

Maitreyavyākaraṇa

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In his well-known study “Maitreya le consolateur,” Sylvain Lévi published folios 3–7 of a Pāla-period manuscript in the possession of the Asiatic Society of Calcutta. It contained the *Maitreyavyākaraṇa*,¹ a comparatively short text of slightly more than a hundred verses (the exact number differs from version to version), which describes the appearance of the future Buddha Maitreya, his career and the means to be reborn in his sphere of action, all in the form of a prophecy made by Śākyamuni, the Buddha of our present age, to Śāriputra, one of his main disciples. The first two folios of the manuscript, containing verses 1–25ab, are missing, but Lévi found a Tibetan translation preserved in the Kanjur and added a transliteration of the first 25 verses of the Tibetan text.²

In 1959 Prabhas Chandra Majumder published another Sanskrit version from a manuscript belonging to the famous Gilgit find.³ This text is also incomplete; it forms part of a larger manuscript containing mostly avadānas. Originally, the *Maitreyavyākaraṇa* must have covered about five folios; preserved are folios 206 to 209 which set in with verse 31 and end with the final verse, counted as 108 by Majumder, and a colophon in line 5 of folio 209 recto.

Finally, in 1989 Ishigami Zenno edited a complete version preserved in a Nepalese manuscript belonging to the National Archives in Kathmandu and added the Chinese translation of Yijing (T. 455). The various Sanskrit texts and the translations are closely related, but there are several minor differences, not least in the number of verses or pādas each version contains,⁴ but also in the wording. The metre is Anuṣṭubh, which easily permits the inversion of word order, as, for instance, in the case of *tasya yūpasya* in the version represented by the manuscripts from Calcutta and Kathmandu (verse 54a of Lévi’s edition, 51a of Ishigami’s) against *yūpasya tasya* in the corresponding verse 51a of the Gilgit manuscript, or the exchange of epithets, as, e.g., *dvipadottama* (Lévi 69b, Ishigami 66b) against *puruṣottamaḥ* (Gilgit 68b), or even the replacement of whole pādas.

The work never came to be included in any of the Indian canonical collections known to us, and therefore it is possibly a comparatively late composition which, however, appears to have acquired quasi-canonical status, since both the Tibetan and the Chinese compilers of the respective canonical collections placed it in the sūtra section and thus considered it as the word of the Buddha. In the later history of Indian Buddhism the work must have enjoyed considerable popularity for some time or served as a standard representation of the ‘Hīnayāna’ version of the narrative about the future Buddha. This is underlined by the existence of even a Persian translation which Gregory Schopen could identify in the section on Buddhism of Rashīd al-Dīn’s history of India

¹ Lévi 1932: 384–389.

² Lévi 1932: 381–384; in the modern reprint of the Peking Kanjur, the text carries the number 1011 and is arranged among the non-Mahāyāna works in the final part of the sūtra section. Cf. also Schopen 1982: 230ff. for the ‘sectarian’ affiliation of the text. However, it has to be noted that it is labelled a Mahāyānasūtra in the colophon of the Nepalese manuscript edited by Ishigami, cf. Ishigami 1989: 309.

³ Majumder 1959; facsimiles in Raghu Vira/Lokesh Chandra 1974: nos. 1536–1542. Cf. also Hinüber 1979: 344, no. 13c. Regrettably, the edition listed in Hinüber 1980 never appeared.

⁴ For instance, verses 33 and 44/41 of the Calcutta and Nepalese manuscripts are not found in the Gilgit text, as indicated by Schopen 1982: 229, while verses 105 and 106 of the Gilgit version are absent from the Calcutta and Nepalese texts.

written in the 14th century.⁵

When a fragment appeared among the Schøyen manuscripts which contained the name of Maitreya and preserved part of a work apparently written in Anuṣṭubh metre, it was therefore rather obvious to think of the *Maitreyavyākaraṇa* as a possible source. Once the connection was made, it was easy to locate the corresponding passages in the published versions. The fragment preserves the remains of only four verses, but since the wording and the order of the verses are identical with the other three Sanskrit versions the identification as *Maitreyavyākaraṇa* is a very safe guess. The small amount of text preserved does not allow us to establish the exact relationship between the four manuscripts, but it is enough to indicate that the transmission of the text was rather loose and that one probably has to reckon with multiple versions. In one case (word order in verse 53ab/56ab/53ab, cf. below) the Schøyen fragment corresponds to the manuscripts from Calcutta and Kathmandu, in another (epithet in verse 55b/58b/55b) to the Gilgit text.

