

1.1 Expanding the Master('s) Hagiography: The *Fo Benxing Ji Jing*, an Understudied Biography of the Buddha*

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Abstract: The *Fo benxing ji jing*, 'translated' by the late sixth century Gandharan monk She'nayeshe—Dhyānayaśas, as I reconstruct the name—is the first Buddha biography in Chinese which was 'translated' into a Western language—into English by Samuel Beal—and has no known Indian original or counterpart (like Aśvaghōṣa's *Buddhacarita* or the *Lalitavistara*). Since Beal's 'translation', the text has been used—if at all—uncritically by scholars and no real research has been done on it. This paper will address the possible reasons for this negligence but will then focus on certain features of the text, as, for example, its North-western origin and its potential value for the interpretation of Buddhist narrative art, particularly from Gandhāra.

Keywords: *Fo benxing ji jing*, Buddha biography, Gandhāra, Jnanayasas / Dhyānayaśas

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INTRODUCTION

It is a deplorable fact that some quite ‘well-known’ texts in Buddhist Studies—and not only there—are not that well-known, i.e., well-studied as much as they deserve or not studied at all. Kōichi Shinohara has worked and is working himself on several of these texts and recently has given the academic community several volumes of Daoshi’s 道世 (?–683) encyclopaedic *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 [Forest of Pearls from the Dharma Garden], hopefully followed by more. The text I have been working on for some time now, Xuanzang’s 玄奘 (600/602–664) *Da Tang Xiyu ji* 大唐西域記 [Great Tang Record of the Western Regions], also is a good example of such a text widely used but understudied, but certainly there are others as well.

One of these texts which has been widely used but is notoriously understudied is the so-called ‘Romantic Legend’, an extensive, yet incomplete,¹ biography of the Buddha. I have selected this text as a topic of my contribution because it belongs to the genre of hagiobiography, which constitutes the research area in which I have experienced the greatest influence from Professor Shinohara’s work. I have been working with this text for quite some time now and thought that some insights I have gained so far may be of interest not only to a scholarly readership but also, hopefully, to Professor Shinohara. Another overlap with his research, an interest in sacred places linked to biographies,² will also be touched upon, although in a more ‘secondary’ way by trying to place a text—rather than a biography as such—into its possible spatial and regional context of origin.

¹ On the distinction between complete and incomplete biographies of the Buddha see Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 648ff., Deeg, ‘Chips from a Biographical Workshop’, 51ff., and Tournier, ‘Śākyamuni’, 23ff.

² Shinohara, ‘The Story of the Buddha’s Begging Bowl’.

THE 'ROMANTIC LEGEND' AS A BUDDHA-BIOGRAPHY

What became known as the 'Romantic Legend' or, incorrectly,³ through Samuel Beal's 'translation' as the *Abhiniṣkramaṇa-sūtra*—which is, in reality and for most parts, a paraphrase in English of the much longer Chinese original—is the Chinese Buddha-biography *Fo benxing ji jing* 佛本行集經 (*T* no. 190; abbreviated as *FBJJ*). Unfortunately, Beal's 'translation' seems to have been the last Western scholarly engagement with the text; generally, the *FBJJ* has been neglected as an object of study. So far, there is, as I can see, no major study of this biography, and the few studies that exist are by Japanese scholars and in Japanese.⁴

The *FBJJ* itself was translated by one of the most productive translators of the Sui dynasty (581–618), She'najueduo 闍那崛多/**dzia-na'-gut-ta*.⁵ The underlying Indic name of this transliteration usually is identified as Jñānagupta or Jinagupta, but, as I have shown elsewhere, it is more likely that the name originally was Skt. Dhyānagupta, transliterated from a 'vernacular' (late Gāndhārī influenced) form *Jhānagu(t)ta.⁶ This conclusion and the fact that Dhyānagupta hailed from Gandhāra were my starting points for looking at the text for more evidence of a North-western or Gandhāran context or origin of the *FBJJ*.

The *FBJJ* is divided into sixty fascicles (*juan* 卷) which do not correspond with the sixty thematic chapters (*pin* 品) and, according to the Chinese Buddhist catalogues, was translated between 587 and 591/592.⁷ It covers the bodhisattva's encounters with Buddhas of the past in his previous rebirths up to the enlightened Buddha

³ Tournier, 'Śākyamuni', 24f.

⁴ See, e.g., Okano, 'Butsu-hongyō-jikkyō no hensan'.

⁵ The most recent and comprehensive study of She'najueduo, his biography, and his work is Overbey, *Memory, Rhetoric and Education*. All Early Middle Chinese reconstructions in this article, indicated by an asterisk (*) are the ones by Pulleyblank, *Lexicon of Reconstructed Pronunciation*.

⁶ Deeg, 'An Unromantic Approach'.

⁷ Overbey, *Memory, Rhetoric and Education*, 42.

Śākyamuni's visit to his hometown Kapilavastu. The text very likely belongs to the Dharmaguptaka tradition,⁸ which indeed had some prominence in Gandhāra.⁹ I reconstruct the Sanskrit title tentatively as **Buddhacarita-saṃcaya-sūtra* [Sūtra of the Collection of the Acts of the Buddha].¹⁰ In terms of narrative content, it shows some similarities with the biographical portions of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* and particularly the *Mahāvastu*,¹¹ although it is more organized and narratively more linear than the latter.

THE GANDHĀRAN 'IDENTITY' OF THE *FBJJ*

Apart from the fact that the translator Dhyānagupta hailed from Puruṣapura (modern Peshawar) in Gandhāra and received his Buddhist education in a Gandhāran environment,¹² there is text-internal evidence that the biographical tradition on which the *FBJJ* is based, originated and developed in the region. This evidence can be linguistic¹³ or in terms of narrative content.

⁸ This *nikāya* is the only one which is not mentioned in Dhyānayaśas' notes on other versions of the Buddha biography interspersed in the *FBJJ*; for more details, see Deeg, 'An Unromantic Approach'.

⁹ Salomon, *The Buddhist Literature of Gandhāra*, 2, 75 and passim.

¹⁰ For more details, see Deeg, 'An Unromantic Approach'.

¹¹ This also seems to be suggested by a recent series of articles by Karashima and Marciniak ('The Question of Nālaka/Nālada', 'Sabhika-vastu', and 'The Story of Hastinī') who do not come up, however, with a conclusion as to what the relation between the two texts is.

¹² For a translation of the biographies of Dhyānagupta, see Overbey, *Memory, Rhetoric and Education*, 386ff.

