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More Missing Pieces of Early Pure Land Buddhism: New Evidence for Akṣobhya and Abhirati in an Early Mahayana Sutra from Gandhāra

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INTRODUCTION: GANDHĀRA AND MAHAYANA BUDDHISM

THE EMERGENCE of Mahayana and its intellectual, social and institutional background have been matters of scientific debate for quite a long time.¹ One of the major problems in this discussion is the fact that this new movement seems to have left almost no material traces among the

THE RESEARCH on the Bajaur Collection of Buddhist Kharoṣṭhī manuscripts would have been impossible without the generous financial support of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. In preparing this article, I am especially indebted to Jan Nattier, who not only spent much of her time in autumn 2009 discussing the contents of the sutra and many other questions regarding early Mahayana, but also agreed to read through the manuscript of this paper before its submission. Without her valuable advice and patience, I would not have been able to deal with all the problems raised here. The great impact of Nattier's work on the present study is also indicated by the title of this paper, which modifies that of her ground-breaking article on Akṣobhya and his Buddha-land (Nattier 2000).

Thanks also go to Peter Skilling for enriching our autumn meetings with many ideas from the perspective of Pāli sources, to Paul Harrison for his steady interest and helpfulness whenever we met, and to Matsuda Kazunobu for his efforts to trace a Chinese parallel for the Gāndhārī sutra. He, Nattier, and Harrison, who had a closer look at the Tibetan traditions, were an indispensable source of support in investigating the non-Indian contexts. As the article shows, the study of this remarkable text is just in its initial stage, and any errors that remain are of course my own. But with the cooperation and help of the friends and colleagues mentioned above and other colleagues whose interest might be awakened, I am convinced that the coming years will bring many interesting new discoveries.

¹ The recent state of the discussion has been summarized and evaluated by Shimoda 2009 and Drewes 2010a.

inscriptions and manuscripts of the concerned period.² Equally problematic is the definite attribution of art-historical and archaeological remains. When discussing early Mahayana, we have to therefore mainly rely on the testimony of the Chinese translations of original Indian texts, which were prepared during the first few centuries of the Common Era. In most cases these translations represent the earliest versions of the respective texts and provide reliable—and often the only—chronological evidence for the existence of a specific work and the ideas represented in it. If an Indian original is available at all, it is mostly preserved within a much later manuscript tradition.³ Moreover, all extant Indian texts of early Mahayana literature are preserved in Sanskrit or Buddhist Sanskrit, although there is strong evidence for an earlier transmission in one or more Middle Indian languages. The irregular language of the verses contained in the preserved Sanskrit versions and observations on the underlying languages of the Chinese translations have given rise to the assumption that many of these early translations were prepared from originals composed in the dialect of the Indian Northwest, the so-called Gāndhārī.⁴ Of course, this as-yet hypothetical suggestion presupposes not only the existence of a substantial corpus of Mahayana literature in Gandhāra, but of Mahayana Buddhism in Gandhāra as such. Although it is possible to interpret both the inscripational and art-historical evidence of Gandhāra against the background of an emerging Mahayana, this hardly provides an unanimous proof for its existence.⁵ The most serious problem the adherents of this “Gāndhārī hypothesis” have faced so far has been the complete absence of any kind of textual remains of early Mahayana in Gandhāra or in the Gāndhārī language. For a long time, the only Buddhist text extant in the language of Gandhāra was a Dharmapada from Khotan,⁶ by itself an important witness of a Buddhist Gandhāran literature, but certainly not sufficient to prove the existence of a comprehensive corpus of texts, let alone of Mahayana literature in Gāndhārī. Although

² For an evaluation of the inscripational material, see Schopen 1979 (reprinted in Schopen 2005 [pp. 223–44]). See also Schopen’s response to the recent discussion in Schopen 2005, pp. 244–46.

³ Only in very rare cases is it possible to get access to a text in the form of a contemporary manuscript, e.g., in the case of the recently published Kuṣāṇa-period manuscript of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* from the Schøyen Collection (Sander 2000).

⁴ For the history and criticism of this so-called “Gāndhārī hypothesis,” see Boucher 1998 and 2008, pp. 101–7.

⁵ Rhi 2003, Rhi 2006.

⁶ Brough 1962.

this situation substantially changed in the late 1990s with the discovery of the British Library manuscripts⁷ and other manuscript collections in Afghanistan,⁸ there remained to be explained the remarkable discrepancy between the inventory of texts translated by the early Han period Chinese translators and the inventory of these new collections. While nearly all of the new Gāndhārī texts belong to the traditional type of Buddhism—being either *āgama* texts, verse texts, *avadānas*, or treatises and commentaries—a considerable number of the early Chinese translations of the Han period are Mahayana works. In fact, all the works attributed to one of the most influential translators of this period, Lokakṣema, are Mahayana sutras, among them such basic works as the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (hereafter *Aṣṭa*), the *Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*, and the *Sukhāvativyūha* (hereafter *SukhV*).⁹ Thus it is quite obvious that a substantial corpus of Mahayana literature must already have been in existence during the period of his translations (178–189 CE).

The question of whether this discrepancy reflected just the one-sided and perhaps non-representative character of the new Gāndhārī collections or pointed even to a misinterpretation of the role of Gandhāran Buddhism in the transmission of texts can now be answered with the help of a series of new discoveries which definitely proves the existence of early Mahayana sutras and consequently of a “Mahayana movement” among Gandhāran Buddhists.¹⁰ On the basis of this new material it will hopefully be possible to settle many of the questions regarding the character of this Mahayana movement and its relationship to traditional Buddhism.

One of these questions can already be answered by the mere physical existence of the Mahayana sutras in the context of their respective collections. Among the few things that have become a kind of *communis opinio* in the last decades is the observation that the Mahayana hardly developed independently from the monastic establishments of the so-called mainstream (or traditional or *nikāya*)¹¹ Buddhism. This observation can now materially be confirmed by the fact that many of the newly discovered Mahayana manuscripts are part of collections which contain traditional

⁷ Salomon 1999.

⁸ A good summary of the recent state of research is now available with Allon 2008.

⁹ For a detailed discussion of these translations and further references, see Nattier 2008, pp. 73–89.

¹⁰ See the article by Mark Allon and Richard Salomon in this issue.

¹¹ For the current taxonomy, see Drewes 2010b, pp. 72–73.

canonical texts side-by-side with those of the early Mahayana. This proves beyond doubt that at least certain groups of the new movement acted in close institutional association with the establishments of the so-called mainstream Buddhism and did not form separate sectarian units with independent organizational structures.¹²

THE MANUSCRIPT BC2 WITHIN THE BAJAUR COLLECTION OF BUDDHIST KHAROṢṬHĪ MANUSCRIPTS

The largest of these newly discovered Mahayana texts and the only one which is not known from other sources is an extensive sutra fragment preserved in the Bajaur Collection of Kharoṣṭhī manuscripts (hereafter BC2). This collection was discovered about ten years ago in the Bajaur district of the Northwestern Frontier Province of Pakistan. Since 2005, it has been studied in a research project at Freie Universität Berlin under the supervision of Harry Falk. The first years of research were dedicated to the identification and cataloguing of the manuscripts. According to the present state of research, the collection comprises fragments of nineteen different birch-bark scrolls, containing around twenty-two texts of different genres of Buddhist literature written by at least eighteen scribes. Judging from their scripts and language, all of the manuscripts can be tentatively dated to the first two centuries CE.¹³

The contents of the collection are remarkably heterogeneous, ranging from the earliest known manuscripts of *Vinaya* literature represented by a fragment of two different versions of a *Prātimokṣa-sūtra* and a small Karmavācanā collection, to a well-preserved *Madhyamāgama-sūtra* and a previously unknown apotropaic (*rakṣā*) sutra, up to the Mahayana text which is in the center of this paper.¹⁴

The scrolls vary considerably with regard to their length and state of preservation. While the shortest of them—the small Karmavācanā collection—is greatly damaged and measures after reconstruction only 13 by 6 cm, some of the manuscripts are almost completely preserved. Our Mahayana text is written on a scroll more than 200 cm in length. It is the largest

¹² A similar conclusion was also drawn by Rhi Juhyung (2003, pp. 183–85) on the basis of the archaeological, art-historical and inscriptional evidence from Gandhāran monasteries.

¹³ Strauch 2008, pp. 109–11.

¹⁴ More information about the Bajaur Collection can be found in Strauch 2007/2008 and 2008. See also the Bajaur Collection project's homepage: www.fu-berlin.de/bajaur-collection.

text of the Bajaur Collection, comprising about 600 lines on the obverse and reverse of this scroll. According to the actual state of research, this corresponds to nearly 45 percent of the entire collection.

Not all parts of this large scroll are equally well preserved: portions are missing, and others have been put into the glass frames in complete disorder, requiring that their sequence be reestablished. In some cases it is possible to reconstruct the original shape of the scroll with the help of image processing, while in other cases we have to rely solely on the analysis of the contents. Although the process of reconstructing and editing the text is still going on, it is possible to communicate here some preliminary information regarding its structure and contents.

The text is written in the style of a conventional sutra. Its outer narrative framework is composed as an instruction by the Buddha Śākyamuni to his disciple Śāriputra. The introduction (*nidāna*) to the sutra as well as its end are missing. It is therefore not possible to determine its original extent. The prose text is interrupted by metrical passages ranging from ten to thirty-two verses which usually summarize the contents of the preceding paragraph.

In my preliminary survey of the Bajaur Collection, I labeled this sutra as an “early Mahayana sutra related to the *Akṣobhyavyūha*,”¹⁵ or even—in search for a more handy title—**Akṣobhya-sūtra*.¹⁶ This hypothetical title was chosen because a first cursory reading of the text without reconstructing its many fragmentary passages indicated that this Buddha and his land played a prominent role in the contents of the Gāndhārī sutra. Although this evaluation remains generally true, it has to be supplemented by a more detailed analysis of the function and the actual characteristics of Akṣobhya and his Abhirati Buddha-land within the textual structure of the sutra. By investigating and contextualizing this central aspect of the Gāndhārī Mahayana sutra BC2, this paper aims at making a contribution towards the comprehension of the sutra’s structure and contents and towards defining its position within the broader context of early Mahayana literature.

THE CONTEXT: THE INSTRUCTION OF THE *DEVAPUTRAS*

The Arising of the Thought of Awakening (Bodhicittotpāda)

The central part of the sutra is devoted to the instruction of 84,000 *devaputras* who approach the Buddha and ask to be taught the way to perform

¹⁵ Strauch 2007/2008, p. 47.

¹⁶ Strauch 2008, p. 125.

the bodhisattva training (Gāndhārī *bosisatvaśikṣā*, Skt. *bodhisattvaśikṣā*). Although this setting does not belong to the most frequently found arrangements of Mahayana literature, it is not unique. Thus a similar situation is described in the *Lalitavistara* where 84,000 *devaputras* attain the Highest Perfect Enlightenment after being instructed by a bodhisattva.¹⁷ The instruction is introduced with the following words:

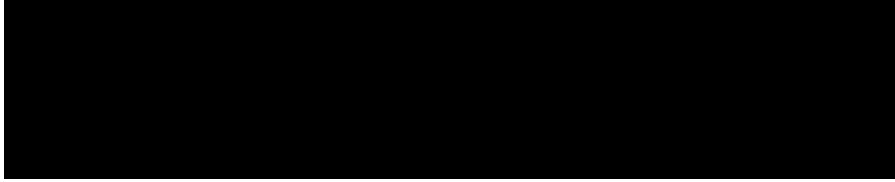


Figure 1: Extract 1 (BC2, part 7 recto)

- 9 *caduraśidi ca devasaḥaṣa vāya bhaṣati vae bhate bhagava ·*
eda[śa dha]ma[śa daṇaṣa] aśamochedae aṇatarahaṇae ca ·
bahajaṇahidae bahaja[ṇa]-
- 10 (**suha*)*[e loa]ṇuapae arthae hidae suhae devamaṇuṣaṇa*
budhanetriaṇuchedae sarvasatvahidae sarvasatvasuhae
loaṇapae tasagadaśaśa-
- 11 (**ṇasa*) *aṇatara[ha]ṇae · vurdhie vehulae · aśamoṣae ·*
bhavaṇaparipurie · aṇutarae samasabosae · cito upadema ·
aṇutarae samasabusie
- 12 */// ma · yaṣapraṇātae · vae bhate bhagava bosisatvaśikṣae*
śikṣiśama · eva vuto bhagava · te caturaśidi devaputrasahaṣa
*edadoya*¹⁸

¹⁷ Vaidya 1958, p. 25. See also the *Samghāṭa-sūtra* (Canevascini 1993, p. 48), where 84,000 *koṭis* of *devaputras* approach the Buddha, and the *Drumakinnararājapariprcchā-sūtra*, where the 84,000 wives of Druma conceive the spirit of awakening (Harrison 1987, p. 77).

