

## Baron Mannerheim's hunt for ancient Central Asian manuscripts

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In Finnish collections there are comparatively few manuscript finds pertaining to the ancient history of Central Asia. This is because during the golden era of scientific expeditions, at the end of the 19th century, domestic scholars were more interested in runic inscriptions engraved on monuments and rocky walls. State Archaeologist J. R. Aspelin still believed at the end of the 1880s that such runic inscriptions were expressly connected with the history of the forefathers of the Finno-Ugrians. However, on the basis of the material collected and published by Finns, the Danish scholar Vilhelm Thomsen soon found out that the monuments belonged to the Ancient Turks, as also Professor Otto Donner had already instinctively felt.

As to manuscripts, when searching for inscriptions in Mongolia in 1910, the geographer J. G. Granö discovered at the ruins of Qadasun (Khadaasnii khara balgas, Bulgan aimag) a small fragment of birch bark with a seemingly rather old Mongolian script written on it; only four or five columns and not a single complete word. Of this piece nothing but a pencil copy and one third of the original are nowadays left in the archives of the Finno-Ugrian Society (2.71).

When C. G. Mannerheim set out in 1906 on his well-known two-year journey across China from west to east, his tasks also included the gathering of antiquities. Otto Donner had instructed him to look especially for ancient written documents in any language, as well as to copy and photograph inscriptions.

Mannerheim's first, still probational, trip was directed towards the Khotan area on the southern branch of the Silk Road. There he succeeded in purchasing a small manuscript fragment found in Yangi Längär, SE of Khotan, as well as six documents originating from the ruins of Khadalyk close by Domoko Bazar, quite far to the NE from Yangi Längär. These are obviously the very same Sanskrit and Khotanese Saka texts which J. N. Reuter published later.<sup>1</sup> They number eleven fragments, although Mannerheim speaks of only seven. All of them are from Buddhist sūtras of which at least the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, *Suvarṇaprabhāsa*, *Śatasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*, and *Saṅghāta-sūtra* can be identified; in

addition, there is a fragment referring to a discussion between the Buddha and the senior monk Kâśyapa.

On the northern branch of the Silk Road Mannerheim made acquisitions in the Turfan area. From Yâr Khoto, to the west of the oasis city of Turfan itself, originates one of the collection's long Chinese scrolls and a variety of lesser finds. However, the main part of his manuscript remnants seems to come from Idiqut Shähri to the east of Turfan City. In addition, from certain ruins nearby the small Chinese fort of Chiktym, a three or four days' journey east of Turfan, Mannerheim purchased four Uighur loan contracts, later published by G. J. Ramstedt.<sup>2</sup>

Mannerheim described the views of the area in his journal entry of September 30, 1907, but does not say a single word about his manuscript purchases, although it is exactly here that he must have come upon the major part of his haul:

«On the right of the road, as it leads out of Astana, lies the picturesque ruined town of Idiqut Shähri, of imposing dimensions. We rode about in various directions for a couple of hours among the ruins that extend for 1–1½ miles. Everything was in an exceedingly bad state, which is not surprising when one knows that during the two years' sojourn and excavations of the Grünwedel expedition it recently suffered fresh destruction. Of the paintings on stucco there is practically nothing left. The size of the walls and some of the buildings, colossal in the case of the walls, is astounding (...) To-day I visited the ruined city again, this time under the guidance of an excellent cicerone, my host. He took me to all the buildings that had attracted my attention yesterday. It looked as if everything had been searched and examined by former expeditions (...) From Idiqut Shähri we rode to Astana, where there is an interesting, massive ruin with small, vaulted holes running outside it in 3 storeys. Practically nothing remains of the decorative paintings.»

By contrast, in a letter to Otto Donner, dated on the 17th of February 1908 in Lanzhou, Mannerheim elaborates on his acquisitions as follows:

«In Turfan I was able to buy a document found in the diggings and originating from Yar Khoto, if I'm not mistaken. It is rolled around a wooden pin. A small piece is lacking. The characters resemble Chinese script. In addition, I bought from people who improve their fields with soft earth from the ruins a number of document fragments discovered in the soil of both Yar Khoto and Idiqut Shähri. Many fragments are so minute that I never would have purchased them had I not in Kashgar had the opportunity to see Mr G. Macartney buying considerably smaller pieces of paper for the learned societies in England. Now I have a small box full of such fragments. The characters seem to be mostly of the same kind as in the document mentioned above. (...) At Chiktym, a minor Chinese fort at the distance of some days' journey beyond the city of Pichan, there is a ruin where Prof. Grünwedel is said to have carried out excavations on his way to Hami. The local population seems to have continued excavating, because I was offered an opportunity to buy a document consisting of three or four sheets of paper. Judging from the quality of the

paper it must be of a considerably later origin than those from Turfan. It is said that the Chinese are unable to decipher the script. However, I have not had the opportunity to check this personally.»

