THE FEATURES OF THE INTERPRETATION OF MAŇGAŁA-SYMBOLS IN BUDDHIST SANSKRIT MANUSCRIPTS FROM CENTRAL ASIA

Palaeographers working with the Buddhist MSS debate about the interpretation of the maňgala-symbols opening the Buddhist manuscript texts. The main problem of this dispute is how to interpret ornamental symbols-ideo-grams (per se — logograms) at the beginning of the text: as oṁ, as siddhām or (more rarely) as svasti? As Lore Sander (Germany) points out, such question arises when studying the Gilgit manuscripts mainly [1]. At first glance, there is no fundamental difference between these three openings: each of them represents the good wishes to adept before text reading. However, the accuracy and thoroughness of palaeographic science, as well as the nuances of the etymology of the three sacred words, require their clear identification.

Today the main propositions concerning the problems of interpretation of opening maňgala-symbols accepted in the modern Indian palaeography are most clearly reflected in three publications: the article of German Indologist Gustav Roth (1916—2008), “Maňgala-Symbols in Buddhist Sanskrit Manuscripts and Inscriptions” [2], in the article of his colleague Lore Sander “Om or Siddham — Remarks on Openings of Buddhist Manuscripts and Inscriptions from Gilgit and Central Asia” [3], as well as in the extended researching remark of Japanese Buddhologist Hirofumi Toda in his article “Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscript from the National Archives of Nepal” [4].

Actually, the problem of the interpretation of the opening maňgala-symbols coincides with the beginning of the study of Sanskrit manuscripts. At the end of 19th century Lorenz Franz Kielhorn and Louis de la Vallee Poussin encountered this problem.

At the end of 19th beginning of 20th centuries the Sanskrit edition of a manuscript in Brahmi script prepared by Augustus Frederick Rudolf Hoernle (1841—1918) was published. This manuscript on birch bark numbering 51 folios was acquired by British lieutenant Hamilton Bower (1858—1940). The discovery of the manuscript has become an event in the world manuscriptology because it testified on the existence of the Buddhist civilization in East Turkestan. Hoernle, having managed “on the face of it, incomprehensible” text, has identified the ideogram of initial maňgala-śloka as oṁ [5].

In the 20s of 20th century E. Hultzsch (1857—1927) solved this problem researching the epigraphic material — namely, the Aśoka’s Rock Edicts [6].

The discovery of ancient manuscripts near Gilgit in 1936 gave a new impulse to the study of Central Asian Sanskrit manuscripts. N. Dutt and U. Wogihara were the leaders of that research process. After the World War II palaeographers turned to the studying of the Central Asia manuscript heritage again. So the dispute regarding the interpretation of opening maňgala-symbols was continued. We can distinguish three different point of views, showing all possible answers to this question: some scholars think that most of the opening symbols must be interpreted as oṁ [7]; others consider maňgala-śloka’s openings as siddhām [8]; the third “group” of researchers does not hurry to unambiguously interpret the opening maňgala-symbols, inclining, however, to the second point of view [9].

Particularly, we would like to cover the work of J. Boeles “The Migration of the Magic Syllable OM” [10], where the author basing on results of Hoernle research pointed in detail the first mentions of this mantra in the Vedas and Upaniṣads and presented the oṁ traditional interpretations and modes of its writing. Also, J. Boeles retraced the changes in the writing of this sacred syllable-word that have taken place throughout the expansion of Indo-Buddhist culture — from India to South-East Asia, Central Asia and the Far East.

It is necessary to note that J. Boeles holds fast the point of view that ideograms often occurring in the early Central Asian manuscripts and depicting the sacred conch śaṅkha located horizontally and shaped like a curl with a loop should be treated as oṁ [11]. To solve the problems of his research J. Boeles used Tibetan wood-cut, Sanskrit manuscripts and the data of Indian epigraphy.

Thus, basing on analysis epigraphic material of the Gupta period J. Boeles have dated the the earliest examples of the oṁ writing in the form of right-curl, resembling the Buddha’s curl (the one of thirty two icono-
graphic marks of the Great Person (mahāpūrṇālasaṅkara) and Sanskrit writing of the figure of one, to 493–4. The onī symbol's writing in the form of left-hand curl, according to J. Boeles, appeared later — ca. 558 [12].

