

Buddhism in Khotan and Soghdiana

Fariba Sharifian

(Received 07 December 2015)

Abstract

Most Iranians consider Buddhists as people across the world away from Islamic lands. They worship Buddha's golden statues in their own temples. One would hardly assume that Buddhists have had important influence on the Iranian culture and literature. This research analyzes the traces of Buddhism in Pre-Islamic Iranian texts and shows that Buddhist beliefs and convictions had a significant presence in the literature of eastern Middle Iranian Languages: Soghdian and Khotanese. The spread of Buddhism in Iranian territories is due to tribute and trade mission of Buddhist monks as they were frequently the most highly educated and literate working members of society. Most Iranian Buddhist texts religious or non-religious have been originally written in Indian or Chinese of which only some original texts exist.

Key words: Aśoka, Avesta, Buddhism, Iranian Languages, Khotanese, Soghdian, Zambasta.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Iranian linguistic history the "Middle Iranian" era is thought to begin around the 4th century BCE lasting for about nine centuries. Linguistically, the Middle Iranian languages are classified into two main groups, Western and Eastern. The Western family includes Parthian (Arsacid Pahlavi) and Middle Persian, while Soghdian, Bactrian, Khwarazmian and Scythian fall under the Eastern category (Haig, 2008, pp.89,90).

Khotanese and Soghdian languages, were spoken in the lands of Khotan and Soghdiana located on the east of the present state of Persia. Khotan as a major oasis of the southern Tarim Basin in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China and Soghdiana in central Asia which stretches from the rivers Āmu Daryā in the south to the Syr Daryā in the north, with its heart in the valleys of the Zarafshān and the Kaška Daryā are historically important kingdom with Iranian-speaking population (Windfuhr, 2013, pp.279,

280, 377, 378; Tafazzoli, 1993, pp.357-365).

A substantial number of manuscripts and manuscript-fragments have come to light at the end of the 19th century and in the early of 20th century that contain texts written in Khotanese and Soghdian with Buddhist concepts (Utz,1978,pp.1-3 & Bailey,1979,pp. 2-4). Most of the Khotanese texts have been published in transcription by H. W. Bailey in his *Khotanese Texts* and *Khotanese Buddhist Texts*. Facilitation of the study of Khotanese and Soghdian Buddhists text is due to the efforts of many scholars such as Emmeric, Konow E. Luimann and M. luimann E. Benveniste, David. N. Mackenzie, Ilya. Gershevitch, Werner Sundermann, Friedrich W.K. Muller, F. Rosenberg, Hans Richelt, Sims-Williams, Hansen, and Utz.

2. SPREAD OF BUDDHISM BEYOND THE EASTERN BORDERS OF IRAN

The spread of Buddhism beyond the eastern borders of Iran coincides with India's

* Research Institute of Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (ICHTO), Iran
Email: far_sushans@yahoo.com

influence at the time of Aśoka emperor (Aśoka: 264- 230 BCE) that was based on Buddhism. Aśoka's promotions and efforts in the development of Buddhist beliefs led to the development of this religion in the north India and Afghanistan. At that time Buddhist monks were called to go to different areas to promote and propagate this religion. One of the active missionaries in this area was Koushanian government from the first century BCE to the fourth century CE) (Brough, 1961, pp.517-520).

Kaniṣka, the third emperor of Kuṣāna (50-128 CE), was the first Buddhist Kuṣāna king who ruled in Peshawar. His governance in Iran was important because he developed his territory to Kabul and Kashmir and provided the development of Buddhism in these lands and it was in that period that the Buddhism teachings penetrated the eastern parts of Iran in eastern area at the time of Parthian. On the other hand the compromise of the Parthian provided the context for the development of Buddhism. The city of Balkh in northern Afghanistan was considered as one of the most important centers of Buddhist religion in the Parthian period. One of the important Buddhist temples in this city was Nobahār temple and it is said that the wash-basin, teeth and swept of Buddha has been preserved in the temple, which was considered respectful among the Buddhists (Amin, 1999, p.89; Boyce 1996, pp. 187-188; Mashkour, 1999, pp. 390-396; Beal,1911, p.49).

