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A NOTE ON PTOLEMY IN CHINA

PAR

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In their often cited paper on the Manichaean works in China¹, Chavannes and Pelliot first mentioned three books of which titles were recorded in the official history of the T'ang Dynasty, but which were no longer existent. They are (1) Tu-li-ching (都利経), (2) Yü-ssu-ching (聿斯経), and (3) Ssu-mên-ching (四月経). The two great French orientalists suggested that the three books, which were closely related with each other, might have belonged to some Sogdian school of astrology. The provenance of the first two books, as they maintained, were somewhere in the Central Asia, and the ultimate origin of the third one could be sought in north India because ssu-mên (四月) seemed to be related with the division of the 28 lunar mansions (naksatra) into four cardinal directions. In fact, however, the argument was based on a fragile ground, because the division of the 28 naksatra into four directions is more a Chinese practice than Indian. Although Chavannes and Pelliot knew that the third title was also recorded in the list² of the 35 books which the Nestorian priest Adam (Chinese name: Ching-tsin 景海) offered to the T'ang Dynasty in about A.D. 780, they did not develop the discussion further.

Inspired by Chavannes and Pelliot, Mikinosuke Ishida³ collected further evidence on these books in Chinese as well as Japanese documents. The titles of the books were sometimes found in the combined forms, e.g. Tu-li-yü-ssu-ching (都利聿斯経), Yü-ssu-ssu-mên-ching (聿斯四門経), and Ishida even suggested the possibility of the complete original title Tu-li-yü-ssu-ssu-mên-ching (都利聿斯四門経). As Ishida discovered the Tu-li-yü-ssu-ching is exactly the title that is found in the list⁴ of the books brought from China to Japan by the Buddhist monk Shuei (or Soei 宗叡) in 864. He further collected some Japanese documents in which were found fragmentary quotations from the Yü-ssu-ching. Supporting, with reservation, Chavannes and Pelliot's view of the Indian origin of the Ssu-mên-ching, Ishida concluded that the Yü-ssu-ching also belonged to Buddhist astrology. Both texts were used in Japan by the Buddhist school of astrology called Sukuyodo (宿曜道) which flourished in the Heian Period.

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The problem did not attract much attention of the orientalists outside Japan, until recently when Jao Tsong-yi, in a paper⁵ dealing with an astrological manuscript of the Touen-Houang documents, proposed a new interpretation of *Tu-li* (都利) as the Sogdian name of the river Talas. This interpretation, however, is not convincing enough, because it was not explained why the river name should have been used as the title of the book on astrology.

Recently a new perspective was cleared by two Japanese savants. Hiroyuki Momo⁶, after studying fragments of the Yü-ssu-ching, which are quoted in the class of documents called Sukuyo-kanmon (宿曜勘文), suggested that the text in question was neither of Indian nor of Chinese origin but it was rather characteristically Hellenistic. This view was supported by Kiyosi Yabuuti⁷, who independently proposed a very revealing idea that the Ssu-mên-ching might have been somehow related with Ptolemy's astrological book Tetrabiblos, because both titles denote 'work consisting of four books'.

Fully agreeing with Momo and Yabuuti, I want to proceed further to say that the first four Chinese characters in the title Tu-li-yü-ssu-ching (都利聿斯経) represent a phonetic translation of the very name of Ptolemaios. Thus the longest title Tu-li-yii-ssu-ssu-mên-ching which Ishida proposed could possibly mean 'Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos'. From whichever language the book was translated, Syriac, Sogdian, Pahlavi, or Arabic, these four Chinese characters evidently preserve the five graphic elements, i.e., [t], [l], [y], [v], [s], only the initial [p] and the medial [m] between [l] and [y] being lost. The written forms of Ptolemaios' name as attested in Syriac texts and Arabic manuscripts are extended to the cluster of the cluster plane (B-Ţ-L-M-Y-W-S) respectively. The loss of initial sound plane of the cluster plane is a very common phenomenon (as in modern English pronounciation of Ptolemy). What remains to be explained is only the disappearance of [m] in the middle in this phonetic or, possibly, graphic environment.

It is not surprising at all if Ptolemy's works were transmitted to the T'ang Dynasty China, because most of the books which Adam offered to the Dynasty were of Hellenistic origin. Furthermore the important role of Nestorian priests in the transmission of the Greek science to the East is one of the established historical facts. As Nau's papers have shown Ptolemy's astrological works, *Tetrabiblos* and *Karpos*, were translated into Syriac already in the mid seventh or early eighth century. Soon after that a Pahlavi version of the *Tetrabiblos* appeared. When 'Umar ibn Farrukhān made his Arabic translation of the *Tetrabiblos* in 812 he made it from the Pahlavi version.

