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An Old Uighur Fragment in Alliterative Verses Preserved in the Turfan Museum

Li Gang*

1. Description

The Old Uighur fragment presented in this article was found by chance in the storehouse of the Turfan Museum (Xinjiang, China) in 2015, when the workers were classifying the relics preserved there. No inventory number had been given to the fragment, so we have no information about when/where the fragment was excavated, nor who brought it to the storehouse. Now it is given the number as “T1” for the convenience of scholarly works.

The fragment is a nearly complete leaf of the paper (22.5 x 17 cm), even though the top and bottom margins are slightly damaged. No marginal lines can be seen.

On the *recto* side, we find twelve lines of Old Uighur text in the formal script. Its first ten lines refer to Buddhist praises in Sanskrit (Uig. *vamsan* < Chin. 梵讚 *fan-zan*, see note r1a). It is not clear whether the stanzas are part of a colophon⁽¹⁾ to a specific praise or a general description of praises as no title of praise is preserved.

In lines 11–12, we find a colophon note by a Buddhist monk named Sinkuy Šāli. He wrote the stanzas on request of another monk, whose name may be restored to Kin[ts]o Šāli. Both of them belonged to the monastery of a certain Tazuk Tegin, who could be a kind of supervisor of his monastery in Kočo (Gaochang). It is unique that within the verses the scribe mentions that he wrote his text *yazın* “in spring.”

Several scribes reused the verso side for drafts or scribbles. We find, at least, four different hands in the cursive Uighur script: lines 1–3, lines 4–6, lines 7 & 9, and line 10. Noteworthy is the third part (lines 7 & 9), also a stanza in alliterative verses. It is uncertain whether line 8 follows lines 4–6.

Besides, in the middle of the lines 1–3, the first five letters of the Uighur alphabet are written horizontally and separately: aleph (ʾ), beth (v), gimel (γ), vau (w), and then samech (s) in place of zain (z), apparently influenced by dental confusion of z/s.⁽²⁾ Above the aleph are two more letters, both of which can be read as cheth (x). This hand of the alphabet might be the same with lines 4–6.

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(1) Some typical phrases of Old Uighur colophons like *y(e)mä* and *sadu* or *ädgü sadu* (see Kasai 2008, 38) are missing.

(2) For the similar example of Uighur alphabet with dental confusion of z/s, see Zieme 1991, 349.

It is hardly possible to determine the date of the verse text on the recto side, while the texts on the verso side may be safely dated to the Mongol-Yuan period (13th – 14th centuries), judging from their curive script.

2. Recto

Transliteration

- 1 []tyqlyq 'ydwq []ms'n 'yq . y'zyn pytydym mn synkwy []y
- 2 []ncyq 'wynky []nky v'm[]'n l'r : y'r'dynzwnl'r 'w[]'ty
- 3 []synt' : y'lnkwq twysyn 'l'zwn l'r : kyc' t'nk'd'
- 4 mwny 'wqyzwn l[r] : kysy twysyn 'wk 'l'zwn l'r :
- 5 kyrtw twyzwk t'pzw l'r : kyrdyn 'wynky kydzwn l'r :
- 6 'ylykd' twtwp 'wqyzwn l'r : 'ydyklyk nwm l'ryq
- 7 []l'zwn l'r : 'ylkysyz d'p'rwky 'yrynty lyk qylync dyn
- 8 []tzw l'r : t'tyq lyq 'ydwq v'm's'n l'ryq : t'vr'n[]
- 9 kwykwlyn twtzw l'r : t'mwdyn 'wq 'wzsw[]
- 10 t'nl'ncyq m'ytry pwrq'n q' twszwn l'r
- 11 mn synkwy s'ly t'zwq tykyn vrq'r ynd' twyrtwnc
- 12 []y kyn[]w s'ly kwyswy (+'wycwn) pytyyw t'kyndym : 'wytyk 'wl ::

Transcription and Translation

[]	[..... I wrote?]
₁ [ta]tɪɣlɪg ɪduk [va]msan-ɪg	(this) [lov]ely, holy Sanskrit [pr]aise.

