



Paul Pelliot and the *Deśanā-parivarta* of the *Suvarṇabhāsa-sūtra**

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In 1913, only four years after returning (October 1909) from his monumental expedition into Central Asia (1906–1908),¹ Paul Pelliot published a Khotanese text for the first, and last, time from among his numerous manuscript findings from Dunhuang. The manuscript, in *poṭhi* format, P 3513,² is a collection of Buddhist texts,³ among which is found the *deśanā* “confession” chapter of the Sūtra of Golden Light in Late Khotanese. Pelliot published the first quarter (the introductory prose 3.01–010 and verses 3.1–24 in Skjærvø’s edition, to which references of the *Suvarṇabhāsa* text are made hereafter) in transcription and translation accompanied by a commentary (only to the introductory prose). It was Sylvain Lévi who first noticed in 1910 the presence of a part of the *Suvarṇabhāsa* as well as the *Bhadracaryādeśanā* among the 84 folios of P 3513,⁴ and, although the work on the *Suvarṇabhāsa* text was conducted in close collaboration with Robert Gauthiot, it is Pelliot alone, as it is explicitly stated on p. 94, who was responsible for the decipherment, the separation of words, and the literal interpretation. Gauthiot’s part of the work was expected to be published as a second part (*ibid.*), which was however never to be realized.

Seen from the present perspective, Pelliot’s work of 1913, when the study of the Khotanese language was in its infancy, is naturally full of shortcomings. On the other hand, considering what was known of the language at that time, and in the context of contemporary works by others, the high quality of Pelliot’s paper is unmistakable.⁵ Apart from the manuscripts brought from Dunhuang by himself, of which reference is made only to P 3513 and another batch of folios P 3510, he had at his disposal two articles by

Hoernle of 1910 and 1911, and two works by Ernst Leumann of 1908 and 1912. Hoernle’s 1911 paper obviously benefited others including Pelliot and Gauthiot by presenting for the first time in facsimile some manuscripts from Dunhuang where syllabaries are given as scribal exercises of the “cursive” Brāhmī of similar types to P 3513, and by discussing their reading, Hoernle has been credited with having *deciphered* Khotanese for the reason that he pointed out its similarity to some Iranian Pamir languages.⁶ However, decipherment in the case of the Khotanese language was a gradual process. Hoernle’s role at the initial stages of this process can more adequately be characterized as publishing, often with facsimile plates, the materials he had at hand with a limited degree of success as regards interpretation. His identification of what he called an “unknown language of Eastern Turkestan” with Iranian is but superficial.⁷ In 1901 he compared a number of words with Sanskrit, Persian and *Ghalchah* dialects (of the Pamir) without discriminating indigenous words from Indic loans. In a series of articles in 1910–1911 dealing with abundant new material from Stein’s Second Expedition (1906–1908) he hardly goes into the details of the genetic affiliation of the language except for a comment on another “unknown” language, i.e. Tocharian (1910, 1299f.). His interest was simply not there. Moreover, Hoernle consistently read (1911, 460, and *passim*) the very frequent ligature *tt-* as *nt-* even in an initial position.⁸ Pelliot (p. 102f.), on the other hand, agreeing with Konow and Leumann, preferred the reading *tt-*. As with Konow (1912a, 1130), the main argument for Pelliot was the comparison with the demonstrative pronouns of Old Iranian (which was to be discussed by

Gauthiot in the unpublished second part). Already in a lecture given in December 1911 (Pelliot 1912), Pelliot maintained, against Leumann (who first called it *Sprache II*, then *Nordarisch*) and with Konow (1912b, 553), that the language was Iranian, “assez aberrante, assez usée, beaucoup plus éloignée des autres langues iraniennes que le sogdien par exemple, mais dont les caractéristiques ne sont pas douteuses” (103–4).⁹

