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A Verse from the *Bhadracarīpranidhāna* in a 10th Century Inscription found at Nālandā

by Gregory Schopen

Although it has not been previously recognized or identified, a verse from the *Bhadracarīpranidhāna* occurs in a 10th Century inscription from Nālandā which was published more than forty years ago. The inscription, unique in some ways, consists of four separate parts which are "engraved round the base of the drum" of a small *stūpa*. The first part—A—is a donative record written in two verses of an elaborate *kāvya* style; B consists of a single verse which is clearly identical to verse 46 of Watanabe's edition of the *Bhadracarīpranidhāna*; C contains what is usually called "the Buddhist creed"; and D contains two more verses which come from Buddhist literature.

A first reading of the inscription was left in manuscript by Hiranand Sastri. When this manuscript was edited and readied for publication by N.P. Chakravarti he added a very much improved reading of his own in a footnote. I re-edit the text here on the basis of the plates published in *Nalanda and Its Epigraphic Material*, but my text differs only occasionally from that given by Chakravarti.

The inscription—which has not previously been translated—is of interest from a number of points of view. It provides us with a late record of religious activity undertaken by a monk for the sake of his teacher. It provides us with another instance of the inscriptive use of religious verses of a kind already known from other sites. From Swat we have two inscriptions which contain a verse that is also found in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, the *Avadāna-sataka*, the *Dīgha- and Saṃyutta-nikāyas*, the
Theragāthā, the Jātaka, the Gāndhāri Dhammapada, and the Udānavarga; another inscription containing a verse that occurs in the Mahāvastu, the Dīgha, the Dhammapāda, the Udānavarga, and in the concluding verses of the Prātimokṣas of the Mūla-sarvāstivādins, Mahāsaṅghikas and Sarvāstivādins also comes from Swat. There is at least one more verse of a similar kind and distribution found at Swat and another at Guntupalli. All of these are much earlier than our Nālandā inscription, but the verses found in D are of exactly the same kind: they too also occur in the Udānavarga, the Avadānasataka, the Divyāvadāna, the Dīgha- and Samyutta-nikāyas, etc. If nothing else our Nālandā inscription establishes the continuity of the old practice of using apparently well known verses in Buddhist inscriptions.

The primary importance of our inscription, however, must lie in the fact that it contains the only verse of the Bhadracariprāṇidhāna known to occur in an Indian epigraph, and its occurrence establishes the fact that the Bhadracarī was known and actually used in the 10th Century at Nālandā. Moreover, although several specifically identifiable dhāraṇīs have been found at a number of sites, this verse is the only passage from a Mahāyāna text so far known to occur in an Indian inscription. This fact may suggest that, apart from Dhāraṇī texts, Mahāyāna literature—contrary to what we might think—was not widely known. The fact that this passage occurs in a 10th Century inscription, coupled with the fact that the only known references to “classical” Mahāyāna texts in Indian inscriptions come from the 11th Century, could suggest in turn that if this literature was known at all outside of narrow scholarly circles, it was known only very late. It may also be significant that when a passage from a Mahāyāna text does finally occur in an Indian inscription it occurs in a single inscription together with two other passages from demonstrably non-Mahāyāna texts. This at the very least is curious, although it may have some connection with the equally curious fact that the one Mahāyāna text to be cited in an Indian inscription is also one of the Mahāyāna texts which the Indo-Tibetan tradition from the 9th Century on specifically associates with the Sautrāntikas.
A.  

(1) oṁ [ | | ] yo buddha'-sāsana-saroja-vikāsane bhūl lokottare tad itare U U -U³ tattvah⁴ |  

(2) sāstrē prabhākaramatih saviteva loke śītānsu-tulya-carito pi yaśo viśuddhaḥ [ | | ]  

(3) śīṣyena tasya yati-kairava-śītadhāmān buddhākareṇa⁵ yatinā suguṇākareṇa⁶ [ | ]  

āropito bhagavataḥ sugatasya caityaḥ (4) sva[r]nācala-pratisamasthitīr eva bhūyāt |  

punyenaṇena labhāsau⁷ bauddham padam anuttaram śreyo-[mā]rge niyuṇjīta lokam samsāra-pīditam⁸ | |  

1 The scribe or engraver has used here—and at several other places—v for b, writing vuddha-.  
2 This is Chakravarti’s emendation; there is no sign of an e-mātra on the plate.  
3 There are four akṣaras which cannot be read here with certainty.  
4 The plate has tatvah, which Chakravarti emends to what is printed as tatvah(ttvh). The latter is obviously a typographical error.  
5 The scribe or engraver has again written vuddha-.  
6 Chakravarti reads svagunākareṇa, but the first akṣara is clearly su-; compare the su- of sugatasya later in this same line.  
7 The scribe has written labdhā-sau.  
8 The scribe here has used v for p, writing viḍitām.