yazın bitidim m(ä)n sinkuy [šäl]i	In spring, I, Sinkuy Šäli, wrote (these) various
₂ [yalı]nčig öñi [ö]ñi vam[s]an-lar :	[shi]ning Sanskrit praises. (People) shall train
yaratınzunlar u[z]atı ₃ [ya]şınta :	themselves along their lives, (thus) they shall
yalıuk tüšin alzun-lar :	receive the fruit of (human) creatures.

kečä tañda 4munı okızun-l[a]r :	Late in the evening and at dawn they should recite
kiši tüšin ök alzun-lar :	them, (thus) they shall receive the fruit of human
şkertü tözüg tapzun-lar :	beings. They shall find the true root!
kirdin öñi ketzün-lär :	Each of them shall get rid of impurity!

6eligdä tutup okızun-lar : Holding (them) in hands, they shall recite (them)!
 etiglig nom-larig 7[ıda]lazun-lar : They shall give up the *saṃskṛta dharmas*!
 ilkisiz-däbärüki They shall keep away from the sinful deeds done
 ırinti-lig kılınč-dın 8[ke]tzün-lär : since primordial times.

tatig-lig ıduk vamsan-larig : With a striving mind they shall keep the lovely holy
 tavan[u] 9köñülin tutzun-lar : Sanskrit praises!
 tamudın ok ozzun-[lar] They shall be released from hell!
 10tañlančig maitri burhan-ka tuşzun-lar. They shall meet the lovely Buddha Maitreya!

[Prose colophon]

11m(ä)n sinkuy šäli tazuk tegin I, Sinkuy Šäli, humbly wrote (this praise) in the
 v(a)rhar-ında törtünč 12[a]y kin[ts]o šäli monastery of Tazuk Tegin in the fourth month on
 küsüši üçün bitiyü täğindim : ötig ol request of Kin[ts]o Šäli. (This) is a note of memory.

Notes

r1a, *vamsan* < Chin. 梵讚 *fan-zan* “praise to be recited in Sanskrit.”⁽³⁾ Just recently A. Yakup correctly pointed out that *vamsan* ~ *vamtsan* is attested in another alliterative verse text: *ätizgü ürgü tıg labay ägzig vamtsan yırtakşut* “the flute (*tıg* < Chin. 笛 *di*) and the conchshell horn (*labay* < Chin. 螺貝 *luo-bei*) to play and blow; voice, Sanskrit praise (*vamtsan*), song and hymn.”⁽⁴⁾

r1b, *sinkuy šäli*, the first element should be originated from Chinese Buddhist name 進惠 *Jin-hui*, as attested in the well-known portraits of Buddhist monks from Bezeklik Cave 20 (Grünwedel’s Cave 9): Uig. *sinkuy tutung bäg-ning ıduk körki bo ärür* = Chin. 進惠都統之像 “this is the portrait of Sinkuy-tutung.”⁽⁵⁾ Other probable transcription for *synkwy* may be *šenkuy* < 善惠 *Shan-hui* or 禪惠 *Chan-hui*.⁽⁶⁾ For the Buddhist title *šäli*, which is derived from Chin. 闍利 *she-li* (< Skt. *ācārya* “master, teacher”) but generally means “a monk,” see Hamilton 1984, 425–431.

r11, *tazuk tegin* is the name of an official who is governing a monastery in Kočo (Gaochang). He is known from the fragment U 2330 (T I D 523) in the Turfan Collection of Berlin.⁽⁷⁾ The meaning of the name *tazuk* is not clear.

(3) Mochizuki V, 4688–4699.

(4) Yakup 2015, 199, 210, 444; *vamtsan* had been mistaken as *†yamtsan* by Tezcan 1974, 69–70.

(5) Le Coq 1913, 16a.

(6) Cf. Matsui 2005, 50.

(7) Zieme 1976, 770.