The material of the fragment is birch bark. Its layers have become separated, and only one side is preserved. A search in the collection for the missing side, taking words from the preceding and following verses as a starting point, has yielded no result. The leaf contained most probably seven lines, since only line four is interrupted by the string hole. The left margin of the first three lines is fully preserved, but does not show any trace of a folio number. This points to the remains of a verso side. The number of akṣaras to a line can be calculated as slightly more than 60, which means that it was not a small-size manuscript. It is written in the so-called Gilgit/Bamiyan type I, dating probably to the 6th or 7th centuries. Since the manuscript from the Gilgit finds is written in Gilgit/Bamiyan type II, the Schøyen fragment most likely represents the oldest surviving Indian testimony of the text so far.

Transliteration

MS 2382/286; one side only

- 1 māṇavānām sa maitreyo maṁtrān adhyāpayiṣyati + + + + + ///
- 2 vibhūṣitaṁ · pradāsyati dvijātibhyo ya[jña]ṁ [k]ṛ .v. [p]u[r] . .s. ra || t. ///
- 3 ṣṭvevan tām anityatām* kṛtsnaṁ vicintya saṁsāraṁ pravrajyām [ro]cayiṣya ///
- 4 + + + + + hasrai saṁpuraskṛtaḥ niṣkramiṣya ○ ti maitre ///
- 5 + + + + + + + + + .[ai] .e[y] . [p] . [ruṣ]o ///

Reconstruction and comparison with the parallel versions

MS 2382/286

māṇavānām sa maitreyo
maṁtrān adhyāpayiṣyati (|)

Gilgit/Calcutta/Kathmandu

aśītibhiś caturbhiś ca
sahasraiḥ saṁpuraskṛtaḥ⁶ |
māṇavānām sa⁷ maitreyo
maṁtrān adhyāpayiṣyati || 47/50/47

⁵ Schopen 1982.

⁶ *sa puraskṛtaḥ* Lévi, Ishigami.

⁷ *ca* Lévi.

x x x x vibhūṣitam |
 pradāsyati dvijātibhyo
 yajñam kṛ(t)v(ā) pur(as)sara<m> ||

(dṛ)ṣṭvevan tām anityatām |
 kṛtsnam vicintya saṃsāram
 pravrajyām rocayisyati |

(sa)hasrai<h> saṃpuraskṛtaḥ |
 niṣkramiṣyati maitre(yaḥ)

(m)ai(tr)ey(a)<h> p(u)ruṣo(ttamaḥ)

sa tam yūpaṃ narapatir
 nānāratnavibhūṣitam |
 pradāsyati dvijātibhyo
 yajñam kṛtvā puraḥsaram |
 saptaratnamayaṃ⁸ yūpaṃ
 brāhmaṇebhyaḥ pradāsyati || 49/52/49⁹

yūpasya tasya¹⁰ maitreyo
 dṛṣṭvā caitām¹¹ anityatām |
 kṛtsnam vicintya saṃsāram
 pravrajyām rocayisyati || 51/54/51

aśītibhiḥ sahasraiḥ sa
 caturbhiś ca puraskṛtaḥ |¹²
 niṣkramiṣyati maitreyaḥ
 pravrajyām¹³ agrapudgalaḥ || 53/56/53

niṣadya tasya cādhasṭān
 maitreyaḥ puruṣottamaḥ |
 anuttarām śivām bodhim
 samavāpsyati nāyakaḥ || 55/58/55¹⁴

⁸ *saptaratnasamākirṇam* Ishigami.

⁹ Pādas e and f are attested in both the Gilgit and the manuscript used by Lévi. They cannot have been included in the Schøyen manuscript since the number of akṣaras missing between lines 2 and 3 would not accommodate two additional pādas and the remains of the first akṣara of the following line clearly point to the beginning of verse 50/53/50. The manuscript used by Ishigami also contains only four pādas, but unlike the Schøyen fragment they correspond to pādas a, b, e and f of Lévi's manuscript:

<i>sa tam yūpaṃ narapatir</i>	<i>nānāratnavibhūṣitam </i>
<i>saptaratnasamākirṇam</i>	<i>brāhmaṇebhyaḥ pradāsyati 49</i>

¹⁰ *tasya yūpasya* Lévi and Ishigami.

¹¹ *cainām* Lévi and Ishigami.

¹² *aśītibhiś caturbhiś ca sahasrais sa puraskṛtaḥ* Lévi and Ishigami (*saṃpuraskṛtaḥ* Ishigami), cf. verse 47ab/50ab.

¹³ *pravrajyārtham* Ishigami.

¹⁴ The Calcutta/Kathmandu version differs slightly:

<i>tasya mūle niṣaṇṇo 'sau</i>	<i>maitreyo dvipadottamaḥ </i>
<i>anuttarām ca saṃbodhim</i>	<i>prāpsyati nātra saṃśayaḥ 58/55</i>

prāpsyate Ishigami.