To my point of view, J. Boeles stated the interesting suggestion that the onī symbol in the curl form originated in the old-fashioned writing of the vowel “o” [13]. The analysis of the image of the sacred syllable-word presented in the Boeles's article is very interesting too. Boeles compares the point (bindu), a component of the anuṇaśīka, with the flame (sikhā), blazing over the vowel “o”. The long echo of this mantra, says Boeles, “symbolizes the bell's echo off again, leading to immortality” [14]. J. Boeles mentioned the one of later Upaniṣads — Nādābindu-apāntaśad — specially dedicated to the concept of “echo” (nāda) in a syllable-word onī and to the reflections on the point-bindu in anuṇaśīka [15].

Besides of maṅgala-symbols that are considered in this article such ideograms as triśūla (trident of Śiva), triratna (Three Treasures — Buddha, Dharma, Saṅgha) and dharmacakra (Wheel of Teaching) occurring in Sanskrit texts, fulfil, according to widespread opinion, the sacral protective function [16].

In the article “Maṅgala-Symbols in Buddhist Sanskrit Manuscripts and Inscriptions” G. Roth, based on a very wide palaeographic material, gave a quite respectable “collection” of symbols opening the maṅgala-slokas of various manuscripts (fig. 1). G. Roth, holding strictly to the points of view of D. Sircar and A. Basham, tends to interpret most part of the symbols as siddham and only a very small number of them — as onī [17], and, it should be noted, not always correctly. L. Sander speaks not such categorically as G. Roth. In the table which L. Sander puts in her article (fig. 2), she uses symbols similar to the examples of G. Roth. L. Sander simply describes this signs without identification but nevertheless she holds to the G. Roth's point of view [18].

Let us try to analyze the ideograms presented in the Roth's article (fig. 1). Thus, G. Roth considers the following symbols as siddham: Nos. 1—4; 8—13; 15, 16, 18, 19, 31—34, 37—41, 49—52. It is remarkable that G. Roth referring to the D. Sircar's monograph [19] did not take into account the mentioned above J. Boeles's monograph [20], as well as other monumental volume — the Ahmad Dani's monograph “Indian Palaeography”, where the author shows the examples of the sacred symbol onī writings that are typical for different regions of South Asia [21] (fig. 3). L. Sander makes reference to the Dani's monograph, not accenting, however, the attention to the interpretation of symbols given in the example [22]. Thus, symbols that Roth, following the opinion of D. Sircar and A. Basham, interprets as siddham, in our opinion, should be understood, according to A. Dani [23], as the onī. Moreover, Kielhorn, Bhandarkar, Dutt understood the symbols, mentioned above, in the same way [24], as well as J. G. Bühler and E. Hultzsch [25].

First of all, let us turn to D. C. Sircar's arguments. In his book “Indian Epigraphy” (1996) in the chapter “Auspicious Symbols” the author mentions that even al-Bīrūnī interpreted initial auspicious symbols as onī. However, D. C. Sircar mentions that N. K. Bhattacharjee questioned the al-Bīrūnī's point of view, indicating that the great ancient scholar was wrong [26]. D. C. Sircar gives many examples of the various characters perceived incorrectly as onī. One of the main arguments is the following: onī was confused with the Bengali (and Sanskrit) number “seven” [27] which actually has a shape similar to those of symbols of Nos. 38—41 in fig. 1. However, D. C. Sircar does not result in a fairly reasoned argument, proving the validity of his conclusions. One of the arguments D. C. Sircar is that this auspicious symbol is found in Buddhist texts but Buddhist tradition does not pay due attention to onī [28], the auspicious symbol of the earlier Brahmanic tradition.

As for the texts of Indian unorthodox religious traditions, for example in the Jain texts one can find only the word siddham (figs. 4—5). However, in the inscriptions of Sanchi Buddhist temple complex (figs. 6—7), we can see a familiar character in the form of a curl scrolling to the left. J. G. Buller has interpreted this symbol as onī [29].

Moreover, each section (nīrdeśā) of the famous Buddhist treatise “Encyclopedia of Abhidharma” (Abhidharmakośa) of Vasubandhu begins with praṇava onī. The praṇava onī can hardly be considered as an exclusive sign of the orthodox Indian (Brahmanic) tradition.