Mannerheim's Chinese fragment collection consists of 204 large (more than 16 cm in diameter), 592 medium size (7–15 cm) and 1175 small (0–6 cm) pieces. Among them numerous commonly known Buddhist texts can be identified, including *Fahua jing* (*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* or the so-called «Lotus Sūtra»),<sup>3</sup> *Huayan jing* (*Buddhāvataṃsaka*), *Amituo jing* (the Lesser *Sukhāvātīvyūha* or «Sūtra of the Happy Land»), *Jingguangming jing* (*Suvarṇaprabhāsa* or «Golden Light»), *Nieban jing* (*Mahāparinirvāṇa*), *Jingang jing* (*Vajracchedikā* or «Diamond Sūtra»), and others.

N° 27 *Mohe sengqi lü* (\**Mahāsaṅghika-vinaya*) and N° 35 *Miaofa lianhua jing* (*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, Kumārajīva's translation) might be from the middle of the 4th century judging by the quality of the paper. There are ca. 30 fragments probably dating back to the Northern Dynasties, i.e. from the end of the 5th century. The largest number, however, are from the Tang dynasty, AD 618–907. Four fragments are even dated:

N°s 22 & 63 are from the year AD 591 (two different manuscripts of the Buddhist sūtra entitled *Renwang banyao jing*; end parts and colophons.) Copied in obedience to an Imperial order of Qu Qiangu, ruler of the Kingdom of Gaochang = Turfan in AD 561–601. He had made 150 copies of this particular text. Consequently, identical samples are found in Albert von Le Coq's and Count Ôtani's collections.

N° 79 from AD 650 (*Guanding suiyuan wangsheng jing*, *Bhaiṣajyagurupūrvapraṇidhānaviśeṣavistārasāstra*, oldest of the Chinese versions of a sūtra extolling the transcendent Buddha Bhaiṣajyaguru or «Lord of Healing.» End of volume 11).

N° 151v from AD 699 (a list of non-Buddhist character).

N°s 36, 57, 92 date from the 6th century, and N°s 83A, 141, 166 from the 10th century.

A certain scientific value must be ascribed to fragment N° 38 belonging to a previously unknown commentary on *Amituo jing* or the *Amida-sūtra*, mostly used in China and Japan. The *Amida-sūtra* is one of the Chinese versions of the *Smaller Sukhāvātīvyūha-sūtra*. Its great age is evident from the fact that it is cut in the format of an Indian palmleaf manuscript. Another previously unknown text is N° 143, a commentary on *Dacheng qixin lun*, *Mahâyānaśraddhotpâdasāstra*. The main text is written in very large calligraphic characters, the commentary in small interlinear parenthetical double columns. N° 161 *Liangchao fu dashi song*

*jingang jing*, end part of a commentary on the so-called «Diamond Sûtra» (*Jingang jing*), and N°s 52 & 155–157 *Foming jing* should also be mentioned.

One very valuable fragment—a piece of evidence of the early use of the Quadratic or 'Phags-pa script in printing Mongolian with wooden blocks—seems, regrettably, to have been lost. It belonged to a Mongol version of Saskya Pandita's (1182–1251) collection of Buddhist maxims entitled *Subhâsitaratnanidhi*. However, Ramstedt published it preliminarily in 1912.<sup>4</sup>

Other Chinese Turfan finds of interest in the Mannerheim Collection are N° 37, a Chinese court-note provided with a red official stamp and written upon a text printed with wood-blocks; N° 75, a petition; N° 29, a *Vajracchedikâ* text with some words in rather clumsy Uighur writing on the reverse, and N° 33, archaic Tibetan writing on the reverse of a Chinese text.

The Ancient Turkic (Uighur) documents comprise, in addition to the above mentioned rather late loan contracts, conventional Buddhist confessions of sins, a popular calendar containing divination concerning health conditions, a Buddhist text treating the liberation from the world of *samsâra*, a contract concerning the sale of a house, etc.<sup>5</sup>

Since almost all of the fragments in this collection belong to Buddhist texts, they probably were found in the ruins of some Mahâyâna Buddhist temples or monasteries. In general, the Mannerheim collection of fragments gives valuable information on the history of Buddhism in the Turfan area.