¹⁸ The dots (·) are transcriptions of small dots in the original text to indicate word, sentence, verse, half-verse, or other minor unit divisions. The characters enclosed within brackets are transcriptions of unclear or partially preserved graphic syllables whose readings are uncertain that have been restored on the basis of context or other means. The characters enclosed in parentheses and preceded by an asterisk—that is, (***)—are transcriptions of lost or illegible graphic syllables that have been conjecturally restored on the basis of context, parallel citation, or by other means. Three slashes (*///*) indicate the beginning or the end of an incomplete line.

And the 84,000 gods said: “We, Venerable Lord, are directing our mind to the Highest Perfect Enlightenment, for the non-destruction and non-disappearance of the gift of this teaching, for the welfare of many people, for the happiness of many people, out of the compassion for the world, for the benefit, the welfare and the happiness of gods and men, for the non-interruption of the Buddhas’ lineage, for the benefit of all beings, for the happiness of all beings, out of compassion for the world, for the non-disappearance, the development (and) increase, the non-confusion of the Tathāgata’s teaching, for the completion of meditation. To the Highest Perfect Enlightenment (we are directing our mind). We, Venerable, want to be trained in the Bodhisattvaśikṣā, as it is announced (*yathāprajñāpta-?*).” Thus addressed, the Lord said to the 84,000 *devaputras*.

The phraseology of this passage is quite conventional and finds parallels in traditional Buddhist texts as well as in early Mahayana sutras.¹⁹ Using the phrase *cito upadema* (Skt. *cittam utpādayāmaḥ*) the text explicitly refers to the first step in a bodhisattva’s career—“the initial thought of awakening” (*bodhicittotpāda*) which regularly figures among the “key stages in this career” as described, e.g., in Lokakṣema’s translations.²⁰

“*Endurance towards Dharmas*” (Dharmakṣānti)

The main contents of the subsequent instruction focus on the character of perceptions (*saṃjñā*) and their relationship to enlightenment. It is concluded by an extensive passage where the religious merit resulting from this instruction is favorably compared to that of conventional types of religious activity, such as donations and stupa worship. This passage clearly belongs to those parts of a Mahayana sutra where, according to Paul Harrison’s picturesque words, “the texts fairly groan under the weight of their own self-glorification, and kalpas can tick by while one wades through chapter after chapter proclaiming the merits of this doctrine or practice.”²¹

The term which is used in this passage to define the religious goal of the preceding instruction which so impressively surpasses all other religious endeavors is *dharmakṣati* (Skt. *dharmakṣānti*) or *dharmehi kṣati* (Skt.

¹⁹ See the detailed remarks in Strauch 2007/2008, p. 55.

²⁰ Harrison 1993, p. 171.

²¹ Harrison 1987, p. 80.

dharmeṣu kṣānti). This term is by no means peculiar to our text and figures—especially in its extended form *anutpattikadharmakṣānti*—among the most important practices of a bodhisattva in Mahayana literature.

According to Ulrich Pagel:

In the earliest strand of Mahāyāna literature, the role of *kṣānti* was at first limited to patient endurance towards outright physical hostility and to the conviction of the non-arising of the factors of existence (*anutpattikadharmakṣānti*) . . . Although not clearly differentiated as separate aspects of *kṣānti* in this incipient phase, most early texts already distinguish what later treatises describe as patient acceptance with regard to beings (*sattvakṣānti*) and patient acceptance with regard to the factors of existence (*dharmakṣānti*). This distinction is found in the *Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikā Prāṇīpāramitā* and recurs as the most fundamental one in many other discussions of patient acceptance.²²

A similar distinction—without using these terms—is expressed by Jan Nattier, who describes two different types of *kṣānti* in the early Mahayana literature: first, “the optimal reaction of a bodhisattva when he is insulted . . . by others,” second, “the bodhisattva’s reaction to certain cognitive prepositions, e.g., the fact that all things are unoriginated (*anutpattikadharmakṣānti*).” In more general terms, these two distinctions clearly paraphrase the categories *sattva-* and *dharmakṣānti*. According to Nattier, an English equivalent for *kṣānti* which matches these different contexts is “endurance” defined as “the ability to endure torment without responding with anger . . . or fear and disorientation.”²³

On the basis of these observations the question arises: Is the *dharmakṣānti* of the Gāndhārī sutra identical with the concept in early Mahayana texts as described above or are there alternative ways to interpret this term?

²² Pagel 1995, pp. 184–85.

²³ Nattier 2003, p. 244, n. 240. Although Boucher recently voted for a more differentiated understanding and noticed that according to the context the term should be translated either as “forbearance” or as “tolerance,” he generally agrees with Jan Nattier, arguing that both meanings are “two fundamentally compatible extensions of its root meaning, namely, ‘to endure,’ or in the vernacular, ‘to stomach’ that which is difficult to bear” (Boucher 2008, p. 220, n. 83).

Excursus 1: *Dharmakṣānti* in Early Mahayana Literature

The present paper is not the place to discuss the rather complex conceptions which are construed around the term *kṣānti* in different Buddhist traditions. A quite comprehensive survey of these various systems that demonstrates not only their historical development but also the incoherence of their usages is provided by Ulrich Pagel in his study of the *Bodhisattvapiṭaka*.²⁴

For our purposes, we will limit the discussion to a short evaluation of the different connotations of the term *dharmakṣānti* and its relation to the “Perfection of Endurance” (*kṣāntipāramitā*) as found within early Mahayana literature. As we will see, this evaluation has to be based on an analysis of the verbal meaning of the compound *dharmakṣānti*. Despite the undeniable progress made in the definition of the semantic scope of the term *kṣānti*, there remains a certain ambiguity with regard to the meaning of *dharma* in this compound.

As indicated in the cited contributions, the most popular term which is found in connection with *kṣānti* is *anutpattikadharmā* resulting in the compound *anutpattikadharmakṣānti*. In many cases this compound is dissolved as *anutpattikeṣu dharmeṣu kṣānti*.²⁵ The use of the plural and the qualifying attribute (*anutpattika*) clearly indicate the intended meaning of *dharma* and suggest the translation “Endurance towards the non-originated factors of existence.” On the other hand, the expression *dharmakṣānti* is also known from other contexts where *dharma* is not qualified or is qualified in a different way. Are these kinds of *dharmakṣānti* necessarily identical with *anutpattikadharmakṣānti*? Or can this term be used to signify different types of endurance towards different types of *dharmas*? This question includes a semantic problem which is almost constantly present when dealing with Buddhist literature, i.e., the meaning(s) of *dharma*. Without taking up the discussion here, regarding the multitude of meanings hiding behind this term, one can refer to Rupert Gethin’s recent observation with regard to its use in early Buddhism. Gethin discerned two basic meanings of *dharma*: “the practices recommended by the Buddha and the basic qualities that constitute reality. The first takes *dhamma* as something normative and prescriptive, the second as something descriptive and factual.”²⁶ A similar distinction was suggested by Linnart Mäll with regard to the meanings of *dharma* in

²⁴ Pagel 1995, pp. 182–201.

²⁵ See, for example, Vaidya 1960a, pp. 169, 182, 202.

²⁶ Gethin 2004, p. 534.

the *Aṣṭa*. He uses the terms “teaching” and “element.”²⁷ Is it therefore possible to interpret *dharma* as used in the compound *dharmakṣānti* in a different sense, i.e., as “teaching, doctrine?”

While those cases where *dharma* is characterized as *anutpattika* clearly refer to its connotation as “elements, factors of existence,” there are indeed instances which seem to require a different interpretation. An understanding which presupposes the meaning “teaching (of the Buddha)” for *dharma* has been recently suggested by Daniel Boucher in his translation of the *Rāṣṭrapālāparipṛcchā* (hereafter *Rāṣṭrapāla*). Although Boucher did not particularly justify his choice, an analysis of the respective textual contexts shows that his interpretation must be maintained against the assumption of a coherent use of *dharma* in the concept of *dharmakṣānti*.

The first term occurring in the Sanskrit version of the *Rāṣṭrapāla* is *gambhīradharmakṣāntipratilābha*. It was translated by Boucher as “the obtaining of tolerance for the profound Dharma.”²⁸ The second term found in the same chapter is *anupalambhadharmakṣānti*, translated in a similar way as “tolerance of the inconceivable Dharma.”²⁹ As indicated by Boucher, the Chinese renderings of this second term seem to indicate different Sanskrit originals. The translation by Dharmarakṣa (ca. third century CE) suggests the popular *anutpattikadharmakṣānti* while the text of Jñānagupta (523–600) seems to presuppose the Sanskrit *ānulomikadharmakṣānti*.³⁰

For determining the concrete semantic value of both terms, it is necessary to consider the structure of the text. Each prose passage corresponds to a number of verses which are directly related to it. The term *gambhīradharmakṣāntipratilābha* is reflected by verse 56:

*gambhīra dharmā śrutva dhīra śūnyatopasaṃhitam
na cātmasattvajīvadṛṣṭi teṣu bhonti sarvaśaḥ.*³¹

When the resolute hear the **profound Dharma** connected with emptiness, they have in no way any wrong views concerning “self,” “being,” or “life-principle.”³²

²⁷ Mäll 2005, pp. 33–44.

²⁸ Boucher 2008, p. 122.

²⁹ Boucher 2008, p. 122.

³⁰ Boucher 2008, p. 220, n. 88.

³¹ Vaidya 1961b, p. 126.

³² Boucher 2008, p. 122.

In similar terms, the expression *anupalambhadharmakṣānti* is matched by verse 58:

*śṛṇoti dharmā nāyākāna śāntam ānulomikam
āśayena śrutva dhīra yoniśaḥ prayujyate,
anupalambhadharma śrutva kāṅkṣa nāsyā jāyate
niḥsattva iti *sarvadharmā nātra ātma vidyate.*³³

The resolute man listens to the tranquil and well-suited Dharma of the Guides,
and, after hearing it, applies himself to it earnestly and thoroughly.
Hearing the inconceivable Dharma, no doubt arises for him
that all these things are without “being” and nothing called “self”
is found.³⁴

We see that according to the first *pāda* of this verse, the reading of Jñānagupta’s Sanskrit original, *ānulomikadharmakṣānti*, is also possible. Regardless of this uncertainty, it is quite obvious that in all cases the verses do not refer to *dharmas* as “things, elements, factors of existence,” but to the teaching, the Dharma of the Buddha. Only verse 58 extends the scope to the contents of this teaching with regard to the quality of the factors of existence (*dharmas*). Boucher’s translations are therefore completely justified and in accordance with the text’s own inner logic. But can this interpretation be applied outside the *Rāṣṭrapāla*? Or is it a peculiarity of this text, caused by the author’s desire to interpret “old verses” in terms of a more appropriate, “modern” terminology?

The purpose of this discussion is quite clear. If the understanding of the *Rāṣṭrapāla* can be attributed to other texts as well, this would of course seriously affect the interpretation of *dharmakṣānti* as the central concept in the Gāndhārī sutra of BC2.

Our discussion will start from a rather technical perspective which focuses on the syntactic structure of the respective compounds and compares these suggested structures to more elaborate statements found in other early Mahayana texts. Such a method, based on a kind of cumulative evidence, will of course yield results only in terms of probability. It cannot replace a more thorough study of the concept of *dharmakṣānti* based on a well-established textual and doctrinal history—a task which is beyond the scope of the present paper.

³³ Vaidya 1961b, p. 126.

³⁴ Boucher 2008, p. 123.

