An Shigao

An Shigao (安世高; also known as An Qing [安清]) was a Central Asian translator active in the Chinese imperial capital of Luoyang (洛陽) in the latter half of the second century CE, during the Later Han (後漢) dynasty. He was the first known translator of Buddhist texts into Chinese, and indeed the earliest figure involved in the transmission of Buddhism to China about whom we possess any reliable historical information. An Shigao's pioneering activities as translator inaugurated an important chapter in the history of cultural exchange between the Chinese world and the West (that is, Central Asia and India) which would continue for centuries, exerting an immense, lasting influence on many aspects of Chinese language and culture. He also played a crucial role in the introduction of meditative techniques, and in shaping the earliest phase of Buddhist exegetical literature in China. Yet these important *historical* contributions do not exhaust An Shigao's significance. His life soon became the focus of miracle stories, which were included in Buddhist encyclopaedias and tale collections, and depicted in Dunhuang frescoes.

An Shigao and his work are extensively discussed in the main histories of early Chinese Buddhism (Tang, 2000, 46–48; Tsukamoto, 1985, 80–90; Zürcher, 2007, 32–34; Kamata, 1982, 140–155; Ren, 1981, 228–314, with a detailed analysis of some texts from An Shigao's corpus), though recent research and discoveries now allow corrections and expansions of the picture they have drawn.

An Shigao's life: between biography and hagiography

The earliest surviving complete biographies of An Shigao are those included in Sengyou's (僧祐, 445–518) *Chu sanzang ji ji* (出三藏記集, T. 2145 [LV] 95a6–c21), and in Huijiao's (慧皎, 497–554) *Gaoseng zhuan* (高僧傳, T. 2059 [L] 323a24–324b12; trans. Shih, 1968, 4–12; Forte, 1968, 152–161; Funayama & Yoshikawa, 2009, 34–49). The latter is largely based on the former.

The gist of the information provided by these works can be summarized as follows: An Qing (安清), whose courtesy name (*zi* [字]) was Shigao (世高; on these names see Zürcher, 2007, 33; Forte 1995, 74), was the crown prince of Anxi (安息; on this geographical designation, see below), being the son of the king and his main consort. He was

intellectually gifted, expert in many fields of learning, and a devout Buddhist. At the death of his father, due to what are presented in the biographies as purely religious motivations (T. 2059 [L] 323b1–2), he renounced the throne in favour of his uncle. Having gained a profound knowledge of Buddhist scriptures, doctrines and practices, he travelled extensively, eventually reaching China at the beginning of the reign of Emperor Huan (桓, r. 146–168). A more precise date for the beginning of An Shigao's activities in China, 148, is provided by the great fourth century scholar and bibliographer Dao'an ([道安], T. 2059 [L] 324a9–10). In the following years, he devoted himself to translating Buddhist texts into Chinese.

As the biographies narrate the tale, An Shigao left north China at the end of the reign of Emperor Ling (靈, r. 168–189), when he moved southwards in order to escape from the unrest and ruin affecting the capital, Luoyang (de Crespigny, 2017, 440–465). The remainder of these biographies is devoted to the narration of several miraculous events, for the most part taking place during An Shigao's (as we will see, alleged) travels in South-Central China.

These biographies were the result of a process of gradual accretion, and drew on a variety of heterogeneous materials dating to different periods and possessing varying degrees of reliability. Huijiao was keenly aware of the problems posed by some of his sources (especially in matters of chronology), as is shown by the extremely interesting "critical appendix" attached to his biography (T. 2059 [L] 324a6–b12; Shih, 1968, 9–12).

Even if we leave aside their most glaringly legendary elements, the information provided by the biographies should be read with caution. Thus, in order to reconstruct An Shigao's life, it is preferable to adopt a "stratigraphic" approach to the available sources, reading the biographies against the backdrop of earlier, more direct documents. These are a series of prefaces, mostly to commentaries on texts translated by An Shigao, dating from the second half of the second century through the middle of the fourth century. At least at a preliminary stage, these various sources must be considered independently, to assess their relative documentary value without conflating the information they provide.