B.  

(1) oṁ [ | | ] yāvata niṣṭha¹ nabhasya bhaveyā |  

²sa(tvā) ā[ṣe]ṣata niṣṭha tathaiva² |  

(2) karmatu³ kleśatu⁴ yāvata niṣṭhā |  

tāvata niṣṭhā⁵ mama praṇidhānam | |  

1 C akravarti reads niṣṭhā, but a comparison with the same word at the end of line 3 where the long ā is clear makes this unlikely.  
2⁰ Chakravarti reads this line as: sa cāṣeṣata niṣṭhā tathaiva. i. The second syllable is hard to interpret. Sastri had read -vā, but the textual parallels suggest -tvā-, which is possible. The bottom part of the akṣara involved appears to be broken. Chakravarti reads the third syllable as -ṣe-, but a comparison of it with -sā- in lines 1 and 2 of A, or with śa- of line 3 of B, makes it unlikely
that a ś is involved here. A comparison of it with ā- of āropito in line 3 of A, or with the a- of apramattā in line 2 of D, on the other hand, suggests it was intended for initial a-. This is also what the textual parallels have. But if read in this way the line is short a syllable. Chakravarti makes up for it by reading an i at the end of the line, but what he reads for i is almost certainly only a danda. The textual parallels suggest that the scribe has inadvertently omitted a -še-. (For the grammar of this line see Edgerton’s remarks on it at BHSG § 8.10). 3 Chakravarti reads karma tu as if tu were a separate indeclinable; cf. BHSG §§ 8.53–.55. 4 Chakravarti reads [kṛj]śatu, but the reading klesātu is virtually certain and confirmed by the textual parallels: klesātu. 5 Chakravarti reads niṣṭā, but I see no trace of the ā-mātra, and the textual parallels read niṣṭha.

C.

“Buddhist formula in two lines”

D.

(1) ārabhadhvam niṣkramata yujyadhvam buddha¹-sāsane² dhunīta mṛtyunāḥ sainyam na-(2)-dāgaram iva kuṇjaraḥ |

yo hy asmin dharmma-vinaye apramattās cariṣya-(3)-ti prahāya jāti-samsāraṃ duḥkhasyāntaṃ kariṣyati | |

¹ The plate reads again vuddha-. ² Although Chakravarti read -sāsane, and although this is obviously what was intended, there is no ā-mātra visible in the plate.

A.

Om. He who was, in the unfolding of the lotus of instruction of the Buddha which goes beyond the world . . .

For the Teacher, Prabhākaramati was in the world like the rays of the sun; his presence too was like the beams of the moon,
beautiful and brilliant.

By his pupil, the cool delight to the night blooming flowers of ascetics, the ascetic Buddhākara, a mine of good qualities, a caitya of the Blessed One, the Sugata, was raised—may it endure like a mountain of gold!

Through the merit of this may that one (Prabhākaramati) obtain the unsurpassed station of a Buddha!

may the world, afflicted by continuous rebirth, be fixed on the more fortunate path!

B.

as great as the full extent of the sky would be—
so too the full extent of all living beings without remainder;
as great as the full extent of acts and imperfections—
so great is the full extent of my vow.

C.

“Buddhist formula in two lines”

D.

You must begin! You must set forth! You must attach yourselves to the instruction of the Buddha!
This would topple the army of death like an elephant does a hut of reeds.

Indeed, he who, being attentive, will practice in this teaching and discipline having abandoned the continual cycle of births, will effect the end of suffering.
NOTES