Excursus 2: *Gambhīradharmakṣānti*

According to Boucher's translation, the compound *gambhīradharmakṣānti* has to be understood as *gambhīre dharme kṣānti*, taking (1) *dharma* as a singular and (2) *gambhīra* as relating to *dharma*. The term itself is in this form by no means singular in Buddhist literature, although it is much less frequently attested than *anutpattikadharmakṣānti*. We find references to it in various Mahayana texts, e.g., in the standard lists of attributes of the Buddha's entourage of the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (hereafter *Pañca*)³⁵ or the corresponding passage of the *Larger Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (hereafter *Larger PP*).³⁶ Perhaps the most informative passage, however, is found in the *Samādhirāja-sūtra*, where the whole ninth chapter is dedicated to *gambhīradharmakṣānti*. The state of a bodhisattva endowed with that kind of endurance is described as follows:

*kathaṃ ca kumāra bodhisattvo mahāsattvo gambhīradharma-
kṣāntikuśalo bhavati? iha kumāra bodhisattvena mahāsattvena
māyopamāḥ sarvadharmā yathābhūtataḥ prajñātavyāḥ. . . sa
gambhīrayā dharmakṣāntyā samanvāgato rañjanīyeṣu dharmeṣu
na rajyate, doṣaṇīyeṣu dharmeṣu na duṣyate, mohanīyeṣu
dharmeṣu na muhyate.*³⁷

And how, young man, does the bodhisattva *mahāsattva* become skilled in the “profound endurance towards the factors of existence”? Young man, the bodhisattva must perceive all factors of existence here as similar to illusions according to their real essence. . . . One who is endowed with “profound endurance towards the factors of existence,” does not enjoy enjoyable things, is not polluted by polluting things, is not deluded by things producing delusion.

³⁵ Dutt 1934, p. 4: *gambhīradharmakṣāntipāraṃgatair*.

³⁶ Zacchetti 2005, p. 366, 1r8: *gaṃbhīradharmakṣāntiparamagatīṃgataiḥ*. Other references can be found, e.g., in the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana-tantra* (Skorupski 1983, p. 142: *gambhīradharmakṣāntikāś-*), *Daśabhūmika-sūtra* (Vaidya 1967, p. 40: *gambhīradharmakṣānti*), *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra* (Vaidya 1960b, p. 93: *gambhīradharmakṣāntyavatārāya*).

According to Zacchetti (2005, pp. 19–23), the Gilgit manuscript identified by Conze (1962 and 1974) as Sanskrit versions of the *Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* is indeed the Sanskrit original of the *Larger PP* (translated by Dharmarakṣa under the title *Guangzan jing* 光讚經 [T 5, no. 222]). Due to the general parallelism of these sutras, we will therefore indicate citations from editions of this manuscript under the title “Larger Prajñāpāramitā.”

³⁷ Vaidya 1961b, p. 44.

As is obvious from this description, the *Samādhirāja-sūtra* here explicitly refers to the *dharmas* as “things, factors of existence,” and not to the Dharma, the teaching. Moreover, it makes it clear that the adjective *gambhīra* “profound” is related to *kṣānti* and not *dharma*, as in the case of the *Rāṣṭrapāla*. For understanding the conception of *kṣānti*, it is significant that according to this explanation, endurance is obtained by the recognition of the real truth of the *dharmas* (*yathābhūtataḥ prajñātavyāḥ*).

Based on this passage from the *Samādhirāja-sūtra*, the compound *gambhīradharmakṣānti* has to be analyzed as *gambhīra dharmeṣu kṣāntiḥ* “profound endurance towards the factors,” i.e., with (1) *dharma* in the plural, and (2) *gambhīra* relating to *kṣānti*. The same function of *gambhīra* as a qualification of *kṣānti* is attested in the *Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka-sūtra* (hereafter *Kpsū*) where we find beside *gambhīrāṃ dhāraṇīm* and *gambhīrāṃ samādhiṃ* a reference to *gambhīrāṃ kṣāntiṃ*.³⁸

It is not clear whether the use of this attribute can be directly connected with the classification of *kṣānti* as one of the perfections (*pāramitā*). At the very least, *gambhīra* “profound” belongs to the favorite attributes of a *pāramitā*, generally of the *prajñāpāramitā*, but occasionally also of the *kṣāntipāramitā*.³⁹

It seems, however, that the understanding revealed by the *Samādhirāja-sūtra* and the *Kpsū* is not the only option for interpreting the term *gambhīradharmakṣānti*. Thus the *Pañca* defines *kṣānti* with the words:

*yā gambhīreṣu dharmeṣu nidhyaptiḥ kṣāntir iyam ucyate.*⁴⁰

What is complete comprehension with regard to profound *dharmas*, that is called “endurance.”

Here, indeed, a different understanding of *dharma* seems possible. There are numerous places in Buddhist literature—in the “traditional” as well as the Mahayana literature—which qualify the teachings of the Buddhas as “deep, profound, difficult.” See, e.g., chapter 4 of the *Pañca*:

*punar aparam subhūte ’vinivartanīyasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasya gambhīreṣu dharmeṣu nāsti kāṅkṣā nāsti vimatir nāsti vicikitsā.*⁴¹

³⁸ Yamada 1968, p. 386.

³⁹ See, e.g., *Pañca*, ch. 4 (Kimura 1990, p. 117): *kṣāntipāramitāgambhīratayā*.

⁴⁰ Dutt 1934, p. 220.

⁴¹ Kimura 1990, p. 144. See also *Aṣṭa*, ch. 17 (Vaidya 1960a, p. 162).

Again, Subhūti, a Non-returner bodhisattva *mahāsattva* has no doubt with regard to difficult teachings, no disagreement, no uncertainty.

It is possible that this common combination of *gambhīra* and *dharma* “teaching, doctrine” promoted an alternative interpretation of the term *gambhīradharmakṣānti* which perceived *dharma* in its second basic meaning, i.e., “teaching, doctrine.” Although in most cases it is impossible to decide which of these meanings is actually intended, there are occurrences like that cited from the *Pañca* where *dharma* has to be interpreted in this sense. For example, see the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* (hereafter *Vkn*) which seems to refer to the same concept as that expressed by the *Pañca*:

*maitreya dvābhyāṃ kāraṇābhyāṃ ādikarmikā bodhisattvā ātmānaṃ kṣiṅvanti / na ca gambhīreṣu dharmeṣu nidhyaptiṃ gacchanti.*⁴²

Maitreya, for two reasons the beginner-bodhisattvas harm themselves and do not attain profound comprehension with regard to the profound teachings.⁴³

Contrary to the *Pañca*, however, the *Vkn* distinguishes this state from that of *anutpattikadharmakṣānti*, which is cited just after this passage with regard to advanced bodhisattvas (*na cānutpattikeṣu dharmeṣu kṣāntiṃ pratilabhate*). According to the *Vkn*'s system, the capacity to forbear the difficult teachings of a Buddha was expected already of a beginner-bodhisattva, while endurance towards the non-originated quality of the factors of existence belongs to a higher level bodhisattva (see pp. 40–43 below).⁴⁴

⁴² *Vkn* 12. 18 (Taisho University Study Group 2006, p. 123).

⁴³ Lamotte (1976, p. 269) translates the Chinese text as “do not analyse the profound Law” (*gambhīraṃ dharmāṃ na nirūpayanti*). See also McRae 2004, p. 198: “are unable to be definite about the extremely profound Dharma.” The expression is also found in the *Samādhirāja-sūtra*: *gambhīreṣu ca dharmeṣu nidhyaptiṃ gacchati* (Vaidya 1961a, p. 136).

⁴⁴ Both citations above paraphrase *kṣānti* with *nidhyapti* “profound comprehension.” This association of *kṣānti* and a noun derived from *ni-dhyā* is also found in other frequently attested terms like *dharmānidhyānakṣānti* or *dharmānidhyānādhimuktiṃkṣānti*. The latter term was translated by Pagel (1995, p. 194) as “patient acceptance consisting in receptive examination and convinced adhesion of the Doctrine” which clearly presupposes *dharma* in the meaning “teaching.” The same interpretation was suggested by Pagel for the direct terminological predecessor of these expressions in the older canonical literature of early Buddhism, e.g., Pāli *dharmānijjhānakkhanti* in the Caṅkīśutta (Pagel 1995, pp. 194–95, n. 367). On the other hand, there are also cases which clearly speak in favor of the meaning “factor of existence, thing,” e.g., *sarvadharmasvabhāvanidhyānakṣāntiḥ* “endurance (caused by) the comprehension of the essence of all factors of existence” (*Gaṇḍavyūha* [Vaidya 1960b, p. 192]).

To sum up: It seems that the different interpretations of *dharmā* in the compound *gambhīradharmakṣānti* are mainly due to the different syntactic functions ascribed to the compound member *gambhīra*. The traditional understanding is likely represented by interpretations which relate *gambhīra* to *kṣānti* and where *dharmā* was perceived as “thing, factor of existence.” The common association of the adjective *gambhīra* with *dharmā* in the sense of “teaching, doctrine, concept” which is frequently found in early Mahāyāna literature promoted a different and—according to my view—secondary interpretation of the term which is related to the capacity of a bodhisattva to endure the teaching of a Tathāgata. Accordingly, two interpretations have to be taken into consideration when defining the meaning of the compound *gambhīradharmakṣānti* in a given context: (1) *gambhīrā dharmeṣu kṣāntiḥ* “profound endurance towards the factors of existence,” (2) *gambhīreṣu dharmeṣu kṣāntiḥ* “endurance towards the profound teachings.”

Excursus 3: *Anupalambhadharmakṣānti* and *Ānulomikadharmakṣānti*

Can the same ambiguity also be observed in the case of the other two terms attested in the *Rāṣṭrapāla*? Although both of them are known from other texts, the more popular and distinct variant is suggested by Jñānagupta’s translation: *ānulomikadharmakṣānti*. In the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra* it figures as *ānulomikī kṣānti*.⁴⁵ It is described as one of the features realized by a bodhisattva on the sixth level and is explicitly distinguished from *anutpattikadharmakṣānti*, which is said to be obtained only on the eighth *bhūmi*.⁴⁶ A comparable hierarchical relationship can be observed in various other texts—some of them add *ghoṣānugā kṣānti*, still another inferior type of “endurance.”⁴⁷ As indicated by the term itself, *ānulomikī dharmakṣānti* belongs to the group of “conforming practices” (*anulomacaryā*) of a bodhisattva while *anutpattikadharmakṣānti* has to be attributed to those practices which are closely connected to the prediction of future buddhahood (*vyākaraṇa*) and are grouped as “non-retrogressive practices” (*anivartanacāryā*).⁴⁸

It is presently difficult to decide which of these interpretations is preferable in the case of the above-cited terms. Therefore, we will not include this evidence in our present discussion.

⁴⁵ Vaidya 1967, p. 31.

⁴⁶ Vaidya 1967, p. 42.

⁴⁷ Pagel 1995, pp. 185–87.

⁴⁸ Aramaki 2003, p. 209. The close association of *anutpattikadharmakṣānti* and “the bodhisattva’s final prediction to buddhahood” and “the status of irreversibility” is also stressed by Pagel (1995, pp. 186–87).

The *Daśabhūmika-sūtra* describes *ānulomikī kṣānti* with the following words which also make evident the syntactic structure of the compound:

*sa evaṃsvabhāvān sarvadharmān pratyavekṣamāṇo . . . śaṣṭhīm abhimukhīm bodhisattvabhūmim anuprāpnoti tīkṣṇayānulomikyā kṣāntyā / na ca tāvad anutpattikadharmakṣāntimukham anuprāpnoti.*⁴⁹

One who analyses all factors of existence according to their essence attains the sixth bodhisattva level by means of sharp conforming (preparatory) endurance. He does not attain at that time the endurance towards the non-originating factors of existence.

A similar distinction is also seen in the *Lalitavistara*'s enumeration of "Doors to the Lights of the Dharma" (*dharmālokamukha*). Here, this *kṣānti* is explicitly called *ānulomikadharmakṣānti* and again is clearly separated from the superior *anutpattikadharmakṣānti*.⁵⁰

The idea of *ānulomikī kṣānti* seems to have found its way into Pāli Buddhism as well. Although it is occasionally attested in a few *Aṅguttara-nikāya* (hereafter *AN*) texts (*anulomikā khanti*),⁵¹ its *locus classicus* among the Pāli Buddhist texts is certainly the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* (hereafter *Paṭis*) of the second century CE,⁵² where it is found more than fifty times. What exactly this *anulomikā khanti* is referring to becomes obvious from the phrase:

*Ete vā pana ubho ante anupagamma idappaccayatā paṭiccasamuppannesu dhammesu anulomikā khanti paṭiladdhā hoti, yathābhūtaṃ vā ñāṇaṃ.*⁵³

Or else, while avoiding both these extremes, they either get conforming endurance towards the factors of existence which dependently originated through specific conditionality, or they acquire the respective knowledge.⁵⁴

The Pāli passage makes it clear that here again *khanti* refers to *dharmas* as "factors of existence." Furthermore, like the text of the *Samādhirāja-*

⁴⁹ Vaidya 1967, p. 31.

⁵⁰ Vaidya 1958, p. 25.

