

STUDY OF TWO FOLIOS OF THE UIGHUR TEXT “ABITAKI”

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Recently we found 25 folios in Uighur of the the so-called “Abitaki” text in Beijing. The word “Abitaki” (< Chinese “Amituojing/Amitaking = Sanskrit Amitābha-sūtra) is used only as a code name written in small letter on the left side of some folios of the manuscript. But it has nothing to do with the famous scripture “Amitābha-sūtra” (one chapter, translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva in the 4th century AD). I hold that it belongs to a lost Buddhist Chinese book called “Da Bai Lian She Jing” (The Great White Lotus Society Sūtra) consisting of 4 chapters of the Pure Land School and it was copied in Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368). Here I study and publish 2 folios (belonging to the 3rd chapter) of the text. The whole text will be published in the near future.

Key words: Abitaki, Amitābha, School of Pure Land.

Today only a small part of the Uighur Buddhist texts¹ has been discovered. Therefore, every newly unearthed manuscript (even in fragmentary form) is very precious for Turkic and Uighur philology.

Our manuscript now is preserved at the Department of the books in Minority Languages of National Peking Library. The manuscript consists of 25 folios (50 pages) in the so-called “pustaka” form. It is ca. 27 × 21.5 cm in size. There are 10 or 11 lines of text on each side. The paper is thin and has become yellowish-brown. There are red lines at the top and bottom. Unlike the common Uighur Buddhist manuscripts in “pustaka” form, our manuscript has no circle and hole for threading (binding). In addition, all the names of Amitābha and other Gods are written in red colour.

The manuscript is not complete. According to the extant folios keeping paginations, it seems to be a voluminous work consisting at least of 4 chapters. Among the 25 folios, 9 folios (18 pages) belong to the 3rd chapter, 9 folios (18 pages) belong to the 4th chapter, the remaining 7 folios (14 pages) are without paginations.

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¹ For common knowledge on Uighur Buddhist literature, cf. my monograph “Uighur Buddhist Literature” published in *The Turks*, vol. 1, pp. 896–910, Yeni Türkiye, 2002, Ankara; The Turkish version was published in *Türkler*, cilt 3, pp. 786–800.

On the basis of the language of our text I hold that it was written (or translated) in the 10th–11th centuries. But the script and some orthographical peculiarities used in our manuscript show that this copy belongs to a later time – ca. the 13th–14th centuries. The script used in our text is the Uighur regular script of the Mongol period. It does not distinguish between the letters q and γ, s and š. Sometime we find a confounding of the letters t and d, s and z. This phenomenon always appears in Uighur texts of the Mongol-Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368 AD).

According to the title written in small letter on the left side of some folios, our book is called “Abitaki”. The word “Abitaki” should be the transcription of the medieval Chinese “Amituojing” (< Amitaking = Sanskrit Amitābha-sūtra). After checking up with the Chinese version of this work (translated into Chinese by the famous Uighur-Kuchar Buddhist master Kumārajīva in the 4th century AD), we found that in content our manuscript has nothing to do with the Chinese Amitābha-sūtra. Furthermore, the Chinese Amitābha-sūtra is a short work consisting of only one chapter, and our text consists of as many as 4 chapters. Therefore, it is not a translation of the Amitābha-sūtra, but another work belonging also to the Amitābha-cult. The word “Abitaki” here is not the title of the book, but is used only as a code name for the book.

On the basis of a fragmentary piece of the same work kept in Dunhuang Grottoes, Gansu province of China, which I personally investigated in 1983, I hold that the title of our text should be called “The Sūtra-book of the Great White Lotus Society”. Because on one side of this small fragmentary piece, beside the code name “Abitaki” written in small Uighur script, there are also 5 Chinese characters “Da Bai Lian She Jing” (The Great White Lotus Society Sūtra) written in red colour.

As we know, the “White Lotus Society” of Chinese Buddhism (a school of worshipping the Amitābha Buddha) formed early in the 4th century AD by Hui-yuan, who with 123 notable literati swore to a life of purity before the image of Amitābha Buddha and planted white lotus as symbol in the pond of their temple. This society later played a very important role in the development of the “Pure Land School” in the history of Chinese Buddhism. This school advocates that if their members always chant the name of Amitābha Buddha, after death they can go to the Sukhāvatī, i.e. Pure Land or Western Paradise.