The spread of Buddhism in Kuṣāna is evident in many Buddhist legends, according to which Kaniṣka was an earnest promoter of Buddhism. Buddhism was probably introduced to Soghdiana and Khotan during the period of Kuṣāna empire. Kuṣānian were very international in their culture and they patronized Buddhism as well as Hinduism and other Iranian religions. Soghdiana appropriated most of Kuṣāna cultural elements specially the Buddhist elements (Heirman & Bumacher, 2007, pp.57, 58).

There are various ways to study Soghdian Buddhism such as : biographies of monks and their report of traveling, Soghdian Buddhist texts written mostly in tun-huang and turfan regions. The periods covered by these historical records are from the second to 8th century for the bibliographic records and around 7th to 10th century for the Soghdian Buddhists texts. There is also interesting art historical evidence to show interactions between Soghdian and Chinese especially regarding to religion from which we can name many Soghdian tombs which have been recently discovered in China dated to 6th to the 10th century, the peak of Soghdian activities in China (Bosworth & Asimov, 2000, p.77).

Soghdian Buddhist monk with the surname Kang appear in the early Chinese sources dated from the 2nd through the 7th century. Many of these monks were descendants of Soghdian emigres or expatriates who lived in China, India or Southeast Asia. These early Soghdian monks brought and translated *Mahāyāna*, *Vinaya*, and some *Hinayāna* texts to China maybe they obtained these texts from various regions in Central Asia or India. These monks contributed to the development and formation of Chinese Buddhism in many aspects (Puri, 1993, p.13; Utz 1978, p.8)

Most of Soghdian texts are Buddhist and based on Chinese translation although some texts specially those of Dharani are originally from Sanskrit texts. Some Soghdian Buddhist texts match exactly with the corresponding Chinese parts word for word or at least they are similar in content. Dresden believes that this is often typical in the translation of the literature of religious texts, as translator is faithful to the prototype texts and sometimes this causes misunderstanding or misinterpretation. Mackenzie found that as Soghdian translators were so faithful to the main texts and translated them word by word. So without referring to the original texts Soghdian texts are unintelligible (Bosworth & Asimov, 2000, p.76-79; Utz, 1980, pp.7,8,12).

The main Soghdian Buddhist texts are as follow (adopted and modified from Utz 1978, pp.9-11) :

- A. *Jātaka and Avadāna: Vesāntara jātaka; Daśakarmapatha-avadānamāla* [Garland of *avadāna* regarding the tenactions]; An unidentified *avadāna* regarding two brothers of good and evil qualities (*Kalyāṇaṃkara* and *Pāpaṃkara*)
- B. *Mahāyāna* texts and the related commentaries: *Vajracchedik āprajñā-pāramitā sūtra; Vajracchedik āprajñā; Pañcavimsatisāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā sūtra; Suvarnaprabhāsottama sūtra; Saṅghātradharmaparyāya sūtra; Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra; Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa; Avataṃ saka sūtra; Lanikāvatāra sūtra; Buddhadyāna-samādhisāgara sūtra;*
- C. Tantric texts and *dhāraṇī*: *Amoghapāśamantrahṛdaya sūtra; Padmacintāmanī sūtra; Sūtra* of the 108 names of Auryāvalokiteśvara; *Nīlakaṇṭhadhāraṇī* (or *Nīlakaṇṭha-avalokiteśvara dhāraṇī*).
- D. Other *Mahāyāna* texts: *Dīrghanakha-parivrājakaparipṛcchā sūtra; Bhaiṣajyaguru vaiūryaprabhāsa; Pūrvpra Gidhāna viśeṣavistara sūtra; Aṅgulimālīya sūtra; Śūka sūtra*
- E. Apocryphal Texts: *Sūtra* of the causes and effects of good and evil (actions); *Dhūta sūtra* [Purification (of sin) *sūtra*]

Khotan as an oasis along the Silk Road that had an important role in business, philosophy and religion in Central Asia played an important role in the transmission of Buddhism during the period represented by the extant material (probably from around 700 to the end of the kingdom of Khotan, ca. 1000). Probably before the year 300 CE Buddhism was accepted in Khotan but most of scholars relate the time of acceptance of Buddhism in Khotan to the time of

Aśoka (Smith, 1998, pp.82,83; Hill, 1988, p.466; Whitfield, 2004,p.45).