The earliest and by far most important document we possess is the preface to a lost exegetical work composed by An Shigao's disciple Yan Futiao (嚴浮調 or, less likely, Fotiao 佛調; fl. 178–183), the *Shami shi hui zhangju xu* (沙彌十慧章句序, in T. 2145 [LV] 69c19–

70a8; trans. Nakajima, 1997, 244–246; also Ui, 1971, 5–7). This is our only first-hand source on An Shigao, so in principle its evidentiary value outweighs that of the later biographical tradition. Yan Futiao refers to An Shigao as a bodhisattva from Anxi, learned and compassionate, and describes his activities in the Han empire as being of a considerable scope, these activities including both oral explanations (*koujie* [口解]) and works transmitted in writing (T. 2145 [LV] 69c27–28).

In perhaps the most important passage for the biography (T. 2145 [LV] 70a3; trans. Deleanu, 1993, 34 n. 37), Yan Futiao evokes the sense of mourning caused by the loss of his master (*heshang* [和上]). In the context of this document, and especially in view of the fact that An Shigao's activities as teacher figure prominently in the short record provided by Yan Futiao, it seems reasonable to take *heshang* (already used in Han translations as an equivalent of *upādhyāya*, monastic instructor: Nattier, 2008, 39, with n. 20) as referring to An Shigao (so Ui, 1971, 6; Deleanu, 1993, 7; Nakajima, 1997, 246, n. 10). This is a crucial piece of information for his biography, which first of all strongly suggests a monastic status for An Shigao, and contains clear information about his death.

The date of Yan Futiao's preface is impossible to determine with precision. We know from Dao'an (quoted T. 2059 [L] 388a12–14) that his activities took place between 178–183, so a date for his preface to around 180 seems reasonable (Palumbo, 2013: 102, n. 8; Deleanu, 1993, 33–34). In the sentence immediately following the mention of the loss of his teacher, Yan Futiao bemoans having been deprived for a long time (or, alternatively, forever) of valuable instruction (T. 2145 [LV] 70a3–4), which might suggest a certain temporal distance from the master's death. According to Dao'an, An Shigao translated over thirty texts from 148 to "the middle of the Jian'ning era (168–171) of Emperor Ling" (from Dao'an's lost catalogue, quoted T. 2059 [L] 324a9–10). Putting all the pieces of this puzzle together, it is possible to conclude that An Shigao died around 170.

Proceeding in chronological order, the next important documents are two prefaces to commentaries on texts translated by An Shigao, composed, probably during the first half of the third century, within the same circle (Zacchetti, 2010c, 164–168) in South-central China (Kingdom of Wu [吳], 222–280). The first is Kang Senghui's (康僧會; d. 280) preface to his commentary on the *Anban shouyi jing* (安般守意經; *Canonical scripture on the ānāpānasmṛti* [i.e., "mindfulness of breathing in and out"; on this text, see below], T. 2145

[LV] 42c29–43c3; trans. Link, 1976, 67–80; Nakajima, 1997, 4–9; Aramaki & Kominami, 1993, 37–48). The second is the preface to the so-called *Commentary on the Yin chi ru jing* (陰持入經註 T. 1694 [XXXIII] 9b6–25; trans. Zacchetti, 2010c, 184–188), generally ascribed to Chen Hui (陳慧; d.u.), a little-known lay commentator who collaborated with Kang Senghui.

Both documents contain short but significant (and significantly concurring) records (Forte, 1995, 66–70). In particular, they mention for the first time An Shigao's princely status. But these two prefaces are probably just as important for what they do not say: they squarely place An Shigao's activities in Luoyang, without the slightest mention of any journey to the South. This is all the more remarkable given the southern origins of these documents. In fact, Chen Hui, a person mentioned in Kang Senghui's preface as a prominent transmitter of An Shigao's tradition, and perhaps also the author of the *Yin chi ru jing* preface (Zacchetti, 2010c, 170–171), was from Kuaiji (會稽) commandery which, according to the biographies, would have been the very place where the translator met a violent death (see below). Surely in this case the *argumentum ex silentio* carries considerable weight, and we can surmise that An Shigao did not in fact travel to the South.