Some scholars hold that the Pure Land School of Mahāyāna Buddhism and its main scriptures are formed under the Iranian influences. The word “Amitābha” in Sanskrit means “infinite light”. The Buddha Amitābha presides over a paradise of light inhabited by pure, stainless beings who are reborn there after chanting the name Amitābha.

According to Buddhist tradition, the main scriptures of the Pure Land School consists of the following 3 books:

1. Amitābha-sūtra, also called “The Smaller Sukhāvatīvyūkha” (The Smaller Glorious Adornment of Sukhāvatī), 1 chapter. The book briefly describes the pleasurable aspects of Amitābha’s land and praises his virtues. It then explains that one who chants Amitābha’s name will be born in his paradise-land.
2. Amitāyus-sūtra (Book about the Buddha Infinite Life), also called “The Larger Sukhāvatīvyūkha”, 2 chapters, translated into Chinese by Saṅghavarman in the

3rd century. The book explains in detail how Amitābha attained Buddhahood and how he saves sentient beings. In this book there are also 48 vows.

3. Amitāyurdhyāna-sūtra (Book about the Meditation on the Buddha Infinite Life), 1 chapter, translated into Chinese by Khotanese Kālayaśas in the 5th century. The book presents 16 contemplations (Uighur name is “altı ygrmi qolulamaq”) centring on Amitābha and his land.

As mentioned above, there is no doubt that our text belongs to the work of the Pure Land School of Buddhism. For its adherents this school advocates a simplest method to attain Buddhahood (being born in Sukhāvātī/Pure Land/Paradise), i.e. only thinking of Amitābha Buddha (skr. Buddhānusmṛti) and calling his name (this content is also expressed in our 2 folios of text). After having studied carefully the extant folios of our text, we can make a preliminary conclusion like thus: this is a Buddhist work which has close relationship with the Pure Land School, especially with the White Lotus Society founded by the famous Chinese monk Hui-yuan. But it has neither connection with the Amitābha-sūtra nor with the other two works of the Pure Land. It should be translated from a lost Chinese original consisting of 4 chapters².

Because there is no colophon kept in our text, we do not know the author or the translator's name as well the time and place of the composition or translation of the work.

From the viewpoint of religious history we could say that after the worship of Maitreya (Future Buddha)-cult,³ in Turfan Basin flourished also the Amitābha-cult⁴ for a long period.

Below are the transcription, English translation and commentaries of 2 folios of our text. In transcription I use the traditional Latin alphabet for Turcology. The following marks are used:

(): words or letters added by the author according to context;

... : uncertain number of letters or words are missing;

///: 3 graphs are missing;

.. : 2 short strokes used as punctuation in the original text.

d, s with a point below the letter indicate that the letter should be read as t, z respectively.

o, u indicate that the relevant vowels written without “y”, i.e. written like o, u in the words with front vowels.

² By the way, I want to indicate that according to my opinion, the folio which my former student Kahar Barat (1987) published in *Wenwu* also belongs to our text (but belongs to another earlier copy). Besides, there are some folios of the same texts kept in Ankara and Istanbul which were published by Temir – Kudara – Roehrborn (1984) and Sertkaya – Roehrborn (1984) respectively.

³ E.g. many fragments of “Maitrisimit” (meeting with the Future Buddha Maitreya) in “To-kharian”, Khotanese, Uighur languages were discovered in Tarim Basin.

⁴ About the Amitābha-cult, besides our text, the fragments of the above-mentioned 3 main scriptures of Pure Land were discovered and published. Prof. R. Arat in his famous work *Eski Türk Şiiri* (1965) published some fragments of Amitāyurdhyāna-sūtra in alliterative poem form (No. 19, 20). Cf. also Kudara – Zieme (1985).