¹³ Evidence of underlying north-western Prakrit in early Chinese translations of Buddhist texts have been researched by a number of scholars, e.g., Seishi Karashima, Jan Nattier, Dan Boucher, and others (for respective bibliographical details see, for instance, Deeg, 'Creating Religious Terminology'). The growing number of Gāndhārī manuscripts coming to light and being edited systematically by scholars like Richard Salomon, Harry Falk, Ingo Strauch, Timothy Lenz,

Linguistic evidence

As already mentioned, in my previous paper¹⁴ I argue that the Indic name of the translator of the *FBJJ*, She'najueduo, is a late Gāndhārī form of Skt. Dhyānagupta, G. (Gāndhārī) *Jhānagutta. If this is correct, it may come as a surprise that Gāndhārī should have still been reflected in a Chinese transliteration of the late sixth century, but as scholars have pointed out, the use of the language at a later time is still detectable in some rare cases.¹⁵ Richard Salomon has argued and shown that there are different degrees of Sanskritization of Gāndhārī in the extant texts.¹⁶ This Sanskritization certainly continued and increased in the few decades after the demise of the language and the script (Kharoṣṭhī) in which the Gāndhārī texts are preserved. Therefore, we should not expect too many linguistic traces of the regional vernacular in the underlying text of the *FBJJ* where a more or less complete Sanskritization should have happened at the end of the sixth century;¹⁷ as already pointed out, in the earlier Gāndhārī texts written in Kharoṣṭhī different stages of Sanskritization can already be traced.

To be clear about the limits of my discussion here: I do not think that the Chinese translation allows us to conclude that the 'Urtext'—however it may have looked like if there was one; I prefer to speak of

Stefan Baums, and others, and the continuously updated website for *Gāndhārī Language and Literature* maintained by Stefan Baums and Andrew Glass (See Baums and Glass, *Gāndhārī*), has laid a far more solid basis for this kind of research than, let us say, twenty years ago when the only full-fledged Buddhist text in Gāndhārī was the Dharmapada.

¹⁴ Deeg, 'An Unromantic Approach'.

¹⁵ See, for instance, the name Dharmendramati which reflects the so-called Dardic metathesis of r typical for Gāndhārī in the Gilgit material from probably between the fifth and seventh century. See von Hinüber, 'Die Bedeutung der Handschriftenfunde bei Gilgit', 59.

¹⁶ Salomon, "Gāndhārī Hybrid Sanskrit".

¹⁷ This stage of Sanskritization was already reached some centuries earlier: see *ibid.*: 'Some late documents written in Kharoṣṭhī script are in fact practically indistinguishable from Sanskrit'.

a biographical tradition—was necessarily a Gāndhārī version.¹⁸ But what we might expect is an occasional influence of the vernacular on the transliterational corpus of the *FBJJ* and, since the transliterated names and terms are mostly translated (by semantic rendering) into Chinese by the translator, a reflex of the ambiguous semantic which the transfer of Middle Indic words into Sanskrit may cause.

Although I am yet to study the complete corpus of transliterations in the *FBJJ*—and, in fact, in other translations by Dhyānagupta—particularly the list of Indian scripts mentioned in the episode of the bodhisattva’s study at school, there are some names or terms which, in my view, reflect a possible Gāndhārī influence. Here I will focus on two examples which, to me, show the clearest hint to a Gāndhārī influence.

For the toponym Gayā Dhyānagupta uses the transliteration Jiaye 伽耶/**gia-jia* which is already found in earlier texts.¹⁹ As often, he explains this semantically, and in this case, he gives the meaning as *xiang* 象 (elephant).²⁰ It is obvious that this explanation is based on a Prakrit form *gaya* for Skt. *gaja* (elephant), with the usual Middle-Indic change of the voiced intervocalic palatal *j* to *y*; G. *gaya* is indeed attested in a compound.²¹ See also Jiayeshilisha 伽耶尸梨沙/**gia-jia-si-li-še*; for Skt. Gayāśīrṣa which accordingly is translated as *xiangtou* 象頭 (elephant head).²² Although these examples do not reveal typical Gāndhārī features, Dhyānagupta’s explanation of Jiaye as elephant is clearly based on a Prakrit form (Pkt. *gaya* = Skt. *gaja*), and the most likely Prakrit in this case would be Gāndhārī.

¹⁸ Here I disagree with Matsumura, ‘À propos de note phonétiques’, who assumes that the text translated by Dhyānagupta was in Gāndhārī.

¹⁹ E.g., *Za aban jing*, T no. 99, 2: 321b.5; *Zhong benqi jing*, T no. 196, 4: 154a.26f. (in the name of Gayākāśyapa).

²⁰ T no. 190, 3: 765c.8.

²¹ *Aspagayapedhage*, Skt. *aśva-gaja-pīṭhaka*, ‘horses, elephants and palanquins’. *A Dictionary of Gāndhārī*, s.v. ‘aspagayapedhage’.

²² The transliteration for *-śīrṣa*, *shilisha*, looks like rendering a Sanskrit word but could be G. as well, where a personal name Śīrṣa and the more prakritic form *śīṣa* are attested. *A Dictionary of Gāndhārī*, s.v. ‘Śīrṣa’.

Another, more ‘telling’ example in relation to Gāndhārī is the transliteration for the name Aśvajit, the name of the monk who converted Śāriputra. For once, the *Mahāvastu* differs from the *FBJJ*: here the name of the monk is Upasena.²³ The *FBJJ*²⁴ has a more differentiated story addressing different traditions but confirms that the Mahāsāṅghika call the monk Upasena/Youposina 優婆斯那/**ṛu-w-ba-siṣṇa*’,²⁵ and it seems to follow the other *nikāyas* who give the name as Aśvajit(a).²⁶

At that time, there was an elder bhikṣu called Upasena, dignified and calm, the most eminent among the bhikṣus. Early in the morning, [he] put on [his] robe and took [his] alms bowl, went into the city of Rājagṛha and went from [household] to [household] begging for food. The Mahāsāṅghika-masters say it this way. But the masters [of the] other [*nikāyas*] say the following: at that time, Ashuboyuzhiduo ([in the language] of the Sui [this] means ‘Horse-Star’), early in morning when the sun stood in the east, put on [his] robes, took [his] alms bowl and went into the city to beg for food. 爾時，有一長老比丘，名優婆斯那，威儀庠序，諸比丘中，最為第一。於晨朝時，著衣持鉢，入王舍城，於其城中，次第乞食。摩訶僧祇師作如是說。自餘諸師又復說言：‘時，阿輸波踰祇多，隋云“馬星”。自餘諸師又復說言：‘時，阿輸波踰祇多(隋云“馬星”)，於晨朝時，日在東方，著衣持鉢，入城乞食’。

The transliteration Ashuboyuzhiduo 阿輸波踰祇多 / **ṛa-cuṣ-pa-juā-tṣi-ta* obviously is not a plain representation of Skt. Aśvajit, but the first part of the name-compound is very similar to a (late) Gāndhārī *aśpa* (Skt. *aśva*). The second part, *yuzhiduo*, in some corrupted and odd way, is a cross-over for or mix-up of *-yuj* (Skt. Aśvayuj) and *-jita* (Aśvajita). Maxing 馬星, ‘Horse-Star’, is the translation for the stellar constellation of Aśvayuj (G. *aśpayu/aśpaii*).²⁷ Maxing as a translation

²³ Senart, *Le Mahāvastu* 3: 60ff.; Marciniak, *The Mahāvastu* 3: 70ff.