In the important corpus of Dao'an prefaces, six introduce commentaries on scriptures translated by An Shigao (all included in the *Chu sanzang ji ji* and translated in Ui, 1956, 63–86 and 90–98; Nakajima, 1997, 9–11; 16–22; 25–33; 239–244). These important documents, which are likely to date to the early phase of Dao'an's scholarly career (Zürcher, 2007, 186), deal with various issues of attribution, textual history, and doctrinal interpretation. They also helped to consolidate An Shigao's status as one of the most important early translators. However, in terms of specific, factual information on his life, Dao'an does not add much to what we already know from earlier sources. The only exception is the earliest explicit mention of An Shigao's monastic status, as a bodhisattva "who has abandoned the household" (preface to the *Yin chi ru jing*, T. 2145 [LV] 44b3). The expression used by Dao'an, *shejia* (捨家) is commonly used in the canon with specific reference to the attainment of monastic status, and there is no doubt that he would have been fully aware of this connotation (*pace* Forte, 1995, 75).

If we now reconsider An Shigao's life in the light of the documents analysed above, we can conclude that he was probably a monk who was active in the Han capital Luoyang from 148 until his death around 170.

The largest part of the biographical account provided by Sengyou and Huijiao is devoted to miraculous deeds performed by An Shigao during his travels to South-central China (Wei, 2012). While probably devoid of any value for reconstructing history, these narrative elements are of great interest in their own terms, as testimonies of religious devotion, folklore and literature, but also as reflections of the interests and concerns of medieval Chinese Buddhists.

This part of the biographical account presented by the two sources is thematically centred on the notion of karmic retribution, and consists of four main and related episodes (Wei, 2012, 40–42):

1. Thanks to his ability to recollect past existences, An Shigao narrates that in his previous life he had been a monk who, in expiation of past negative karma, was killed in Guangzhou (廣州), and then reborn as the prince of Anxi. Before his death, he had predicted the negative rebirth of one of his fellow monks, who was particularly prone to anger. An Shigao promised to help this monk when they would meet again in a future life.
2. At the end of Emperor Ling's reign, during his peregrinations in South-central China, An Shigao converted the deity of Lake Gongting's shrine (邶亭湖廟; T. 2059 [L] 323b27) near Mount Lu (廬山), who controlled the wind on the lake, exerting its power over the entire area. Tamed by An Shigao, the deity, which had the appearance of a huge serpent, is revealed to be the reincarnation of the irascible monk whom An Shigao's promised to help in a previous life. With the treasures donated by the grateful serpent, An Shigao builds the Eastern Monastery (東寺) in Yuzhang (豫章, in present-day Jiangxi).
3. An Shigao visits Guangzhou to meet a young man – the person who, in his previous life, had killed him in the very same place. An Shigao reveals his own imminent death in retribution of an outstanding karmic debt to this youth (who, as a result, is converted and becomes his follower).
4. The two go to Kuaiji, where An Shigao is accidentally killed during a brawl. The youth from Guangzhou becomes the witness and teller of this saga, which constitutes a powerful proof of the reality of karmic retribution across lives (T. 2059 [L] 324a1).

As an exemplary moral tale about karmic retribution, the "southern chapter" of An Shigao's biography acquired a life of its own, enjoying considerable popularity across narrative genres in Buddhist literature and art (Ji, 2009, 344–347). An early example, predating the main biographies, is the short story included in Liu Yiqing's (劉義慶, 403–444) *Youming lu* (幽明錄), a collection of "anomaly accounts" (Campany, 1996, 75–77; Zhang, 2014) which was one of the sources of Huijiao's *Gaoseng zhuan* (Wright, 1990, 102). Now lost, a number of its stories are preserved in later sources. The tale concerning An Shigao is found in Li Fang's (李昉; 925–996) *Taiping guangji* (太平廣記, *juan* 295; Li Fang, 1961, 2346–2347; trans. Zhang, 2014, 104–106), a massive tenth century compilation. While shorter and different from the biographies in several details (including the setting of the serpent's conversion), the *Youming lu* version of the story was clearly used by Sengyou and, subsequently, Huijiao (for a detailed comparative analysis, see Zhang, 2014, 154–159; also Ji, 2009, 346–347). In modern times, the same story was included in Lu Xun's (魯迅; 1881–1936) *Gu xiaoshuo gouchen* (古小說鉤沉; Lu, 1951, 274), an anthology of ancient narrative texts compiled by the great twentieth century novelist and scholar, and first published posthumously in 1939.

