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Eli Franco

Three Notes on the Spitzer Manuscript

1.

After my edition of the Spitzer Manuscript (SHT-810)¹ had already gone to press, Dr. Hartmut-Ortwin Feistel, director of the Oriental Department of the State Library, Berlin (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin), kindly informed me that five manuscripts of the Berlin Turfan Collection, three of which belong to the Kuṣāṇa period, had been tested with the ¹⁴C dating method. The calibrated age of SHT-810 turned out to be CE 130; individual testing results varied between CE 80 and 230.² If this dating is correct, the Spitzer Manuscript is probably not only the oldest philosophical manuscript in Sanskrit, but also the oldest Sanskrit manuscript at all. Other Kuṣāṇa manuscripts which were previously assumed to be of an earlier date were dated later than SHT-810. SHT-16 (the so-called *Dramenhandschrift* which contains fragments of Aśvaghōṣa's plays) dates with a probability of 95.4% between 254 and 409; it was assigned three calibrated dates: 264, 270 and 340. Even the earliest of these dates is about hundred years later than the date suggested by Lore Sander on palaeographical grounds. SHT-25, which is a palimpsest,³ dates with a probability of 95.4% between 238 and 343.

In the above-mentioned publication, I dated the Spitzer Manuscript some hundred years later than the ¹⁴C calibrated date. In other words, I can easily accept the later ¹⁴C date of 230, but am somehow reluctant to accept the calibrated date of 130 without further evidence. My main reason for dating SHT-810 to the late Kuṣāṇa period was that the numerical figures used in it testify to a mixture of Kuṣāṇa and Gupta figures. This argument is, to the best of my knowledge, still sound. It is possible, of course, that some older Kuṣāṇa inscrip-

¹ Cf. Eli Franco, *The Spitzer Manuscript. The Oldest Philosophical Manuscript in Sanskrit*. Wien 2004.

² Note that the calibrated age is not simply the average of the various results.

³ The manuscript is written in Gupta letters, but traces of rubbed-off Kuṣāṇa letters are visible.

tions or manuscripts will be discovered in which the so-called Gupta numerals are already used. At the present, however, I am not aware of such materials.

The examination of the contents of the manuscript did not yield any results that would have allowed me to go beyond the palaeographical evidence. It is quite clear that the author knew Dharmasrī or Dharmasreṣṭhin, whose *Abhidharmahṛdaya* was translated into Chinese CE 220 (cf. *The Spitzer Manuscript*, p. 33, n. 135). It is impossible to determine how much earlier the work itself was written; some scholars consider it to be earlier than the *Jñānaprasthāna*, others later. Whatever the case may be, SHT-810 is also later than the *Jñānaprasthāna* because it quotes from a *Vibhāṣā* (i.e., presumably a commentary on the *Jñānaprasthāna*). Even if this *Vibhāṣā* could be identified, the dates of the *Vibhāṣās* themselves have not yet been determined with precision.

The chapters on dialectics which I partially reconstructed in Vol. II of *The Spitzer Manuscript* do not seem older or more archaic than the corresponding sections of the *Tarkaśāstra* and the *Upāyahṛdaya* that are ascribed to Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu. Of course, the attribution is rather doubtful and we cannot be certain that the works belong to the time of these famous philosophers. Can one be sure, however, that only later, and not earlier, works are falsely attributed to revered and famous authors? This seems to be the case; of all the other works that are attributed to these two philosophers, I am not aware of one that is considered by modern scholars to predate them.

In a recent lecture held at the Conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, London, in August 2005, Lore Sander discussed various problems that are involved in ¹⁴C dating. I am not in a position to assess all of her arguments, but she convinced me that ¹⁴C datings of Central Asian manuscripts are far from being certain. Dr. Feistel also informed me that further ¹⁴C tests are necessary and that he is trying to arrange for the necessary funds for this purpose. We look forward to the future results.

In view of the ¹⁴C datings, the temporal sequence of the four types of Kuṣāṇa alphabets cautiously suggested by Lore Sander – about which, I have to admit, I have always felt uncomfortable – will have to be examined anew. However, I do not think that anyone but Lore Sander herself will be able to carry out such a specialized examination.

2.

Lore Sander discovered five further fragments of the Spitzer Manuscript preserved in the British Library. Three are catalogued as Or. 15005/6-8, one fragment is found in Or. 15005/17-21, and another one in Or. 15005/30-32.

3.

In Appendix 3 of *The Spitzer Manuscript* (p. 337ff.), I reproduced a large number of fragments that were catalogued as part of SHT-810, but were clearly written by other scribes. Quite by chance I was able to identify frg. 36 as belonging to the *Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā*. Dieter Schlingloff identified seven fragments from the *Dramenhandschrift* (SHT-16). They are: 183 = 101; 253 = 6; 325 = 96; 329 = 5; 246 = 94; 354 = 99; 500 = 7.⁴ The last identification settles the question of whether frg. 500 is written in Pali; it is clear now that the language is a certain stage-Prakrit. Thus, no fragment in Pali seems to be present in the Turfan Collection.

A comparison of my digital images of SHT-810 with Lüders' reproductions reveals that some of the fragments deteriorated considerably in the course of the twentieth century.

⁴ The first number refers to the frg. number of SHT-810, the second to SHT-16.