²⁴ *T* no. 190, 3: 875c6–876c19.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 875c11f.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 875c10–15.

²⁷ *A Dictionary of Gāndhārī*, s.v. ‘aśpayu’.

for the monk's name is also confirmed by the *Da zhidu lun*,²⁸ and by the *Baozhuang fen* 寶幢分/**Ratnadhvaja* of the *Da fangdeng daji jing* 大方等大集經/*Mahāvaiṣṭyamaśāsanipāta-sūtra*.²⁹

That the different name forms were still identified as referring to the same person in the Song period can be seen in the twelfth-century dictionary *Fanyi mingyi ji* 翻譯名義集 by Fayun 法雲:

Anbi – [*fāngqiè* for *an* is] *wu* + *ge* –,³⁰ [who is] also called Ashuoshi 阿說示/**Ṛa-cwiāt-zī*³¹; it reads ‘Horse-Victory’ here [i.e., in China], [and] also means ‘Horse-Master’. [He] is also called Ashuboyuzhi; it reads ‘Horse-Star’ here [i.e., in China]. 頰(烏葛)鞞, 亦阿說示; 此云馬勝, 亦云馬師. 亦名阿輸波踰祇; 此云馬星.³¹

This entry also may imply that the original name form in the *Fo benxing ji jing* was indeed Ashuboyuzhi 阿輸波踰祇 and not Ashuboyuzhiduo.

Direct and indirect content evidence

In terms of narrative content, the *FBJJ* clearly shows parallels with the *Mahāvastu*, but also with the Buddha-biography represented in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. The comparison with these two texts is somewhat impeded by the facts that the *FBJJ* does not include some portions which are found in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, and that the *Mahāvastu* in its extant form is narratively ‘unorganized’ in the sense that it does not present us with a linear biography.

²⁸ *T* no. 1509, 25: 192b18. Rendered by Lamotte, *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse* 2, 1076, as *Aśvajit*.

²⁹ *T* no. 397, 13: 129a.12–129b.10.

³⁰ *Fāngqiè*: **Ṛ* + *kat* = *Ṛt* for *an* 頰; Anbi 頰鞞 would then be something like **Ṛt-pij*?. This is also the transliteration used, e.g., by Faxian (*T* no. 2085, 51: 862c.15, Deeg, *Das Gaoseng-Faxian-zhuan*, 551) and in the *Mahīśāsaka-vinaya* (*T* no. 1428, 22: 110b.10, *passim*). Since the underlying form cannot be *Aśvajit* (or any Prakritic form), I suggest that this transliterates Skt. *Aśvi(n)*, or rather *Gāndhārī* **Aśpi*.

³¹ *T* no. 2131, 54: 106a8ff.

As is well known from the Buddha-biography in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, there existed a biographical tradition which incorporated a visit of the Buddha to the Northwest, to Gandhāra.³² The ‘landmarks’ of this visit are the subjugation of the nāgas Gopāla and Apalāla (in the upper Swat Valley) and other spirits (nāgas, yakṣas, rakṣas), and the prophecy of the Kuṣāna king Kaniṣka’s erection of a stūpa which marks the *terminus ante quem* of this series of episodes as the early second century CE.³³

Unfortunately, the *FBJJ* ends before the part of the biography where one would expect this ‘trip’ of the Buddha to one of the most peripheral regions of the South-Asian subcontinent. Since at least the narrative of the nāga Apalāla was known across South Asia and beyond Buddhist sectarian boundaries, it can be assumed that the narrative complex around the Buddha’s visit to Greater Gandhāra was part of the tradition of Gandhāra’s biographical tradition: it made the region part of the sacred geography of Buddhism. This is supported by the records of the Chinese Buddhist travellers: in the first decade of the fifth century, Faxian localizes both the conversions of the nāgas Apalāla and Gopāla and the construction of the Kaniṣka-stūpa in the region of Greater Gandhāra, and Xuanzang, more than two hundred years later, confirms this. It only can be assumed that the biographical tradition to which the *FBJJ* belongs may have contained a version of this journey of the Buddha to the Northwest as well, but unfortunately there is no evidence of this.

One faint hint to Gandhāra may already be the homage to the Buddha Vairocana at the very beginning of the text.³⁴ Gandhāra, or more specifically the Swāt valley, in the Tibetan esoteric tradition is seen as the home of Padmasaṃbhava and his teaching and practice. The homage to Vairocana and the fact that the translator of the *FBJJ* also translated some of the first texts of esoteric Buddhism or the evolving

³² See Przyłuski, ‘Le Nord-Ouest de l’Inde’.

³³ On the Kaniṣka-stūpa, see Deeg, ‘Legend and Cult’, and on the conversion of the two nāgas, see Deeg, *Miscellanae Nepalicae*, 92ff.

³⁴ *T* no. 190, 3: 655a8: 歸命大智海毗盧遮那佛 (‘Refuge to the great ocean of wisdom, the Buddha Vairocana’).

Mantrayāna into Chinese may reflect the influence that Dhyānagupta's region of origin had on his work and his selection of translated texts.

At the very beginning, the *FBJJ* contains a quite long story of the bodhisattva's encounter with the Buddha of the past Dīpaṅkara (Randeng-fo 然燈佛), stretching over fascicles two, three, and four.³⁵ The prominence of this Buddha in the first two chapters of the *FBJJ*, called 'Faxin gongyang pin' 發心供養品 [Chapter of Developing the Mind (of Enlightenment) and Offerings] and 'Shou jue ding ji pin' 受決定記品 [Chapter of Receiving the Prophecy (of Enlightenment)], is not only highlighted by the well-known story of the bodhisattva as a young ascetic brāhmaṇa Megha who donates flowers to Dīpaṅkara, spreads his hair on the muddy ground to let the Buddha pass without staining his feet, and receives the prediction from the Buddha Dīpaṅkara that he will become the Buddha Śākyamuni in the future. Before this crucial encounter the text also provides details about Dīpaṅkara's career in previous existences, particularly his encounter with the Buddha. The *FBJJ* shares this feature only with the *Mahāvastu*.

In this context it is important to remember, that, according to the Chinese travellers Faxian and Xuanzang, these events in the remote past were located near Nagarahāra (area of Jālālabād) in Gandhāra.³⁶ As Jason Neelis has stated, the localization of the Dīpaṅkara episode in the Gandhāran region goes well together with overwhelming presence of the Dīpaṅkara story in Gandhāran art of the Kuṣāna period: of the depicted 'previous existence' (*jātaka* or *pūrvayoga*) narratives, Dīpaṅkara is by far more frequently (ca. one hundred thirty images) found than, e.g., the two 'runner-ups', the *Viśvantara-jātaka* (twelve images) and the *Śyāma-jātaka* (eleven images) which, again according to the Chinese travellers, had been localized in the region as well.³⁷ Although no Gāndhārī version of the Dīpaṅkara episode is preserved in the corpus of Gāndhārī-Kharoṣṭhī manuscripts discovered in the

³⁵ These fascicles are 'translated' in an extremely abridged form by Beal, *The Romantic Legend*, 10ff.

