



BODHISATTVA

BODHISATTVA in the Middle Iranian languages. The Sanskrit word *Bodhisat(t)va*, literally a being (blessed with) understanding, designates someone destined for Buddhahood later in life or in a future existence on account of his excellent virtuous behavior. The word entered the Iranian languages with the spread of [Buddhism](#) into what is now Afghanistan and Central Asia during, or perhaps before, the 2nd century a.d. (P. Daffinà, “Sulla più antica diffusione del Buddismo nella Serindia e nell’Iran orientale,” in *Monumentum H. S. Nyberg I*, Acta Iranica 4, Tehran and Liège, 1975, pp. 179-200). It appears to have been disseminated mainly through the vehicle of Parthian. Its Parthian form *Bōdisadf* or *Bō’isadf* was conserved in Manichean script as *bwdysdf* (W. Sundermann, “Die Bedeutung des Parthischen für die Verbreitung buddhistischer Wörter indischer Herkunft,” *Altorientalische Forschungen* 9, 1982, pp. 104-05; N. Sims-Williams, “Indian Elements in Parthian and Sogdian,” in K. Röhrborn and W. Veenker, eds., *Sprachen des Buddhismus in Zentralasien*, Wiesbaden, 1983, p. 133). The Parthian form can be regarded as also the source of both the Mid. Pers. *Bōdāsp* or *Bō’āsp*, spelled *bwt’sp* in Pahlavi texts (with assimilation to names ending in *-āsp*), and of the Buddhist Sogdian *Bōdisaf(?)* spelled *pwt(y)sβ* (with the change of *df* to *f* typical also of Parthian). The other Buddhist Sogdian spellings *pwt(y)stβ* and *pw’ystβ* are harder to explain, but it is possible that they were read either as *Bōdisadf/Bō’isadf*, corresponding to the Parthian forms, or as *Bōdisatv/Bō’isatv*, reproducing the Sanskrit word, which would be quite likely in the case of Buddhist texts of the 7th-8th century a.d. Uighur Buddhist texts show examples both of borrowing of Sogdian forms (e.g., *pw’y-sβ*) and of



imitation of the Sanskrit word. (On the whole subject, see Sundermann, op. cit., pp. 106-07.)

Outside the Buddhist community, Bodhisattva was taken to designate the Buddha Śākyamuni before his rise to enlightenment. The legend of his youth spread all the way to Christian Europe, where it became well-known in several languages as the story of **Barlaam and Iosaph** (P. Peeters, “La première traduction latine de Barlaam et Joasaph et son original grec,” *Analecta Hollandiana* 49/1, 1931, pp. 276-312). The generally accepted view (first propounded by F. W. K. Müller, in A. von Le Coq, ed., “Ein christliches und ein manichäisches Manuskriptfragment in türkischer Sprache aus Turfan [Chinesisch-Turkestan],” *SPAW*, 1909, p. 1205, n. 1) is that Sogdian Manicheans were the first to modify and further diffuse the Buddhist legend. A fragment of an Uighur Manichean manuscript on the subject was published by A. von Le Coq (op. cit.). W. B. Henning identified fragments of a New Persian Manichean version from the 10th century a.d. (Henning, “Persian Poetical Manuscripts from the Time of Rūdakī,” in *A Locust’s Leg. Studies in Honour of S. H. Taqizadeh*, ed. W. B. Henning and E. Yarshater, London, 1962, pp. 89-98) and argued convincingly for the derivation of the New Pers. form Bōdisaf/Bō’isaf from the Sogdian *pwtysβ/pw’ysβ* (Henning, “Die älteste persische Gedichthandschrift: Eine neue Version von Barlaam und Joasaph,” in *Akten des 24. Orientalistenkongresses München 1957*, Wiesbaden, 1959, pp. 305-07; idem, “Qadīmtarīn noska-ye še’r-e fārsī,” *MDAT* 5/4, 1337 Š./1958, pp. 1-9). The Arabic forms Būdāsaf and Būdāsab are probably related to both the Manichean and Pahlavi forms, since Arabic writers combine the Manichean Barlaam and Iosaph tradition with a legend that Būdāsaf was the founder of the religion of the Mesopotamian and “Chinese” Šābians (A. Christensen, *Les types du premier homme et du premier roi dans l’histoire légendaire des Iraniens* I, Stockholm, 1917, pp. 183-216).

As regards the diffusion of the Barlaam and Josaphat legend and the variants of the word *bodhisattva* in other languages, the basic studies are D. M. Lang, *The Wisdom of Balahvar*, London, 1957, and J. P. Asmussen, “Der Manichäismus als Vermittler literarischen Gutes,” *Temenos* 2, 1966, pp. 14-21. For Khotanese *balysūñavūysaa*– “Bodhisattva” see, e.g., *balysa*, Bailey, *Dictionary*, p. 272, and R. E. Emmerick and P. O. Skjærvø, *Studies in the Vocabulary of Khotanese* II, Vienna, 1987, p. 102, s.v. *balysūsti*.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

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