Text

Transcription

III, 11

recto

1. (1) tižit kšanti bolzun
2. (2) yana ymä abita tngri burxan ... ning tawar⁵
3. (3) qut qolunmaqlıy küči üzä bizni (irinčkäyü tsuy-)
4. (4) urqap sıyuru içkärü yrlıqamış ärip biz bli- ...
5. (5) ulatı nizwanılar üzä aşıp yangılıp ...
6. (6) -mz täginmätimz iyin udu bolmadımız .. t(i)zik ... (umuγ-)
7. (7) umuz inayımz šakimuni tngri tngri burxan ul(atı on)
8. (8) sıngarqı alqu qamaq burxanlar ymä bir q- ...
9. (9) (b)ır qata abita tngri burxan(nı)ng ađın (ađasar)
10. (10) (ot)γuraq adırtlıy suhawati tigmä (artuq mängilig)
11. (11) (uluš)da toγyalı bolur (..) t-///

verso

abitaki üçünč bir ygrmi

12. (1) burxanlarnıng⁶ yrlıqamış č(in kirtü nomlary)
13. (2) kirgünmätimz täginmädimz yiwik ...
14. (3) ymä äšid(t)üktä yiniklämək ... -lanmaq ...
15. (4) üzä kültümüz qatγurd(u)muz .. azuča ymä
16. (5) burxannıng ađın adataçı kišiläriγ kört(ükdä)
17. (6) kōngül öritip ädgülüg išingä tıdıy ant(ıray qılıp)
18. (7) buštumuz artadtımz .. burxanlarnıng yrlıqam(ış)
19. (8) yrlıqın näčä az t(ä)nginčä ki-ä kirtgünsär (ymä)
20. (9) kōngülümüztä otγuraqlanmadımz.. bir uçluγ (kōngüllüg)
21. (10) bolmadımz.. ayıy qılınčlıy tıltaγ basutčı(lar)nıng
22. (11) qalın ayır bolmaqıntın yirtinčü(dä) to(γmıšbiz) ...

III, 12

recto

23. (1) -gä ägrik(län)mäk yorgälänmək üzä...
24. (2) -ta tursar ymä kōngülümüztä yiri(k) ...-ranč
25. (3) sawlarıy oq atqandımz ayızimzta suh(awati) uluy (ađın)
26. (4) ađasarbız.. kōngülümüztä bu sp (lokadatu)

⁵ It seems that the words "... ning tawar" do not belong to this line.

⁶ This word is added to the left side.

27. (5) yirtinčügä ők artuqraq ilintimz yapšintimz.. (azuča)
28. (6) ymä az tänginčä ki-ä abita burxanıy ö(sär)
29. (7) saqınsarbiz ymä ömiš saqınmıš ödtä kōng(ül)
30. (8) öküš sačiltı täbräti.. üč türlüg arıy s(üzük)
31. (9) qılınčlarta az tänginčä (ki-ä) ymä ...
32. (10) (qıl)yalı umatimz.. altı ygrmi (qolulamaq) ...
33. (11) üzä qolulamaqıy ymä ...

verso

abitaki üçünč iki ygrmi

34. (1) (azu)ča ymä ödsüz ölüm
35. (2) ...ıgläp ölüp burxanlar ...
36. (3) tägmäsär azuča ymä ayır (ig)kä käm(gä)
37. (4) ät'özümüz kōngülümüz sıqılıp tangılıp angd...
38. (5) urlayu mangrayu ögsüz bolup burxanlarıy ög(äli saqın-)
39. (6) yalı um(a)sarbiz(..) azuča ymä ölgäysük ödtä
40. (7) äriqläp kirtgünmäk süzülmäklig kōngül (öritip)
41. (8) ädgü ögli bayşı uluı üskümiztä yuüz y(ügarü bol-
42. (9) masar bu muntay qılınč adartmaqı tıltayınta ///ti//
43. (10) ölgäysük ödtä abita tngri burxan(ıy körmät)ümüz...
44. (11) bulmadın suhawatıta toıyalı (bolmadımz)...

Translation

III, 11

recto

... Please pardon us ... Again with the strength of praying for fortune from Amitābha Buddha please deign to pity (hend.) on us and embrace us. Owing to our... passion, we made mistakes, we did not... and did not follow (your teaching). Our refuge (hend.) – the God of Gods, Šākimuni Buddha and all the Buddhas in (ten) directions also once ... If someone chants the name of Amitābha Buddha once time, he surely (hend.) will be born in Sukhāvātī – the most happy land.

verso

...We did not believe in the true doctrines delivered by... Buddhas. When we heard the ... we laughed (hend.) without paying attention, or when we saw people chanting the name of Buddha, we hindered them from doing this good deed and broke their chanting. Although we professed a little bit faith in the Buddha's teaching, but we had no faith in our heart. Owing to the cause and effect of our heavy evils, we were born in this world.