³⁶ Deeg, *Das Gaoseng-Faxian-zhuan*, 252ff.

³⁷ Neelis, 'Making Places for Buddhism in Gandhāra', 176ff; Deeg, 'The Buddha in the "Wild West"'.

last two decades or so,³⁸ the Gāndhārī *Bahubuddha(ka)-sūtra* contains the name of Dīpaṅkara (Divakaro/-e)³⁹ as the first of the Buddhas of the past.⁴⁰

It is again the *FBJJ*, together with the *Mahāvastu*, which provides a kind of rationale for the localization of the Dīpaṅkara episode in the wider region of Gandhāra. Some narratives contain elements that may have facilitated the localisation in the vicinity of the high mountain ranges to the north of the subcontinent. In the *Mahāvastu*, the bodhisattva Megha is a young ascetic practicing austerities in the Himālaya who ‘came down’ to the royal city to get the tuition fee for his teacher where he happened to meet the Buddha Dīpaṅkara:⁴¹

³⁸ Deeg, ‘The Buddha in the “Wild West”’, 179.

³⁹ I am grateful to Richard Salomon to have provided me with the Gāndhārī forms of the name (in an e-mail from September 6, 2021). The name—in the genitive form Dhivhakarasa—is also preserved in an inscription (see *A Dictionary of Gāndhārī*, s.v. ‘Dhivhakarasa’).

⁴⁰ See Salomon, *The Buddhist Literature of Gandhāra*, and Tournier, ‘Buddhas of the Past: South Asia’, 98ff. For a detailed analysis of the *Bahubuddha(ka)-sūtra* in the wider context of Buddhist literature see Tournier, *La formation du Mahāvastu*. Junko Matsumura, in a series of articles (‘The *Sumēdhakathā*’, ‘The Story of the Dīpaṅkara Buddha Prophecy’, ‘The Formation and Development of the Dīpaṅkara Prophecy Story’), has studied different versions of the Dīpaṅkara narrative; particularly in the second article she gives a useful overview and classification of the different versions.

⁴¹ A similar narrative is found in the Chinese *Ekottarikāgama* (*T* no. 125, 2: 597b.15–598a.1) where the bodhisattva’s teacher is called Yajñadatta (Yeruoda 耶若達/**jiā-niāk-dat*; see also *Dharmaguptaka-vinaya*, *T* no. 1428, 22: 784b4) who is living on the flank of the Himālaya (*xueshan-ce* 雪山側). Megha (Yunlei 雲雷) comes down from the mountains to a city not far from the kingdom in which the Tathāgata Dīpaṅkara (Dingguang rulai 定光如來) resides to get wealth to pay his teacher. After having purchased the necessary items, he enters the capital of the kingdom where the Buddha Dīpaṅkara is expected and its king (Skt. Dīpa?, Ch. Guangming 光明) has reserved all flowers for offering them to the Buddha. The bodhisattva finally manages to buy five flowers from a brāhmaṇa girl called Sugandha (Shanxiang 善香) inside of the city which he offers to the Buddha.

Then he, having studied the Veda [and] having come down from the ancillary [mountains] of the Himālaya (*anubhimavat*) to the people's land (*janapada*) thinking: 'I will strive to get the money for [my] teacher'.⁴²

The *FBJJ* is even more detailed in terms of the bodhisattva's journey and the circumstances of his meeting with Dīpaṃkara. The text specifies that the young *brahmacārin* Megha (Yun 雲), the bodhisattva, studies with a famous teacher on the southern slopes of the Himālaya belonging to Dīpaṃkara's father's kingdom (*bi guo xueshan-nanmian* 彼國雪山南面).⁴³ In order to obtain wealth to pay his teacher, Megha descends from the Himālaya (*cong xueshan xia* 從雪山下) and goes to the city Shuluoboshe 輸羅波奢 (**cuš-la-pa-sia*, Skt. **Śūrapārśva?*),⁴⁴ five hundred *yojana* away—obviously in a southern direction—from his teacher's home, to get offerings from the rich brāhmaṇa Jiside 祭祀德 (Skt. *Yajñagaṇa* or *-gupta?*) who is holding a great donation festival (*wuzhe hui* 無遮會 or *banzhe hui* 般遮會: Skt. *pañcavārṣika*).⁴⁵ After having received the offerings from the brāhmaṇa, Megha wants to return to his teacher's place and approaches the city of Lianhua cheng 蓮華城, the 'Lotus City',⁴⁶ where he finally meets the Buddha Dīpaṃkara.⁴⁷ Before Megha meets the Buddha Dīpaṃkara, there is a quite long episode in which he buys the five Utpala-flowers (*youboluo hua* 優鉢羅華) which he will scatter on Dīpaṃkara from a servant girl called Xianzhe 賢者 (Bhadrā

⁴² *so dāni adbhūtavēdādhyayano anubhimavantā janapadaṃ okasto ācāryasya ācāryadhanam paryeṣayiṣyāmi iti*. Text from Senart, *Le Mahāvastu* 1, 232; translation Jones, *The Mahāvastu* 1, 188.

⁴³ *T* no. 190, 3: 665a.7.

⁴⁴ The reconstruction of the name is based on the following entries in the Tang dictionary *Yiqiejing yinyi* where *shuluo* 輸羅 is explained as *yongmeng* 勇猛, 'brave and fierce [man]' = Skt. *śūra*, 'hero' (*T* no. 2128, 56: 453a.16), and *Xie* (*zunzhe*) 脇(尊者) = *Pārśva* for *boshe* 波奢 (*T* no. 2128, 56: 772a.17).

⁴⁵ *T* no. 190, 3: 665b.15–665c.18.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 666b.9.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 667b.1–667b.21.

or Bhadrīkā?) with whom he has a long conversation.⁴⁸

In the *FBJJ*, Dīpaṅkara is related to a city called Lianhua-cheng 蓮華城, ‘Lotus City’.⁴⁹ Interestingly, the city is compared with Aluojia 阿羅迦/Skt. Alaka,⁵⁰ the city of the guardian deity of the northern regions, Vaiśravaṇa.⁵¹ It may well be that this toponym was deliberately linked with the name of the legendary ancient capital of Gandhāra Puṣkalāvati⁵² based on the semantic identity, and then claimed by one of the other urban centres in the wider region, Nagarāhāra. It would be interesting to know if some more information was included in the now lost *Randeng pusa benxing jing* 然燈菩薩本行經/**Dīpaṅkara-bodhisattva-pūrvacarya-sūtra* (?) mentioned in the *FBJJ*⁵³ which obviously told Dīpaṅkara’s story in some details. In any case, the importance of the Dīpaṅkara episode in the *FBJJ* (and the *Mahāvastu*)⁵⁴ seems to point to a Gandhāran context.

