

The Turtle and the Geese: A *Pañcatantra* Fable in Sogdian

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Olga Chunakova recently published a fragment of a previously unknown Sogdian fable under the title “A Sogdian Manichaean Parable.”¹ As she rightly indicates, the fragment (SI 5704) contains part of a tale which is well-known from sources both eastern and western, including the *Pañcatantra*, *Kalila wa Dimna* and Aesop’s fables, though in this last the content of the story is altered significantly. Chunakova has given an excellent survey of the various versions of this “migratory tale,”² extending as far as the Russian short story, “The Traveling Frog”

¹Olga M. Chunakova, “A Sogdian Manichaean Parable,” *Written Monuments of the Orient*, no. 2 (2017): 35–42. As I have been informed by Yutaka Yoshida and Pavel Lurje, a further Sogdian fragment of this tale, the text of which overlaps with that of the fragment discussed here, has now turned up in St Petersburg and will be published in a forthcoming book by Chunakova.

²Since Chunakova chiefly refers to works in Russian, it has seemed useful to give references here to English translations of the most important versions. For an informative survey of the many

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by Vsevolod Garshin.³ Sogdian-speaking Manicheans frequently employed such stories as parables, and it is very likely that this is the case here too; however, since the fragment is written in Sogdian rather than Manichean script, and since no moral or epimythion survives, one cannot be entirely certain of its Manichean origin.

The oldest surviving Indian version seems to be a story in the Buddhist *Kacchapa Jātaka*, according to which two geese make friends with a turtle (or tortoise) and invite him to visit their home in the Himalayas. They propose flying through the air, holding the two ends of a stick in their beaks while the turtle bites on the middle of the stick, but the plan goes awry when the turtle cannot restrain himself from speaking and thus falls to his death.⁴ Essentially the same story is told in the *Pañcatantra* and *Kalila wa Dimna*, except that in these versions the reason for the journey is that the geese and the turtle need to escape because their pond is drying up.⁵ Although only a small fragment of the Sogdian text survives, Chunakova’s convincing restoration of the word *[p]tw’ty* “dried up” in the last line suggests that it is close to the *Pañcatantra* version.

According to Chunakova, the Sogdian version replaces the geese with falcons, a change which she is inclined to ascribe to reliance on a putative Buddhist text in Chinese.⁶ However, it seems to me that the first word of line 5 is not *zwš* or *nwš* “falcon” but *kws* “side, limit,” here as elsewhere combined with its near-synonym *kyr’n* in a hendiadys: compare. for instance, *pw kws kyr’n* translating Middle Persian ’qn’rgw-

versions and illustrations of this fable see also en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Tortoise_and_the_Birds (accessed 5 March 2019).

³Several English translations of Garshin’s short story are available, e.g. *The Frog Went Travelling*, trans. Olga Shartse (Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1987), archive.org/details/Vsevolod-GarshinTheFrogWentTravelling.

⁴H. T. Francis and E. J. Thomas, *Jātaka Tales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1916), 178–80.

⁵Patrick Olivelle, *Pañcatantra The Book of India’s Folk Wisdom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 51–52; I. G. N. Keith-Falconer, *Kalilah and Dimnah or the Fables of Bidpai* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1885), 48–49.

⁶Chunakova, “A Sogdian Manichaean Parable,” 41. [See n. 1.]

2. The particle *kt* no doubt introduces direct speech, a typical late Sogdian usage. It should be preceded by a 3rd-person plural verb meaning approximately “they (i.e. the geese) said,” but not enough of the word survives to justify making a choice between the various possible forms.

3. *kwc'ky* (also in line 5) must stand for [kōčē] or [kōčā'ī], oblique case of *kwc'kh* [kōčā] “mouth.” Compare it to the variant spelling *kwc'kyh* (with silent *-h*) in P3, line 295.⁹

4. The verb *zy'y* “to bite” (also in line 6) was not recognized by Chuna-kova. It is only known from one other published text, which describes the anguish of an animal which is about to be butchered: *ZKw zβ'k 'M xypδ δnt'k zy'ytw* “it bites its tongue with its teeth” (P2, lines 297–98). In his edition of P2, Émile Benveniste read the initial letter as *n-*, which is in principle possible, but W. B. Henning, in an extended review of Benveniste’s work, noted that the verb is written with an unambiguous *z-* in unpublished texts.¹⁰ One of the texts to which Henning refers is probably So 14410 /I/, a Manichean divination text, which contains the following prediction (verso, lines 5–7):

*wyspw kwtyšt pr tw' šr'k kwn'nt tyw 'y'z-yk'n pckwyr L'(kt') kwn'(n)
t(k)'m δ'mc'ny kwtyšt tw'z-y'y't*

“All the dogs (will) bark at you (and) you will begin to be afraid; (but) the dogs of the (material) world will not be able to bite you.”

