A TALE OF ASOKA

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Asoka has been interpreted in the speculations of historians for his public acts authenticated by his own inscriptions, to those inscriptions long known new inscriptions have been added from Afghanistan. But another side is displayed in the legendary record. Here he is the great patron of Buddhism. The cycle of his acts fills an avadana, a narrative, of his religious career. Two of the episodes of this religious epic of Asoka were translated into the language of Gostana-Devi, that is, modern Kholar, and survive in two copies, both incomplete, now in the Bibliothèque nationale, Paris. They have been published in transcription in my Khotanae Buddhast Text (1951, KST), pp. 40-44. Here I offer a first attempt to render the text in English. Asoka is also the subject of a legend in Tibetan. In the Tanjur, in the Lihi yul lup-ltar-pa, the origin of the Kholalan Saka kingship is traced to a son of Asoka who is here called Dharma ‘Asoka’. Allusion to this genealogy in a Saka text from Ch’ien-fe-tung is made in my book Khotanesa Texte 2.53. Here we read in a panegyric that Vis’ Darma king of Gostana-Devi descends from the ancient family: vasra putara rul mehagama trimara bva yulta cha nareta. This is followed by reference in a list to Varnamana the deva Asum (= Asoka) and Cha-yan the king, who is called in Tibetan Ca-yan and Cha-yan.

A Sogdian reference to Asoka occurs in a Manichaean text in a list of evil-doers: swk MLky by pwar snyan rdzog pa rgya po ye ddi the king Asoka who slandered the Buddha Sakymuni. The tenth century vocabularian in Sanskrit and Tibetan the name Bud. Skt Dhammasagaro is given as ‘rgyal po Darma’ ‘Angs’ in Tibetan. This is near to the Baldvī.

2. Translated in F. W. Throckmorton, Tibetan Literary Texts and documents Concerning Chinese Turkestan. 1981.; a new translation has been made by R. E. Emmerick, and will shortly be printed with a translated text.
3. A translation of this text is in preparation in the Text Volume to be joined to my four portfolios of facsimiles of Saka Documents. See earlier PSQOS 10, 910-8.
4. W. B. Henning, JRAS, 1944, 141.
5. J. Hackin, Formulae sanskrit-tibetain, p. 17.
form which has given in Khotan Saka "Aru (indicating the sound Aru) and Aru, here the -age- has been replaced by -u as usual in Saka dialects. From this same Prakrit came the older Chinese A-Ju for an older A-zu, now pronounced in Japanese A-Iku, showing the older i-. The Bud. Skt Asoka is written in Saka Asokas as the name of four Buddhas of the Bhadrapalika-aura. In Kt 3, 116. 10.4 occurs namau vowikas nama thagatau, the revered Asoka, by name, the thagatas.


The whole avadana of Asoka is preserved in a Chinese translation from Sanskrit; from which J. Przyluski made his rendering into French with an introductory essay. The Buddhist story is told in Sanskrit in the Divyavadana (pp. 392-434) and has recently been studied again by Sujitkumar Mukhopadhyaya in his book The Asocaravdana, 1963. The Kunala episode of the avadana is published with a facsimile of a Buddhist Sanskrit manuscript by G. M. Bongard and O. F. Volkov in their Legenda o Kunale in Moscow 1963, reviewed by J. de Jong, in the Indo-Iranian Journal 8, 233-240. The tale of the man's head is told in the Sutram孔雀ara (French translation by Ed. Huber, p. 90 ff.). The Tibetan version is in the Kunalavadana (Tanjur Mdo, facsimile Pekin 127, 294-302).

The Saka avadana reads in English translation as follows.

TRANSLATION

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When this reverend daśabalaśakavruttisecyamunī, deva of devas, the Buddha had completed the work of bodhi, there also the present vaineyas were taught and delivered, the time (of death) arrived for him. Then he drew near to the bank of the Nalajana river under the yamaka-sala trees he entered upon the same dhana called Mahapariivana when over him the first watch of the night had passed.

7. La legende de Pemereeu Asuka.
Then here in Jambudvipa in Pataliputra a king named Asu' sat in sovereignty. He brought under his own control the whole continent of Jambudvipa as far as the verge of ocean; all who were kings in Jambudvīpa acclaimed him and did his commands. In Jambudvipa he made 18000 caityas, in all of them he placed saris (relics) of the Buddha. This king had two queens, and 800 in his asthāpura—Of the first queen the name was Padmavati and the name of the second Tisyaraksita.