Indirect hints of the Gandhāran origin of the *FBJJ*—or, as it were, its lost predecessor—could be found in legends which are part of the ‘older’ biographical tradition but have become specifically linked with the region. The most obvious of these stories is the one of the two

⁴⁸ *T* no. 190, 3: 666c.13–667b.1.

⁴⁹ The same name occurs in other texts, e.g., in the Zhonghua-cheng 眾華城 in Kumārajīva’s translation of the smaller *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, *T* no. 227, 8: 541c.12, but Huayan-cheng 華嚴城 in the *Da zhidu lun*, *T* no. 1509, 25: 457a.26f., as already earlier at the end of the third century in Mokṣala’s *Prajñāpāramitā* translation, *T* no. 221, 8: 43a.19: Huayan guo 花嚴國. The name is also transliterated as Bomo(cheng) 鉢摩(城)/**pat-ma*°, Skt. *Padma(-nagara), in other texts (e.g., *T* no. 185, 3: 472c.19; *T* no. 125, 2: 597b.18, pass.: Bomo daguo 鉢摩大國).

⁵⁰ *T* no. 190, 3: 664a.14, pass.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 664a.21.

⁵² Identified with the archaeological site of Charsadda in the Peshawar basin. See also the Gāndhārī name *pokhala[di]* in the *avadāna* collection: Lenz, *Gandhāran Avadānas*, 16; Neelis, ‘Historical and Geographical Contexts’, 159f.

⁵³ *T* no. 190, 3: 664b.

⁵⁴ On the North-western ‘setting’ of these texts see Tournier, *La formation du Mahāvastu*, 136.

merchants Trapuṣa and Bhallika who offer food to the Buddha after he has reached enlightenment⁵⁵.

Xuanzang in his *Xiyu ji* locates the two stūpas of the two merchants—the first ones the Buddha instructed to be built—to the region around Balkh in Bactria (Northern Afghanistan). The connection with Bactria seems to be a relatively late one and probably was triggered by the phonetic similarity between the toponym (Bāhlika or Vāhlika) and the name Bhallika. But the connection of the two merchants with the region is also evidenced by a protective spell for travellers, probably stemming from the region of Bāmiyān and edited and studied by Vincent Tournier which is,⁵⁶ in texts like the Mahāvastu,⁵⁷ part of the Trapuṣa-Bhallika narrative. That this localization of the two merchants to the Northwest—originally maybe in Gandhāra proper⁵⁸—is indicated by a version of the narrative in Gāndhārī⁵⁹ and the popularity of sources containing protective verses spoken by the Buddha for the two merchants.⁶⁰

The *FBJJ* locates the story in Northern India (Beitian 北天):⁶¹

⁵⁵ For an overview of the different versions see Allon, ‘A Gāndhārī Version’, 10f.; see also Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 66, 72; Deeg, *Das Gaoseng-Faxian-zhuan*, 459f.; on the Pāli sources see ‘Malalasekera’, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names 1*, 991, s.vv. ‘Tapassu’, ‘Tapussa’, and ‘Malalasekera’, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names 2*, 367, s.vv. ‘Bhallika’, ‘Bhalliya’, ‘Bhalluka Thera’. For an analysis of the different sources see Sadakata, ‘Ni shōnin hōshoku no densetsu ni tsuite’.

⁵⁶ Tournier, ‘Protective Verses for Travellers’.

⁵⁷ See *ibid.*, 407f.

⁵⁸ This is supported by the fact that the Mahāvastu (Marciniak, *The Mahāvastu 3*, 397f.; Senart, *Le Mahāvastu 3*, 312f.) locates Śilukṣa, the place of one of the stūpas, in Gandhāra (Gandhārarājye): Tournier, ‘Protective Verses for Travellers’, 418, note 60. One could also speculate if the place name Śilukṣa has not been brought in connection with (or is even derived from) Takṣaśilā (*śil-/ta)kṣa*) which is indeed mentioned as Śilā in the Mahāvastu (see also below, fascicle 8).

⁵⁹ See Allon, ‘A Gāndhārī Version’.

⁶⁰ Tournier, ‘Protective Verses for Travellers’.

⁶¹ *T* no. 190, 3: 802b.2–803b.9. See similarly *Lalitavistara*, 24 (Vaidya and

At that time, the World-Honoured One, [after] having received the mixture of rice gruel and honey from the two merchant leaders Dilifusuo⁶² and Balijia⁶³ (translated by former generations as Tiwei [and] Boli;⁶⁴ ...) from North India in the new pure alms bowl donated by the gods, accepted [the food] out of compassion and ate it according to the rules. After [he] had eaten, [he] told these two merchant leaders and the [other] people: ‘Come, oh merchant leaders! Receive from me the refuge to the Buddha, the refuge to the dharma, [and] the refuge to the saṅgha, [and] also accept the five precepts [which] will bring you peace and happiness for a long time [and will let you] attain great benefit’. When the two merchant leaders and their party heard the words of the Buddha [they] all said: ‘We will follow the sacred teaching of the Buddha accordingly’. And then [they] all took the three refuges. These two merchant leaders were the first people in the world to receive the three refuges, the five precepts, [and] the name *upāsaka*, [namely,] the two merchant leaders called Dilifusuo and [the other]. ... At that time, the two merchant leaders Dilifusuo [and Balijia] together with the other merchants addressed the Buddha: ‘Oh World-Honoured One! We all are on the road now, [and we] wish that the World-Honoured One could give us [his] blessings and let us without hindrance and quickly arrive in our home kingdom’. Thereupon the World-Honoured One gave the two merchant leaders and the other merchants [his] blessings, ... At that time, the merchant leaders together addressed the Buddha: ‘Oh World-Honoured One! We beg [you] for something to remember [so that,] when [we] return to our hometown and [do] not see the World-Honoured One [anymore,

Tripaṭhi, *Lalita-Vistara*, 276): ... *dakṣiṇāpathād uttarāpatham gacchete sma*, ... (‘... both went from the southern part to the northern part ...’)

⁶² 帝梨富娑/**tej^b-li-puw^b-sa*: *Tripusa.

⁶³ 跋梨迦/**bat-li-kiā*: Bhallika.