3. *Verso*

Transliteration

- 1 yyk nwm l'r 'rs'r l'r : s'ns'r lyq 'qyn t' 'wtrw p'rd'cy 'rwyr l'r : t'rynk t' t'ryn[k]
- 2 tw[]qyn kwyrn'kyn 'lp tytyr . tynlq l'r q' 'mr'nm'q lyq pwry 'wyz' 'wyrwlmys l[]
t'kynm'z[]
- 3 twym'[] k[]m'm'k l'ry 'wqrynt' 'nyn t'kynwrl'r : 'cyq t'rq' 'mk'kyk :
- 4 ym' kympw s'msyn t'ysyn syq'y tykm' 'wyc myng '[]
- 5 'l[]wcy pylyk'nkyz' ylnkwq tydm' tynlq 'wql'n l'ry 'wyz
- 6 tyn 'trylmys 'wl ylnkwz pyz p's l'zwn
- 7 []l'rt' 'rdnysy . 'ty kwytrwlmys nynk yrlyqy 'wl • 'ny twtd'cy
- 8 n'kw(?) twywyq(?)
- 9 'yn'l l'r • 'lqw 'mk'k tyn 'wzqy l'r • pw sw k'd cyn 'wl •
- 10 yyl t twnkwx yyl 'wycwnc
- 11 t(..)k(..)l(?)

Transcription and Translation

1yeg nom-lar ärsär-lär : sansar-lig akin-ta
 utru bardači ärür-lär : täriñ-tä tärin[g]
 2tu[yma]kın körmäk-in alp tetir .
 tınl(1)g-larka amranmak-lig büri üzä
 örtülmiş-l[är] täginm[äzlä]r 3tuyma[mak]
 k[ör]mämäk-läri ugrınta anın täginür-lär :
 ačıg tarka ämgäkig :

4ymä kim bo samsen taisen šikai tegmä üç
 miñ '[] sal[g]uči pylyk'nkyz' y(a)lñuk
 tetmä tınl(1)g oylan-ları öz-6tin adrlımiş ol
 y(a)lñuz biz baş-lazun

[Stanza]

7[alku sudur]lar-ta ärdnisi .
 atı kötrülmiş-niñ y(a)rılıgı ol .
 anı tutdači 9[tınlıg]-lar .
 alku ämgäk-tin ozg(a)y-lar

1-3The good *dharma*s move against the *samsāra*
 stream. To peer in deepest insight is again
 difficult. Those who are covered by the
 membrane of attachment to the living beings do
 not get (the insight). Because of being unable to
 have insight and to peer, they get bitter pain.

4-6And then: The living beings called
pylyk'nkyz' beings who take(?) this Three
 Thousand [Great Thousand World] were
 separated from their selves, Let's start alone.

7-9The jewel of [all sutras] is the saying of
 the One whose name is praised (i.e., Buddha).
 [Living being]s that hold it
 9will escape from all pain.

bo šu käd čin ol .

This writing is very true.

₈nägü(?) tuyuk(?)

What(?) *tuyuk*(?)

₁₀yıl {t} toɣuz yıl üčünč

₁₀[In] the Year of Boar, the third [month].

Notes

v4, *samsen taisen šikai* is the transcription of Chin. 三千大千世界 *san-qian da-qian shi-jie* = Skt. *trisāhasra-mahāsāhasra-lokadhātu*.

v5, *pylyk'nykz'* is the most difficult word to interpret. Seemingly, it should be of Sanskrit origin, and refer to a kind of beings at the end of the world.

v7, [*alku sudur*] “all sutras” at the line top are tentatively restored from the context. We can observe only faint ink remaining. Cf. note v9a below.

v9a, in the part before *-lar* at the line top, now we find a larger scribble like 'yn'l = *mal* “trustworthy” (a title or a personal name) or otherwise *yyl* = *yıl* “year” by another hand, who might have scratched out a word of the stanza. We may restore it as [*tnlig*] “living being” from the context.

v9b, *sw* = *šu* probably derives from Chin. 疏 *shu* (**ɣiwo* in Middle Chinese),⁽⁸⁾ and here seems to mean “writing.”

