. Additionally, the versions differ in which of the personages it is that proposes the means of locomotion: the turtle, as in the *Panchatantra*²² and the mediaeval Indian *Hitopadesha*,²³ or the birds, as in the Pali *Jātaka*,²⁴ *Kalila wa Dimna*²⁵ and the present fragment. The moral of the tale, if there is one, also varies slightly in different versions. In the *Hitopadesha* and *Panchatantra* it amounts to “You should follow the advice of friends”.²⁶ In the Pali *Jātaka*, which in accordance with Buddhist tradition was perceived as a tale of “past birth” (*jātaka*), it is a warning against exces-

¹⁸ YOSHIDA 2000: 84–85.

¹⁹ SUNDERMANN 1985: 34, n. 148.

²⁰ SIMS-WILLIAMS 1976: 66.

²¹ YOSHIDA 2000: 83.

²² *Panchatantra* 1972: 118.

²³ GRINTSER 1982: 131.

²⁴ *Povesti* 1989: 57.

²⁵ *Kalila i Dimna* 1986: 117.

²⁶ GRINTSER 1982: 132; *Panchatantra* 1972: 119.

sive talkativeness.²⁷ Stith Thompson assigns this folklore motif to the category of tales about “talkative fools”.²⁸

To all appearances, the present Sogdian fragment is Buddhist in content and is a translation of a Buddhist work, most probably Chinese (which perhaps explains the choice of falcons as the birds), and its language is Sogdian-Manichaean as is evidenced by, among other things, the form of the 1st person plural personal pronoun *m'x* in line 3 (the corresponding Sogdian-Buddhist form is *m'γw*).

The crossed-out word *k'm* in line 4, which is written exactly the same way in line 6, prompts the conclusion that this text was copied from some other manuscript and the scribe made a mistake when copying and allowed his eye to wander from one line in the original to another. This in turn suggests that the fable circulated widely, was well-known and popular. And the note from the owner on the recto bears that out.

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²⁷ *Povesti* 1989: 58.

²⁸ THOMPSON 1957: 206f.

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