I do not dare to say that the text bearing Ptolemy's name is to be identified with the *Tetrabiblos*. It is possible that the *Tu-li-yü-ssu-ching* was a Chinese

translation of one of the 'pseudoepigraphies' such as was known to the Umayyad prince Khālid ibn Yazīd (704 or 708)¹⁰.

The original title of the *Tetrabiblos* is not established yet, but the book definitely consisted of four parts, thus in Arabic it was also called 'Book consisting of four parts' (*Kitāb al-arba*' al-maqālāt) by 'Umar ibn Farrukhān. Later when Kūshyār ibn Labbān's book on astrology was translated into Chinese in the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, Ptolemy's name was phonetically rendered as 八 (pa) 替 (t'i) 列 (lieh) 木 (mu) 思 (ssu)¹¹. In the Chinese translation *lei* (類) was used for *maqāla* (book, or part), while *mên* (門) was retained for *bāb* (chapter), because both shared the meaning 'gate'.

NOTES

- Ed. Chavannes and P. Pelliot, "Un Traité Manichéen Retrouvé en Chine, Traduit et Annoté", Journal Asiatique 1913, pp. 99-199.
- 2. Ching-chiao-san-wei-mêng-to-tsan (景教三威蒙度讚), Taisho Tripitaka No. 2143.
- M. Ishida, "The Tu-li-yü-ssu-ching and its Fragments" (in Japanese), Asiatic Studies in Honor of Toru Haneda, The Society of Oriental Research, Kyoto University, 1950, pp. 49-62. Reprinted in his Studies in Cultural History of Eastern Asia, The Toyo Bunko 1973, pp. 689-706.
- Shuei's Catalogue of Books brought from China is contained in Taisho Tripitaka No. 2174.
- Jao Tsong-yi, "Les Sept Planetes et les Onze Planetes" (in Chinese), Contributions aux Études sur Toung-Houang sous la direction de Michel Soymié, Librairie Droz, Genève-Paris 1979, pp. 77-85.
- 6. H. Momo, "Sukuyodo to Sukuyo-kanmon", Rissho-Shigaku, No. 39 (1975), pp. 1-20.
- 7. K. Yabuuti, Chugoku no Tenmon-rekiho, Tokyo 1969, pp. 186-191.
- 8. F. Nau, "La Cosmographie au VIIe Sciècle chez les Syriens", Revue de l'Orient chrétien, 15 (1910), pp. 225-254.
- F. Nau, "Le traité sur les (constellations) écrit, en 661, par Sévère Sébokt", Rev. de l'Or. chr. 27 (1929-30), pp. 327-338. "Un fragment syriaque de l'ouvrage astrologique de Claude Ptolémée intitulé le livre du fruit", Rev. de l'Or. chr. 28 (1931-32), pp. 197-202.
- 10. F. Sezgin, Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums, Bd. VII, 1979 Leiden, p. 42.
- M. Yano, "Kūshyār ibn Labbān's Book on Astrology", The Bulletin of the International Institute for Linguistic Sciences, Kyoto Sangyo University, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1984, pp. 67-89.

ADDITIONAL NOTE

After submitting this paper I asked advice from Prof. Gikyo Itō, specialist of Iranian languages, and I learned that he had attested Ptolemy's name in a Pahlavi text Mānuščihr's second letter of which date is 14 June to 13 July 881 A.D. According to Itō's personal correspondence Ptolemy's name was written in two ways, which was (PTLMYWŠ) and which was (PTLMYWS). In both cases [P] and [M] are clearly preserved. In order to link the Pahlavi form and

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the Chinese name Tu-li-yü-ssu, Prof. Itō refers to another Pahlavi form Lipung (T'TLGTWS) which is attested in the Vicārišn i catrang (Explanation of Chess', a well-known text included in Nyberg's A Manual of Pahlavi, pp. 118-120). Prof. Itō regards this as a corrupted form of Tatritos, which is again a corruption of Patrimos. Tatritos as attested in the Vicārišn i catrang is the very name of the Indian who tansmitted the game of chess to the Sassanian court in Khusraw I's reign (531-579). Thus, accreding to Itō, the corruption of the name is partly ascribed to the Indian intermediary.

Although valuable is Itō's suggestion, I rather wonder how the name of Ptolemy, after such a long journey of corruption, finally reassumed in China the form rather close to the original. Since the Pahlavi form PTLMYWS evidently refers to Ptolemy, with the initial [P] and medial [M] being preserved, it is evident that the Chinese form must have been from another source. But it does not nececcarily follow that we should hypothesize an Indian intermediary.