H. Toda's assumption that auspicious symbol in the form of a curl is an element of -i in siddham [30] also seems untenable, because the vowel -i in the word siddham is short, i. e. it can be represented in the form of left-handed helix only. As it is well known, the investigated auspicious symbol can be represented both as a left- and right-handed helix.

I will hazard a guess that such decorative writing of -i in siddham (fig. 1) reproduces either the symbolic mark of praṇāva onī or Dharmachakra (The Wheel of Teachings). In other words, the auspicious symbol (onī or dharmacakra) is reproduced in the writing of auspicious word siddham.

In his article G. Roth interprets the swastika solar symbol (fig. 1, Nos. 20, 21, 23, 27) as onī, following the E. Hultzsch's reasoning, who, according to G. Roth, very originally presented the swastika symbol as the monogram of two crossed aksāras “o” (fig. 1, Nos. 25, 26, 28, 29) [31]. Of course, this “o” writing is common to ancient Indian epigraphy, for example, in the Asokā Rock Edicts but we take the risk to suggest that the swastika symbol at the beginning of Sanskrit texts should be interpreted as an auspicious greeting “Vasati!”

G. Roth also interprets signs in the fig. 1 (Nos. 31—34, 37—41) as a symbolic representation of siddham, supporting his position with the statement that these symbols are variants of the reduced (like shorthand symbol) writing of siddham, — namely, the virāma imaging located above the aksāra “m” (fig. 1, No. 36). The sign in table (fig. 1, No. 38) is also depicted under the same aksāra in the siddham word in the L. Sander's table (fig. 2, Nos. 45, 68, 69). As a proof of his rightness
G. Roth presents a fragment of the manuscript where we see the opening lines of Nidāna-samyukta [32]. The same siddham writing we meet in the Sarvāstivādins' Vinaya from the Central Asian manuscript collections of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts (IOM) of RAS (fig. 8). This Sanskrit manuscript on birch bark was found in 1966 in the Merv oasis near the Bayram'-All.

Unfortunately we cannot accept the interpretation proposed by G. Roth: this sign does not fit well to the virama imaging. Rather, it is similar to anunāsika, its other name is candrabindu (“a moon drop”) because it resembles a drop (dot) hanging over horizontal crescent. So, anunāsika is a distinctive feature of the writing of the sacred syllable-word om. The presence of anunāsika in the siddham word is possible to explain by the grammatical error of the copyist. This is quite typical for the manuscripts. The models for siddham writing (with the typical virama writing) presented in many Central Asian manuscripts in the collection of the IOM (figs. 9—11) can serve as the proof that the virama writing in the siddham word (fig. 8) is episodic.

The G. Roth's virama / anunāsika (fig. 1, Nos. 37—39) is depicted with a horizontal “drop”. In the L. Sander's table (fig. 2, No. 56) the same element is imaged vertically. Referring to the famous English sanskritologist and the expert in Khotan Sanskrit manuscripts, Sir Harold Walter Bailey (1899—1996), L. Sander notes that this sign can be interpreted as a double dāndya — the punctuation symbol that marks the boundary of a large section of the text [33]. This proposition we can accept completely.

In any case, the ideogram considered above can hardly be interpreted as a symbolic representation of siddham.

Let us analyze the following argument used by G. Roth as a proof of his point of view. In the G. Roth's table we can see (fig. 1, Nos. 17, 45) two pairs of symbols where the right symbols of both pairs, undoubtedly, are om-symbols in the usual for us form of writing. It is possible that the writing difference between of the right and left ideograms gave to G. Roth the reasons to suppose that the left symbols in his table mean siddham because they in no way cannot be interpreted as om.

In the introduction to the publication of the Sanskrit original of the Lotus Sūtra from the National Archives of Nepal Japanese Buddhologist Hirofumi Toda briefly concerns the interpretation problem of two symbols that we consider — om and siddham; H. Toda also holds to G. Roth's position. Thus, H. Toda states a very interesting suggestion that the meaning of the first logogram (the “right” mentioned above) representing the siddham word, has been lost in the course of time and the symbol began to perform the punctuation function marking the beginning of the text [34]. In fact, this suggestion explains the presence of the om logogram after this symbol that became a shorthand sign.