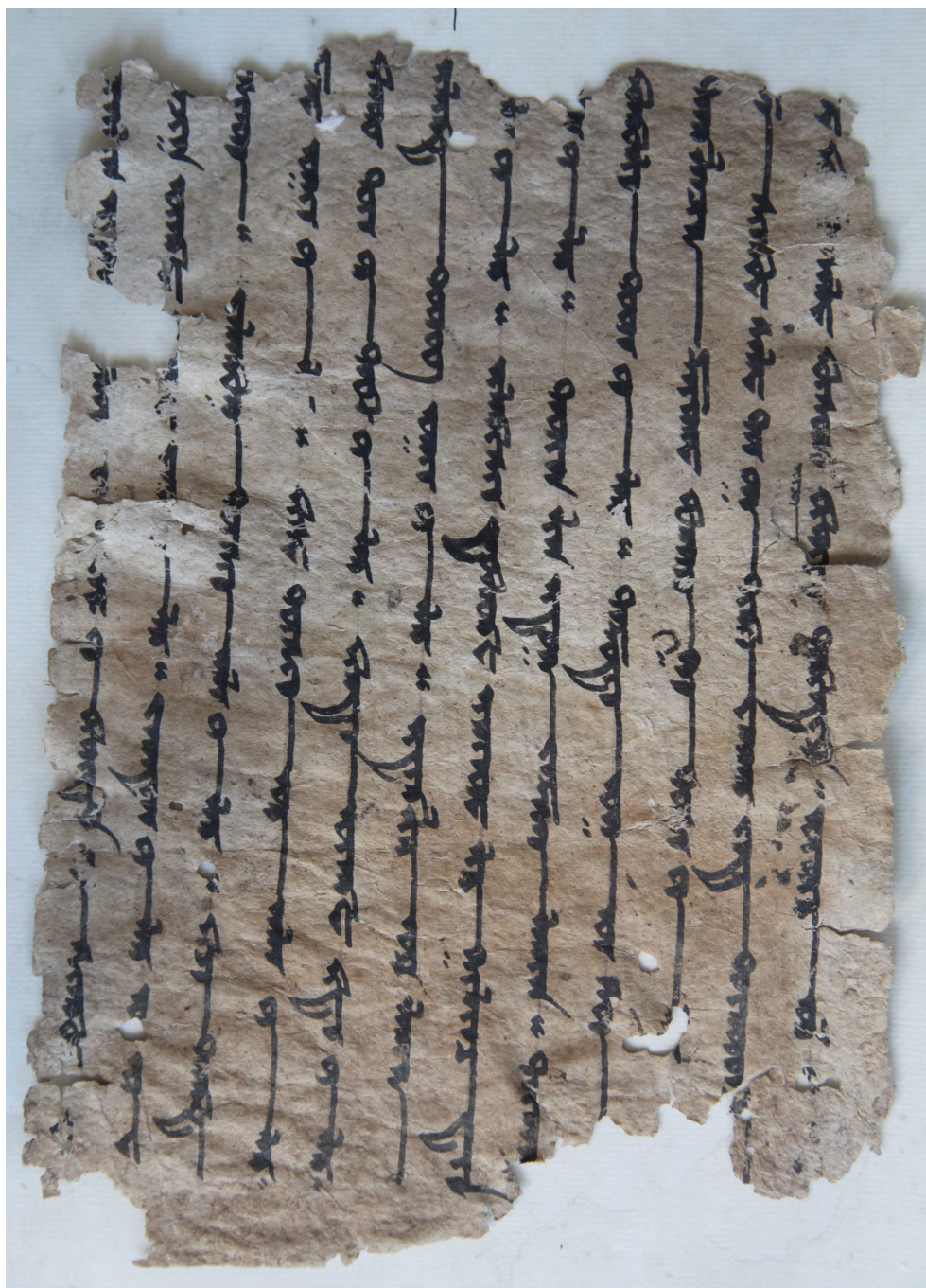
v11, *t(..)k(..)l* is a scribble, seemingly *t(ü)k(ä)l* “complete(ly).” Otherwise, if its final *-l* is a mistake for *-z*, we could regard it as *t(w)n k(w)z* = *toɣuz* “boar,” repeating the word in the previous line.