Then at another time the queen Padmavati became pregnant and after the passing of ten months she bore a king's son like a devāputra. The queen took him up in a wondrous and gave him to the king. The king received him in his arms. To the queen he spoke delightfully, saying; To the measure of a hundred years forward may you live with this prince as in the clear akasa thr graha (planets), the nakṣatras (constellations), and the moon and sun shine out. At the time of Jatiniha (birthday feast) they named a name for him and they gave the name prince Varnavardhana.

Then at another time the king Asu' designed to look at the eyes of the prince Varnavardhana. And he ordered his amatya, saying, You should look at the prince's eyes, whether anything on earth resembles such eyes which are his. The amatya spoke with respect, saying, Deva, in a rumour we have heard on Mount Gandhamadana there is a bird by name kunala and his eye is so fine that if he should not resemble it, on earth no being exists who resembles it. Deva, the prince's eyes are such eyes as if one put two chedonky jewels upon a blue lotus leaf. If he looks straight at us suddenly, it seems that amata flows into our throat, or that in it are brilliant jewels lying there. Then the king ordered, saying, Bring, here a kunala bird from Gandhamadana. When they had brought it for comparison, saying, The eyes are like one another, then they gave to prince Varnavardhana the name Kunala.

Then the prince Kunala quickly grew up and became adult as in cool water the celestial utpala lotuses grow.

Then at another time the king Asu' conducted the prince Kunala to a samghāmaṇa. Kunala was a delight to the sthāvira Upādhyāya. When the sthāvira had finished the dharma dwāna, then the king returned again. There at another samgharama he met with the acarya Senevaka and with his forehead he went with homage to his feet. In his following was an amatya. He was exceedingly devoid of faith. He reproved
the king, he spoke so, saying, Delign not to make the sovereignty contemptible. To every red-clad person that you may see, you go with homage. A king is necessarily fierce and bold with exalted punyas (merits). It is not fitting, Deva, for the sovereignty that he (the king) should roll on the earth. Then the king returned to the palace. Thereupon he issued an order, saying, All amatyas, you shall assemble. Thereupon 7000 amatyas gathered, The king ordered this, saying, Every amatya is to bring a head, Yasa for his part will bring a man’s head, but do not in any way cause pranatipata (death to breathing beings). Early next morning they all brought before the king a head. The king ordered this saying, Take them to the market, and sell them at a price. When they brought them to the market, they sold all of them at a price. When they saw that the amatya Yasa on his part carried a man’s head, horror was felt, in all ways they fled. With abuse they spoke to him, saying, Do not a second time deign to offer that, such a disgusting thing, stuffed with worms as is this head, if indeed he orders, saying, Take it into your hand, indeed, he will suffer great trouble, who buys that at a price. Then the amatyas returned to the palace and they made a report, saying, All other heads we could sell at a price, but the man’s head the amatya Yasa has been unable to sell at a price. Then the king ordained him, saying, What fault do you see in it which you designd to search out? Yasa the amatya spoke, saying, in every one are the same faults. Deva, it is in no one because of peculiar qualities; disgusting it is, stinking, inspicable, the same. The king ordered him, Is only that one disgusting, or are all disgusting? Yasa the amatya spoke to him, saying, All in fact have the same marks, Deva. The king ordered him, saying, This my head which possesses exalted punyas, how is it to be thought of? Speak truly. Yasa the amatya spoke, saying, This too is precisely like the other heads, Deva. Then the king ordered him, saying, It is such a disgusting thing as this man’s head is, for which not even a place can be found where you may put it. Then, amatya, does it not please you when with it I revere the deva Buddha’s pupil who actually appears with the asaya: (mind) of the foremost gotra: (family) of the scars? These good qualities of all kinds, approved, have, they not become subjects recognisable by you? One can know the number of the drops of water in the ocean, then they will know the good qualities possessed by the pravrajitas (wanderers). Then Yasa the amatya begged pardon of the king Asu’, and he spoke, saying, I have not done well, I did not understand that the many good qualities are possessed by the pravrajitas.

And then at another time the inhabitants of Taissila rebelled
against the king Isu, his command they did not obey, and they withheld his taxes. Then Isu the king in Pataliputra mounted and led an army to Takassila. He brought the people of Gandhara back to his command. Long time he remained there. Then here in Pataliputra the queen Tusharasakita desisted to call prince Kunala. When the prince came before her, he greeted her with his forehead, humbly he sat, and the queen spoke to him so saying. When your father went away, he placed the country and the land in your hand, but a month passes for you, you do not come to the palace. The prince spoke to her, saying, As much as is my love to my own mother, so much is it to the devi queen. Because here in the palace there is gossip and talk, I dared not enter. These are those whom you draw to come to the palace, and still more that the king is now not present. Then the queen Tusharasakita tried the fortitude of the prince Kunala by way of love sports. But the prince refused to agree, and he went out from them. Then the queen felt fierce displeasure, she thereupon sough, revenge against him. Then Isu the king returned from Takassila. When he came to Pataliputra there Padmavati, and Tusharasakita the queen, the prince Kunala asked after his health and the fatigue of the road. They spoke (each) to him, saying, My heart is greatly pleased here, that you have come to your throne. We see the Dēva in good state, calm, in health and fortune.