⁵¹ *AN* III 437, 441–43.

⁵² von Hinüber 2000, p. 59ff.

⁵³ *Paṭis*, vol. 1, p. 123. See also the *Critical Pāli Dictionary*, s.v. "anulomakhanti."

⁵⁴ Cf. the slightly different translation by Nāṇamoli (1997, p. 125).

sūtra cited above, it stresses the role of knowledge/recognition in this process. In contrast to the *Samādhirāja-sūtra*'s “*sarvadharmā yathābhūtataḥ prajñātavyāḥ*,” the phrase “*yathābhūtaṃ vā ñāṇaṃ*” is used in Pāli.⁵⁵

It seems that in all attestations of the term *ānulomika(dharma)kṣānti* the syntactic structure and semantic value are identical: *ānulomika*-always refers to a specific type of *kṣānti* while *dharmā* always designates the factors of existence.⁵⁶ The understanding of *dharmā* revealed by the *Rāṣṭrapāla*'s verse (“well-suited Dharma”) is therefore not supported by any other contemporary texts.

What about the second alternative mentioned in the *Rāṣṭrapāla*, i.e., *anupalambhadharmakṣānti*? Here, the adjective *anupalambha* “inconceivable” is clearly related to *dharmā*, and not to *kṣānti*. Although this relation and the meaning of the adjective could easily pave the way for a similar re-interpretation as in the case of *gambhīradharmakṣānti*, there is sufficient evidence to show that *dharmā* in this compound consistently refers to “factors of existence.” Thus the *Larger PP* says:

*kathaṃ ca subhūte ānimitteṣv anābhogeṣv anupalambheṣv anabhisamkāreṣu dharmeṣu kṣāntipāramitāṃ paripūrayati.*⁵⁷

And how, Subhūti, does he accomplish the “Perfection of Endurance” towards the causeless, effortless, inconceivable, non-accumulating factors of existence?

This passage, as well as the expression *anupalambhānutpattikadharmakṣāntisamanvāgataiḥ* “endowed with endurance towards the inconceivable and non-arising factors of existence” found in the *Vkn* 1.3,⁵⁸ suggest that

⁵⁵ See also the statement of the *Larger PP* where *kṣānti* is explicitly defined as *jñāna* “knowledge”: *aṇur api subhūte yad dharmo notpadyate. tad ucyate anutpattikam iti. tatra yaj jñānaṃ tad ucyate kṣānti, yena jñānena anutpattikeṣu dharmeṣu kṣāntiṃ pratilabhate* (Conze 1974, p. 28). “Because, Subhūti, even a subtle factor of existence does not originate, it is called non-originating. The knowledge about this is called ‘endurance,’ (because) through this knowledge one obtains Endurance towards the non-originating factors of existence.” Cf. a related statement in the *Pañca* (Kimura 2006, p. 33).

⁵⁶ The term *ānulomikadharmakṣānti* (Chinese *jou shun fa-jen*) figures also among the kinds of *kṣānti* listed in the *Tathagatopattisambhavanirdeśa* (T no. 291) and is translated by Nattier as “submissive dharma-endurance” (Nattier 2003, p. 279, n. 465). See also the *Vkn*, which refers to the *ānulomikī dharmakṣānti* (*Vkn* 12. 13).

⁵⁷ Conze 1974, p. 16. See also the nearly identical wording in the *Pañca* (Kimura 2006, p. 21).

⁵⁸ Taisho University Study Group 2006, p. 1.

anupalambhadharmakṣānti is closely related and to a certain degree equivalent to *anutpattikadharmakṣānti*. Moreover, the citation from the *Larger PP* shows that this type of *kṣānti* can be identified with the *pāramitā* of the same name.

As far as one can judge from the sources cited above, the compound *anupalambhadharmakṣānti* can be analyzed consistently as *anupalambheṣu dharmeṣu kṣāntiḥ* “endurance towards the inconceivable factors of existence.” As in the case of *ānulomikadharmakṣānti*, the understanding of the *Rāṣṭrapāla* (“tolerance of the inconceivable Dharma”) cannot be verified in other contemporary texts.

Summarizing the results of this short overview, one can state: Although a certain terminological inconsistency could be traced in the use of the compound *gambhīradharmakṣānti*, the overall picture indicates that the original meaning of the term *dharmakṣānti* can be established as “endurance towards the factors of existence.” According to the testimony of some texts, this endurance is based on (if not even identified with) the recognition (*nidhyapṭi/nidhyāna/jñāna*) of these factors.

The irregular use attested in the *Rāṣṭrapāla* has to be explained on the basis of internal textual considerations and is not supported by external evidence.

The Meaning of Dharmakṣānti in the Gāndhārī Sutra

One question remains to be discussed: How does this “plain” *dharmakṣānti* mentioned in our text relate to any of these different types of *dharmakṣānti* discussed above, including the highly rated *anutpattikadharmakṣānti*? There are a few places in early Mahayana texts where a kind of hierarchy can be observed which presupposes a more general concept of *dharmakṣānti* and distinguishes it clearly from *anutpattikadharmakṣānti*. Thus the *Larger PP* knows the term *dharmāvabodhakṣānti* “endurance resulting from the perception of the factors of existence” and describes its relationship to other types of *kṣānti* as follows:

iha subhūte bodhisattvo mahāsattvo dvābhyāṃ kṣāntibhyāṃ kṣāntipāramitāṃ paripūrayati. katamābhyāṃ dvābhyāṃ kṣāntibhyāṃ? adhvāsanaṅkṣāntyā dharmāvabodhakṣāntyā ca. . . . svabhāvaśūnyatām upādāya paramārthaśūnyatām upādāya iyaṃ ucyate dharmāvabodhakṣāntiḥ. sa evaṃ upaparīkṣamāṇa

*kṣāntipāramitāṃ paripūrayati, so 'naya kṣāntipāramitayā paripūrṇayā anutpattikeṣu dharmeṣu kṣāntiṃ pratilabhate.*⁵⁹

Here, Subhūti, a bodhisattva *mahāsattva* accomplishes the “Perfection of Endurance” by two (kinds of) endurance. By which two (kinds of) endurance? By the endurance resulting from the tolerance (towards suffering)⁶⁰ and by the endurance resulting from the perception of the factors of existence. . . . (What) considers the emptiness of the individual nature (and) the emptiness of the Absolute is called “endurance resulting from the perception of the factors of existence.” One who thus investigates accomplishes the “Perfection of Endurance.” He obtains by this accomplished “Perfection of Endurance” the “Endurance towards the non-originating factors of existence.”

The text clearly establishes a three-level hierarchy in which each member preconditions the next one:

adhivāsanakṣānti + dharmāvabodhakṣānti
kṣāntipāramitā
anutpattikadharmakṣānti

Seen from this perspective, a reference to *dharmakṣānti* without further qualification would have to be related to the inferior type of *kṣānti* which is called here *dharmāvabodhakṣānti*. It is, however, far from certain whether such a hierarchical terminology was generally accepted among the different groups of Mahayanists. The Gāndhārī sūtra, at least, does not reveal any traces of such a hierarchical understanding. Here *dharmakṣānti* figures as the supreme goal of the instruction. It is, therefore, quite possible to suggest a stage in the development of this concept where the distinction of different types of *dharmakṣānti* was either unknown or irrelevant, before they became clearly separated from and hierarchically subdued to *anutpattikadharmakṣānti*. The status of *dharmakṣānti* in the Gāndhārī sūtra is furthermore characterized by its direct association with the state of Non-retrogression (*avaivartya*):

⁵⁹ Conze 1974, p. 27. A similar concept is described in the *Pañca* (Kimura 2006, p. 32).

⁶⁰ Other texts call this type *duḥkhādhivāsanakṣānti* “Endurance resulting from the tolerance/composure towards suffering” (cf. Pagel 1995, p. 192: “patient acceptance enduring suffering”). *Adhi-vas* and *kṣam* are nearly synonymous “to endure, tolerate.”

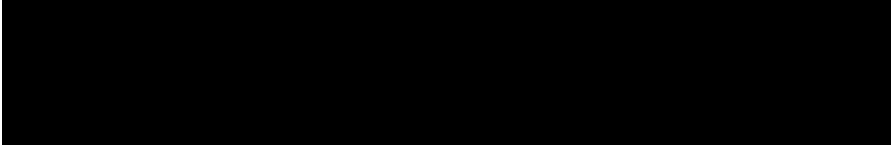


Figure 2: Extract 2 (BC2, part 7 recto)

52 /// [ya]ṣa ime evarua dharma ṣutva cito ṇa sasidadi oghahati
 aṣimuca
 53 (*ti) /// (*pa)[ḍi]gaksida[vo] + + ? + + saḥhido ya aya bosī-
 satva ṇa vivaṭaṣati anutarasamasabosie · ṇa pracuava
 54 (*ṭiṣati) (*a)[ṇu]tara[sa](*ma)[sa]bosie⁶¹

After having heard these teachings, one whose mind is not discouraged, (but) plunges in and believes resolutely, he is to be expected⁶² /// and ///. This bodhisattva will not turn away from the Supreme Enlightenment,⁶³ he will not return from the Supreme Enlightenment.⁶⁴

As will be shown below, the *dharmakṣānti* passage is directly followed by the prediction of buddhahood (*vyākaraṇa*). The direct link with these two features—*avaivartana* and *vyākaraṇa*—is peculiar to the *anutpattikadharmakṣānti* and can hardly be applied to any inferior kind of

⁶¹ A plus sign (+) indicates a missing graphic syllable that would have appeared on a lost or obscured portion of the scroll. A series of these symbols indicates the approximate number of lost syllables, one + sign being equivalent to one graphic syllable. A question mark indicates an illegible but visible or partially visible graphic syllable.

⁶² For similar but not identical phrases, see, e.g., the *Aṣṭa* (Vaidya 1960a, p. 150): *kaccit subhūte bodhisattvo mahāsattvo 'syāṃ gambhīrāyāṃ prajñāpāramitāyāṃ bhāṣyamāṇāyāṃ nāvalīyate na saṃlīyate na viprṣṭhībhavati notrasyati na saṃtrasyati na saṃtrāsam āpadyate, na kāṅkṣati na vicikitsati na dhandhāyate avagāhate 'dhimucyate 'bhinandati prajñāpāramitāyā darśanaṃ śravaṇaṃ ca*; and *ibid.*, p. 201: *sacet subhūte bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ evaṃ bhāṣyamāṇe notrasyati na saṃtrasyati na saṃtrāsam āpadyate na saṃsīdati, veditavyam etat subhūte caraty ayaṃ bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ prajñāpāramitāyāṃ iti*. The function and meaning of these and similar phrases are discussed by Mäll (2005, pp. 89–93).

⁶³ For this expression, see *Pañca*, ch. 5: *vivartīsyaty anuttarāyāḥ samyaksambodheḥ* (Kimura 1992, p. 80). See also *Pañca* 4 (Kimura 1990, p. 133) and *Aṣṭa* (Vaidya 1960a, p. 158).

⁶⁴ For *pracuava*(*ṭiṣati) (Skt. *pratyudāvartīsyate), see *Gaṇḍavyūha*, ch. 38 *avaivartya-pratyudāvartya-* (Vaidya 1960b, p. 220). See also Conze 1973, s.v. “pratyudāvartate.”

dharmakṣānti.⁶⁵ According to Paul Harrison, in the Mahayana sutras translated by Lokakṣema there are highlighted only a few “key stages” in the career of a bodhisattva. Besides the already mentioned “initial thought of awakening” (*bodhicittotpāda*) which precedes the instruction in the Gāndhārī sutra, these are:

Three closely related events which usually take place myriads of lifetimes later, namely the realisation of the fact that the *dharmas* are not produced (*anutpattikadharmakṣānti*); the attainment of the stage of non-regression, whereupon a bodhisattva is assured of reaching his or her goal (*avaivartika*); and the prediction (*vyākaraṇa*), when the Buddha under whom the bodhisattva is currently serving predicts his or her eventual awakening.⁶⁶

Functionally, and with regard to its religious status, the *dharmakṣānti* of the Gāndhārī sutra should therefore be associated with the *anutpattikadharmakṣānti* of contemporary Mahayana texts, although this terminological distinction was obviously unknown to the author of the text. It is possible that the concept of *dharmakṣānti* as represented in the Gāndhārī sutra was not explicitly based on the non-originating character of the factors of existence but perceived in a more general way. Terms like *gambhīra-* or *anupalambhadharmakṣānti* which are found in other early Mahayana works might be reflections of a similar conception.