Another relatively early example of use of lore about this southern chapter in An Shigao's life is provided by Daoshi's (道世, ca. 596–683?) great Buddhist encyclopaedia *Fayuan zhulin* (法苑珠林, T. 2122), which includes, in a section devoted to the "repayment of (karmic) debts," a version of An Shigao's exploits based on the *Gaoseng zhuan* biography (T. 2122 [LIII] 719c2– 720, b1).

The episode of the conversion of the Lake Gongting deity is probably the most colourful and interesting component of An Shigao's hagiographical cycle, reflecting as it does a fascinating synthesis between Buddhist motifs and the rich lore of local cults from the area of Mount Lu (Miyakawa, 1979, 95–96). This mountain became an important Buddhist centre in the fourth century century (Zürcher, 2007, 208–211), and this narrative motif can also be seen as a testimony to Buddhist attempts to conquer local sacred geography. The same episode is represented in Dunhuang frescoes found in Mogao caves nos. 9 (with only the cartouche surviving), 108, and 354, and dating from the Late Tang to the Northern Song (Sun, 1999, 130–133, with plates 109–111 reproducing the Song fresco of cave no. 354).

Taken as a whole, the narrative of An Shigao's travels to the South seems also to reflect an attempt at appropriation of this prestigious figure by medieval southern clergy, of which both Sengyou and Huijiao were typical representatives. Judging from the sources discussed by Huijiao in the final part of his *Gaoseng zhuan* biography (T. 2059 [L] 324a6–b12), there is indeed little doubt that this hagiographical complex was an entirely southern creation (Wang, 1993, 85).

While some authors tend to consider the southern extension of An Shigao's biography as having an entirely legendary character (Zürcher, 2007, 33), as is also suggested by the interpretation of the earlier sources proposed above, others contemplate the possibility that it might contain at least a kernel of historical truth (Deleanu, 1993, 6–7; Forte, 1995, 86; Nattier, 2008, 38–39). Interestingly, even if it is probably not true of An Shigao himself, some of his texts certainly did travel south at an early time (Zürcher, 2007, 48–49; Zacchetti, 2003, 269 with n. 82), as is also confirmed by the commentaries on his translations composed in the Wu Kingdom by Kang Senghui and Chen Hui. It is thus possible that in the early stages of development of the "southern cycle " of the life story, a certain degree of conflation took place between the (real) movements of the texts and the (imaginary) ones of the translator, almost as if the fate of the former had been projected onto the latter.

An Shigao's original background

According to all our sources, An Shigao came from Anxi (安息), as is signalled also by the surname An (安), in effect an "ethnikon" expressing this ancestry. He may also have been a prince, as claimed by documents from the Three Kingdom period onwards (Li, 1989, 63–64). But it gives one pause that the earliest and only direct source we have, Yan Futiao's preface, does not mention An Shigao's royal background, even though it discusses the translator in a highly encomiastic fashion (Li, 1989, 63).

A number of attempts have been made to determine An Shigao's original background with greater precision (Li, 1989). The name Anxi (Middle Chinese *'ansik*) is generally considered a phonetic transcription of Aršak, referring, during the Han period, to the Parthian empire ruled by the Arsacid dynasty (otherwise, see Deleanu, 1993, 27, n. 9). Some authors, taking the tradition concerning An Shigao's princely status at face value, have tried to identify him as one of the Arsacid princes known from other sources (for

example, Ma, 1990, 47–50), but without reaching any convincing result (Li, 1989, 63–64; Wang, 1993, 85). Against these attempts, Maspero (1971, 439–440) observed that the Parthian empire was a rather decentralized political entity, so if An Shigao was indeed a prince, he is likely to have been the scion of a minor princely family from the eastern part of the empire, which was exposed to the influence of Buddhism from a relatively early period.

In this connection, scholars have directed their attention to Margiana, located in the north-eastern part of the Parthian empire, in view of the Buddhist archaeological remains found in this area (Utz, 2012, 181). Koshelenko (1966, 181) explicitly mentioned An Shigao in his discussion of a "Buddhist sanctuary," including a stūpa and a large Buddha statue, found near Merv. Li Tiejiang tried to buttress the thesis that An Shigao was an eminent monk (not a prince) from this area with a detailed analysis of the biographical sources (Li, 1989, 65–66). However, as shown by Callieri (1966, 394–399), the earliest traces of Buddhism in Margiana are much later than was assumed by Koshelenko (1966, 179–180), and considerably postdate An Shigao's time.