We agree with the H. Toda's arguments only in the part that speaks about the loss of the logogram's original meaning and its conversion into a kind of shorthand symbol. We suppose that such fate overtook not siddham but om because this ideogram according to A. Dani (fig. 3), is an interpretation of the symbol that is situated at the beginning of the considering pair (fig. 1, Nos. 17, 45). J. Boeles keeps the same opinion [35]. Moreover, in many inscriptions and transliterations of Indian texts scientists point out that the initial praṇāva om is “expressed by a symbol” [36].

For the proof of our point of view we appeal to the Tibetan-Buddhist manuscript tradition. It Tibetan texts, either at the very beginning or as a marker of the significant section, chapter (fig. 12, plates 1—2), we can see the stylized image of the symbol (fig. 13—15) that is shown in the G. Roth's table (fig. 1, Nos. 31—34) and in the L. Sander's table (fig. 2, Nos. 10, 11, 16, 38, 58). By means of the images under Nos. 59—62 L. Sander, in fact, shows the examples of these stylized images. This punctuation mark yig mgo has a single function, i.e. the marking of meaningful text segments.

According to the commentators of the Nyingma-pa (the oldest school of Tibetan Buddhism) tradition, this symbol is, undoubtedly, the sacred syllable-word om. In the Tibetan text Zhen pa bzhis bral gyi gdam pa bzhugs (“The Precept on the Liberation from Four Affections”) (fig. 16), the authorship of which belongs to the one of the “Five Great” (patriarchs of Sakya-pa) — the mentor Dakpa Gyaltsen (1147—1216), the statement of Teaching begins by clichéd phrase om svasti siddham (fig. 17), typical for many Tibetan-Buddhist texts.

These examples, at first glance, may not only serve to confirm the assumption that the symbol om, that had partially lost its original meaning, was used as a symbol opening the Buddhist texts or relevant sections but also to testify that all these three auspicious greetings later were perceived as the clichéd beginning. However, all the maṅgala-symbols, mentioned above, will continue to be considered as shorthand symbols or clichéd phrases that lost its original meaning until we find out the meaning of the maṅgala term. Unfortunately, today there is actually no literature dedicated to the explanation of functioning of the beginning formulas (maṅgala) in traditional texts. Meanwhile, this problem is solved in the framework of ancient Indian philosophical tradition.

The outstanding Indian thinker Annambhaṭṭa (17th c.), belonging to the Brahmanic tradition of syncretic Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school, in his work Tarka-samgraha (“The Code of Speculations”) and in the autocomments Tarka-dīpikā (“The Explanation to the Code of Speculation”) presented the very detailed analysis of the opening maṅgala-sloka. The undoubted value of the Annambhaṭṭa's work is that it contains the sum of the preceding religious-philosophical tradition of ancient India. Elena P. Ostrovskaya, examining the Annambhaṭṭa's text comprehensively, reconstructed in detail the system of Annambhaṭṭa's ideas including his point of view on the maṅgala-sloka's meaning.

So, in the text of Tarka-dīpikā we read:

For the successful completion of the planned work [the author] proclaims a maṅgala as a symbol of worship to the admonishing deity according to the proper manner that is endorsed by the wise men practice and prescribed by śruti...
for the creation of the similar texts for the purpose of followers' teaching... [37].

And below:

Thus, the maṅgala is that should be performed according to Védas, like dārśa [38] and other [rituals] because it is an object of non-secular [39] and non-prohibited practice of wise men [40].

It is clear that the central problem discussed in this fragment of Annāṃbhāṭṭa’s autocomments is the correlation between a maṅgala as a text beginning (a text fragment) and a maṅgala as a special ritual practice that, according to the Annāṃbhāṭṭa’s text, promotes the accomplishing of the planned work.

The maṅgala’s creation is not the simple fact of introducing to the text the praising formula; the maṅgala words have the practical meaning: the staying in the yogic contemplation (taddhīyānaparo bhātvā) [41].

So, the staying in the yogic contemplation (dhyāna — “contemplation”), according to Annāṃbhāṭṭa, is the indispensable condition for the overcoming of difficulties in the text writing and in the verbal exposition of the Wisdom: the logical discourse is corroborated by the meditation practice. The maṅgala practice (its creation and accomplishment) is sādhana, “the means for the achievement of the goal and the Yoga’s element” [42]. It is remarkable that the term sādhana detects a certain semantic similarity with the term siddhi [43]. Its detailed examination will be presented below.