While the concept of *dharmakṣānti* and its close association with the career of a bodhisattva in its upper levels can thus be linked with contemporary early Mahayana ideas, its prominent role in the Gāndhārī text hardly finds any parallels. I am not aware of any other early Mahayana text where the central religious goal of the instruction is defined as *dharmakṣānti*. Even if we concede that this term refers to one of the *pāramitās* (which is not said *expressis verbis*) the text still remains an outsider. Although there are sutras which concentrate on perfections other than the *prajñāpāramitā*,⁶⁷ their number is rather limited. Moreover, usually these texts also know the other *pāramitās* at least by name, among them of course the *prajñāpāramitā*. Such a knowledge—including even the use of the term *pāramitā*—cannot be proven for the Gāndhārī text. I would therefore cautiously suggest that the exclusive restriction to (*dharm*)*kṣānti* as the religious goal of its

⁶⁵ Pagel 1995, pp. 186–87.

⁶⁶ Harrison 1993, p. 171.

⁶⁷ Pagel 2006, p. 80.

instruction and the foremost capacity of a bodhisattva can be characterized as a distinctive feature of this text.

Is it possible to give an explanation for this peculiarity? Is the concentration on *dharmakṣānti* perhaps directly connected with the specific religious and dogmatic character of the text? It is too early to give a definite answer to this question. For the time being, it might be sufficient to draw attention to the fact that in some Mahayana sutras *kṣānti* is explicitly associated with the root *kṣubh* “to shake, be agitated” which also underlies the name of the Buddha Akṣobhya, literally the “Unshakable.” Thus the *Pañca* and the corresponding passages of the *Larger PP* state: *kṣāntipāramitā paripūrayitavyā akṣobhaṇatām upādāya* “The ‘Perfection of Endurance’ is to be accomplished by means of imperturbability.”⁶⁸ A similar idea is expressed with regard to the “second *kṣānti*” (*dvitīyā kṣānti*) in the *Samādhirāja-sūtra*, v. 7, 10:

*akampiyah samathabalena bhoti śelopamo bhoti vipaśyanāya
na kṣobhituṃ śakyu sa sarvasattvair dvitīyāya kṣāntīya sa
nirdiśīyati.*⁶⁹

He becomes unshakable by the power of tranquility, he becomes like a rock by the right insight. All beings are unable to agitate (him), (when) he is distinguished by the second *kṣānti*.

In other texts, the *kṣāntipāramitā* is directly connected with the injunction to avoid an agitated mind (*kṣobhacitta*).⁷⁰

Can we conclude on the basis of this mainly etymological evidence that the concentration of the Gāndhārī text on *kṣānti* can be explained by its close relation to Akṣobhya? Naturally, *kṣānti* would be the foremost capacity associated with a Buddha of such a name. Was the sutra consequently composed in a community where this Buddha and his “(Perfection of) Endurance”—*kṣānti* (*pāramitā*)—played a central role in doctrine and religious practice?

⁶⁸ Dutt 1934, p. 18 and Zacchetti 2005, p. 376, fol. 8v2. See also *Larger PP* (Zacchetti 2005, p. 382, fol. 13r1).

⁶⁹ Vaidya 1961a, p. 36. Concerning this passage, see Pagel 1995, p. 187ff., n. 317.

⁷⁰ See, e.g., *Pañca*, ch. 5 (Kimura 1992, p. 26), *Pañca* (Dutt 1934, p. 188), *Larger PP* (Conze 1962, p. 115).

THE FUNCTION: ABHIRATI AS A PARADIGMATIC BUDDHA-LAND

The praise of *dharmakṣānti* is followed by a passage describing a future Buddha-land and repeatedly mentioning in this context the terms Abhirati and Akṣobhya. It is therefore not surprising that the description of this Buddha-land largely corresponds to the concept of Abhirati as represented in several works of early Mahayana literature.⁷¹ The most prominent of these works is of course the *Akṣobhyavyūha* (hereafter *AkṣV*, Ch. *Achufoguo jing* 阿闍佉国经, T no. 313). It belongs to the group of Mahayana texts translated into Chinese as early as the second century by Lokakṣema (ca. second century CE) or—more probably—by a later member of his school called here provisionally *Lokakṣema.⁷² A different recension was translated into Chinese as part of the *Mahāratnakūṭa-sūtra* (Ch. *Dabaoji jing* 大宝积经, T no. 310) collection by Bodhiruci (n.d.–727) at the beginning of the eighth century.⁷³ Slightly later is the version preserved in the Tibetan canon. According to Jean Dantinne, *Lokakṣema's Indian prototype was also the basis of the Tibetan translation of around 800.⁷⁴

Until now, no Indian original has been discovered. In his translation and study of the first three chapters of the *AkṣV*, Dantinne suggested a Gāndhārī original for the text translated by *Lokakṣema.⁷⁵ Since Dantinne does not give any positive evidence for this suggestion, his statement is most probably due to the widespread and often unproven application of the “Gāndhārī hypothesis.”⁷⁶ Unless a solid linguistic study of *Lokakṣema's *AkṣV* text can prove its Gāndhāran character, there is virtually no need to assume such a provenance.⁷⁷

⁷¹ The most comprehensive study on Akṣobhya and his Abhirati paradise on the basis of the Chinese Tripiṭaka is the unpublished dissertation by Kwan Tai-wo (1985). For a detailed discussion and evaluation of the Abhirati conception within the history of “Pure Land” Buddhism, see Nattier 2000 and Nattier 2003b. A short survey can be found in Williams 2009, pp. 231–34.

⁷² Nattier (2008, p. 85ff.) includes this text in the “problematic or revised texts” attributed to this translator. For this and the parallel versions, see also Harrison 1993, pp. 166–68.

⁷³ An English translation of Bodhiruci's text (with some omissions) is available in Chang 1983, pp. 315–38.

⁷⁴ Dantinne 1983, p. 38. A critical edition of the Tibetan version is now available with Satō 2002.

⁷⁵ Dantinne 1983, p. 1.

⁷⁶ For a critique of this phenomenon, see Boucher 1998 and Boucher 2008, p. 102.

⁷⁷ For studies of this kind, see, e.g., Boucher 1998; Boucher 2008, pp. 101–7 (with regard to Dharmarakṣa's translations); Karashima 2006; and Karashima 2007 with a more generalized approach.

But the *AkṣV* is not the only text where Akṣobhya and his Buddha-land play a prominent role. Although the contexts and the specific characteristics attributed to Abhirati may vary, works like the *Aṣṭa*, the *Vkn* and the *Kpsū* clearly show that both Akṣobhya and his personal Buddha-land were quite popular among the followers of early Mahayana. Satō Naomi recently compared the various literary evidence of the Abhirati Buddha-land with the concept contained in the *AkṣV* and came to the conclusion that “the terms Akṣobhya and Abhirati were well known though the doctrine written in Av (= *AkṣV*) was not familiar to the early and middle period Mahāyānists. . . . The cult of Akṣobhya lacks consistency . . . and was not as familiar as that of Amitābha (or Amitāyus).”⁷⁸ This statement is nearly opposite to what Nattier (2000) observed in her study on “The Realm of Akṣobhya: A Missing Piece in the History of Pure Land Buddhism” published a few years before. According to her, the “discussions of Akṣobhya and his realm” of the *Aṣṭa* and the *Vkn* “conform to the description given in the Akṣobhyavyūha in most of the relevant details” and “there is every reason to believe that a coherent body of thought concerning the celestial realm of the Buddha Akṣobhya was already circulating in India, at least in certain Mahāyāna circles.”⁷⁹

The present paper is not the place to evaluate the general validity of either of these statements.⁸⁰ For the purpose of our study, it is sufficient to compare the characteristics of Abhirati as described in the Gāndhārī sūtra with the concept(s) as represented in the texts cited above. And without anticipating the results of this comparison, it can be stated that the evidence of our Gāndhārī sūtra clearly speaks in favor of Nattier’s conclusions.

However, before analyzing the contents of this description, it should be clarified which function it fulfilled in the Gāndhārī sūtra. A closer look at all the occurrences of the words *akṣobha* (= Akṣobhya) and *abhiradi* (= Abhirati) in the respective passages reveals that all of them are actually preceded by words expressing “like” (*sayasavi*, *yaṣayeva*) or “now, here” (*edarahi*, *atra*) (see figure 4 below). This seems to indicate that this

⁷⁸ Satō 2004, p. 932 (23).

⁷⁹ Nattier 2000, p. 80ff.

⁸⁰ Such an analysis is still a desideratum and should be the object of a more complex investigation based on a thorough analysis of the contexts in which the respective descriptions appear. A good deal of material has already been collected and studied by Kwan (1985, pp. 185–207), whose dissertation on Akṣobhya and Abhirati is a real *kośa* of information about Akṣobhya Buddhism.

passage is not describing the Abhirati Buddha-land itself but some other *buddhakṣetra* which is in many regards similar to, but not identical with Abhirati. At the same time, the particles *atra* “here” and *edarahi* “now,” as well as the use of the future tense throughout the text, point to the chronological perspective of the sutra’s narrative. Contrary to the *AkṣV*, it is not Abhirati that is here perceived as a future Buddha-land but the Buddha-land which is compared to it. But if this is not a description of Abhirati, but of another Buddha-land, why was it described here? The introduction of this passage, although not completely preserved, can help to settle this question:

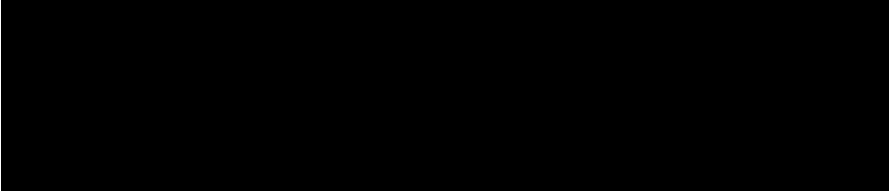


Figure 3: Extract 3 (BC2, part 5 recto)

- 11 *aṣa h(*o) bhagava · te caduraśidi devaputra ṣahaṣa · taṣa ·
sadevamaṇuṣaṣa logaṣa purado aṇutara*
12 */// e ? ? [ṣa] bhaviṣa tusve aṇaga[de] adhva[ṇe] aṣakhea ·
kape aṣakhadare aprameehi aciti*
13 */// [ṇ.] ? + + ? ? ? (*ara)[ha]da-samasabudha ekanama-
ṣea · viholapravha[ṇa]ṇa · sarva ekakapakṣi[ṇa]ṇutara-
samasabosi-aviṣa*
14 *(*budha)*

The formula *anāgate advhane asaṃkhyeye kalpe* or closely related variants of it are occasionally found in Buddhist literature where a prophecy (*vyākaraṇa*) is introduced.⁸¹ Already the paradigmatic *locus classicus* in the *Mahāvastu*, where Dīpaṃkara predicts that the young Brahmin Megha will become the future Buddha Śākyamuni, shows a close parallel to our Gāndhārī sutra:

⁸¹ The same formula is also used when referring to events in the distant past. See, e.g., with a still more complete coincidence in the exact wording, the following citation from the *Samādhirāja-sūtra*: *atīte ’dhvany asaṃkhyeye kalpe asaṃkhyeyatare vipule ’prameye ’cintye ’parimāṇe yadāsīt tena kālena tena samayena bhagavān ghoṣadatto nāma tathāgato ’rhan samyaksambuddho loke udapādi* (Vaidya 1961a, p. 23).

*atha . . . bhagavān dīpaṃkaro meghasya māṇavasya . . . anuttarāye samyaksaṃbodhaye vyākārṣīt // bhaviṣyasi tvaṃ māṇava anāgatam adhvānam aparimite asaṃkhyeye kalpe śākyānāṃ kapilavastusmiṃ nagare śākyamunir nāma tathāgato 'rhaṃ samyaksaṃbuddho.*⁸²

Now . . . the Lord Dīpaṃkara predicted for the young Brahmin Megha . . . the Highest Complete Enlightenment: “**You, young Brahmin, will become in the future, within unmeasured, innumerable kalpas in the Śākyas’ city Kapilavastu a Tathāgata, an Arhat, a Perfectly Enlightened One** called Śākyamuni.”

Almost the same words are also used in the version of this story contained in the second chapter of the *Aṣṭa*:

*bhaviṣyasi tvaṃ māṇava anāgate 'dhvani asaṃkhyeyaiḥ kalpaiḥ śākyamunir nāma tathāgato 'rhan samyaksaṃbuddho.*⁸³

You, young Brahmin, will become in the future, within innumerable kalpas a Tathāgata, an Arhat, a Perfectly Enlightened One called Śākyamuni.”