In the text of the *Deśanā-parivarta* printed by Pelliot, we notice that in a great many cases Pelliot read the vowel sign *-i* where later editions¹⁰ preferred *-ä*. This relates to a detached vowel sign above the right shoulder of an akṣara. The first attempt to distinguish it from the sign *-i* which is attached on the top center or left of the akṣara was made by Bailey (1938a, 521; 1938b, 592), who used *-i* (underlined *i*) and explained that it was a natural development from the double dots (dieresis) found in formal script. The next year, however, Bailey abandoned the transcription *-i* and adopted *-ä* instead (1940, 365), which, with the blessing of Konow, has been standard practice ever since. Another difference in transcription concerned the anusvāra. Pelliot, like most others at the time, transcribed all the anusvāras as *-ṁ*. The use of the so-called “unetymological anusvāra,” which is extremely frequent in Late Khotanese, indicated not by the letter *-ṁ*, but by a subscript tail (Polish *ogonek*, Lithuanian *nosinė*) as in *-ḡ* for *-aṁ*, was first used by Leumann 1912, 59. With Leumann it was an extension of the scheme he employed to distinguish vowels in manuscript readings and metrically required vowels in Old Khotanese verse texts. This method of transcription which violates the principle of diplomatic reproduction never found favor with Konow. However, Bailey first adopted it in 1938a, 530, continued it in *Khotanese Texts* (1945, ix), and it has since become standard usage. Lastly, Pelliot attached the Dative-Ablative ending *-jsa* of certain types of declension to the preceding word, unlike Leumann and Konow, both of whom used a hyphen, or Bailey, who consistently transcribed it as a separate word. Pelliot’s method unfortunately did not find a following, but it is entirely justifiable, since *-jsa* behaves just like an inflectional ending rather than a clitic.

A small number of misreadings¹¹ of the Brāhmī script could not be avoided. The akṣara *lā* is twice read as *lo* in 61r1 (3.4) *śilām* “ślokaś” and 61r3 (3.5) *śa’ma-lām* “Yama-loka.”¹² The vowel sign in question is clearly *-ā*. The reason for the

misreading may be sought in the facsimile plate of the syllabary Ch. 0046¹³ published by Hoernle 1911, plate IV (opp. p. 458), where *le* is followed by two *lās*. The independent (initial) vowel letter *o*, which Hoernle 1910, 1295, transcribes as *wa*, in accordance with its use in Tocharian, is rendered by Pelliot (91, n. 2) as *o* and *ō* (“affecté de la marque de la longue”). Pelliot’s proposal, which has something to recommend it for distinguishing the independent form from the vowel sign attached to a consonant letter, did not however find a following, while the reading of *o-* (and *au-* with the *ā-mātrā*), and not *wa*, was argued for by Konow 1916a, 217, and was generally accepted.

Apart from these minor points, there are a few misreadings which at first sight seem quite serious (see fig. 1). In 60v4 (3.3) Pelliot’s text has *paduā āmṇamḍā ṇesta* with the translation “en avant (?) se trouvant (?) ils étaient assis.” The first word, which must be *paḍā* “before, in front,”¹⁴ has a slightly different shape here from the same word in 63r2 (3.18), where Pelliot has the correct reading. However, the vowel sign *-u* below the akṣara *da* is normally (and always in this manuscript) the hook type as in 61r4 (3.5) *dukha* “misery,” and not the wedge type as in 60v3 (3.2) *khu* “as, like.” Another apparent misreading poses a problem. It concerns 63r2 (3.18) *nūścura* “harsh” (Pelliot “violent”), a loan word from Skt. *niṣṭhura* “hard, severe.” Leumann (1920, 58) corrected it to *nuṣṭhura*, a form found 16 times in the manuscript E (= The Book of Zambasta). Bailey in *KT* 1 (1945) followed Pelliot, but in the second edition (1969) changed it to *nūṣṭhura* like Leumann. However, if we compare the word in 63r2 to 65v2 (3.38) *nūṣṭūra* (both editions of *KT* 1), the difference in the second akṣara is clear. Pelliot’s reading in 63r2 was correct, and the correction by Leumann and Bailey (1969) amounts to an editorial emendation, with the implication that the scribe inadvertently extended the stroke in the middle part to the left, since the existence of a doublet in *-śc-* due to phonetic change is unlikely. Somewhat unfortunately for Pelliot, a rather rare ligature *-thy-* in 64r1 *śaṭhyau jsa* (3.24) “through deceit” led him to read the word as *śavyaujsa* which he could not understand. A comparison can be made with the shape of *vye* “was” in 60v1 (3.010). Leumann, who did not go as far as this part in 1920, 58, would no doubt have had the correct reading as the word occurs seven times in the manuscript E. See *śśaṭhyau* in Z 24.260.