The Sogdian fragments in the collection are written on the reverse of a discarded Chinese scroll containing the Lotus Sûtra. One of them is a formulaic address of a letter, executed in a clumsy cursive hand, apparently written as an exercise or model, with interlinear variants, doodles and *probationes pennae*. Both sides of N° 43 contain Manichaean hymns in Middle Persian. This was probably the first ever published Middle Persian text in Sogdian script. On the border of the Chinese text, a series of block-printed Buddha images in red ink can be seen underneath.<sup>6</sup>

When Mannerheim had succeeded in purchasing such a good collection in the Turfan area, one would believe that he certainly intended to continue his treasure hunting in the next possible place, which was to be the famous oasis city of Dunhuang, starting point and junction of the Desert portion of the northern route of the Silk Road.

In the river valley of Dachuan, about 12 miles SE of the Dunhuang oasis, there is the Mogao cave monastery honeycombed in the steep rock

wall known as the «Caves of the Thousand Buddhas». The first caves were cut in the sandstone by AD 366. During the subsequent centuries the site became the most famous Buddhist centre in all Western China. In front of the extensive cave system wooden pavilions, ladders and plank paths were constructed to join the different temples and hermitages with each other. The wall paintings, statues and finds of objects give a vivid picture of Chinese cultural history from the 4th to the 14th century. From the glorious Tang dynasty only little pictorial material has been otherwise preserved.

Mark Aurel Stein, the well-known hunter of scientific treasures, had on his second expedition reached Dunhuang on the 12th of March, 1907. Four days later he rode to Mogao. He had heard in the oasis city rumours concerning a sensational secret manuscript hoard of ancient book remnants, more than one thousand years old and well preserved in the extremely dry climate. At Mogao he examined the wall paintings and statues, proceeding cautiously so as not to upset the feelings of pilgrims gathering there. At the end of May he succeeded in purchasing from the discoverer, a pious Taoist monk called Wang, seven cases of those manuscripts, five cases of Buddhist silk paintings, embroideries, etc. His haul consisted of thousands of complete or fragmentary texts. In the sealed book storage of the monastery there were altogether more than 36,000 items, immensely valuable for scientific research. Stein's expedition departed from Mogao on the 14th of June, 1907, continuing its journey.<sup>7</sup>

Mannerheim arrived in Dunhuang on the 14th of November the same year, but stayed there only for four days. An icy eastern wind arose bringing sand and dust, and the temperature was a couple of degrees below zero. In his travel account he describes the oasis city, the wall paintings of its temple constructed in 1745, the local people as well as their means of livelihood, and retells local stories. In his *Memoirs*, Mannerheim wrote as follows:

«During my visit to this place my attention was drawn to a unique collection of documents discovered a year before by a Chinese priest in a passage through a cliff, the entrance of which had been walled in. I was not competent to express an opinion on the find, and could in any case not have done so, as I was informed that a French expedition was on its way to examine it. It was, however, the English savant, Sir Aurel Stein, who soon after had the opportunity to examine 'the cave of a thousand Buddhas' and its priceless documents which have thrown such a light on the history of China and Central Asia.»<sup>8</sup>

However, Aurel Stein had been there already half a year before. Paul Pelliot, leader of the French expedition, had heard in Ürümchi of this

manuscript find without suspecting that some other foreigner had already visited the place. Arriving in Mogao only in February 1908 and seeing the secret book chamber, it became clear to him that Aurel Stein had got ahead of him. Pelliot was able, though, to turn things in his favour, and he returned to Paris in the autumn of the same year provided with a large and expertly chosen assortment of the remaining manuscripts which he had bought from Wang.

Mannerheim and Pelliot had during this time regularly exchanged letters informing each other about their finds and the movements of their rivals. Originally they had become acquainted in Russian Turkestan, as there was a plan for Mannerheim to join the French expedition. Their routes diverged, however, in Kashgar, but they stayed in contact with each other. They even planned to meet in Xi'an and go the remaining part of the journey together—there had been an idea to meet already in Karashähr or Ürümchi.

The explanation given in the Memoirs of the fact that Mannerheim had not visited the Mogao grottoes does not sound very convincing. It was, after all, not Mannerheim's task to express his opinion concerning his finds, but to acquire material for specialists. There had been similar situations in Khotan and the Turfan area: he certainly was not «competent» there either, but this by no means prevented him from eagerly searching for manuscripts and purchasing things that were offered for sale. Leaving everything to the Pelliot expedition is the more astounding, as Mannerheim, like Pelliot, does not seem to have known that Aurel Stein had already been there. Mannerheim could therefore have thought that he would perhaps be the first westerner heading for that place. True, it is possible that Mannerheim wished to assume the role of a gentleman giving way to his French colleague and rival, but how to explain this to Otto Donner, who was eagerly looking forward to manuscripts? Clearly, Mannerheim was looking for a suitable excuse to explain his behaviour after the tremendous importance of this find had become commonly known.