Yet another hypothesis has been proposed by Aramaki (Aramaki & Kominami, 1993, 229–230 n. 30; also de La Vaissière, 2004, 74), namely that An Shigao might have been a second or third generation descendant of Gondophares, the founder, in the early first century CE (Bivar, 1983, 197), of the so-called Indo-Parthian kingdom (Neelis, 2011, 123–125) which controlled an area encompassing parts of present-day Pakistan, Afghanistan, and North-western India. Whether or not he was indeed related to the Indo-Parthian dynasty, an origin from the territory controlled by the Indo-Parthians no doubt would better account for An Shigao's Buddhist background. The *Hou Han shu* (後漢書) shows awareness of the past connections of this area with Anxi/Parthia (Fan Ye, 1965, 2921, discussing the "country of Gaofu" [高附國], i.e. Kabul; trans. Chavannes, 1907, 192; Zürcher, 1968, 367–368). It is not entirely clear, however, whether the name Anxi would still have been applied to a person from this area in the second century (when, as Aramaki himself points out, the area was already under Kuṣāṇa control). In the end, in the current state of our knowledge, all these hypotheses on An Shigao's background remain, to varying degrees, speculative.

A completely different picture of An Shigao's life and, indeed, identity has been proposed by Forte (1995) on the basis of a number of previously little-studied secular

sources (biographies, genealogies, epigraphical sources etc.). These mention, as ancestor of several individuals of Iranian descent lived in China from the fourth to the eighth centuries, an An Shigao who had come to China from Parthia during the Later Han dynasty as a hostage to the imperial court. Forte argues that this hostage is the same person as the famous traslator, whom he considers to have been a layman (Forte, 1995, 74–78). The title "Marquis of An" (安侯), attested in some Buddhist sources from an early period, is interpreted by Forte (1995, 78–81) as official title reflecting An Shigao's position vis-à-vis the Chinese government. The main difficulty with this fascinating hypothesis lies in the fact that it seems impossible to find any clear and convincing evidence linking the secular sources on the hostage with their Buddhist counterparts dealing with the translator. Another, perhaps more serious, problem is that Forte confined himself to a rather cursory analysis of Yan Futiao's preface (Forte, 1995, 66), without taking into account the implications of this all-important document (above, and Nattier, 2008, 39). Although Forte's study of An Shigao has been convincingly challenged by some scholars (Deleanu, 1993, 7–20; Rong, 2001, 427–440), it has had the unquestionable merit of bringing to light materials of exceptional interest, and of providing a fresh perspective on the Han translator.

An Shigao is referred to, in nearly all our early sources, as bodhisattva (either with the transcription *pusa* [菩薩] or the translation *kaishi* [開士]), a fact which seems to imply his Mahāyāna orientation. This fact has received considerable attention in modern scholarship (Forte, 1995, 70–74; Wang, 1997), and at first sight, appears to contradict the picture suggested by the corpus of his surviving translations, none of which belong to the Mahāyāna. As convincingly shown by Nattier (2008, 42) this is probably a false problem: the content of the surviving corpus does not rule out that An Shigao might have considered himself to be on the bodhisattva path. Moreover, it is not impossible that some of his lost translations might have been of Mahāyāna scriptures.

In fact, a text discussing the bodhisattva path and originally ascribed to An Shigao is still extant. This is the *Wushi jiaoji jing* (五十校計經, Deleanu, 1993, 43–44 n. 100; Nattier, 2008, 55–59; Vetter, 2013), which is ascribed to An Shigao in the earliest catalogue (T. 2145 [LV] 6a14), but is preserved in the canon as a part of a later text, the *Da fangdeng da ji jing* (大方等大集經 T. 397 [XIII] 394 b9–407a16). The *Wushi jiaoji jing*, while certainly archaic, cannot be ascribed to An Shigao (Nattier, 2008, 57–59). Recently Greene (forthcoming) has

argued that this text is, in fact, not a translation but a Chinese composition linked to the circle of commentators of An Shigao's translations active in the Wu Kingdom. Its most conspicuous feature is that it contains a detailed, sophisticated criticism of the bodhisattva path, which, however, does not altogether deny its validity as a possible religious option.