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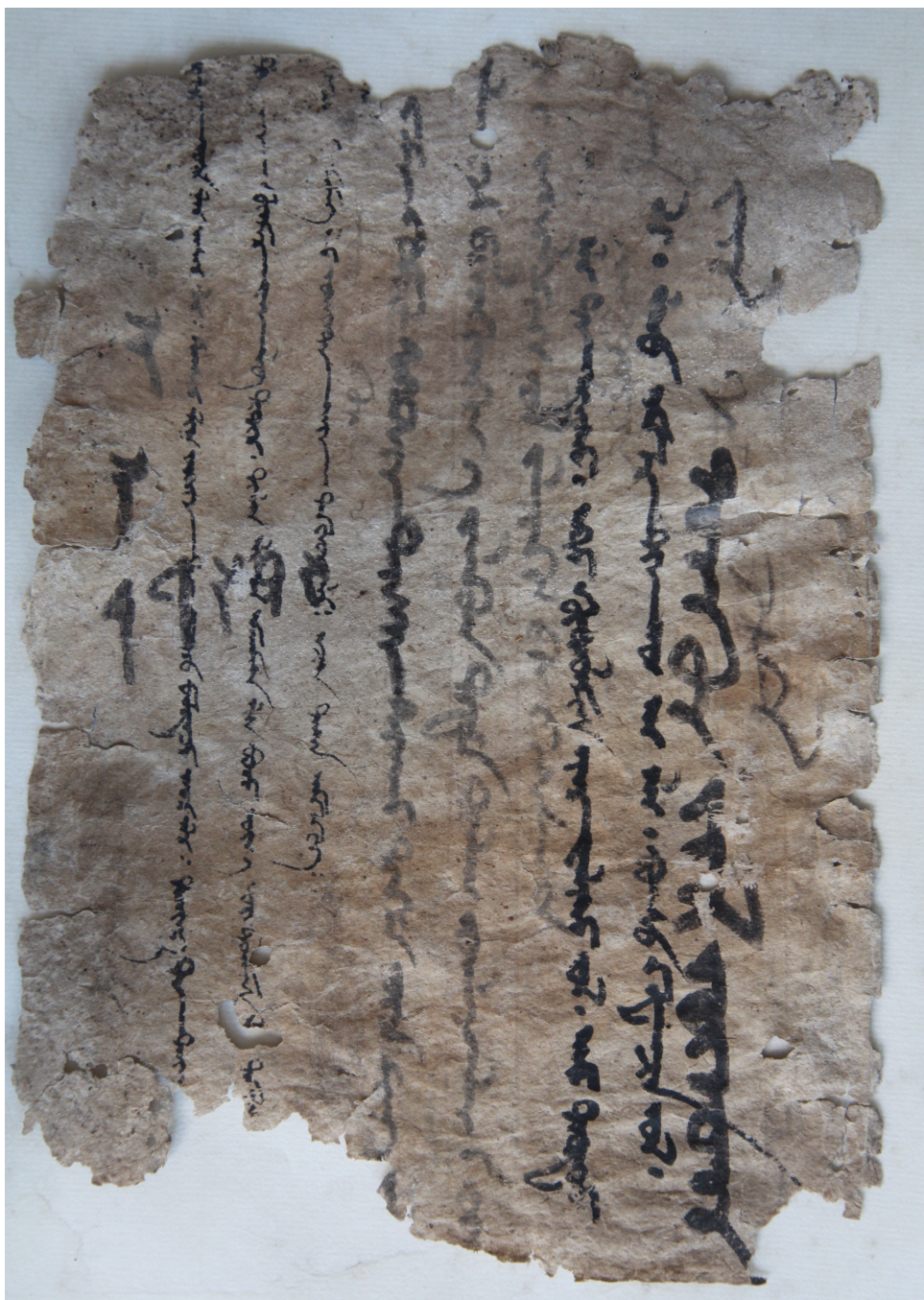
Acknowledgement: Herewith I express my great gratitude to Prof. Peter Zieme and Prof. Dai Matsui, for their kind help and advice in deciphering and interpreting the texts.

(8) Karlgren 1997, 45, No. 90.



T I (recto)

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T I (verso)

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