Hsuan-Tsang was a Chinese Buddhist pilgrim who has recorded the name of Khotan in the local language as Huan.na and the Iranian as Huo.tan which is the secondary form of hvam na. Another Chinese pilgrim called Fa- Hsien who visited Khotan in 400 CE following the Indian scriptures, describes it as a pleasing area with an expanding population. He introduces the Khotan inhabitants as music lovers and following school Mahāyāna. The Khotan name is presented in Chinese sources as: *chieh-pan-to, han-pan-to, ho-pan-to, han-to, ko-koan-tan* and *ko-lo-to*. Today, the land of Khotan is under the governance of Chinese government in the region “Xinjiang” in West Republic of China. (Mirfakhraei, 2004,pp. 8-11,19; Bailey, 1979,p. 9; Stein, 2006,pp. 151-152; Puri 1993: 105).

Khotanian works were obtained from Tumshuq in the northeast of Kashghar and in Khotan in the southeast of the city in the late twentieth century. All these works belong to Buddhists. Most of the Buddhist texts including religious and non-religious works have been translated from Sanskrit and only the original texts of some of them exist and the original form of many of them can be observed from the Tibetan and Chinese translations that are available. Skillful use of Sanskrit terms in Khotanese translation is another evidence of the fact that Buddhist influence in the region has been very substantial (Tafazzoli, 1998, p.356).

Among the Buddhism schools the school of *Mahāyāna* had been widely developed in Khotan. Apparently this school was developed to unify and clarify Buddhist teachings that put a great emphasis on the dual values (*karūṇā*) and character (*prajñā*). The belief in emptiness (*śūnyata* or *śūnyavāda*) is one of the most important beliefs of this school that allocating three chapters of *Zambasta* is a proof of this claim

(Williams, 2009, p.52; Mirfakhraei, 2004, pp. 13-14; Bahar, 2005, pp. 180-184).

The main body of Khotanian literature is based on translated works but as Khotan was an important center of Buddhism throughout the first millennium of our era, the Khotanese Buddhist monks also composed texts themselves from which we can name the most important one as *Zambasta* (Bailey, 1979, p.2-3). The major Buddhist texts in Khotanese are as follow: 1. *Mahāyāna sūtras*, 2. various texts translated from Sanskrit, 3. indigenous Khotanese compositions (Adopted from Bailey, *Khotanese Buddhist Texts*, 1981).

1. Major *Mahāyāna sūtras* Khotanese: *Saddharmapuṇarīka-sūtra*; *Saṅghāma-sūtra*; *Śūraṅgamasamādhi-sūtra*; *Suvarṇabhāso-ttama-sūtra*; *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra*.
2. Many other kinds of Sanskrit texts were translated into Khotanese. Among them are various doctrinal texts, *prajñāpāramitā* texts, *deśanā* texts, *dhāraṇīs* (i.e., texts containing spells), *avadānas*, *jātakas*, etc. The most important of the *prajñāpāramitā* texts is the *Vajracchedikā Adhyardhaśatikā*, a bilingual Sanskrit-Khotanese text and one of the first Khotanese texts. *Dhāraṇīs* range from fragments of spells in single manuscript folios to extensive texts, some of which are known from Sanskrit (or Tibetan and/or Chinese); among the latter are the following: *Anantamukhanirhāri-dhāraṇī*; *Jñānolka-dhāraṇī*; *Amṛtaprabha-dhāraṇī*; *Avalokiteśvara-dhāraṇī*;

Three *avadāna* texts are attested in Khotanese: *Aśokavadāna*; *Nandāvadāna*; *Sudhanāvadāna*. Of the *deśanā* texts only one, *Bhadracaryā-deśanā*, has a known original. The others may be translations or local compositions : *Bhadracaryā-deśanā*; *Karmavibhaṅga*.

