

Jens Peter Laut: *Der frühe türkische Buddhismus und seine literarischen Denkmäler.* (Veröffentlichungen der Societas Uralo-Altaica, 21). Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz (in Kommission) 1986. X, 228 pages, DM 60,-

“Early Turkic Buddhism and its Literary Documents” by Jens Peter Laut is the author’s revised doctoral thesis (Gießen 1985). As the title suggests, it is an attempt to use literary sources to shed some light upon the early history of Turkic Buddhism. Laut begins his discussion with an account of the “Sogdian hypothesis” according to which Turkic Buddhism in its early stages was influenced by Sogdian Buddhism. While the “Sogdian hypothesis” was based on the evidence of the stele of Burgut alone, the present study centres around the question of whether parts at least of the extant Old Turkic literature may also be traced back to the earliest times of Turkic Buddhism.

Laut’s argument is roughly as follows. Manichaeism, which was taken over by the Turks from the Sogdians, is documented by early texts which are datable (before 850). If orthographic and linguistic features peculiar to such texts are also found in Buddhist manuscripts, the Buddhist text in question will probably be a relatively early translation – this in spite of the fact that the manuscripts were repeatedly copied and the originals are no longer existent. Laut further shows that such early texts contain an unusually high percentage of Sogdian loanwords (in most cases originally Indian loanwords in Sogdian).

Thus, the “Sogdian hypothesis” is confirmed by the classification and examination of Buddhist texts on linguistic principles. The transmitters of Buddhism must have been *Eastern* Sogdians, for not only was Buddhism not a dominant religion in the Sogdian homeland of Sogdiana in the 7th century (as Laut rightly points out), but there is hardly any literary or archaeological evidence for Sogdian Buddhism in the West at all. Furthermore, Sogdian-inspired Turkic Buddhist literature seems to be largely Mahayanist, as was “Eastern” Sogdian Buddhism, which was itself adopted from the Chinese.

Students of Uighur, Sogdian or Tocharian texts will appreciate Laut’s very impressive philological work. This book contains a thorough study of the famous text “Maitrisimit”, and includes photographs, transcriptions, and translations of several re-arranged and newly interpreted fragments.

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