

A SANSKRIT MANUSCRIPT ON BIRCH-BARK FROM BAIRAM-ALI. II. AVADĀNA AND JĀTAKA (PART 8)

As we have seen earlier, the text of the Bairam-Ali manuscript contains a large number of Prakrit grammatical forms. For example, in place of Skt. *satvaiḥ*, Instr. Pl., we find the form *satvehi*, which goes back to *satvebhiḥ*. We find *-ehi*, in place of *-ebhiḥ* and *-aiḥ*; which is one of the most widespread Prakrit grammatical forms, repeated almost invariably throughout the text. Especially frequent are violations of the *saṃdhi* rule, for example, *kin tayā* and *kin tena* instead of Skt. *kiṃś tayā* and *kiṃś tena*. Also, many verb forms — aorist forms, for example — are given incorrectly.

A textual comparison with *avadānas* with the same plotline shows that the text in the manuscript is abbreviated and simplified. One is tempted to conclude that the stories outlined in note form in the manuscript hark back to an earlier folkloric layer that was further developed in alter *avadānas*. The language would have been intentionally “Sanskritized” to grant it legitimacy by making it similar to the language of classical Sanskrit literature.

In two recently published articles, Prof. Seishi Karashima (Tokyo) analyzes the grammatical features of a number of Sanskrit texts recorded in the fifth — ninth centuries. He notes departures from standard Sanskrit in orthography, phonology, syntax, and morphology and identifies several forms reflected neither in *BHSD* nor in *BHSG*, but which came to be standard for the Buddhist Sanskrit of the period under discussion. Seishi Karashima concludes that the language of many Buddhist texts (e.g., the earliest extant version of the “Lotus *Sūtra*” that we find in the Lūshun fragments of the *sūtra*) was originally not Sanskrit, but Prakrit (the Indian vernacular of the medieval period), only later “Sanskritized” when they were recorded in written form. It seems that the Bairam-Ali manuscript may confirm Karashima's conclusion. But, of course, its language needs additional and thorough intensive study [1].

FOL. 26a

TRANSLITERATION

1. *catur mahārājā{nā}nām¹ vina[ya] vistareṇa kiṃ karma śvāsaś ca mahāśvāsaś ca babhūva.*
2. *aṭiśvaraś ca cūṭiśvaraś ca garuḍa babhūvuh te kāśyape saṃmyaksambuddhe sakaśā² śikṣāpadā-*
3. *nī gr̥hī Otāhi || vivāha iti dharmadinnāyām bhikṣuṇyām vistareṇa pravrajyā vaktavya tasya*
4. *karma kāśyape saṃmyaksambuddh[e] pravrajitā tatra karma tayā mātāpitarā³ varṣakam kāritaṃ*
5. *vedapatyaṃ kṛtaṃ brahmacaryaṃ cīrṇaṃ || chedanaṃ yathā mahāsamudre satvasya paṃcahi⁴ yakṣa*

TRANSLATION

1. [Tell] in detail the *vinaya* of the four *mahārājās* ^[1]. What was [their] *karma*? The [*nāgas*] Śvāsa ^[2] and Mahāśvāsa ^[3] were
2. [flying in the air]. Aṭiśvara ^[4] and Cūṭiśvara ^[5], [later became] Garuḍa. At the time when the entirely enlightened Kāśyapa was alive, they followed
3. moral norms of conduct. [Story] of entering marriage ^[6]. In detail about the *bhikṣuṇī* Dharmadinnā. Tell how [she received] *pravrajyā*. Her
4. *karma* [was thus]: in the time of the entirely enlightened Kāśyapa [she] underwent the ritual of induction. Here the *karma* [was the following]: her parents commanded that a house be built for her to *varṣa* time; [by her] the Vedas were
5. comprehended ^[7]. She led a pious way of life. [Tale] entitled “Division”. How in the ocean between five-hundred *yakṣas*

¹ Braces { } designate superfluous *akṣara*.

² Instead of *sakaśe*.

³ Instead of Skt. *mātāpitarau*.

⁴ Instead of Skt. *paṃcabhiḥ*.