8. For some remarks—not always well supported—on the use of gāthās see Ét. Lamotte, "De quelques influences grecques et scythes sur le boud-
dhisme," Académie des inscriptions & belles-lettres. Comptes rendus des séances de l'année 1956, 500ff. (This was later incorporated into Ét. Lamotte, Histoire du bouddhisme indien des origines à l'ère saka (Louvain: 1958) 546ff.; Ét. Lamotte, Le traité de la grande vertu de sagesse, t.II (Louvain: 1949) 688 & n.4. For textual warrants for the practice of inscribing religious verses on objects of worship see the interesting story in the Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya where the Buddha himself specifies that exactly the same verses as occur in section D of our inscription should be written above an image of himself painted on a cloth (R. Gnoli, The Gilgit Manuscript of the Sāyanāsanavastu and the Adhikaranavastu (Serie Orientale Roma 50) (Roma: 1978) 63–69); and the similar story—again involving the same two verses which occur in D—in the Rudrāyanavadāna (P.L. Vaidya, Divyāvadāna (Buddhist Sanskrit Texts no.20) (Darbhanga: 1959) 466 (cf. G. Roth, “Symbolism of the Buddhist Stūpa” in The Stūpa—Its Religious, Historical and Architectural Significance, ed. A.L. Dallapiccola & S.Z.-A. Lall- mant (Wiesbaden: 1980) 194 n.61, 197; and G. Roth, “The Physical Presence of the Buddha and its Representation in Buddhist Literature,” in Investigating Indian Art, ed. M. Yaldiz & W. Lobo (Berlin: 1987) 297—in the second of these papers Roth suggests that the verses that occur in D are the two verses which—according to some texts—are “represented” by the two bells of an ideal stūpa).

10. The verses in D are not specific to any one text but—like many similar verses—were freely used by the compilers of a variety of Buddhist texts. The verse in B, however, is both specific to and characteristic of the Bhadracari. It appears to occur nowhere else. Knowledge of the verse might in this case, therefore, be taken to imply knowledge of the text as a whole.


12. The Bhadracari itself apparently came to be classified as a “Dhāraṇī Text” at some stage. It is frequently found, for example, in manuscript collections of dhāraṇīs from Nepal; M. Winternitz & A.B. Keith, *Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, Vol. II (Oxford: 1905) 260; H. Halen, *Handbook of Oriental Collections in Finland* (Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies Monograph Series, No. 31) (London & Malmö: 1978) 85–86 (285); Ryōtai Kaneko, et al., “A Descriptive Catalogue of the Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Possession of the Toyo Bunko,” *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 37 (1979) 171, 189, etc. Unfortunately the history and function of these collections is far from clear. But if the Bhadracari was so classified already in the 10th Century then the verse which occurs in our inscription may have to be considered only another instance of a “dhāraṇī” in an Indian inscription.

13. “The Sarnath Stone Inscription of Kama: (Kalachuri) Year 810” (=1058 C.E.) records the fact that a copy of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā* had been made and given to the community of monks at Sarnath, and that something else had been given—what is not clear—to insure its constant recitation (V.V. Mirashi, *Inscriptions of the Kalachuri Chedi Era* (Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, IV.1) (Ootacamund: 1955) 275–78); “The Nalanda Inscription of Vipulasrimitra” (11th Century) also seems to refer to the same text as “‘the Mother of the Buddhhas’ in eight thousand (verses)” (yasya hṛdaye sahasrāś triṣṭibhiḥ pratvasati sambudhā-jañanāti; N.G. Majumdar, “Nalanda Inscription of Vipulasrimitra,” *Epigraphia Indica* 21 (1931/32) 97–101; cf. J.C. Ghosh, “The Date of the Nālandā Inscription of Vipulasrimitra,” *Indian Culture* 1 (1984) 291–92.

14. The Bhadracari, for example, was known to a few Buddhist scholiasts: to Bhavya (c. 6th Century; C. Lindtner, “Mātṛceta’s Pranidhānasaptati,” *Asiatische Studien / Études asiatiques* 38.2 (1984) 102), Śāntideva (c. 8th Century; C. Bendall, *Çikhiśasmucaya. A Compendium of Buddhistic Teaching compiled by Çāntideva chiefly from Earlier Mahāyāna-Sūtras* (Bibliotheca Budhhica 1) (St. Petersburg: 1897–1902) 290.8, 291.9, 297.1), Kamalaśīla (late 8th Century; G. Tucci, *Minor Buddhist Texts*, Part II (Serie Orientale Roma IX,2) (Roma: 1958) 221.2); G. Tucci, *Minor Buddhist Texts*, Part III (Serie Orientale Roma XLIII) (Roma: 1971) 13.12), and Atiśa (10th/11th Century; Lindtner, *Asiatische Studien / Études asiatiques* 58.2 (1984) 105). The problem, of course, is that we have no idea how widely these men and their works were known in actual
Buddhist communities and their “importance” has almost certainly been badly distorted by modern scholarly interest in them.

15. It is of some significance to note that inscriptive evidence suggests that Dhāraṇī texts were publically known much earlier and much more widely than the texts we think of as “classically” Mahāyāna. cf. the papers cited in n. 11 above.