Virtually the same standard phrase can be found in a number of other texts which describe a prophecy. As an example, I cite the famous Gaṅgadevī story from chapter 19 of the *Aṣṭa*, where the Buddha says to Ānanda:

*iyam ānanda gaṅgadevā bhaginī anāgate 'dhvani suvarṇapuṣpo nāma tathāgato bhaviṣyati arhan samyaksaṃbuddho.*⁸⁴

Ānanda, this woman Gaṅgadevā **will become in the future a Tathāgata, an Arhat, a Perfectly Enlightened One** called Suvarṇapuṣpa.

If we compare the structure of these passages to that of the Gāndhārī text, their parallelism becomes quite obvious. If this structural parallelism indicates a similarity of functions, we should expect to find in the Gāndhārī sutra a prophecy (*vyākaraṇa*) to somebody about becoming a future Buddha. Reading the passage from this perspective, it becomes clear that here the *devaputras* who have just received instruction from the Buddha are promised a future existence as Tathāgatas.

⁸² Senart 1882–97, 1, p. 239.

⁸³ Vaidya 1960a, p. 24.

⁸⁴ Vaidya 1960a, p. 181.

The structure of this type of *vyākaraṇa* as revealed by the *Mahāvastu* and the *Aṣṭa* is: **A** = will become (*bhū*, future tense) – **B** = You (*tvam*, *yuṣmat*) – **C** = Buddha's name.

If the Gāndhārī sutra follows this scheme, it should also contain a reference to the future Buddha's name. Although the birch bark is not completely preserved in this portion, it seems indeed possible to identify such a name. The text runs: (**ara*)[*ha*]*da-samasabudha ekanamaṣea · viholappravha[ṇa]ṇa* (line 13) and can be translated as: "You will become Arhats, Perfectly Enlightened Ones, all with the same name (*ekanāmadheya*-): Viholaprabha (= Skt. Vipulaprabha)."

As far as I could ascertain, the word *vipulaprabha* "(possessing) great light" is unattested as a Buddha's name. In the *SukhV*, it is used as an epithet of the Buddha Amitābha.⁸⁵ This is of course not sufficient to prove the identity of the Buddha of the Gāndhārī sutra. However, the summarizing verses at the end of this paragraph seem to indicate that this Buddha was also known by an alternative name. Instead of *viholappravha* (Skt. *vipulaprabha*), the verses seem to refer to the same Buddha under the name *mahappravha* (Skt. Mahāprabha): *mahappravha ṇama ahoṣu sarve* "They all became (*Tathāgatas) called Mahāprabha" (BC2, part 8 recto, v. 11). According to the *SukhV*, a Buddha of this name is located in the West.⁸⁶ Although it might be tempting to identify the Buddha Viholappravha (Skt. Vipulaprabha) *alias* Mahappravha (Skt. Mahāprabha) of the Gāndhārī sutra with this Mahāprabha of the *SukhV*, there is no further evidence to support such an assumption. It is also possible that this Buddha is completely unknown to other sources and his name is formed by using the popular elements *vipula* (= *mahā*) and *prabha*, thus resulting in a name which is rather usual for Mahayana terminology. Buddha names beginning with *vipula*- and ending in *-prabha* are quite frequently found, e.g., **Vipulakīrti**, **Vipulaguṇajyotihprabha**, **Vipulatarāṃsa**, **Vimalaprabha**, etc.⁸⁷

Another interesting feature of the present prophecy is that all of the *devaputras* are predicted to become Buddhas having the same name (*ekanamaṣea*, Skt. *ekanāmadheyāḥ*). A similar procedure is described in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, chapter 9. Here, two thousand disciples are said to become Buddhas called Ratnaketurāja. As in the Gāndhārī sutra,

⁸⁵ *SukhV* (l) (Vaidya 1961b, p. 231, v. 15).

⁸⁶ *SukhV* (s), 13 (Vaidya 1961b, p. 256).

⁸⁷ See *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*, vol. 2, s.vv. "Vipulakīrti," "Vipulaguṇajyotihprabha," "Vipulatarāṃsa," "Vimalaprabha."

the verses describing this event are explicitly referring to the fact that all of them bear the same name:

*ekena nāmena daśaddiśāsu kṣaṇasmi ekasmi tathā muhūrte,
niṣadya ca drumapraravāṇa mūle buddhā bhaviṣyanti sprṣitva
jñānam.*

*ekaṃ ca teṣāṃ iti nāma bheṣyati ratnasya ketūtiha loki viśrutāḥ,
samāni kṣetrāṇi varāṇi teṣāṃ samo gaṇaḥ śrāvakabodhisattvāḥ.*⁸⁸

14. They shall all, **under the same name**, in every direction, at the same moment and instant, and sitting at the foot of the most exalted tree, become Buddhas, after they have reached the knowledge.

15. **All shall bear the same name** of Ketus of the Ratna, by which they shall be widely famed in this world. Their excellent fields shall be equal, and equal the congregation of disciples and bodhisattvas.⁸⁹

A comparable collective prophecy is described in the *Kpsū* where Ratnagarbha predicts the buddhahood of ten thousand people. Among them, several thousand or five hundred are said to become Buddhas of the same name.⁹⁰

According to this analysis on the basis of parallels from early Mahayana texts, it is possible to translate the Gāndhārī passage of Extract 3 as follows:

Now the Lord (predicted) to these 84,000 *devaputras* in front of the people consisting of gods and humans the Highest (*Complete Enlightenment): You will become in the future, after innumerable *kalpas*, after very innumerable, immeasurable, unthinkable (**kalpas*), (Tathāgatas), Arhats, Perfectly Enlightened Ones of one name: Viholaprabha (Skt. Vipulaprabha), all enlightened to the Highest Perfect Enlightenment, *ekakalpākṣīṇa* (?).

Returning to the question of the function of this Buddha-land description in the Gāndhārī sutra, it can consequently be assumed that it is part of the prophecy (*vyākaraṇa*) which concludes the instruction of the 84,000 *devaputras* and predicts their future existence as Buddhas called Vipula-

⁸⁸ Vaidya 1960c, p. 140–41, vv. 14–15.

⁸⁹ Translated by Kern (1884, pp. 211–12).

⁹⁰ Yamada 1968, pp. 157–60.

prabha/Mahāprabha in a Buddha-land which is comparable to the Abhirati *buddhakṣetra* of Akṣobhya.

THE FEATURES OF ABHIRATI AS DESCRIBED IN THE GĀNDHĀRĪ SUTRA OF BC2

In the following section, I will deal with some of the most distinctive elements which characterize the Abhirati concept as found in the Gāndhārī sutra and their relation to other descriptions of Abhirati found in early Mahayana literature.

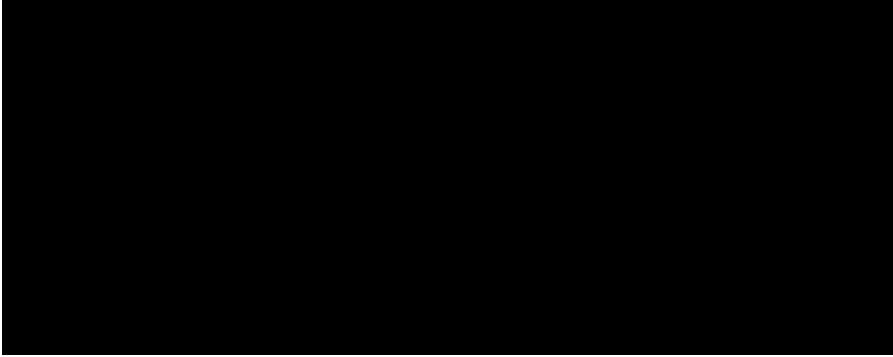


Figure 4: Extract 4 (BC2, part 5 recto)

- 16 /// · (1) *teṇa [h>(*o) [va]ṇida samaeṇa te maṇuśa daśakuśala-*
samaḍiṇa ya bhaviṣati avaramida ca
- 17 /// (2) *(*teṇa ho vaṇida) samaeṇa teṣa maṇu[śa]ṇa ·*
sar[va]galaṇo paḍipraśadha bhaviṣati (3) teṇa ho vaṇida
samaeṇa [sa]taradaṇamagakudaga
- 18 *(*ra bhaviṣati (4) sayasavi) edarahi akṣo[bha]sa taśagadaśa*
arahadasamasabudhaśa ṇa ya tatra budhakṣetrami [tri]ṇi
avayāni bhaviṣati
- 19 /// ? *ṇi bhaviṣati (5) teṇa ho vaṇida samaeṇa satahaparamo*
istri grabhadharīni bhaviṣati (6) ṇa ya [te]śa maṇu[śaṇa
ucaro]
- 20 /// *pariśao · (7) sa ya mahapraśavi suaṇavaṇa bhaviṣati*
kailibiasaphaśa paṃḍugabalasadiśa · yava ṇikṣita ca pado
caduragulo
- 21 /// *[pa]do caduragulo unamiṣati (8) te ya maṇuśa aparaga*
bhaviṣati apadośa · apamoha tikṣitria aṇolabhaśimuta

- 22 /// **(9)** ? + + *saveṇa savo atara asamudayaro vi ṇa bhaviṣati*
(10) *sayaṣavi edarahi akṣobhasa tasagadaṣa arahadasamasabu-*
 23 *(*dhasa ṇa ya tatra budhakṣetrami) /// satva aṇa[gade va]*
*ṇa ma ṣi ṇa bhaviṣati añatra tasagadeṇa · **(11)** ṇa ya teṇa*
samaeṇa koyi tatra rayaṇo bhaviṣati [añatra]
 24 /// ? ? ? *(*ara)[hada]samasabudha **(12)** teṇa ho vaṇida*
*samaeṇa te istria tatra evarua bhaviṣati ya[ṣa y](*e)[va] atra*
avhiradi
 25 *(*e akṣobhasa taṣagadaṣa arahadasama)sabu[dhaṣa] **(13)** teṇa*
ho [vaṇi]da samae sarvagaparipuro so budhakṣetro bhaviṣati
sayaṣava ṇama eṣo avhiradi
 26 /// ṣa **(14)** *teṇa ya samaeṇa ekameke tasagad[e] arahadasa-*
masabudhe aṣakheṇi satvaṇi parivayiṣati te ya sarva
 27 /// **(15)** ? ? ? + + ? *[bo]sisatva bhaviṣati avhiṇikhada-*
gaha[va]ṣa⁹¹

(1) At that time the people will assume the ten virtues . . . and unlimited . . . **(2)** (At that time) all sickness of the people will be eradicated. **(3)** At that time houses (will be) made of the seven kinds of jewels. **(4)** (Just as) now (in the Buddha-land) of the Tathāgata Akṣobhya, the Arhat, the Perfectly Enlightened One, in the Buddha-land there will not be the three evil states. . . will be. **(5)** At that time a woman will be pregnant not more than seven days. **(6)** And the people will not have feces. . . **(7)** And this great earth will be of golden color, of a (pleasant) touch (like) *kācilindika*-cloth, and appearing like *pāṇḍukambala*-cloth. As long as the foot is down, it (i.e., the earth, will sink down) four fingers, (if the foot is taken up, it) will come up four fingers. **(8)** And the people will have little lust, little hatred, little delusion, sharp senses, and be devoted to inconceivability. **(9)** (And) altogether there will also be no other kinds of inappropriate behavior. **(10)** Just as now (in the Buddha-land) of the Tathāgata Akṣobhya, the Arhat, the Perfectly Enlightened One, (in the Buddha-land there) . . . will not be . . . except the Tathāgata. **(11)** And at that time there will be no king except . . . the Arhat, the Perfectly Enlightened One. **(12)** At that time the women there will be of such a form like here in Abhirati, (the Buddha-land of the Tathāgata Akṣobhya,) the Arhat,

⁹¹ The numbers in parentheses in bold are inserted here by the author to indicate the internal structure of this text passage.

