



Georg Morgenstierne

GEORG MORGENSTIERNE AND TIBETAN STUDIES

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Due to Georg Morgenstierne's great fame as an Iranian scholar, it is probably less well-known that during the early years of his academic career he devoted considerable time and effort to the study of Tibetan texts.¹

It is likely that this interest in Tibet can be traced back to his early youth, when, in his own words, "I was a passionate reader of books of travel . . . in particular Hedin, on whom I became quite an expert."² After studying Latin and Greek for some years at the University of Oslo (he commenced work on a thesis, never completed, on "The Role of the Matron in Roman Drama"), he decided, in 1914, to concentrate on Indology which he studied in Bonn with H. Jacobi, and, from the autumn of 1915, with H. Lüders in Berlin. While in Berlin he also started studying Tibetan with Herman Beck, under whose guidance he read the Tibetan versions of the *Lalitavistara* and the *Udānavarga*. For the study of Sanskrit poetry in Tibetan translation, Beck was undoubtedly the leading expert in Europe at the time. "I also made an attempt at studying Beck's edition of the Tibetan translation of the *Meghadūta*. But it was tough going."

In 1917 Morgenstierne returned to Oslo (or Kristiania, as it was still called) as a Research Fellow at the University. He gave courses in Sanskrit, completed his doctoral thesis which he sent to Lüders, and continued his Tibetan studies on his own.

He returned to Berlin in October 1918 in order to pass his doctoral examination. The University was closed, but his teacher Beck, who in the meantime had become a high official in the Ministry of Education, was able to obtain for him special permission to appear before the board of examiners in private. Beck himself examined him in Tibetan. "I was the first candidate he had ever had, so he was just as anxious as I. But he was most amiable, and all went well."

Morgenstierne's doctoral thesis was a study of classical Sanskrit drama.³ Accordingly it was in this direction that he pursued his Tibetan studies. "I was still interested in Tibetan, and in the autumn of 1920 I copied in London Candragomin's drama *Lokānanda*, which only exists in Tibetan translation." It is clear that Morgenstierne prepared an edition and translation of this play, the interest and importance of which he was fully aware. The words of Professor Michael Hahn, who has, more than fifty years later, published the first critical edition and translation of the *Lokānanda*,⁴ testify to the discernment of Georg Morgenstierne:

"Candragomin's *Lokānanda* enriches our knowledge of the Indian

theatre in two ways: in the first place, it increases with a further piece the limited number of complete dramatic works consisting of several scenes from the early classic period; secondly, being the oldest Buddhist play preserved in its entirety it represents a link between the works dating from the 2nd century A.D., of which only fragments are preserved, and the *Nāgānanda* of Harṣadeva from the 7th century."⁵

Among his papers, Morgenstierne left a complete transcription of the Tibetan text of the *Lokānanda* (68 foolscap pp.) on the basis of the copies of the Tanjur preserved in the British Museum and the Bibliothèque Nationale respectively.⁶ He also wrote a synopsis of the entire play, partly in English but mainly in Norwegian (10 pp.), a translation of the prose parts of the play with notes, likewise mainly in Norwegian (99 pp.), and an extensive card-index of all Tibetan words, with Sanskrit equivalents.

In order to provide a firm basis for this edition and translation, he made a complete transcription of the *Nāgānanda* (115 pp.), of which the Sanskrit text has been preserved, and this resulted in the article "The Tibetan Version of the *Nāgānanda*" (*Acta Orientalia* II [1924], pp. 39-54). This was the only Tibetological article he published, but it was of the same high philological standard which characterised all his later work.

He also turned his attention to the *Jātaka*-literature as preserved in Tibetan. In particular, he transcribed the first, second and part of the fourth *jātaka* of the *Haribhātṭajātakamālā*, and made an index of titles of all 35 *jātakas* of that collection (in all, 45 pp.). Presumably he was encouraged to proceed with this work by F.W. Thomas, with whom he was in contact and who had published an article on the *Haribhātṭajātakamālā* as early as 1904.⁷ Once again, one can only admire Morgenstierne's sure sense in finding worth-while and important tasks, and once again it has been left to Professor Michael Hahn to open up the *Haribhātṭajātakamālā*, of which he has recently published the Tibetan text and translation of two stories.⁸

A Tibetologist may be permitted to regret that Morgenstierne's interest gradually turned towards other fields. However, by 1920 he was already moving towards Iranian studies. Nevertheless, he did not abandon his interest in Tibet. While in Berlin, he had read Laufer's edition of some of the songs of Milarepa. "I was deeply impressed by his description of the mountain scenery of Tibet." No doubt Milarepa's love of the mountain solitudes of Tibet struck a familiar chord, for Morgenstierne had from his earliest childhood been accustomed to spending his holidays in the high Norwegian mountains. In later years he translated three of Milarepa's songs into Norwegian.⁹

NOTES

1. *Georg Valentin von Munthe af Morgenstierne (1892-1978)*, Norwegian Indologist and Iranist, professor in Göteborg (Sweden) in 1930, thereafter in Oslo 1937-1962. Among his most important publications

are *Report on a linguistic mission to Afghanistan* (1926), *Etymological vocabulary of Pashto* (1927), *Report on a linguistic mission to North-Western India* (1932), and especially the monumental *Indo-Iranian frontier languages* (1929-1967, reprinted in six volumes 1973). Further publications are *Orthography and sound system of the Avesta* (1942) and *Etymological vocabulary of the Shughni group* (1974). Morgenstierne provided the first descriptions of several local languages of Afghanistan and Pakistan, including some which have now virtually disappeared. He also collected much oral literature in the course of fieldwork spanning more than fifty years. Of Morgenstierne Sir Olaf Caroe once said, "The candle of his tent burns as clearly as the lamp of his study."

2. Here and in the following I refer to and quote from an unpublished autobiographical ms., written in Norwegian, now in the possession of the Indo-Iranian Institute of the University of Oslo.
 3. *Über das Verhältnis zwischen Carudatta und Mṛcchakaṭika*, Leipzig 1921.
 4. Michael Hahn, *Candragomins Lokānandanātaka. Nach dem tibetischen Tanjur herausgegeben und übersetzt. Ein Beitrag zur klassischen indischen Schauspieldichtung*. Asiatische Forschungen Band 39, Wiesbaden 1974. - The transliteration of the Tibetan text by R. Handurukande does not merit the designation "critical edition".
 5. P. 35. Translated from German.
 6. This and the following mss. are all deposited at the Indo-Iranian Institute of the University of Oslo.
 7. *JRAS* 36 (1904), pp. 733-743.
 8. "Die Haribhaṭṭajātakamālā (I). Das Ādarśamukhajātaka," *WZKS* XVII (1973), pp. 49-88; "(II). Das Śyāmajātaka," id. XX (1976), pp. 37-74; "(III). Das Dardara-Jātaka," id. XXIII (1979), pp. 75-108.
 9. "Milaraspa," *Filologen* 16, 1 (Oslo 1958), p. 17.
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