

THE BUDDHA NOT A MAGICIAN
FRAGMENT FROM THE PĀṬALAKASŪTRA
OF THE MADHYAMĀGAMA

According to the legend of the Buddha's life, the master performed many miracles during his long lasting career, just like Jesus Christ, the saviour of the Christians, in his relatively short earthly existence. One of the most famous miracles of the Buddha was done in a contest with heretics in the capital of the kingdom of Kosala Śrāvastī (Pāli Sāvattī), on account of which it is called the great wonder of Śrāvastī. There the Buddha, ascending into the air, emitted water from his feet and fire from his shoulders. We have also reports that he multiplied his figure many times on this occasion. All in all, there is no doubt that the Buddha was reported by his contemporaries to have surpassed any rival in miraculous powers.

Did the master boast of such faculties? This question is raised in a section of the Gāmaṇisaṃyutta of the Saṃyuttanikāya (SN)¹, in a Sutta under the heading « Pāṭali », where the *gāmaṇi* (Skt. *grāmaṇī*, village headman) Pāṭaliya appears as interlocutor of the Buddha. We are told that this gentleman at a certain time when Lord Buddha was staying among the Koliyas, neighbours of the Śākya of Kapilavastu, in the market town Uttara came to see the master as he had heard the rumour that the « Samaṇa Gotama » boasts of knowing magic (*māyā*). Pāṭaliya has some scruples whether the reports are true or popular distortions. The Buddha confirms the rumour to be true and in accordance with his teaching. People reporting that the Buddha knows magic, should not be censured. Disappointed, the village headman charges the Buddha with the reproach of being a magician. This conclusion is opposed by the Lord who entangles Pāṭaliya in a game of questions and answers. He begins with asking Pāṭaliya whether he knows that the Koliyas (Koliya-authorities) employ hirelings (policemen, peons) wearing hanging down crests (as a sort of uniform)². When the headman answered in the affir-

1. Ed. M. L. FEER, *Saṃyuttanikāya*, part IV, London, 1894, pp. 340ff.

2. Pāli, l.c., p. 341.16-12: *jānāsi tvaṃ gāmaṇi koḷiyānaṃ lambakacūḷake bhaṭṭe ti*.

mative, the next question is about the purpose for the employment of this special force. Answer: They serve for the checking of robbers and the conveying of messages³. Question: Are they honest fellows or of bad character? Answer: They belong to the most wicked men in the world.

At this point I like to discontinue the summary of the Pāli Sutta for the benefit of inserting and explaining a pretty small Sanskrit fragment from Central Asia which I recognized of late as transmitting a few words of a Sanskrit version of the Pāli text discussed. It is written on paper in Brāhmī script of about the 8th century A.D. and belongs to the discoveries of German expeditions led by Albert Grünwedel and Albert von Le Coq to places along the Northern « silk route » of Chinese Turkistan (Sin-kiang) in the beginning of this century. The Sanskrit version deviates in details from the Pāli, and the pretty small rest of words (see below) is so much mutilated that the Sanskrit remnants are only understandable with the help of the Chinese translation of a Sūtra which corresponds to the Sanskrit on the whole better than the Pāli. It is the Pāṭalakasūtra, contained as No. 20 in the Madhyamāgama (Chung-a-han-ching)⁴. In the Chin. Saṃyuktāgama (Tsa-a-han-ching) the Sūtra is missing.

The fragment listed as Cat.-No. 1402 reads as follows⁵:

Ob

- 1 /// + ca saṃ(gra)haṇārtha[m] ki(m) man[y](a)se grāmaṇi jāniṣe ///
 2 /// .. duḥśilā kraudyeṣū lamba(cūḍak)ā bhaṭās=teṣā[m]= . ///
 3 /// [ṭa]lako⁶ grāmaṇīr=duḥśilo [bh](a)[vi]ṣyati pāpadha(rmaḥ) ///
 4 /// + + [kṣ]āntayaḥ anyarucaya + + + .i [p].ā[y]. + ///
 5 /// + + [m]āyāṃ⁷ c=āhaṃ g[r](āma) + + + + + ///

3. Pāli, I.c., p. 341.16-18: *ye ca bhante koḷiyānaṃ corā te ca paṭisedhetuṃ yāni ca koḷiyānaṃ dutteyyāni tāni vahātuṃ etadatthiyā bhante koḷiyānaṃ lambacūḷakā bhaṭāti.*

4. Taishō Issaikyō (TI), Jap. Ed. of the Tripiṭaka in Chinese translation, vol. I, pp. 445a25-448c7. The Chinese title of the Sūtra is Po-lo-lao-ching (phonetically transcribed). In the book of THICH MINH CHAU, *The Chinese Madhyama Āgama and the Majjhima Nikāya, A Comparative Study*, published by the Saigon Institute of Higher Buddhist Studies, 1964/65, the Po-lo-lao-ching is mentioned once on p. 331 with its title only. There is no indication of the contents or reference to the parallel in the Saṃyuttanikāya which could have been found in CHITZEN AKANUMA's, *Comparative Catalogue of Chinese Āgamas and Pāli Nikāyas*, Tokyo, 1958, p. 8. — The Chinese text immediately referring to our fragment starts TI, vol. I, p. 445c1.