An Shigao's works

The earliest surviving catalogue of Buddhist translations, included in Sengyou's *Chu sanzang ji ji*, lists 35 texts translated by An Shigao (T. 2145 [LV] 5c23–6b3; Tsukamoto, 1985, 83–89). However, the Taishō edition of the canon contains 55 scriptures bearing his name as translator. The difference between these two figures is, ultimately, the result of a tendency to increase the number of scriptures ascribed to famous translators, which is typical of the development of the Chinese Buddhist canon during the Sui and Tang periods (on the bibliographical records concerning An Shigao's translations, see Ōtani, 1924; Tokiwa, 1938, 499–523; Forte, 1968, 165–194).

As it is often the case, the responsibility for the excessive expansion of the corpus ascribed to An Shigao lies with Fei Zhangfang (費長房), the author of the influential but unreliable *Lidai sanbao ji* (歷代三寶紀, T. 2034), a historiographical and bibliographical work compiled at the end of the sixth century. Fei attributed to An Shigao a staggering 176 translations (T. 2034 [XLIX] 52b23). In an interesting and revelatory passage attached to the list of An Shigao's works (T. 2034 [XLIX] 52b23–c14; Ōtani, 1924, 117–118), Fei Zhangfang seeks to justify the massive increase in attributions, compared with the meagre records of previous catalogues (see also Daoxuan's [道宣, 596–667] catalogue, *Da Tang neidian lu* [大唐內典錄], T. 2149 [LV] 223b13–c6). Fei blames Dao'an, Sengyou and Huijiao for not having taken fully into account An Shigao's exceptional personality and the vagaries of his peripatetic life (including his travels to southern China), thus limiting their bibliographical records to the Luoyang phase of the translator's activities. In other words, Fei astutely used An Shigao's extended legendary biography to legitimize his own enlarged record of the translations. He even claimed that most of the translations for which there were bibliographical records were produced piecemeal during his journeys in the West and the South (T. 2034 [XLIX] 52c11–12).

Crucially, Fei Zhangfang's approach was essentially endorsed, with some corrections, by Zhisheng's (智昇, 669–740) authoritative eighth century catalogue (*Kaiyuan shijiao lu* [開元釋教錄], T. 2154 [LV] 480c25–481c16). Zhisheng cut down the number of An Shigao's translation to 95, of which he stated that 41 were missing in his day; this has determined the number of texts ascribed to An Shigao in the present canon (54 or 55, counting also the *Jiaye jie jing* [迦葉結經], T. 2027, unusually included in vol. XLIX of the *Taishō* edition). Many of these texts are thus to be regarded as spurious (for a study of these texts, see Ui, 1971, 437–450).

Determining which works are genuinely by An Shigao is thus one of the most important tasks confronting scholars of the Han translators. Zürcher's ground-breaking works on early translations (1977, 1991) established a methodology for approaching issues of authorship in this research area, employing a combination of criteria both external (traditional bibliographical records) and internal (terminology, language, style, etc.). The starting point for defining An Shigao's corpus is the relevant entry in Sengyou's catalogue, which closely follows the earlier lost bibliographical work by Dao'an (Tokiwa, 1938, 104).

The list of An Shigao's authentic translations proposed by Zürcher (1991, 297–298) is thus the basis of any serious study (also Ui, 1971, 18–22). However, recent developments impel a reconsideration and partial revision of Zürcher's list (Nattier, 2008, 44–71; Zacchetti, 2010b).

Below are the surviving texts which can be ascribed to An Shigao, subdivided into main categories (largely following the classification used in Nattier, 2008).

(a) Texts transmitted in the canon

(a.1) *Sūtra* translations (listed in the order of their appearance in the Taishō edition, with more or less closely corresponding Pali parallels; details in Zacchetti, 2010b):

(1) *Chang Ahan shi bao fa jing* (長阿含十報法經,T. 13 [*Daśottarasūtra*], corresponding to the *Dasuttarasuttanta* [DN, vol. III, 272–292]).

(2) *Ren ben yu sheng jing* (人本欲生經, T. 14 [*Mahānidānasūtra*], corresponding to the *Mahānidānasuttanta* [DN, vol. II, 55–71]).