Thus, it is fair to assume that the presence of the maṅgala-śloka in texts, belonging to the ancient Indian religious-philosophical traditions (both orthodox and unorthodox), indicates the indispensable condition of the religious practice’s accomplishment (the certain worship ritual or the session of the yogic contemplation focused on a worship object) immediately before the creation of the text and also before the reading of it for the unhampered insight into the text’s sense. So, may be the presence of one to three punctuation signs sīg mgo (short-hand symbols om) in the Tibetan Buddhist texts indicates one-, two- or threefold ritual structure that should be accomplished before the reading of the text; moreover, the cliché phrase om svasti siddham not only designates a combined good wishes but also refers to a certain religious practice content and meaning of which finally can be understood only after the analysis of the semantic field of all three “auspicious formulas”.

Many specialized works are devoted to the research of the mystical syllable-words om (aum)’s meaning. Therefore, in our opinion, there is no need to dwell on the coverage of its semantics. It will suffice to say that the utterance of the sacred syllable-word expresses a highest degree of respect to the utterance’s addressee who has indisputable sacrality. The sacral syllable-word om as the “sacral statement”, eliminating completely the question of the truth of all that is described in the text of the manuscript, can be translated as “yes”, “indeed”, “so be it” [44]. This interpretation typologically brings together the Védic (as well as Buddhist and Hindu) om and the Bible “amen” that is also called to consolidate the truth and the sacred meaning of the spoken words [45]. The sacred syllable-word om, positioned at the beginning and end of sacred texts, as a sacred exclamation or auspicious greetings in the manuscript is guarded anxiously by the adepts against profanes’ ears and eyes. According to the Brahmanic tradition, the presence of the sacred syllable-word om in Védic texts guarded the holiness contained in the manuscript; otherwise the followers could not understand the meaning of the sacred Védic hymns [46].

The word svasti is formed by the combination of su + asti and means wishing of health, success and prosperity to the greetings’ addressee. The swastika image, the cross with curved ends directed in a clockwise direction and against it, indicated good wishes too. The term swastika is also used for the designation of singer-storyteller who performed in honour of someone else’s songs of praise.

The word siddham, less-known for a wide range of orientalists but well-known for all Sanskritists-palaeographers who specializes in the study of Central Asian manuscripts, often occurs in early manuscripts originated from the north of Gilgit — the so-called North (Kucha, Turfan) and South (Khotan) routes of the Great Silk Road.

The auspicious word siddham, as well as svasti formed by the combination of su + asti, is synonymous to the combination siddhir + asta where the last word (the verb as- is in the Imperative) represents the emphatic wish of accomplishment in the near future merits whose meanings are found in the word siddhi semantics.

In its lexicography the word siddhi has a lot of semantic clusters. One of them is “accomplishment”, “complete attainment”, “successes”. Of course, we mean here the accomplishment of the religious practices’ sequence by means of that the ascetic has attained completely the final goal — the absolute emancipation — in this case, Nirvāṇa, having attained qualities necessary for this state.

The next semantic “bundle” is very interesting. It defines the siddham word in the medical terminology as “healing” (of a disease) and “cure” (by something). The meaning of these definitions becomes clear if we turn to the description of the existence in kāma-loka — the sensual world of passions where each of us dwells. The terms that define the beginningless cycle of birth-death — saṁsāra — are characterized by such metaphors as “disease”, “suffering”. Three affective roots polluting our minds (greed, hatred and ignorance) “torture”, “hurt” us. So, according to the Buddhist tradition, the Buddha’s Teaching (Dharma) acts as a medicine and the Bhagavan is compared with a skilled doctor [47]. That is why he has the epithet Bhaisajya-guru (“The Honourable Healer”).

Besides, speaking about the necessity of ceaseless self-control during the devotee’s path for the final elimination of the mind affective and, as a result, for obtaining Nirvāṇa, Vasubandhu (5th c.), the great Buddhist thinker, compares the practice of the final liberation path
with the serious illness treatment [48]. But for the sake of deliverance from sufferings, for the win over “disease” — sanssāra's existence — it is necessary to obtain the certain set of qualities that enables to escape the sanssāra shackles.