Gāndhārī sutra BC2		<i>AkṣV</i>	Other Abhirati descriptions			<i>SukhV</i> (s/l)
			<i>Kpsū</i>	<i>Aṣṭa</i>	<i>Vkn</i>	
1	ten virtues (<i>daśa kuśala</i>)	2, 11	166			
2	no sickness	2, 13	166			
3	houses made of seven kinds of jewels	2, 17	167			s: 254. 24–26
4	no three evil states of existence (<i>avaya</i> , Skt. <i>apāya</i>)	2, 11	165f.			
5	seven-day period of women’s pregnancy	*2, 18	169			
6	no feces	2, 16	167			1: 250. 2–3
7	golden color and softness of the surface of the earth	2, 12	165			s: 255. 4–5 1: 239. 19–21
8	people with little lust, hatred, delusion	2, 14	166			
9	no inappropriate behavior					
10	?					
11	no king	2, 20				
12	presence and characteristics of women	*2, 18+ 2, 24	169			
13	completeness of the Buddha-land					
14	innumerable beings brought to maturation	3, 1				
15	many bodhisattva-renunciants	4, 1				

Figure 5: The features of the Abhirati Buddha-land

the Perfectly Enlightened One. **(13)** At that time that Buddha-land will be complete with all its parts, exactly like this Abhirati (Buddha-land) . . . **(14)** And at that time one single Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Enlightened One will bring to maturation innumerable beings. And they all (*will attain arhatship). **(15)** . . . (there) will be (many) bodhisattvas who leave their home.⁹²

The table above⁹³ lists the characteristic features of Abhirati as represented

⁹² A detailed analysis of this passage, which also includes the terminology of the Gāndhārī text and its parallels, is part of my preliminary annotated catalogue (Strauch 2007/2008, pp. 48–52).

⁹³ The indication of the paragraphs of the *AkṣV* follows Dantinne 1983. The respective pages in the *Taishō shinshū daijōkyō* and the Peking, Derge and Narthang editions of the Tibetan Kanjur can easily be found with the help of the concordance in Dantinne 1983 (pp. 66–69). The data in the remaining columns are based on the *buddhakṣetra* passages in the *Kpsū* (Yamada 1968, pp. 161–78), the *Aṣṭa*, chs. 19, 27, 28 (Vaidya 1960a, pp. 175–82,

in this passage and compares them with the most important parallels from early Mahayana literature and with features of Sukhāvātī as found in the Sanskrit versions of the *SukhV*.

As was shown by Kwan Tai-wo, many of these features are borrowed from earlier conceptions, in particular that of Uttarakuru.⁹⁴ Some of them are consequently not restricted to Abhirati, but are also used in connection with other Buddha-lands. Thus features 3, 6 and 7 can also be found in the *SukhV* with regard to the Sukhāvātī *buddhakṣetra*. Nonetheless, the correlation of the Gāndhārī text with the concept described both in the *AkṣV* and the *Kpsū* is striking and obviously beyond the range of mere coincidence. According to Yamada Isshi, the portion of the *Kpsū* dealing with Akṣobhya is based on the *AkṣV*.⁹⁵ It is difficult to decide whether the same can be said for the Gāndhārī sutra. The different sequence, the slightly different terminology, and the fact that with features 13 and 14 two characteristics are included which figure in the *AkṣV* in different contexts, hardly prove any kind of direct textual dependence. Moreover, there are features in the Gāndhārī concept which are not found in the parallels (9, 10 and 12). It seems therefore more plausible to regard the Abhirati concept of the Gāndhārī sutra as closely related to but textually independent from the *AkṣV* and the *Kpsū*. It might be interesting to note that the Abhirati descriptions of the *Aṣṭa* and the *Vkn* contain absolutely no parallel material to this passage of the Gāndhārī sutra. Whether this is indeed due to a lack of familiarity on the part of the authors of these texts with this part of the Abhirati concept as suggested by Satō⁹⁶ or has to be explained as a deliberate choice on the basis of the contextual and intentional peculiarities of these texts, remains to be studied. The evidence of the Gāndhārī sutra, however, shows that the knowledge of many of the characteristics of Abhirati was by no means restricted to the *AkṣV* and its direct relative, the *Kpsū*, but seems to have been more widespread among early Mahayanists.

The relationship of the Gāndhārī text to these two works can be demonstrated by the way in which some of the distinctive features of Abhirati are represented. One of these significant features which distinguishes Abhi-

220–25, 226–34), the *Vkn*, ch. 11 (Taisho University Study Group 2006, pp. 109–15), the *SukhV* (*l*) (Vaidya 1961b, pp. 221–52) and the *SukhV* (*s*) (Vaidya 1961b, pp. 254–57). Some more texts which refer to Akṣobhya and Abhirati are included in Satō 2004.

⁹⁴ Kwan 1985, pp. 62–82.

⁹⁵ Yamada 1968, vol. 1, p. 236.

⁹⁶ See p. 46 of this issue.

rati from any other Buddha-land including Sukhāvātī is the presence of women.⁹⁷ While the description of females covers quite a large amount of text in the *AkṣV*⁹⁸ and *Kpsū*,⁹⁹ the Gāndhārī sutra mentions women only in two sentences. The first of them (5) refers to the seven-day period of pregnancy: “*teṇa ho vaṇida samaeṇa satahaparamo istri grabhadharīṇi bhaviṣati*” (At that time a woman will be pregnant not more than seven days). Although this feature is not explicitly mentioned in the Chinese versions of the *AkṣV*—probably due to a corrupt text transmission—the Tibetan translation¹⁰⁰ as well as the parallel from the *Kpsū* suggest that it was part of the original Abhirati conception as probably contained in the Indian original of the *AkṣV*:¹⁰¹ “*saptame ca divase paramasugandhena parameṇa ca sukhopadhānena samarpitāḥ pratyājāyeyuh*”¹⁰² (And on the seventh day they can give birth with the best fragrant smell and filled with highest happiness). Like many other Buddha-land features, the seven-day pregnancy is also found in some of the Buddhist descriptions of Uttarakuru, e.g., in the *Da yingtan jing* 大櫻炭經 (T no. 23).¹⁰³

The second sentence concerning women in Abhirati simply states “*teṇa ho vaṇida samaeṇa te istria tatra evarua bhaviṣati ya[sa y](*e)[va] atra avhiradi(*e akṣobhasa tasagadaṣa arahadasama)sabu[dhaṣa]*” (At that time the women there will be of such a form like here in Abhirati, [the Buddha-land of the Tathāgata Akṣobhya, the Arhat, the Perfectly] Enlightened One). This shortcut reference seems to indicate that the features of women in Abhirati were well known to the author of the text and his supposed audience and did not need any further elaboration. This again speaks in favor of a solid common knowledge of Abhirati and its main characteristics in the group where this text circulated.

⁹⁷ A survey on the position of women in the *AkṣV* and related texts is provided by Satō (1998). The situation in the Sukhāvātī tradition is dealt with by Harrison (1998).

⁹⁸ Dantinne 1983, § 2, 18 + 24.

⁹⁹ Yamada 1968, p. 168ff.

¹⁰⁰ Stog Palace edition, p. 38a, line 5ff.

¹⁰¹ The paragraph about women (2, 18) seems not to be preserved completely in the Chinese versions. The reference to the Tibetan text I owe to Jan Nattier (personal communication). The Tibetan translation as well as the text of the *Kpsū* stress the fact that males and females grow together as embryos in one uterus and are born without any suffering. The birth is caused not by sexual intercourse but by desire which leads on the man’s part to a state of *samādhi*, on the woman’s part to a painless pregnancy (Nattier 2000, p. 82).

¹⁰² Yamada 1968, p. 169.

¹⁰³ See Kwan 1983, p. 74.

Although this evidence seems sufficient to show the close relationship of the Gāndhārī sutra to the Abhirati conception as laid down in the *AkṣV* and the *Kpsū*, there is still another, perhaps even more impressive parallelism. It has been repeatedly stressed that contrary to the more advanced concept of Sukhāvātī as represented in the Sanskrit versions of the *SukhV* and the later Chinese translation by Saṃghavarman (ca. third century CE),¹⁰⁴ the *AkṣV* accepts all traditional paths of Buddhism. A person reborn in Abhirati can consequently not only pursue the bodhisattva path, but also the paths of a *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha*.¹⁰⁵ This implies that the *AkṣV* still highly esteems the traditional *arhat* ideal.

Although most Mahayana sutras naturally promote the bodhisattva career, many of the earliest texts as represented by the translations of Lokakṣema are still aware of the older *arhat* ideal and accept it as a possible, though inferior religious goal.¹⁰⁶ It remains to be clarified, however, whether any of these texts shows a comparable esteem for the traditional *śrāvakayāna* as that expressed in the *AkṣV*. According to Paul Harrison:

The *śrāvakas* of Akṣobhya's world Abhirati are described at length, and they share that world happily with *bodhisattvas*. In fact, Abhirati teems with so many *arhats* that it is described as an *arhat-kṣetra*, while both those who follow the Śrāvakayāna and those who follow the Bodhisattvayāna there are assured of freedom from molestation by Māra.¹⁰⁷

The same observation was made by Nattier who characterized this feature of the *AkṣV* as follows: "The 'job description' of a buddha is still—as it was in the time of Śākyamuni—to lead his followers to arhatship, though (in harmony with the early Mahāyāna teachings of the 'three vehicles') some choose to pursue buddhahood instead."¹⁰⁸ The extraordinary position of the *śrāvakayāna* and the *arhat* ideal within the *AkṣV* is also shown by the fact

¹⁰⁴ The earliest versions of the *SukhV* as represented by Zhi Qian's and Lokakṣema's translations (T nos. 361–62. Cf. Nattier 2008, pp. 87, 139) seem to present a different picture in which *arhats* play a much more prominent role. See, e.g., Nattier 2000, p. 93, n. 66, which characterizes the differences between these versions as the result of a marginalization of *arhats* within the Sukhāvātī tradition.

¹⁰⁵ For this topic, see especially Satō 2002b.

¹⁰⁶ Harrison 1987, pp. 80–87.

¹⁰⁷ Harrison 1987, p. 83ff.

¹⁰⁸ Nattier 2003b, p. 186.

that it devotes its entire third chapter exclusively to this topic under the title *śrāvaka-parṣad* “The assembly of the disciples.”¹⁰⁹ This chapter describes how favorably the Abhirati land and the presence of Akṣobhya influence the career of a *śrāvaka* on his way to arhatship.

The *AkṣV* illustrates the consequences of these favors on the basis of the concept of the *srota-āpanna*, “stream-enterer,” a religious status which is attained after being released from the three lower fetters (*saṃyojana*), i.e., personality-belief (*satkāyadrṣṭi*), sceptical doubt (*vicikitsā*), and attachment to rules and rituals (*śīlavrataparāmarśa*). The *srota-āpanna* is the lowest of the four states of humans on their way to arhatship (*āryapudgala*). According to the traditional understanding—as found in the *Puggalapaññatti* and in *āgama* texts like the *AN*—there are three types of “stream-enterers.” The lowest of them designates a person who is destined for seven further rebirths before attaining arhatship (*sattakkhattuparama*).¹¹⁰ The *AkṣV* uses this traditional conception to highlight the virtues of Abhirata. Here “stream-enterers” of this lowest category—also called *kusīda* “indolent”—can already obtain arhatship after listening to four *dharma* instructions of Akṣobhya without being reborn even once.¹¹¹

Our Gāndhārī sutra contains a passage which clearly presupposes this concept of the *AkṣV*.

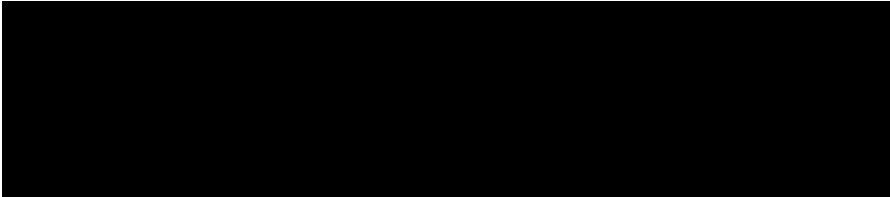


Figure 6: Extract 5 (BC2, part 5 recto)

34 *yaṣa yeva akṣobhaṣa tasagadaṣa arahada-samasabudhaṣa yo kuṣido bhoti sodavaṇo so caduḥhae dharmadeṣa[ṇae]*
 35 *(*aṣavakṣao a)[ṇuprauṇati] evam eva tasvi samae yo ku[sido] bhaviṣati sodavaṇa · so cauḥhadharmadeṣaṇae aṣavakṣao aṇuprauṇiṣati · ṣayaṣavi ?*

¹⁰⁹ Dantinne 1983, p. 231.

¹¹⁰ See, e.g., *AN*, vol. 1, p. 234ff. See also Nyanatiloka 1980, s.vv. “*soṭāpanna*” and “*saṃyojana*.”

¹¹¹ *AkṣV* 3, 5–6; Dantinne 1983, pp. 232–34.