(3) *Yiqie liu sheshou yin jing* (一切流攝守因經, T. 31, corresponding to the *Sabbāsavasutta* [MN no. 2, vol. I, 6–12).

(4) *Si di jing* (四諦經 T. 32, corresponding to the *Saccavibhaṅgasutta* [MN no. 141, vol. III, 248–252).

(5) *Ben xiang yi zhi jing* (本相猗致經, T. 36, corresponding to *sutta* 62 in the *Dasakanipāta* of the AN [AN vol. V pp. 116–119]).

(6) *Shi fa fei fa jing* (是法非法經, T. 48, corresponding to the *Sappurisasutta* [MN no. 113, vol. III, pp. 37–45]).

(7) *Lou fenbu jing* (漏分布經, T. 57, corresponding to *sutta* 63 in the *Chakkanipāta* of the AN [AN vol. III pp. 410–417]).

(8) *Pu fa yi jing* (普法義經, T. 98, *Arthavistaradharmaparyāya*).

(9) *Ba zheng dao jing* (八正道經, T. 112, corresponding to no. 21 of the *Maggasaṃyutta* [*Micchattaṃ*, SN vol. V pp. 17–18]).

(10) *Qi chu san guan jing* (七處三觀經, T. 150A; a collection originally consisting of 44 *sūtra*s with three subsequent additions, listed in the *Chu sanzang ji ji* as *Za jing sishisi pian* [雜經四十四篇, T. 2145 [LV] 6a13]; Harrison, 1997).

In addition to these, all traditionally attributed to An Shigao, Harrison (2002) has argued that the anonymous *Saṃyuktāgama* collection known as *Za ahan jing* (雜阿含經, T. 101) should, at least in its greater part, be similarly ascribed (partly differently, Nattier, 2008, 65–68). In contrast, the attribution to An Shigao of three scriptures listed by Sengyou and accepted by Zürcher and Ui as genuine should be rejected, mainly on internal grounds (Zacchetti, 2010b, 259–262; Nattier, 2008, 53–55), namely the *Da anban shouyi jing* (大安般守意經, T. 602; Zacchetti, 2010a; trans. Du, 1997), *Chan xing fa xiang jing* (禪行法想經, T. 605), and *Fa shou chen jing* (法受塵經, T. 792).

(a.2) Translations of treatises

(11) *Yin chi ru jing* (陰持入經, T. 603); listing and analyzing key Buddhist concepts, this corresponds to part of chapter 6 (Barua, 1949, 112–138) of the Pali *Peṭakopadesa* (Zacchetti, 2002).

(12) *Daodi jing* (道地經 T. 607); a partial translation of Saṅgharakṣa's *Yogācārabhūmi*, an influential early treatise on meditation (Demiéville, 1954, 343–347; Deleanu, 1997).

(13) *Apitan wu fa xing jing* (阿毘曇五法行經, T. 1557) a translation of a Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma text parallel to the first chapter (*Pañcavastuka*) of the *Prakaraṇapāda* (*Zhong shi fen apitan lun* [眾事分阿毘曇論] T. 1541 [XXVI] 627a8–628c27; *Apidamo pinlei zu lun* [阿毘達磨品類足論] T. 1542 [XXVI] 692b22–694b2). Its traditional attribution to An Shigao (T. 2145 [LV] 6a2; see also Ui, 1971, 380–10) was implicitly rejected by Zürcher, who did not include it in his list. Although a systematic study remains to be carried out, both style and language appear compatible with the traditional attribution.

(a.3) A Chinese composition

(14) *Ahan koujie shi'er yinyuan jing* (阿含口解十二因緣經, T. 1508; *Oral Explanations on the Āgamas: The Sūtra on the Twelve Causes*). As suggested by the title and, above all, the text itself, this is not a translation, but the record of some "oral explanations" (*koujie* [口解]) on dependent origination and other topics imparted by An Shigao to his disciples. Although in most of the ancient editions of the canon this is attributed to two other Later Han translators, An Xuan (安玄; fl. 178–183) and An Shigao's disciple Yan Futiao, it can be safely ascribed to An Shigao and his circle (Zacchetti, 2004a, 212–219).