III,12

recto

With being bound to ..., although we stood on ... but we still attached ourselves to ... words in our minds. Although we chanted the great (name of) Sukhāvātī, but we were still bound (hend.) to this secular world in our minds. Or although we thought a little bit of Amitābha Buddha, but when we thought of him, our minds were not concentrated. Although we did a little bit three kinds of pure deeds, but we could not do ... (Although) through sixteen contemplations we contemplated ...

verso

Or we died an unnatural death... We fell ill and died ... Buddhas... and did not get ... Or we fell ill seriously and our body, our heart suffered (hend.) very much, we groaned (hend.), we fell into swoon and could not think of Buddhas. Or when we die, (owing to our) lacking of pious, pure mind, the Merciful Master would not appear in front of us. Owing to the hindrance of this action, when we die, we cannot meet Amitābha Buddha and cannot be born in Sukhāvātī Land.

Commentaries

Common Uighur words and Buddhist terms will not be given commentaries. The Arabic numbers before every entry indicate line number in the text.

The following abbreviations are used:

Chin.: Chinese

DL: Atalay, B.: *Divanu Lūghat-it-Turk Tercümesi*. 1939–1941.

ED: Clauson, G.: *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish*. 1972.

hend.: hendiadys.

Skr.: Sanskrit

Sogd.: Sogdian

1. tižit: < Skr. deśita “confession”.

1. kšanti: < Skr. kṣānti “confession”.

2. Abita: < Medieval Chin. Abita/Amita (modern Chin. Amituo) < Skr. Amitābha “boundless light”, name of the Buddha in Sukhāvātī (Western Pure Land/Western Paradise). His another name is Amitāyus “boundless life”. Amitābha is one of the most popular Buddhas in Mahāyāna Buddhism. His land is in the West and is called Sukhāvātī “Utmost Bliss Land”. According to the doctrines of this school, those who have sincere faith in Amitābha and recite his name are able to be born in his land after their death. The school of Buddhism worshipping Amitābha Buddha is known as Pure Land (or Lotus) Buddhism.

4. sīyur-: a verb meaning “accept”.

5. nizwani: < Sogd. nyzw’ny = Skr. kleśa “passion”.

7. umuḡ inay: means “something, or someone, desired and trusted” (ED, p. 157). Here used as a Buddhist term meaning “refuge”.

10. Suhavati: < Skr. Sukhāvātī. According to the Pure Land School it is a paradise-like place in the West where there is no suffering and everybody lives a happy life.
17. tidiy antiray: It should be a calque translation of Chin. “zhang ai” = Skr. āvaraṇa “hindrance, obstruction” (ED, p. 452).
21. tīltay basutči: It should be a calque translation of Chin. “yin yuan” = Skr. hetupratyaya. According to the Buddhist viewpoint, “yin = hetu” is the primary cause, “yuan = pratyaya” is the secondary cause or are causes, e.g. a seed is “yin = hetu” and rain, dew, farmer, etc. are “yuan = pratyaya”. The “shi er yinyuan = Skr. dvadaśa-pratītyasamutpāda = twelve links” are the concatenation of cause and effect in the whole range of existence. The second word “basutči” is a derivative noun meaning “supporter, helper” < basut “support, help” + -či.
23. ägriklän-yorgälän-: a hend. verb with meaning “twine, bind, wind”. The first verb derives from the noun ägrik “thread” (DL, I, p. 105).
25. atqan-: a Buddhist term for “to be attached (to this world)”. Its derivative noun “atqanyu” means “attachment (to this world)”.
26. sp: < Skr. saḥā “the world of suffering”. It is also called “saḥāloka” or “saḥāloka-dhātu = Uig. yirtinčü”.
38. urla-: a verb meaning “shout, yell” (DL, p. 614).
39. ölgäysük: It should be an adjective deriving from the verb öl- “die”. This word is not met in the dictionaries of Old Turkic languages.
40. äriglä-: according to the context, it seems to have the meaning “being in a certain state”.
42. qilinč adartmaqi: It seems to be a calque translation of Chin. “nie zhang” = Skr. karmāvaraṇa with the meaning “karma/action which hinders the attainment of Bodhi/Intelligence”.

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III, 12 (v)

III, 12 (r)