The real reason can be read from his journal. On the 20th of November, 1907, Mannerheim noted down the following in Anxi:

«I had intended to visit a *miao* called 'Chien fo-tung', lying in a gorge in the mountains to the S, and to proceed thence obliquely across the gravel plain to Ko-ta-jing-tse station, but the pheasants and *djeirans* were too tempting, however. I could not resist the temptation of shooting both and bagged a brace of pheasants and 2 *djeirans*, unfortunately both does.»

Mannerheim's Chien fo-tung (Ch'ien-fo-tung, Qianfodong) means exactly the famous «Caves of the Thousand Buddhas.» He had hunted for

the same prey on the 11th of November or slightly before arriving in Dunhuang oasis:

«While we were looking for the track, I caught sight of a flock of *djeirans* or *kiyiks* (...) With a couple of pheasants that abound around Anxi, shot earlier in the day, this will be a welcome change from our monotonous diet.»

A cynic might now have reason to state that if Mannerheim had had a more qualified cook, he probably would have gone to the Mogao grottoes instead of hunting for this «welcome change to his diet» and perhaps been able to purchase something before the arrival of Pelliot.

So, a great scientific treasure had to go in exchange for roast pheasant and gazelle.

### Notes

- 1 J. N. Reuter, Some Buddhist fragments from Chinese Turkestan in Sanskrit and Khotanese. *JSFOu* XXX,37. Helsinki 1913–1918 and C. G. Mannerheim, *Across Asia from West to East II*. Helsinki 1940; an emended edition of the Khotanese Saka fragments was published by H. W. Bailey, *Khotanese Texts V*. Cambridge 1963, 394–395.
- 2 G. J. Ramstedt, Four Uigurian documents; in: C. G. Mannerheim, *Across Asia from West to East II*; emended version in: Nobuo Yamada, *Sammlung uigurischer Kontrakte*. Hrsg. von. Juten Oda & Peter Zieme & Hiroshi Umemura & Takao Moriyasu. Osaka UP 1993, 18–19, 136–137, 150–153, 250–253.
- 3 The identification of Mannerheim's Chinese texts was mainly carried out by Prof. Kôgi Kudara, Ryûkoku University, Kyoto. As a source I have used his draft entitled «Chinese Buddhist Manuscripts from Central Asia in the Mannerheim Collection,» CISHAAN Seminar A-4, Tokyo, 5th September 1983, whereas the printed abstract on p. 475 in the CISHAAN publication is very much abbreviated. Thanks are also due to Dr. Jean-Pierre Drège, École pratique des hautes études, 4<sup>e</sup> section, Équipe de recherche sur les documents de Touen-houang et matériaux connexes (letters dated June 29 and August 4, 1983).
- 4 G. J. Ramstedt, Ein fragment mongolischer quadratschrift. *JSFOu* 27:3 (Helsinki 1912) = A fragment of Mongolian «Quadratic» script; in: C. G. Mannerheim, *Across Asia from West to East II* (1940); Pentti Aalto, *Altaistica 1: The Mannerheim fragment of Mongolian Quadratic script. Studia Orientalia* 17:7 (Helsinki 1952); id., Fragmente des mongolischen Subhâsitaratnanidhi in Quadratschrift. *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung* 3:2 (Berlin 1955), 279–290.
- 5 See Harry Halén, Die uigurischen Mannerheim-Fragmente 1–2. *Studia Orientalia* 51:4 (1979), 9+vii pp. & 67 (1991), 161–169.

- 6 See Nicholas Sims-Williams & Harry Halén, The Middle Iranian fragments in Sogdian script from the Mannerheim Collection. *Studia Orientalia* 51: 13 (1980).
- 7 See Annabel Walker, *Aurel Stein. Pioneer of the Silk Road*. London 1995, 162–171.
- 8 *The Memoirs of Marshal Mannerheim*. Transl. by Count Eric Lewenhaupt. New York 1954, p. 55. The English version of the Memoirs is somewhat inaccurate. According to the Swedish original, this passage runs as follows: «...To examine this find exceeded my competence and even otherwise I would by no means have undertaken it as I heard that a French scientific expedition was on its way there in order to tackle the task. However, some time later the English scholar Sir Aurel Stein was to be the first one to examine this 'Cave of the Thousand Buddhas' and he could, prior to others, check through the incomparably valuable documents included in it and elucidating the history of China and Central Asia.» In his *Oriental Studies in Finland* (Helsinki 1971), p. 115, n 1, Pentti Aalto seems to interpret this passage erroneously when saying: «In his Memoirs, Mannerheim relates that he had visited the Cave of the Thousand Buddhas and also seen the famous manuscript treasure, whereas in AA there is no mention of those manuscripts, and the wording on p. 416 seems rather to suggest that he had no time to visit the Cave.»