5. The exterior of the fragment (measurements etc.) will be described in a fifth part of the catalogue « *Sanskrithandschriften aus den Turfanfunden* », edited by LORE SANDER and ERNST WALDSCHMIDT in the near future (1982?). Supplemented akṣaras in the transcript are enclosed in round brackets; square brackets enclose damaged or hardly recognizable akṣaras.

6. Restore: *pāṭalako*.

7. Cp. Pāli, I.c., p. 342.5: *māyaṇ cāhaṃ gāmaṇi pajānāmi*. Continuation: *māyāya ca vipākaṃ | yathāpaṭipanno ca māyāvi kāyassa bhedā param maraṇā apāyaṃ duggatiṃ vinipātaṃ nīrayam upapajjati taṇca pajānāmi.*

R

- 1 /// + + + (ā)syavasi⁸ sa + + + + + + + + +
 2 /// + [n]. ca pudgalaṃ mṛṣāvāda .. + + + kam* + ///
 3 /// [pr](a)hāya⁹ tāṃ dṛṣṭiṃ tāṃ ruciṃ .. saṃkalpān=apra⁹ + ///
 4 /// nīr¹⁰=bhītas=trastaḥ saṃvigna(ḥ h)[r]ṣṭaromakūpo + ///
 5 /// + yo .i¹¹=nām=āhaṃ bhava[nta]ṃ [gau]tamaṃ amāyāvi + ///

The discussion between the Buddha and the grāmaṇī Pāṭalaka is in full swing. The Buddha has asked in the course of his counter-questioning for what purpose the hirelings are employed by the authorities of the Koliyas (Skt. Koḍya, Kroḍya, Krauḍya)¹². The first two words in our fragment (*ca saṃgrahaṇānāṃ* « and for the checking » [of robbers]) is the end of the answer. (Chinese:) « The hirelings are employed as messengers and for the purpose of killing robbers (rebels) »¹³. In the Chinese parallel Gautama continues: What do you think, headman (cp. Ob 1: *kiṃ manyase grāmaṇī*)? Do you know (Ob 1: *jānīse*) the hirelings with hanging down crests as honest or dishonest people¹⁴? The answer is that they are of bad character and that nobody in the world exceeds the hirelings regarding their bad character and wickedness (cp. Ob 2: *duḥṣilā kraudyesu lambacūḍakā bhaṭās* =)¹⁵. The Buddha furthermore asks whether a person would speak the truth who concludes from his, Pāṭalaka's, knowing the hirelings as wicked fellows that he, Pāṭalaka, himself is likely to be of bad character and subjected to wickedness (cp. Ob 3: *pāṭalako grāmaṇīr duḥṣilo bhaviṣyati pāpadharmaḥ*). Pāṭalaka answers in the negative and calls the hirelings men of different views, different longings and different wishes (cp. Ob 4: *anyakṣāntayaḥ anyaruṇayaḥ*)¹⁶. He calls himself in contrast to them a man who strictly keeps the precepts and is not subjected to wickedness. The Buddha states that he in the same manner knows magic (cp. Ob 5) but is not a magician. « How is that? I know magic, I know the person performing magic, I know the result (fruit) of magic, I know how to give up magic »¹⁷. Using the same phraseology he adds that he knows the killing

8. Reading and interpretation doubtful.

9. Restore: *aprahāya* and *tāṇi* (= *tān*) *saṃkalpān*=*aprahāya* respectively.

10. Restore: *grāmaṇīr*=.

11. Restore: *yo hi*.

12. Cp. F. EDGERTON, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, 1953, s.v. Koḍya.

13. TI, vol. I, p. 445c4. For the Pāli wording cp. note 3.

14. TI, vol. I, p. 445c5. Pāli, l.c., p. 341.19-20: *jānāsi tvaṇi kolīyānaṃ lambacūḍake bhaṭe silavanto vā te duṣṣilā vā ti*.