3. Indigenous Khotanese compositions: Few of the local compositions are extant, but three long texts in particular stand out as monuments to this activity: the Old Khotanese *Book of Zambasta*, the Late Khotanese *Mañjuśrīnairātmyāvatāra* and the so-called *Book of Vimalakīrtī*. These three texts are original Khotanese works concerning various aspects of Buddhism. The *Book of Zambasta* and the *Mañjuśrīnairātmyāvatāra* are both metrical, the *Book of Vimalakīrtī* at least in part. All three are based on Indian sources although they are not direct translations. The two Late Khotanese texts contain quotations from known Old Khotanese texts, and the *Mañjuśrī* text even cites long passages from the *Book of Zambasta*.

The most detailed Khotanian text with Buddhist themes is in the book. H. Bailey called it *Zambasta* in 440 pages including 1000 verses. This book contains poems with Buddhist themes that has the longest Khotanian literary text and it is important in the recognition of Khotanian language. The main title of the book is not clear but since the book is written under the command of an authority called Zambasta it is titled *Zambasta* as it has been proposed by "Baily" which was based on the lists provided by E. Leumann as the E edition. Then it was introduced by the character Z standing for Zambasta For the *Book of Zambasta* it has been argued that it should not be dated earlier than the seventh century. One may tentatively conclude that the bulk of the extant Khotanese manuscripts were written from about 700 to 1000, that is, over a period of 300 years (Bailey, 1979: Preface; Emmerick, 1967, pp.1-47).

The first and only translation of the text in 1968 by the New York-Toronto-Emerick been published. In *Zambasta* a collection of philosophical stories related to the Bodhisattva is provided. *Zambasta* lyrics are gathered in 24 chapters with Buddhist themes. The *Zambasta* themes are as follows: Chapter 1: About a *sūtra*

from *Samantabhadra*; Ch. 2: The narrative description of conversion of Bhadra sorcerer into Buddhism; Ch. 3: On the Love; Ch. 4: The theory of “The idea of invalid created world”; Ch. 5: The return of Śākyamuni and his residence in Kāpilavastu; Ch. 6: Evaluation of a sūtra; Ch.7: *Śūnyatā* study; Ch. 8: More discussion on *Śūnyatā*; Ch. 9: More discussion on *Śūnyatā*; Ch. 10: About Bodhi *sambhara* (or enlightenment factors); Ch. 11: About the love, affection and way to enlightenment; Ch. 12: About *samvara* or about ethical limitations for Bodhisatva and the official ceremony to supervise the limitations; Ch.13: Comparison of Buddhism, Mahāyāna and Śāravākyaneh; Ch.14: Rejection of the traditional life of Buddha based on intuitive view of the Mahāyāna sect; Ch. 15: Value and admiration of faith; Ch. 16: The description of the mountains and the seasons of the year; Ch.17: The description of the mountains and the seasons and the absence of happiness in the end of cycle; Ch. 18: Description of the old age and aging and the conditions of sinful and malignant people; Ch.19: About the women; Ch. 20: Description of spring and the impact on young monks; Ch. 21: The description of the cemetery that Buddha took his disciples to preach his teachings; Ch. 22: Description of Śākyamuni; Ch. 23: The command of Udine to draw a portrait of Buddha and his descent in Samskāra; Ch. 24: Description of the decline in the future. This chapter is the longest chapter in *Zambasta* (Bailey, 1967,pp.59,74 ; Emmerick 1968 :287-299 ; Mirfakhraei 1383 ,pp.99-100; Konow, 1914pp. 13-46; Leumann ,1967.pp.366- 375).

3. CONCLUSION

Presently Buddhism is a well-known religion in many countries such as India, Japan and China and nobody consider it in Iranian territories within its history. However, Iranian Buddhist texts including Khotanese and Soghdian Buddhist texts reveal Khotan and Soghdiana as

Eastern Iranian lands which played an important role in promotion of Buddhism in the Central Asia.