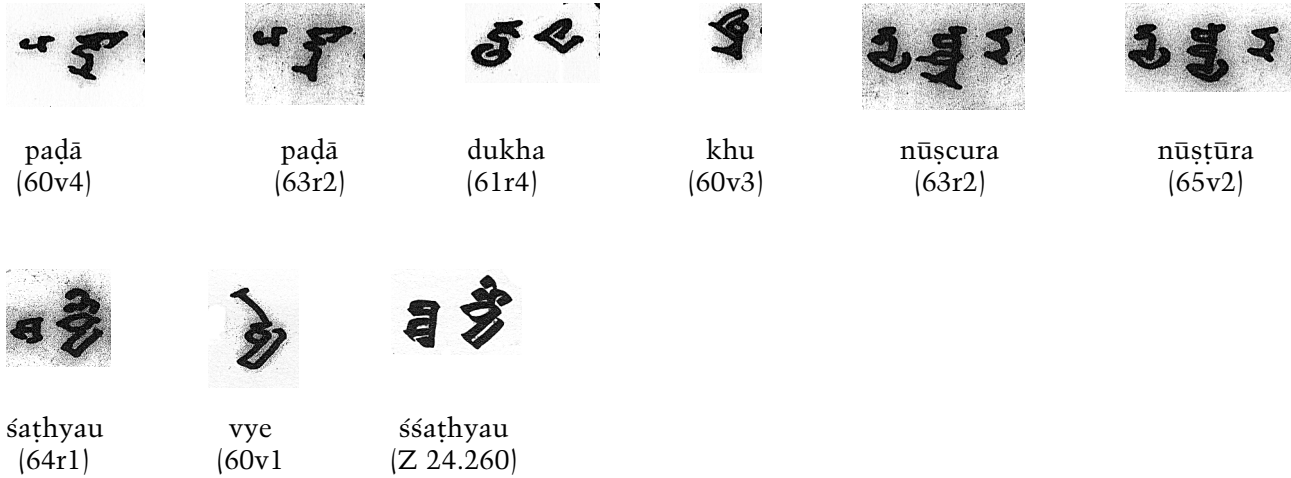


Fig. 1. Problematic readings.

In morphology, Pelliot failed to recognize the abstract suffix *-auṇa* in *dukhittauṇina* (3.5, 24) “through poverty” and *tsāmṭtauṇiṣa* (= *tsāmṭtauṇi ṣa*) (3.20) “through wealth,” separating *ttauṇina*, *ttauṇiṣa* as a word of unknown meaning.¹⁵ It was Konow who, almost 20 years later (1932, 62), first recognized this suffix, deriving it from **-a-van-ya-* and comparing it with the Sogdian suffix *-wny*. Another example of an unrecognized grammatical form was the present middle participle *śāna* “lying” in 60v2 (3.1) *ahaphiḍā śāna* “lying undisturbed.” Pelliot read *ahamphiḍiśāṃna* as one word with the translation “n’étant pas épuisé (?)” as it appears to correspond to the Sanskrit *atandritena* “not tired.” His question mark no doubt resulted from his inability to analyze the form. Leumann (1920, 59) was able to correct the reading with the translation “unangegriffen . . . liegend.” Both words, *haphāḍa-* “verwirrt” and the present participle *śśāna-* were known to him from the manuscript E (Book of Zambasta). Similarly, Pelliot did not recognise the word *haḍara* in *haḍara ba’ysa* “the former buddhas,” 60v2 (3.1), and took *ba’ysa* as the vocative singular, while Leumann (ibid.) was able to translate *haḍara* as “einstige,” since the older form *hatāḍara-* “früher, einstig” was known to him from the manuscript E. Many further such cases could be mentioned which demonstrate how severely handicapped Pelliot was by the lack of material available to him before 1913. In addition the only Sanskrit printed edition was notoriously inadequate (Dās and Čaṣṭrī 1898, described

by Nobel (1933, 573), as “eine der schlechtesten Ausgaben, die jemals von einem indischen Text gemacht worden sind”)¹⁶ and the Chinese version by Yijing (cf. Nobel 1948) as a rule does not give word-to-word correspondences.