15. Pāli, l.c., p. 341.21-23: *jānāmaḥam bhante kolīyānaṃ lambacūḍake bhaṭe duṣṣile pāpadhamme | ye ca loke duṣṣilā pāpadhammā kolīyānaṃ lambacūḍakā tesam aññatarāti*.

16. Cp. R 3. — The wording in Pāli deviates; see l.c., p. 341.28-30: *aññe bhante kolīyānaṃ lambacūḍakā bhaṭā añño hamaṃsi aññathādhammā kolīyānaṃ lambacūḍakā bhaṭā aññathādhammo hamaṃsi*.

17. The somewhat deviating Pāli text is quoted in note 7.

of living beings, the taking of things not given and the telling of lies. The last case reads: « I know the telling of lies, know the person telling lies (cp. R 2: *ca pudgalaṃ mṛṣāvāda...*), the result (fruit) of lies, how to give up the telling of lies »¹⁸. Then the Buddha turns to threatening sentences: If somebody would say « the Śramaṇa Gautama knows magic, therefore he is a magician », and if he would not give up such words, such thinking, such longing, such wishes, such ideas, such considerations, such views (cp. R 3: *aprahāya tāṃ dṛṣṭiṃ tāṃ ruciṃ tāṃ saṃkalpān aprahāya...*)¹⁹, he would at the end of his life, as quickly as a man bends and stretches out his arm, be reborn in the hell.

When the *grāmaṇī* hears these words, he is afraid and has the hair of his body standing erect out of fear (cp. R 4: *grāmaṇir bhūtaḥ trastaḥ saṃvigna(h) hr̥ṣṭaromakūpo*)¹⁹. Getting up from his seat he bows his head down to the feet of the Buddha and confesses how foolish, dazzled, rash and bad he was, and that it was a lie when he called the Śramaṇa Gautama, who is not a magician, a magician (cp. R 5: *yo hi nāmāhaṃ bhavantaṃ gautamaṃ amāyāvinaṃ...*). The Buddha, he wishes, might accept his repentance¹⁹.

Here the first section of the Pāṭalaka-Sūtra as well as the text of our fragment comes to an end, and I may be allowed to conclude my article at this point likewise as it is not my aim to present a full comparative analysis of the Pāli Pāṭaliya-Sutta and the Pāṭalaka-Sūtra in the Chinese Madhyamāgama, but to expound, though of insignificant size, our Sanskrit fragment from Central Asia. The incoherent words are seen to have almost all gained sense by the identification with sections in parallel texts. The discussions of the Buddha with the headman on similar topics in the two texts compared go on, and the deviations of the Pāli text from the Chinese translation increase. The Pāli Sutta is much longer, but in both cases the headman finally asks the Buddha to be admitted to the Buddhist order as a lay disciple (*upāsaka*).

Let us ask in conclusion: How far do the arguments of the Buddha convince a modern reader in regard to the fact that the Buddha has obviously used supernatural powers at occasions and has even in public demonstrated his power to surpass competitors in this respect? The answer is that the term *māyā* in the Pāṭalaka-Sūtra and Pāṭaliya-Sutta certainly means « fraud », « deceit », otherwise the Buddha could not have placed the knower or possessor of *māyā* (*māyāvin*) on one level with a killer, thief, and a liar. The somewhat adequate indication for the psychic power exercised by the Buddha at the time of his miracles might be that it is a high class *ṛddhi* (Pāli *iddhi*). The meaning of *iddhi* in Pāli is very complex as a look into the Critical Pali Dictionary²⁰

18. Cp. Pāli, l.c., p. 342.22-25: *musāvādaṃ cāhaṃ gāmaṇi pajānāmi | musāvādassa ca vipākaṃ | yathāpaṭipanno ca musāvādi kāyassa bheda* etc. as in note 7.

19. The phrase is without a correspondence in the Pāli-Sutta. Cp., however, *Dīghanikāya*, vol. I, p. 50.1 and II, p. 240.8: *bhūto saṃviggō lomahaṭṭhajāto*.

20. Vol. II, pp. 291-92.

shows. The term *ṛddhi* is explained by Edgerton in his BHSD s.v. simply as « supernatural or magic power », but the magic power of the Buddha is incomparable with the magic power of a magician or trickster according to our text.

Göttingen.

ABBREVIATIONS

Ed.	= edition
Edgerton BHSD	= F. EDGERTON, <i>Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary</i> , New Haven, 1953.
l.c.	= loco citato
Ob	= obverse
PTS	= Pali Text Society
R	= reverse
SN	= Saṃyuttanikāya
s.v.	= sub voce
TI	= Taisho Edition; fuller title in note 4.