Then at another time the queen Tusharasakita remembered the grief against prince Kunala, Yasa the amatya she desired to call, to him she desired to disclose that earlier hostility against him. Yasa the amatya spoke, saying, The prince formerly put me to shame before men. My hat fell off and he struck me six strokes upon the head. This hatred therefore is not yet forgotten. Together they formed a plot against him. And they worked upon the king Isu so that they induced him to send prince Kunala to Takassila to rule in his own native land. (The rest is missing).

COMMENTARY

These Saka text are still full of difficulties. A short commentary is therefore necessary.

Line 7, simaham simavase he entered into samadhana; the same time is mentioned in KT v 137, 12 painivara-kata-sanaye, but with the madhyama yame the middle watch.

19, hadikana, loc. sg. only here, is from the context the cloth in which the child is carried; in form it is hada-with suffix ita-connected.
with hussa-clothing, see Transactions of the Philological Society 1954, 195, and the Barr Festschrift; Georgian loan-word ardep mantle, and Armenian arts- are likely to be the same word.

22. *vram, B text 139 *vra 2 sg. conjunctive, may you live, to *vrate he lives.

24. *such-to name, call from a base *suk- familiar in Baltic Lithuanian *sauku, *saukti. Lithish *sautk to name, see Indo Iranian Journal 2,186,7.

36. karakiyin, reman B text 163 karakiyin, chacedony stone, Siddhasara 137vi kirkyan for Bud. Skt *amar-i mani elsewhere Skt karketane-. Zoroastrian Pahlavi kerkhan, Arab, kerkhion, see Asiatica, Festschrift Wolter, 14-5.

37. *viita vi, B text 37 *visā vi in the throat, heart only. from the base *vī- to turn, elder *vīca-to vari-to turn, see Asa Ajar, new series’ 11,114.

42. parbutsa he became adult, as Bud. Skt Divyavardhana 3,17 mehan samaytrey.

48. isada infidal, from Prakrit Gandhara asada-. Bud. Skt asradha-. 53. *bhīth- to turn, twist, from older *bha-ya-, attested in Sridhawara 121vi bhāthana-. Bud. Skt udavastrin-Tibetan dril-ba be twisted, with proverb Sdt 18v2 hambith, Bud. Skt grahi-, Tib. ser-bar byed.

83. *kundal-palace, Bud. Skt rajakula-pajusda-camtal, Bud. Skt raja-dhana, from older *kauza-da-as in Avestan kauza-ai, and with suffix -ka in Middle Persian kosa,

65. pisaraviya- renders Bud. Skt jumgalin in Divy 382,25.

73. kusa. infinitive to kusa-, Bud. Skt s nimarga seeking.

76. *sitra has been taken as Bud Skt sama- equal, same.

85. pisiina, B text 203 pisina, is derived from pissan-to know, hence pissa-ya-renunciation.

104. spasti is elsewhere ripasti, from Prakrit; Bud. Skt virvasta-with suffix-ya-, occurring also Jataka-stava.

104. caksus play, sport, gen, plural for older *carka-, which renders Bud. Skt rasi.

104. ha ni anavartiya aurye he did not approve of agreeing, he refused to consent.

105. *stema vasta then for him, with stema-adjecutive from ta-belonging
to that time or place, in loc. sg. none with pronoun ye.

113. gachanai grief, trouble, Siddhasara 125r2 gachenam jed. Tib. gdungs misery.

117. bauzi richade the hat fell down, in the Chinese version k'i kuam jian ni his hat fell to the ground.

117. engi blends Chinese t'ou head, found also in KT (=Khotanese Text) 2, 1,11 smgigs babsa bme dba rendering Chinese 'ou sa hair on the head.

117. k'i palei kuaxe he struck six light strokes, in Chinese p'ai he struck lightly.

118. sambaji barsadu they bound an agreement. Here sambaja is from Prakrit to Bud. Skt sam-vad-yoga-planning together, not the more usual Saka sambaji to be successful, prosper from sam-padyate.

120. raste rule, sovereignty, acc. sg. to elder runta acc. sg. ruttva abstract to ruttva-king.