With all these shortcomings one might get the impression that Pelliot’s attempt at understanding the newly discovered text was a failure. In fact it was not. Even when he questioned the meaning of individual words, he nevertheless in most cases correctly understood the basic structure of the sentence, and, most importantly, he meticulously distinguished what could be known from what was uncertain. In this respect it is unfortunate that he was only able to publish a commentary on the initial prose part, in which he gives lengthy discussions of important words. In an explanation of the passage *ttye śīvi byūṣṭā* “that night having turned into dawn” (60r2 (3.06); see Skjærvø 2004, vol. 2, 109), Pelliot (120–21), following the Sanskrit *tasyāṃ rātryāṃ atyayena* “at the end of that night,” reluctantly translated the phrase as “cette nuit s’acheva,” and then unsuccessfully tried to connect *byūṣṭā* “dawned” with the verb *bud-* “to know, be awakened” (with the form *bvāmde* “they will know”) on the analogy of *pyūṣṭā* “heard” beside *pvāmde* “they will hear.” All the forms alluded to by Pelliot are Late Khotanese, and we now know that the analogy fails in Old Khotanese. It emerges from the discussion of the word, however, that the Khotanese version is much closer to Yijing’s Chinese 至天曉 已 *zhì tiān xiǎo yǐ* “quand fut arrivée l’aurore”

than the Sanskrit (all manuscripts). It has been pointed out (Skjærvø 2004, vol. 1, lxxv) that the Khotanese version “was made from the same Central Asian recension that Yijing used around 700 C.E.” This is one of the clearest points that support the view.¹⁷

When Pelliot published his article in 1913, no text publication of Khotanese existed in the modern sense, in which the manuscript reading is presented in transcription, accompanied by a translation in a modern language with a commentary which discusses philological and other matters. In this sense Pelliot’s work was the very first. Before him, Hoernle (1910, 1284–93) had published a small portion of the *Vajracchedikā* and the *Aparimitāyuh-sūtra* in Late Khotanese, both found at Dunhuang during the second expedition of Aurel Stein. Here each word of the Khotanese text is accompanied by the Sanskrit word below. However, since the Khotanese version is not a word-for-word translation of the Sanskrit in exactly the same sequence, this method leaves many Khotanese words unexplained. Some paleographical and grammatical points are mentioned in the footnotes, which are rather rudimentary compared to Pelliot’s. Leumann (1912, 77–83) published the same texts as Hoernle 1910, and here again the text was presented in the same way with some improvements on the reading. Leumann’s own *editio princeps* of the Sanskrit-Khotanese text of the *Adhyardhaśatikā Prajñāpāramitā* (1912, 92–99) has only the transcription of the text. It was not until Konow (1916a, 1916b, 1916c) published the two texts, the *Vajracchedikā* and the *Aparimitāyuh-sūtra*, in toto together with a grammatical sketch of the language and a complete glossary, that a model for the publication of such texts was established. Although Konow’s work took many years in preparation, possibly laid aside while Hoernle was assembling the contributions to the volume,¹⁸ the honor of the first publication of a Khotanese text in the sense discussed above belongs to Pelliot.

We can only speculate as to why Pelliot did not continue his work on Khotanese. The publication of Konow’s major work (1916a, 1916b, 1916c), or the inaccessibility of older, and grammatically richer material being worked upon by Leumann may have been part of the reason. Gauthiot’s death in 1916 could also have been a blow. But above all he had, with the abundant material available to him, more than a lifetime’s work of

Sinological and Central Asian studies. It was a quarter century later, in 1937, before another scholar, H. W. Bailey, started to work again on the Pelliot Khotanese manuscripts.