⁶⁴ The transliterations Tiwei 提調/**dēj-wu^b*, Boli 波利/**pa-li^b* are taken from older translations and are obviously based on Pkt. forms as maybe Tiwei for *Devu(‘a), and Boli for *Bhali(‘a); the Gāndhārī forms of the names are Trivūṣa and Valia: Allon, ‘A Gāndhārī Version’, 9 passim.

we]’ can construct a stūpa for this thing, venerate it by [setting up] a pole, [and thereby] remember the great saint World-Honoured One. We and the others will exhaust [our] lives to make offerings and pay respect [to it]’. ‘Thereupon’, the World-Honoured One gave the merchants hair and nails of the body of the Buddha [to] remember [him] and told them: ‘Oh merchant leaders! Today I give you this hair and these nails [so that] you remember [me]. When [you] look at these [you should know that they] are not different from me. Later there will be a stone falling from the sky in front of you. When you see it [you should] go home [and] build a stūpa, make offerings and pay respect [to it]’. At that time, when the two merchant leaders, Dilifusuo [and the other], had received the hair and the nails from the Buddha the following thoughts occurred [to them]: ‘[Since] this hair and these nails are things which the body has thrown off, [his] dharma [cannot be] so wonderful, [and we] should not venerate [it] and not offer [our] dedication’. When at that time the World-Honoured One understood the thoughts of all these merchants [he] told them: ‘Oh merchant leaders! Do not think so! I remember [that] in the past, [before] immeasurable, countless [and] incalculable kalpas, there was a World-Honoured One appearing in the world [whose] name was Thus-Gone “Lamp-Kindler”,⁶⁵ a tathāgata, an arhat, a *samyaksambuddha*, well-gone, a saviour of the world, a supreme master, a charioteer, a teacher of gods and men, a Buddha, a World-Honoured One. At that time, I was a brāhmaṇa [called] Monapo (Skt. Manava), achieved in expounding the treatises of the four Vedas. I saw, at that time, this World-Honoured One entering a city, [and] the city was called “Lotus-Flower”. At that time, I scattered five stalks of blue *utpāla*-flowers over that Buddha, and then developed the mind towards bodhi. Then that Buddha gave me a prophecy [saying]: “You, Mānava, in a future time, [after] an *asamkhyeya* of kalpas of time will have passed, will become a

⁶⁵ Randeng 然燈, Skt. Dīpaṅkara; the strange redundancy of *rulai* 如來 as the common part of the name of a Tathāgata and the immediately-following transliteration *duotuoajiadu* 多陀阿伽度 is probably caused by a mechanical translation error.

Buddha called Śākyamuni, a tathāgata, arhat, *samyaksambuddha*". Then, under the dharma of that World-Honoured One, I gave up [my] family, shaved hair and beard, [and] became a monk. After I had become a monk, the gods took my hair, one hair being [taken] by one billion gods, being divided [between them] into pieces, [and] being offered by [them] together. Since then, I have now realized the *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*, have seen with [my] Buddha eyes these living beings, [and] there is not one living being who, being close to the Buddha, will not attain nirvāṇa. At that time, I was not yet free of desire, anger [or] hatred. And yet, [when they] made offerings to my hair and nails, an uncountable number of myriads of living beings reached nirvāṇa. But today [that I] have ridden [myself] of all disturbances, fetters, delusion, desire, anger [and] madness—how then can you possibly not greatly venerate my pure, untainted hair and nails?' When the two merchant leaders and the other people heard these karmic events of the past spoken by the World-Honoured One as rare dedication arose [in them] for the hair and nails, a [state] of mind of great respect and veneration arose, [and] with one mind [they] greeted the feet of the World-Honoured One with the tops of [their] heads, circumambulated [him] three times, retreated and went away'.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ 爾時，世尊於新淨潔天施鉢內從彼北天帝梨富娑并跋梨迦（前代譯稱提調，波利；...）二商主邊受於麩酪蜜和之搏，慈愍故受，如法而食。食已，即告彼二商主及諸人言：‘汝商主等來！從我受歸依佛、歸依法、歸依僧，復受五戒，當令汝等長夜安樂，獲大善利’。其二商主及諸眷屬聞佛語已，即共白言：‘如佛聖教，我等不違’。即便共受三自歸依。彼二商主於人世間最初而得三歸，五戒，優婆塞名，所謂帝梨富娑二商主等。... 爾時帝梨富娑二商主等及諸商人共白佛言：‘世尊！我等諸人今在道路。唯願世尊為我等故作吉祥願，當令我等無有障礙，速疾而至自所居國’。爾時世尊為二商主及諸商人作吉祥願，... 爾時商主同白佛言：‘世尊！願乞我等一物作念，若到本鄉，不見世尊，當以彼物作塔，禮拜以表，憶念大聖世尊。我等諸人供養尊重，盡今形壽’。爾時世尊即與諸商佛身髮爪以用作念而告之言：‘汝等商主！此之髮爪今持與汝，令汝作念。若見此物，與我無異。於後當更別有一石從空而下，至汝等處。汝等若見，當還起塔，供養尊重’。爾時帝梨二商主等從於佛邊受髮爪已，作如是念：‘此之髮爪乃是身上所棄之物，法非勝妙，不合尊重，無供養心’。爾時世尊知彼一切商人心已，告彼等言：‘汝等商主！莫作是念。我憶往昔無量，無邊，不可

The *FBJJ* does not specify the home region of the two merchants, but it seems to be significant that the Buddha refers to the Dīpaṅkara narrative to remind the merchants of the venerability of his bodily relics, the hair and nails. The combination of the Buddha's instruction of the two merchants to venerate his relics after they return home with the Dīpaṅkara narrative is only known from three texts, the *FBJJ*, the *Mahāvastu* and, interestingly the *Dharmaguptaka-vinaya* which inserts a long passage with the biography of Dīpaṅkara (Ch. Dingguang 定光).⁶⁷ It is probably not by chance that two texts which contain references to the Northwest, the *FBJJ* and the *Mahāvastu*, and two texts who belong to the same *nikāya*-affiliation, the Dharmaguptaka, the *FBJJ* and the *Vinaya*, have the same narrative structure of the Trapuṣa-Bhallika episode.

While the *FBJJ* does not give any place names, the *Mahāvastu* mentions the names of the hometowns of Trapuṣa and Bhallika:

Then [Trapusa and Bhallika] said, 'We, Lord, are traders who range over many a country and kingdom. Well would it be if the Exalted One were to give us a relic which we could worship'. With his own hand the Exalted One cut off some of the hair on his head and gave it to them, saying, 'Have a tope made for this hair'. He then cut his nails