The form of the verb in line 6 of our fable is apparently 1st person singular future but must be intended for 1st person plural “we will bite” (*zy'y-'mk'm* for **zy'y-'ymk'm*), while that in line 4 is 2nd person singular imperative *zy'y* “bite!” Here too the scribe seems at first to have written *zy'y-'mk'm*, anticipating the later form, but the last five letters have been deleted.

⁹Cited in B. Gharib, *Sogdian Dictionary. Sogdian–Persian–English* (Tehran: Farhang, 1995), 199.

¹⁰E. Benveniste, *Textes sogdiens* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1940), 16; W. B. Henning, “The Sogdian Texts of Paris,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 11, no. 4 (1946): 734.

Etymologically, *zy'y* “to bite” seems likely to derive from the Iranian root **gah* “to gorge,” Old Indian *ghas* “to eat, devour.”¹¹ For the semantics cf. in particular Choresmian **bγ'h-* “to bite,” attested via forms of the imperfect stem *b'γγ-*, which is found in sentences such as *b'γγt'y xyr* “the donkey bit” or *b'γγtyc wsn' prm'h'cyc* “he bit on it (= the wood) to test it (for hardness).”¹² The initial *z-* of the Sogdian verb probably represents the preverb **uz-*, while the remainder of the stem could derive from **gahaya-* (cf. *ptxw'y* “to kill” from **pati-hwahaya-*) or **gāh(a)ya-*.

6–7. For *βrwz-'ny-(h)* (whose final *-h* is perhaps just a line-filler) cf. *βrwz'n'k* “flying” (SCE, line 304), Christian Sogdian *brwz'ny* “bird” (E27/17V2).¹³ Its use with *šw-* “to go” may be compared with the phrase *prn'y'nn šw-* “to go flying” in the Rustam text.¹⁴

8. As noted above, *[p]tw'ty* “dried up” was already restored by Chunakova. The same word occurs in a partially comparable Sogdian tale concerning a parrot who is obliged to move because the tree in which he has his nest loses its water supply and dries up.¹⁵ My restoration of a form of the verb *nyšk'w* “to remove, bring out, take out” is hypothetical, but the third letter does appear more likely to be *š* rather than *m* as read by Chunakova.

¹¹ Johnny Cheung, *Etymological Dictionary of the Iranian Verb* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 93.

¹² Mahlagha Samadi, *Das chwaresmische Verbum* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1986), 17.

¹³ Ilya Gershevitch, *A Grammar of Manichean Sogdian* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1954), section 1039; Nicholas Sims-Williams, *The Christian Sogdian Manuscript C 2* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1985), 58.

¹⁴ Sims-Williams, “The Sogdian Fragments of the British Library,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 18 (1976): 43–82, esp. 55, line 20.

¹⁵ Enrico Morano, “Sogdian Tales in Manichaean Script,” in *Literarische Stoffe und ihre Gestaltung in mitteliranischer Zeit*, ed. Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst et al. (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2009), 173–200, esp. 179, line 23 of the reconstructed text.

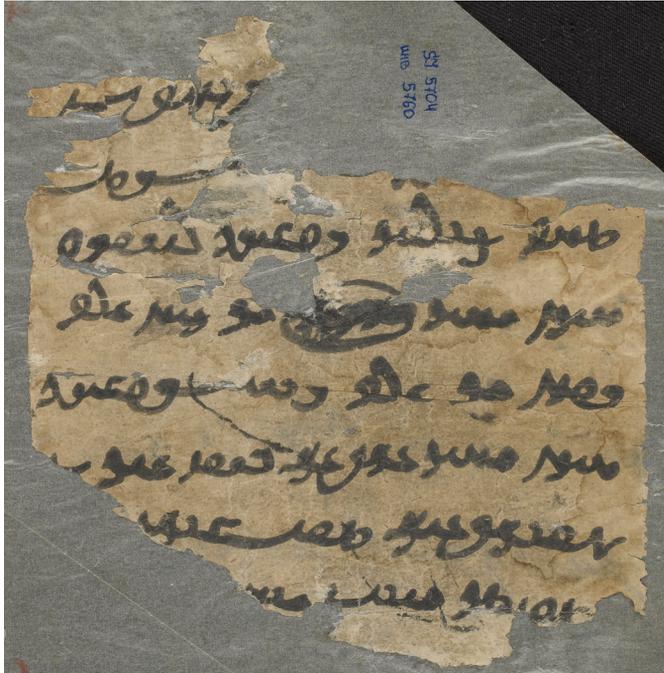


Fig. 1. The manuscript SI 5704, verso. By permission of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences



Fig. 2. The Turtle and the Geese, carving from Nalanda, Temple 2. Photo by Michael Gunther, CC Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License