The paper has tried to delineate the influence of Buddhism on Iranian literature by giving a brief history of Buddhism penetration in Iran by introducing Buddhist texts which are still available by only listing them. Study of Buddhist texts written in Khotanese and Soghdian provided information about Buddhism in the Central Asia. On the other hand the variety of these texts reflects the popular Buddhism which spread in Khotan and Soghdiana as part of history of Iran.

In the Khotan and Soghdiana colony there were interesting cultural interactions among the different ethnic groups. The most famous groups were Zoroastrianism, Manacheism and Buddhism. So there were centuries of interactions and borrowings of religious ideas and concepts between these religions specially Buddhism and Manacheism. The existence of Khotanese and Soghdian Buddhists texts shows that among the Central Asian nations, Khotanese and Soghdians seem to have much more extensive role in transmitting and developing Buddhism in Central Asia than the others.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Amin, Sh. *Baztabe Buddha dar Iran va Islam*, Mir Kasravi, Tehran, 1999.
- Bahar, M. *Adyane Asiyaiee*, Cheshmeh, Tehran, 2005.
- Bailey, H.W. *Prolexis to the book of Zambasta*, Cambridge, 1967.
- Bailey, H.W. *Khotanese Buddhist Texts*, Cambridge University Press, New York,1981.
- Bailey, H.W. *Khotanese Texts*, Vol.II. Cambridge University Press, NewYork, 1979.
- Bosworth, C.E. & Asimov, M.S. *History of Civilization of Central Asia*, UNESCO, Paris, 2000.
- Boyce, M. *The history of Zoroaster* (trans.) by Homayoun Sanati Zade, Toos Publications, Tehran, 1996.
- Brough, J. A Kharoshti Inscription from China, *BSOAS* 24 (1961): 517-30.

- Beal, S. *The life of Hiuen-Tsiang* by Shamam Hwi Li, London, 1911.
- Dresden, M. "Soghdian Language and Literature", Cambridge History of Iran, 3(2), Cambridge, 1983: 1216-29.
- Emmerick, R.E. *Tibetan Texts concerning Khotan*, London, 1967
- Emmerick, R. E. *The Book of Zambasta. A Khotanese Poem on Buddhism*, London, 1968.
- Haig, Geoffery L.J. Alignment change in Iranian languages (A Construction Grammer Approach), Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, 2008.
- Heirman, A. & Bumbucher, S.P. *The Spread of Buddhism*, Leiden, Netherland, 2007.
- Hening, W.B. The Soghdian Text of Paris, *BSOAS* 11 (1946):713-40
- Hill, John E., Astudy of the Silk Routes during the later Han Dynasty, 1st and 2nd centuries, Booksurge Press, South Carolina, 2009.
- Konow, S. Fragments of Buddhist Work in the Ancient Aryan Language of Chinese Turkestan, Memory of The Asiatic Society, 1914 pp.13-46.
- Leumann, M. Neue Fragmente des altkhotan -sakischen, *ZDMG* 117 (1967): 366-375.
- Mashkour. Mohammad J. *Nameye Bastan*, Tehran, 1999.
- Mirfakhraiee, M. *Daramadi bar Zabane Khotani*, Tehran, 2004.
- Puri, B.N. *Buddhism in Central Asia*, Shri Jainendra Press, India, 1993.
- Stein, Aurel M. Ancient Khotan: Detailed Report of Archaeological Exploration in Chinese Turkestan, Clarendon Press, Oxford. 2006
- Smith, V.A. *Asoka the Buddhist Emperor of India*, Asian Educational Services, 1998.
- Taffazoli, Ahmad. *Tarikhe Adabiyate Iran pish az Islam*, by Zh .Amuzegar, Sokhan,1993.
- Utz, A.D. *A Survey of Buddhist Soghdian Studies*, Tokyo, 1978.
- Windfuhr, Gernot. *The Iranian Languages*, Routledge, London, 2013.