The next meaning of the word siddhi is “coming into force” i.e. the obtaining of the certain mental qualities of ascetic-yogi. These are clear, uncontaminated by affects, psychic abilities guiding the adept's mind to overcoming the sanssāra that is achieved by over-secular, i.e. monastic, methods: (i) “the cognition of that which is not yet known”, obtaining through the True Path — the way of Noble Truths vision (dārśana-mārga); (ii) “the deeper knowledge” forming on the Contemplation's Path — the way of yogic concentration (bhāvana-mārga); (iii) “the perfect knowledge” obtaining only through the Non-teacher's Way — the practice of arhat, “who no longer needs the religious education (asaiṣṭa)” [49].

The term siddhi has also such notions as “settlement”, i.e. “calmness”. The achievement of complete inner calmness (sāntivihāra) is the goal of the over-secular (monastic) ascetic practices. Thus, Vasubhandhu writes: “Indeed, the concentrating on the [mind] cessation is a silence; indeed, the concentration on the cessation is like Nirvāṇa” [50]; that is why the notion “calmness” is described as nirodha (lit. “cessation”) — the term that has a fundamental importance in Buddhist discourse. Also, the “calmness” could be interpreted as “equanimity” (upeksa) — the mental ability of consciousness.

The next semantic cluster contains such definitions of the term siddhi as the “liquidation”, the “solution”, the “vanishing” in the sense of “the liquidation of all barriers (i.e. the mind affective states) on the Way to Nirvāṇa — the final liberation from the sanssāra's shackles”. In this semantic field the complete synonym of siddhi is the stable epithet sarvātha-savva-hata-anidhakāraḥ — “the complete liquidation of any darkness” where under “darkness” we understand the absence of the true knowledge — the true vision of things such as it exist in reality (yathābhūtam). This state is achieved by means of many years yoga practice aiming at the complete liquidation of “ego”. In the maṇḍala-ślōka that opens the first volume of Vasubhandhu's “Encyclopaedia of Abhidharma”, Buddha (as well as pratyekabuddha and śrāvakas) is characterized by the epithet “The One who Completely Solved any Darkness” [51].

The next very important “bundle” of meanings of the term siddhi contains such definitions as “determination”, “decision” marking the steadfastness of intentions to follow the Path of liberation. The determination (adhimokṣa) is characterized as the steadfast aspiration, involvement, “the ability to adhere to a selected path; its function is eliminating the possibility of failure” [52]. Thus, the yogi, embarked on the path of knowledge (the way of vision of Noble Truths) and having mental capacity of cognition of that what is not yet known, is full of steadfast determination to know what is still not known — the universal characteristics of Truths [53].

The previous field of meanings of the term siddhi is very close to the semantic cluster that includes such notion as “the maturation [of the fruit(s)]”. Ripening of what kind of fruits should we talk about? Of course, we mean the “four fruits of religious life” (sramanyaphala) [54].

The first “fruit” is the “fruit of the entry in the Stream” (srotāpattiphala). It is the result of the first stage of Buddhist asceticism — the practice of vision of Noble Truths signifying the destruction of the most serious manifestations of the affects. Since then, the yogi is called “The one who learns Dharma”. The second “fruit” is “the fruit of the return [in sanssāra] one more time” (sakṛdāgāmiphala). It is at this stage where is the gradual liberation of mind from the three affective roots: greed, hatred and ignorance (the commitment to the false teachings). At this stage affects are not destroyed completely; the hidden tracks of it remain in mind and sakṛdāgāmin, ascetic practicing the yoga's second stage) for final liberation should born one more time. The third “fruit” is “the fruit without return” (anāgāmiphala). Anāgāmin, ascetic who obtained the third fruit of the yoga practice and eliminated all affects of the sensual world, to obtain the higher fruit (arhatship) does not need a new birth in the kama-loka. The fourth “fruit” is the arhatship's fruit. At this highest stage of religious asceticism arhat is able to realize “the path of liberation” (vimukti-mārga) because of the obtaining capability of the perfect knowledge. He sees reality as it is, i.e. he distinguishes dharmas in his own individual stream and because of that the affects eventually lose their ground, and their reoccurrence is impossible. The obtaining of arhat status by the devotee correlates to one of the meanings of the word siddhi — “[the obtaining] the absolute holiness” [55].