計劫有一世尊，出現於世，名曰然燈如來，多陀阿伽度，阿羅呵，三藐三佛陀，善逝，世間解，無上士，調御丈夫，天人師，佛，世尊。我於彼時作一婆羅門摩那婆，具足解於四毘陀論。我於爾時見彼世尊入於一城，城名蓮花。我於彼時以五莖青優鉢羅花散彼佛上，即便發於菩提之心。時彼世尊即授我記：‘汝摩那婆於未來世，時節過數阿僧祇劫，當得作佛，號釋迦牟尼，多陀阿伽度，阿羅呵，三藐三佛陀’。我時於彼世尊法中捨離居家，剃除鬚髮，而便出家。我出家後，一切諸天取於我髮，一髮即有十億諸天，作分將行，而共供養。從彼已來，我今得成阿耨多羅三藐三菩提，以佛眼觀彼等眾生，無一眾生各在佛邊而不皆得證涅槃者。我於彼時既未脫貪慾，瞋，癡，猶尚供養我之髮爪，無量眾生，千萬億數，而得涅槃。況復今日盡諸一切煩惱，結，惑，貪慾，恚，癡皆悉除滅，汝等何故不大尊重我此清淨無染髮爪？’爾時，商主及諸人等聞於世尊說是往昔因緣之事，即於髮爪生希有心，生大尊重恭敬之心，頭頂一心禮世尊足，圍遶三匝，却步而行。

⁶⁷ T no. 1428, 22: 782a.25–785c.27. Omitted in Bareau's translation of the narrative (Bareau, *Recherches sur la biographie du Buddha*, 109).

and gave them the parings, saying, ‘Have a tope made for my nails. Stones will be provided to you and you set them up’. So, they erected a tope for the hair where the place named Keśasthālin is now. They erected a tope for his nails where the city named Vālukṣa is now. At the place named Śilukṣa they set up the stones which the Exalted One by his magic power had thrown there with his own hands.⁶⁸

Both the *FBJJ* and the *Mahāvastu* ‘densen’ the story by linking it to other episodes of food-donation around the narrative complex of post-Enlightenment. In these episodes, the Buddha, after the two merchants have left, accepts the rags of a woman reborn as a deity and wants to wash them. When Śakra miraculously provides him with a stone for drying the washed garment, the stone, after the Buddha had dried the rags on it, miraculously flies to the North of the subcontinent to serve as building material for the stūpa built by Trapuṣa and Bhallika:⁶⁹

Then, through the superhuman power of the Buddha, the stone on which the clothes had been dried in the sun flew through the air to North India to be used by the merchant chief Trapuṣa and [his companion Bhallika] to build a stūpa for [their] offerings.⁷⁰

The parallel in the *Mahāvastu* is even more explicit in terms of location:

⁶⁸ *te dāni āhansuḥ: ‘vayaṃ bhagavaṃ vāṇijakā deśadesāni ca rājyāni ca aṇvāma. Sādhu maṃ bhagavāṃ kecid dadeya dhātum yaṃ vayaṃ pūjayema’. Bhagavatā dāni teṣāṃ śīrṣāto pāṇinā keśāni otāritvā dinnāni: ‘imaṃ keśastūpaṃ kārayetha!’, nakhāni ca otāritvā dinnāni: ‘imaṃ nakbastūpaṃ kārayetha! Śilā ca āgamisyanti, tām ca śilāṃ pratiṣṭhāpetha!’ Tehi dāni yatra keśasthālī nāma adhisthāno taḥ keśastūpaṃ kārapitaṃ. Vālukṣo nāma nagaraṃ taḥ nakbastūpaṃ kārapitaṃ. Śilukṣaṃ nāmādhisthānaṃ tatrāpi śilāṃ pratiṣṭhāpitā sā bhagavatā rddhiye pāṇinā kṣiptā. Text Senart, *Le Mahāvastu* 3, 310; for slightly different readings see Marciniak, *The Mahāvastu* 3, 395; translation Jones, *The Mahāvastu*, 301, 297f.*

⁶⁹ T no. 190, 3: 408a.16–18.

⁷⁰ 時，曬衣石，以佛威神，從虛空飛往到北天竺，為彼帝梨富娑商主等作於塔，為供養故。

The third stone slab the Exalted One threw away to the settlement called Śīlukṣa where Trapusa, Bhallika [and the others] resided. There, they erected this stone slab as a *caitya*. This is now the foundation [place] in the realm of Gandhāra known by the name [Takṣa]śīlā.⁷¹

It is obvious that the name Śīlukṣa—the other name Vālukṣa is not mentioned—here is taken up to give an etymology for the city and name of Takṣaśīlā as the capital (*adhiṣṭhāna*) of Gandhāra. It is construed in a similar way as the foundation story of Pāṭaliputra in the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* where the city is built from a village bearing a name which is phonetically similar to the name of the city to be founded (Pāṭaligrāma: Pāṭaliputra—Śīlukṣa: Takṣaśīlā).⁷²

Another indirect clue for a North-western ‘situatedness’ of the *FBJJ*, however, comes from a rather unexpected direction. In a forthcoming publication, I try to demonstrate that the *FBJJ* reflects the narrative tradition of the possible Buddhist ‘Vorlage’ for the long-searched-for frame narrative of the story which became known in the West as the Christian hagiographical legend of ‘Barlaam and Josaphat’.⁷³ The similarities between the Buddha-biography and this legend were already highlighted by Laboulaye in 1859 and Liebrecht in 1860.⁷⁴ The identification was based on the recognition of the identity of the name Josaphat and the Skt. term or title bodhisattva of the Buddha-to-be—in the later discovered Arabic version *Kitāb Bilawhar wa Būdāsaf* (end of the eighth century or beginning of the ninth century)⁷⁵ the

⁷¹ ... *trṭīyaṃ śīlāpaṭṭaṃ bhagavatā Trapusa-Bhallikānāṃ Śīlukṣanāmanigama āvāsītānāṃ tatra riddhīye purato utkṣiptaṃ. tehi taṃ śīlāpaṭṭaṃ tatraiva cetīyaṃ pratiṣṭhāpitaṃ. adyāpi Gandhārarājye adhiṣṭhānaṃ Śīlā nāmena jñāyati.* Text Senart, *Le Mahāvastu* 3, 313; Marciniak, *The Mahāvastu* 3, 397.

⁷² In this case, this ‘etymology’ would not be based on an ‘atrociously ... incorrect geography’ (Jones, *The Mahāvastu*, 301, note 2) but on common onomastic ‘practice’.

⁷³ For the most recent monograph on this subject see Lopez and McCracken, *In Search of the Christian Buddha*. Subsequently, I use this title as a generic one for the non-Indian narrative tradition.

⁷⁴ See Cordoni, *Barlaam und Josaphat*, 6.

name form Būḍāsaf clearly confirms this identification—and mainly the parallels of prince Josaphat’s encounters with sickness and old age, and finally with the ascetic saint Barlaam and the well-known ‘Four Departures’ of the bodhisattva in the Buddha-biography. Without being able to go into details here, I would at least like to present the most striking parallels between this story and the *FBJJ*.