Notes

* I dedicate this short article to Professor Skjærvø to whom I am particularly grateful for making his monumental 2004 edition of the *Suvarṇabhāsa-sūtra*—unfortunately still difficult to obtain—available to me in digital format.

1. Duyvendak 2001, xix. Pelliot reached Beijing in October, 1908, not in December, 1910 as Lieu (n.d.) has it. In the meantime, having given a number of lectures in 1909 and 1910 (Walravens 2001, 22–24, nos. 136, 148, 150), he had published, together with Édouard Chavannes, “Un traité manichéen retrouvé en Chine, traduit et annoté,” *JA* (1911), 499–617; (1913), 99–199; 261–394.

2. Bibliothèque nationale, Pelliot chinois 3513. Digital images of this manuscript are available on <http://idp.bl.uk> (search under Pelliot chinois 3513).

3. See Dresden 1977, 75.

4. *JA* 1910, 626–27; Pelliot 1913, 94 n. 3.

5. Pelliot’s work is not mentioned in Emmerick 1992 either among “the pioneers of the decipherment” (p. 6) or in the section dealing with the *Suvarṇabhāsa* (p. 33f.). Lieu (n.d.) does not mention it either.

6. Emmerick 1992, 6; Skjærvø 2002, lxix; Sims-Williams 2004, 419.

7. Hoernle 1901, 32–36.

8. Only some years later (Hoernle 1916b–d) did he choose to follow Konow (1912a, 1129–30; 1916a, 217) and Leumann (1912, 38).

9. This view was shared, independently from each other, by Lüders 1913 and Reichelt 1913, among others.

10. Skjærvø 2004, vol. 2, 40–44, notes all the important differences in Pelliot and later editions (Leumann 1920, 57–58, and both editions of Bailey’s *Khotanese Texts* I).

11. 61r3 (3.5) *syama-* for *ysama-* is likely to be a typo. 61r4 (3.6) *pāhāmmejsa* “by the sounding” for *pā’-*, 61v4 (3.8) *bvāmde* “they will know” for *bvāmḍi*, 62v3 (3.15) *ttrīyaśūm’* “among animals” for *-śū* are misreadings.

12. Corrected by Leumann 1920, 57. Leumann appears not to have seen the manuscript himself. He also omitted the last five verses (3.20–24) published by Pelliot without explanation. Leumann moreover restored all the forms of *ba’ysa-* “Buddha” and *ba’ysūsti-* “bodhi” in the verse part to *balysa-* and *balysūsti-* for metrical reasons (p. 56), but not in the prose part. He thus produces a Late Khotanese text with a mixture of typical Old Khotanese forms.

13. = IOL Khot S. 30. See Skjærvø 2002, 536.
 14. So in Bailey 1945 and all subsequent editions, but Leumann 1920 has *paduā*.
 15. Leumann, 1920, 57, read 61r2 *dukhittauñina* as one word, translating it (p. 60) as “Unglücklichsein.”
 16. For example in verse 4 (p. 9) both the second and fourth pādas are defective and make no sense. While Pelliot partially managed to get the correct reading of the Khotanese version and its meaning, in the fourth pāda he read *kva ysīra* for *nvaysīra* “would issue” and translated “extrêmement” with a question mark. The fact that Leumann (1920, 57) corrected Pelliot to *hvata ysīra* with an arbitrary reconstruction of the Sanskrit (p. 60) suggests again that he proposed all the corrections to Pelliot without seeing the manuscript.
 17. See also *uvāra* “noble” in verse 4 discussed in the footnote above. Yijing has 妙 *miào* “excellent” which is absent from all the known Sanskrit versions. On the other hand the absence of verse 12 from the Khotanese version alone (Nobel 1937, xxvii) may simply be a lapsus in this single manuscript.
 18. Pelliot, 1913, 91, had seen the announcement of the forthcoming publication in Konow 1912c, but the book took three more years to come out.

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