The next number of meanings for the word siddhi: “prosperity”, “advantage” (as “benefit”). The last meaning should be understood as “the advantage for oneself” (ātma-hita-pratipatti) and “the advantage for another” (para-hita-pratipatti). Of course, “the advantage” should be understood as a yogic practice and, as result, the obtaining of Nirvāṇa. The notion “advantage for oneself” marks the ideal of pratyekabuddha (“buddha-for-self”) who “liquidated any darkness” by means of his own efforts but does not have the determination to act for the others' advantage. “The advantage for the other” implies that the yogi has reached arhatship but he vowed not to leave sanssāra until all living things will be rescued. In another words, the one who acts for other's advantage is bodhisattva. The realization of “the advantage for other” comes true by means of “the giving of helping hand” for all living beings, i.e. the preaching of the Dharma (sad-dharma-deśanā-hasta-pradānā). It allows “to pull out all living beings from the sanssāra's quagmire” (samsāra-punkāj-jagadj-ujjhāhāra) [56].

Another number of meanings of the word siddhi can be grouped under the title “[the obtaining of] supreme felicity, bliss” that has nothing to do with everyday notions of bliss. According to Buddhist ideas, “bliss” is the liberation from the passions and fetters of karma attained by the practice of rejecting the pleasures of sensory experience. First of all, it is the feeling of pleasure obtaining through the practice of yogic concentration.
Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Forms of Om

North India

West India

South India

Rare

Fig. 3
At the first and second dhyānas the psychic ability to feel pleasure is expressed in the nice bodily feeling — relieving of stress, deep and very comfortable relaxation (prāśrabdhi). There is the complete disconnection of the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch senses) at the third dhyāna, i.e. there are no bodily senses. Therefore, the sensation of pleasure experienced by the yogi who stays in the third dhyāna has the mental nature. The fourth dhyāna practice necessarily leads to the good karma consequence — bhogavipāka (“the bliss matur-ing”) [57].

The ascetic achieving the arhat status acquires the ability to the sensation of four bliss types: the bliss of ascetic life; the bliss of distinction (the learning of dharma); the bliss of complete calm of mind and bliss of enlightenment. All these four bliss kinds are highest states of mind. Arhat enjoys staying in such states as well as the liberation of mind from the affects that gives the experience of freedom, alongside with the nonsusceptibility to the influx of affects perceived as safety [58].

The next important semantic cluster of the term siddhi is “the acquisition of supernatural powers by magical means”. The supernatural powers (riddhi) represent the yogic concentration exclusively with strong desire (chanda), energy (vīrya), mind propensity (citta) and thorough investigation (mīmāsa) being its supports (ṛddhipāda). Vasubandhu explains what is riddhi, citing one of the sūtras:

I give you, monks, necessary explanation about the supernatural powers. So, what is riddhi? In this case, a monk obtains the ability to perform all sorts of magical operations. Being a one he becomes many… [59].

That is to say the speech in this passage of “Encyclopaedia of Abhidharma” is about the creation of illusory twins who can appear at any point in space. Also, the “core set” of riddhi contains such supernatural powers as the walking on water and air, the obtaining of invisibility to the eyes of others, etc. However, this gift should be used exclusively for the sake of Dharma but not for the sake of indulging the vanity of a yogi.

Siddhi also can have such meanings as “understanding”, “becoming clear or intelligible”. And here it is necessary to speak about the cognition that allows to gain liberation, understand and apprehend clear and obvious meaning of the Four Noble Truths. In “Encyclopaedia of Abhidharma” it is said:

The enlightenment about that was mentioned above should be understood as the true knowledge — the knowledge of the liquidation [of the suffering] and the knowledge that it [the suffering] will not arise [again] [60].

The last semantic cluster that we shall analyze has a very unusual meaning: “the recognition in one person different good qualities” [61] that, nevertheless, is quite simply explained from the standpoint of Buddhist didactics. This recognition is the one of riddhi abilities mentioned above. However, we have previously considered supernatural abilities as actions but this ability should be attributed to the magical knowledge. This “recognition of other person’s qualities” is the ability to see other's mentality as well as the last birth of another. The knowing of other's mentality was necessary for mentors to control the spiritual progress of the students.