- 36 /// ? ? + *sodavaṇo bhoti kuṣido so sa[takuṭhora]mo bhoti
[satakūthoramo] [bha]va sasaradi [ta]dutvaro [ṇa] sasarati
evam=eva teṇa samaeṇa*
- 37 /// (s)o[davaṇa] · so cauḥhadharmadeśaṇa(*e) aṣavakṣao
aṇupraṇiṣati

As (in the Buddha-land) of the Tathāgata Akṣobhya, the Arhat, the Perfectly Enlightened One, the indolent person who becomes a stream-enterer reaches in the fourth dharma-teaching (the perishing of evil influences, *āsravakṣaya*), thus at that time the indolent person who becomes a stream-enterer will reach in the fourth dharma-teaching the perishing of evil influences.

As (*in Śākyamuni's land) a stream-enterer who is indolent is a *saptakṛtparama*, (i.e.,) he will be reborn into at most seven existences, more than that he will not be reborn, so at that time (an indolent person who becomes a) stream-enterer will reach the perishing of evil influences in the fourth dharma-teaching.

Again the Gāndhārī text compares the predicted Buddha-land with Abhirati. As in the passage discussed before (figure 4), the text clearly distinguishes the chronological levels. While the features of Abhirati are described in the present tense (*bhoti*, Skt. *bhavati*; *aṇupraṇati*, Skt. *anuprāpnoti*), the future Buddha-land is always referred to in the future tense (*bhaviṣati*, Skt. *bhaviṣyati*; *aṇupraṇiṣati*, Skt. *anuprāpsyati*).

When we compare this Gāndhārī passage with the text of the *AkṣV*, the parallels are quite apparent (see figure 7). To illustrate the correspondence of both passages, I use the Sanskrit reconstruction of the *AkṣV* text as suggested by Dantinne.¹¹²

It is obvious that the Gāndhārī sutra is well acquainted with the concept described in the *AkṣV*. While the latter includes in its description also the effects of the preceding three *dharma* instructions leading to the spiritual levels of *srotāpannaphala*, *sakṛdāgāmin* and *anāgāmin*, the Gāndhārī texts omit them. But its explicit mentioning of the fourth *dharma* instruction clearly indicates that it is well aware of these three preceding steps and presupposes this knowledge also among its audience. I know no other example of Buddhist literature outside the *AkṣV* where this peculiar feature of Abhirati is described.

¹¹² Dantinne 1983, pp. 232–34. The French and English translations of the respective passage are found in Dantinne 1983, pp. 232–34 and Chang 1983, p. 325.

Gāndhārī sutra BC2	Skt. reconstruction of <i>AkṣV</i> 3, 5–6
<p>Akṣobhya's land</p> <p>(34) <i>yaṣa yeva akṣobhaṣa tasagadaṣa arahada-samasabudhaṣa yo kuṣido bhoti sodavaṇo so caduḥḥae dharmadeṣa[n]ae (*aṣavakṣao a)[n]uprauṇiṣati]</i></p>	<p>Akṣobhya's land</p> <p>6. <i>ye sattvāḥ Śāriputra tathāgatasyākṣobhyasya prathamāyāṃ dharmadeśanāyāṃ srotāpannaphalaṃ parigrhṇanti, dvitīyāyāṃ dharmadeśanāyāṃ ca sakṛdāgāmināṃ sākṣātkurvanti, tṛtīyāyāṃ dharmadeśanāyāṃ cānāgāmināṃ sākṣātkurvanti caturthāyāṃ dharmadeśanāyāṃ arhattvaṃ sākṣātkurvanti, ya āsṛavakṣayam sakṛdñiṣaṇṇaṃ nopasampadyate teṣāṃ kuṣidā iti nāma karomi</i></p>
<p>The predicted Buddha-land</p> <p>(35) <i>/// evam eva tasvi samae yo ku[sido] bhaviṣati sodavaṇa ° so cauḥhadharmadeśaṇae aṣavakṣao aṇuprauṇiṣati °</i></p>	
<p>Śākyamuni's Buddha-land</p> <p><i>ṣayaṣavi ? (36) /// ? ? + sodavaṇo bhoti kuṣido so saṭakuḥthoramo bhoti [satakuḥthoramo] [bha]va sasaraḍi [ta]dutvaro [na] sasaraḍi</i></p>	<p>Śākyamuni's Buddha-land</p> <p>5. <i>kuṣidāḥ srotāpannaḥ Śāriputra saptakṛdbhavaparamo yo yāvad eva dharme deṣite tāvad agraphalaṃ parigrhṇāti tasyāhaṃ saptakṛdbhavaparama iti nāma karomi</i></p>
<p>The predicted Buddha-land</p> <p><i>evam eva teṇa samaeṇa (37) /// (s)o[davaṇa] ° so cauḥhadharmadeśaṇa(*e) aṣavakṣao aṇuprauṇiṣati</i></p>	<p>Akṣobhya's land</p> <p>6. <i>yo 'muṣmiṃ buddhakṣetre Śāriputra srotāpannaḥ kāyena sākṣātkṛtvāsṛavakṣayam upasampadyete sa neha loke saptakṛdbhavaparamasya samah</i></p>

Figure 7: Comparison of features of Buddha-lands in BC2 and *AkṣV* 3, 5–6

CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

The Gāndhārī sutra of BC2 is arranged as a typical early Mahayana sutra containing the basic elements of the bodhisattva career: *bodhicittotpāda*, *dharmakṣānti*, *avaivartya*, and *vyākaraṇa*. Its prophecy (*vyākaraṇa*) uses the familiar concept of Akṣobhya and Abhirati to describe its own idea of a future Buddha-land. Abhirati is here clearly perceived as a model for a paradigmatic *buddhakṣetra*. It should be added that in a later—still less explored—portion of the sutra it also figures as the place where the instructed *devaputras* are said to be reborn: “*ede devaputra . . . avhiradie*

logadhadue uavajiṣati” (These *devaputras* . . . will be reborn in the Abhirati world-sphere, BC2, part 4 verso).

Both these functions of Abhirati recall the position of Sukhāvātī in later Mahayana texts, as investigated by Gregory Schopen in his classic article on “Sukhāvātī as a generalized religious goal.”¹¹³ In exactly the same way as Amitābha’s Buddha-land Sukhāvātī figures in the texts studied by Schopen, the Gāndhārī sutra describes the role of Abhirati. It is the place where adepts of the bodhisattva path are reborn or it serves as a model for their own predicted Buddha-lands.

In its basic ideas the concept of Abhirati represented here is largely coherent with that contained in the *AkṣV*. According to Nattier (2000), the *AkṣV* represents a transitional stage in the development of Pure Land Buddhism, where traditional conceptions like the *śrāvakayāna* and the *arhat* ideal still play important roles and which seem to precede the “Pure Land” conception as represented by the Amitābha/Sukhāvātī tradition. Due to the many parallels with the *AkṣV*, the Gāndhārī sutra BC2 can be characterized as a further witness to this important “transitional stage” in the development of Pure Land Buddhism.

On the other hand, the text displays some features which clearly separate it from most other early Mahayana sutras, including the *AkṣV*. First, it never mentions the term *pāramitā* or even *prajñāpāramitā*. The only concept which can be associated with the complex of *pāramitās* is represented by the idea of *dharmakṣānti* “Endurance towards the factors of existence” which is attributed a prominent position.

Moreover, there is no evidence for any shortcut devotional practices which can promote a bodhisattva adept on his way to buddhahood. This is not only true for later practices like the veneration of the respective Buddha or Buddha-to-be or the visualization of his Buddha-land, but also for practices which are otherwise common and sometimes even regarded distinctive for early Mahayana sutras. Thus we find not the slightest indication of a “book cult” in the sense established by Schopen¹¹⁴—even the otherwise usual recommendation to memorize, recite, write, etc. the sutra for obtaining religious merit is missing. Of course, it cannot be completely excluded that some of these omissions are due to the fragmentary state of the manuscript. Nonetheless their cumulative evidence provides a fairly coherent picture.

¹¹³ Schopen 1977 (reprinted in Schopen 2005 [pp. 154–89]).

¹¹⁴ Schopen 1975 (reprinted in Schopen 2005 [pp. 25–62]). For a serious criticism of Schopen’s theory, see Drewes 2007.

As shown by Nattier, there is a “significance of absence” in the historical evaluation of a Mahayana sutra.¹¹⁵ Many of the early texts show only a limited repertoire of features and ideas which were regarded later on as obligatory for a Mahayana sutra. Only gradually did a more integrated conception arise that included most of these characteristics. This tendency to harmonize the different traditions was certainly caused by an increasing intellectual and institutional exchange of Mahayana groups and the gradual predominance of certain protagonists among them. It is hardly possible to reconstruct this history in its entirety, but some processes can be identified which characterized this development. One of these processes was certainly the abandonment of the Akṣobhya/Abhirati conception in favor of Amitābha and Sukhāvātī.¹¹⁶ Possibly closely connected to this change was the marginalization of the role of the *arhat* and the *śrāvakayāna* which later on culminated, in at least some circles, in the establishment of the *ekayāna* theory of Mahayana.¹¹⁷ One might be inclined to call this process “de-arhatization.” Another parallel development can be described as “subsequent introduction of Prajñāpāramitā”¹¹⁸ or “prajñāpāramitā-ization.”¹¹⁹ It is striking that the Gāndhārī sutra does not even once refer to the *prajñāpāramitā*. This distinguishes it clearly from the *AkṣV*, which explicitly mentions this perfection and considers it as one of the essential practices of a bodhisattva.¹²⁰ It seems that the emergence of the Prajñāpāramitā literature and the philosophical ideas developed here exercised an enormous influence on other branches of Mahayana and resulted in the general acceptance of this category in almost all Mahayana texts. If this assumption is correct, the Gāndhārī sutra would represent a stage of development which predates this influence from the side of *prajñāpāramitā* concepts.

The few characteristics of the Gāndhārī sutra described above—its close association with Akṣobhya/Abhirati, its stress on the *śrāvakayāna/arhat* ideal, its ignorance of (*prajñā*)*pāramitā* and the complete lack of any “easy” devotional practices—designate this text as a rather early example

¹¹⁵ Nattier 2003a, pp. 171–92.

¹¹⁶ Nattier 2000, Nattier 2003b.

¹¹⁷ An interesting example of this process is the textual history of the *SukhV* (see n. 103 in this article).

¹¹⁸ Vetter 1994.

¹¹⁹ Williams (2009, p. 47ff.) speaks instead of the “commingling of two originally separate strata, say ‘philosophical’ and ‘religious’ . . . The extant Prajñāpāramitā literature . . . shows a predominance of the philosophical, while the other wing is represented by, e.g., the Sukhāvātī sūtras and the *Akṣobhyavyūha Sūtra*.”

¹²⁰ Harrison 1993, p. 166; Kwan 1985, p. 139.

of a Mahayana sutra which leads into a stage of Mahayana which is nearly unknown to us. If Paul Harrison's assumption is right that Lokakṣema's translations represent only the "Early *Middle* Mahayana" stage in the history of this literature,¹²¹ does the Gāndhārī sutra BC2 offer a glimpse into the true "Early Mahayana"?

It can only be suggested that this sutra is just one fortunately preserved example of innumerable texts of its kind created in the constitutive phase in the development of Mahayana literature when the different communities were still in search of the shape of a "standard" Mahayana sutra.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AkṣV</i>	<i>Akṣobhyavyūha</i> .
<i>AN</i>	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i> , ed. R. Morris and E. Hardy. 5 vols. London: Pali Text Society, 1885–1900.
<i>Aṣṭa</i>	<i>Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra</i> .
BC2	The Bajaur Collection of Kharoṣṭhī Manuscripts, fragment 2.
<i>Kpsū</i>	<i>Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka-sūtra</i> .
<i>Larger PP</i>	<i>Larger Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra</i> .
<i>Pañca</i>	<i>Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra</i> .
<i>Paṭis</i>	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga</i> , ed. Arnold C. Taylor. 2 vols. London: Pali Text Society, 1905–7.
<i>Rāṣṭrapāla</i>	<i>Rāṣṭrapālapariṭicchā</i> .
<i>SukhV</i>	<i>Sukhāvātīvyūha</i> . (s) and (l) after <i>SukhV</i> indicate respectively "small" and "large" recension.
T	<i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i> 大正新修大藏經. 100 vols., ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–34.
<i>Vkn</i>	<i>Vimalakīrtinirdeśa</i> .

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¹²¹ Harrison 1993, p. 140, n. 4.

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