It is very likely that the narrative of the prince ‘bodhisattva’ and his ascetic teacher or guide originally was transmitted from South Asia to Persia via a Manichaean mediator version written in an Iranian language (Parthian, Pahlavi, Middle Persian) which then was translated into or rendered in Arabic, and finally—and in a relatively short period of time—into the languages of the eastern Christian churches (Georgian, Greek, possibly Syriac, etc.) before it spread into the whole Christian *oekumene*.⁷⁶

The departing point of my assumption that the biographical tradition of the *FBJJ* may be the one which provided the frame-story of the Barlaam and Josaphat legend was that it is only in this version of the parallel episodes of the ‘Four Encounters’ in the Buddha-biography that the ‘identification-marker’ of the direct encounter of the prince (Josaphat) with an ascetic teacher or guide (Barlaam) is present. In other versions (e.g., *Lalitavistara*, the Pāli *Nidānakathā*) the bodhisattva only sees these figures, and does not communicate with them, but has to ask his charioteer about their meaning. This difference was one of the main reasons that none of the extant Buddha-biographies could be proved to be the model for the Barlaam and Josaphat narrative.⁷⁷ Like the Barlaam and Josaphat story, the *FBJJ*

⁷⁵ Gimaret, *Le livre de Bilawhar et Būdāsp*. The most recent attempt to read the Arabic version against the Indian Buddha biography is de Blois, ‘On the Sources of the Barlaam Romance’; although this article contains some interesting ideas and thoughts, particularly seen from the standpoint of Arabic, it does not solve the problem of the underlying Indian version of the story.

⁷⁶ Deeg, ‘Looking for the Roots of Barlaam and Josaphat’.

⁷⁷ See Lopez and McCracken, *In Search of the Christian Buddha*, 55: ‘Both [Arabic versions, M. D.] draw on an unidentified Buddhist account of the life of the Buddha, translated from Sanskrit or another Indian language into Pahlavi, ...’

has the prince/bodhisattva encounter a deity turned into a sick man, an old man, dead man, and finally an ascetic mendicant, speaks to him directly and receives instruction.

As a second step, I identified the possible link of the deity/guide of the bodhisattva with the name of Bilawhar/Barlaam which, so far, had resisted any explanation. In the *FBJJ* this deity (*tianzi* 天子) is called ‘potter’ (*zuoping* 作瓶). In Sanskrit, one of the standard terms for ‘potter’ is *kumbhakāra* (or *ghaṭikāra*), but interestingly in the *FBJJ* both the terms *kumbhakāra*⁷⁸ and *bhārgava*⁷⁹—a derivation of the ancient Vedic name Bhṛgu—are used. In both cases Dhyānayaśas translates with the synonym *washi* 瓦師 instead of *zuoping*. It is striking that Dhyānayaśas does not give a transliteration for *zuoping* although this is the name of the deity who plays such a decisive role in the narrative of the bodhisattva’s decision-making. It may well be that Dhyānayaśas did not want to create a conflict of consistency by giving the same name to two different agents, the ṛṣi Bhārgava and the potter-turned-god *Bhārgava (*zuoping*).⁸⁰

It is then indeed Skt. *Bhārgava*, which may, in a series of ‘corruption’ through different languages (Gāndhārī, Bactrian (?), Middle Persian, etc.) be the origin of Arabic Bilawhar and, further modified, Barlaam.

If all this is the case, the most probable scenario for the transmission of the story is that the Manichaeans learnt about the biography of the

⁷⁸ Or, more specifically, the feminine form *kumbhakāri*: *qianpojiali* 鉗婆迦梨/*washi* 瓦師. In the *FBJJ*, this is the name of one of four sisters (*T* no. 190, 3: 804c.7) who give food to the Buddha when he spends several weeks meditating after the enlightenment.

⁷⁹ *bajiapo* 跋伽婆/**bat-gia-ba*: *washi* 瓦師, ‘potter’, Skt. *bhārgava*. In the *FBJJ*, this is the name of a ṛṣi (*xianren* 仙人) whose forest dwelling place the bodhisattva visits after having left the palace (*T* no. 190, 3: 733c.2–6)

⁸⁰ There is some evidence in Pāli sources and other biographical sources of a potter called Bhaggava (Skt. Bhārgava) who is reborn as a god after having been a lay follower of the Buddha of the past Kāśyapa. For a detailed analysis of the rather complex narrative situation, I have to refer to Deeg, ‘Looking for the Roots of Barlaam and Josaphat’.

Buddha through a text from a region closest to, or in the sphere of political control or influence of the Sassanian empire (224–651). From the biographical material, we know that Mani (216–274) himself had stayed in the Northwest of the subcontinent, and there had come into contact with Buddhism. Thus, it is the Northwest, the region since more recently called Greater Gandhāra, which is the most likely place from which the Manichaeans may have picked up the Buddha-biography and integrated it into their pool of narratives. The only extant version which comes close enough to the Barlaam and Josaphat narrative is the *FBJJ*. With the deity ‘potter’ it even may deliver the clue to solve the crux of the name of Josaphat’s/the bodhisattva’s spiritual guide Bilawhar/Barlaam.

CONCLUSION

While a final assessment can only be given after a complete and detailed analysis of the linguistic and narrative material of the text, there is, in my view, already enough evidence to claim that the *FBJJ* is a text which has emerged from a north-west Indian biographical tradition which probably was linked to the Dharmaguptaka⁸¹ and still reflects some traces of the local vernacular of Gāndhārī. While following the general blueprint of the Buddha biography, this tradition incorporated some idiosyncratic narratives which point to its north-western region of origin at the periphery of the Indian subcontinent. These narratives could serve not only as nodal point for a transmission to Central Asia and eventually China, but also as a provider of stories from the Buddhist and Indian tradition into the adjacent Iranian cultural sphere. The text, fully studied, may also provide new ways of interpreting Buddhist narrative art in Gandhāra and Central Asia.

I think that the observations made in this article are justification enough to dedicate more research to an understudied Buddha biography such as the *FBJJ*. Such research may provide more insights in the role of the post-Kuṣāna Northwest of the Indian subcontinent

⁸¹ For a detailed discussion see Deeg, ‘An Unromantic Approach’.

in the later period of the transmission process of Buddhism to Central Asia and East Asia.

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Abbreviations

- FBJJ* *Fo benxing ji jing* 佛本行集經. See Primary Sources.
T *Taishō shinsū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. See Bibliography, Secondary Sources, Takakusu and Watanabe, eds.

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- Fanguang banruo jing* 放光般若經 [Skt. *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*]. 20 *juan*. Trans. Wuluocha 無羅叉 (*Mūlākṣa?) or Wuchaluo 無叉羅 (*Mokṣala?) (fl. 291). *T* no. 221, vol. 8.
- Fanyi mingyi ji* 翻譯名義集 [Collection of the Meaning of Translated Names]. 7 *juan*. Comp. Fayun 法雲 (1088–1158). *T* no. 2131, vol. 54.
- Fo benxing ji jing* 佛本行集經 [Skt. **Buddhacarita-saṃcaya-sūtra*, *Sūtra of the Collection of the Acts of the Buddha*]. 60 *juan*. Trans. She'najueduo 闍那崛多 (*Dhyānagupta, fl. 560–581). *T* no. 190, vol. 3.
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