Summarizing all of the above it is necessary to formulate the first conclusion of our research: the vast majority of logograms (and in fact — all) that occur in early Sanskrit manuscripts mainly from Gilgit and are presented illustratively in the publications of R. Hoernle, A. Dani, G. Roth, L. Sander and others, are correctly interpreted as signs of the sacred syllable-word on, because, in our opinion, elements that are used as logograms in maṅgala-lokas of Sanskrit manuscripts are absent in the writing of the word siddham. Conversely, in the writing of the sacred syllable on we can see a number of elements frequently used in the texts belonging to the ancient Indian religious and philosophical tradition.

The second conclusion is based on the hypothesis that the presence of the maṅgala-lokas in Sanskrit texts points to a “maṅgala-practice” — a special ritual practice honouring a religious authority or the same practice of yogic concentration conducive to the overcoming the difficulties associated with the explanation of the knowledge presented in the text as well as with the comprehension of the essence of the text. The above proves once again the correctness of the thesis about the indissoluble unity of religious doctrine and yogic practice. In particular, the analysis of the semantics of the maṅgala-formula siddham allows discovering the main content of this maṅgala-practice.

N o t e s

S. SHOMAKHMADOV. The Features of the Interpretation of Maṅgala-Symbols

Fig. 20
Tantras Issued from the Sacred Primordial Buddha, the Glorious Wheel of Time”), ed. by R. Vira, L. Chandra, Kālacakra Tantra and Other Texts, part 1 (New Delhi, 1960), p. 332.


12. Boeles, op. cit., p. 44.

13. Ibid.


15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., p. 43.


19. Sircar, “Siddham Ṭa before namaḥ Śīvāya”, pt. VII.


25. For these examples see: Epigraphia Indica (Calcutta, 1892), i, pp. 12, 34, 76—7, 86, 104, 112, 160, 179—80.


27. Ibid., pp. 93, 96.

28. Ibid., p. 95.


32. Ibid., p. 240.

33. Sander, 1986, p. 256

34. Toda, op. cit., pp. 7—8.

35. Boeles, op. cit., p. 43.

36. For these examples see: Epigraphia Indica, i, pp. 40, 47, 173, 208.


38. Darsa — the Vedic ritual that performed in the first day of a New Moon.

39. I. e. ascetic, monastic.

40. Ibid., p. 30.

41. Annambhatta, p. 33.

42. Ibid.


44. Ibid., p. 235.

45. The following is remarkable. Oh (auni) “unfolds” into three components: A + U + M, symbolizing the trinity: Brahma (The Creation), Vishnu (The Preservation) and Shiva (The Destruction); three sacrificial fires: Gārēpati (the householder's sacrificial fire), Dākṣiṇāgni (the offering fire) and Āhavanīya (the sacrifice fire); three words: the incarnation of Prajapati — Bhūr (Earth), Bhuvah (Space), Svar (Heaven) (for details about the meaning of the syllable oh see Boeles, op. cit., p. 41). In the same manner “amen” is formed of three letters of the Hebrew alphabet: Aleph + Mem + Nun. According to gematria, one of the methods of “disclosure of the word's secret meaning”, each letter has the numeric value. The sum of letters' numerical values in a word gives a “key” to the understanding its deeper meaning. Thus, the numerical value of the word “amen” (Aleph (1) + Mem (40) + Nun (50)) is 91. The resulting amount changes to 9 + 1 = 10, the number that expresses the perfection of divine order, symbolizes the completeness of the cosmic cycle. “Ten”, by-turn, unfolds to one (1+0=1) that symbolizes the beginning of all things.


47. Vasubandhu, Ėnciklopedia buddiškoj kanonickej filosofij (Abhidharmakosa) (The Encyclopaedia of the Buddhist Canonical Philosophy (Abhidharmakosa), compiling, translation, comments, research by Ostrovskaya, Rudoi (St. Petersburg, 2006), p. 343.


49. Vasubandhu, Ėnciklopedia buddiškoj kanonickej filosofij, p. 390.
50. Ibid., p. 387.
54. Ibid., p. 102.
56. Vasubandhu, Ėnciklopediia Abhidharmy, p. 192.
57. Vasubandhu, Ėnciklopediia buddi sko kanonicheskoi filosofii, p. 386.
58. Ibid., p. 404.
59. Ibid., p. 412.
60. Ibid., p. 417.

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