(b) Manuscript discoveries

Two manuscript scrolls containing texts ascribable or linked to An Shigao were discovered in 1999 at the Kongōji (金剛寺) in Ōsaka Prefecture, Japan (Kajiura, 2001). This find represents a substantial addition to An Shigao's corpus and to early Chinese Buddhist literature in general. Apart from Kang Senghui's *Anban shouyi jing* preface, all the remaining four texts contained in the Kongōji manuscripts were previously known only through mentions or allusions in prefaces and catalogues (where nos. 15–17 are ascribed to An Shigao), and in a handful of quotations in other early works. The attribution to An

Shigao and his circle of this rediscovered corpus (which forms a sort of anthology of early texts on meditation) seems on the whole acceptable.

The two Kongōji scrolls (labelled as A and B) share the same content, apart from minor variants. (Facsimiles of both, and a transcription of A in comparison with B, are published in Ochiai, 2004, 183–227). The four rediscovered scriptures (all anonymous) are listed below (references are to scroll A):

(15) *Anban shouyi jing* (安般守意經, Scroll A, columns 61–275; Ochiai, 2004, 188–194; study in Deleanu, 2003). Devoted to the fundamental meditative practise of "mindfulness of breathing" (Skt. *ānāpānasmṛti*), this is very different from the scripture transmitted in the canon under a similar title and traditionally ascribed to An Shigao (*Da anban shouyi jing*, T. 602). The Kongōji text is probably the original Han translation, while the canonical version represents a later commentary (Zacchetti, 2010a; see also below).

16. *Fo shuo shi'er men jing* (佛説十二門經, columns 283–365; Ochiai, 2004, 195–197). A scripture introducing and analysing three series of four meditative practises, forming the "twelve gates" (*shi'er men* [十二門]) evoked by the title (Zacchetti, 2003, 270–277; trans. Zacchetti, 2004b).

(17) *Fo shuo jie shi'er men jing* (佛説解十二門經, columns 366–385; Ochiai, 2004, 197). A short analysis of the "twelve gates", largely overlapping with the final portion of the preceding text (Zacchetti, 2003, 259–261).

(18) An anonymous exegetical text on the "twelve gates" and other meditation topics (columns 386–584; Ochiai, 2004, 197–203), starting (without title) immediately after the end of the *Foshuo jie shi'er men jing*. This is an archaic text, possibly composed within An Shigao's circle on the basis of the translator's oral explanations on the "twelve gates" (Zacchetti, 2003, 278–296).

The texts listed above, all fairly short, represent one of the earliest bodies of Buddhist literature whose spatial and temporal coordinates can be determined with precision. As such, their importance transcends the boundaries of Chinese Buddhism, and has attracted the attention also of specialists of Indian Buddhism. From this point of view, determining the sectarian affiliations and doctrinal orientations of this corpus (and, by association, to

some extent also those of its translator) constitutes an important issue in An Shigao studies (Ui, 1971, 452–453). In contrast, with the works of the other great Han translator, Lokakṣema (支婁迦讖, fl. 168-186), all of An Shigao's *sūtra* translations are of Mainstream texts with parallels in the Pali *Nikāya*s and/or in the corresponding *Āgama* collections. Some texts show clear Sarvāstivādin connections (Deleanu, 1993, 17): this affiliation has been established for nos. 1 (T. 13; de Jong, 1966) and 8 (T. 98, Hartmann, 1989, 41 with n. 12) from the above list, which have close parallels in the Sarvāstivādin *Dīrghāgama*. No. 2 (T. 14) represents a recension of the *Mahānidānasūtra,* which is in essential agreement with the Sarvāstivādin parallels, especially the *Da yin jing* (大因經) included in the Chinese translation of the *Madhyamāgama* (*Zhong ahan jing* [中阿含經] T. 26 [97] [I] 578b 7–582b5; see also Schmithausen, 2000, 48 with n. 28). The likelihood of a similar background has been suggested by Harrison (1997, 280) also for T. 150A (no. 10). Turning to treatises, a Sarvāstivādin affiliation for T. 607 (no. 12) seems well established, though this text displays some peculiarities (Deleanu, 1997, 35–38). If the attribution to An Shigao of T. 1557 (no. 13) is accepted, the presence of this Abhidharma text in his corpus would constitute an even clearer connection with this tradition.

Other scriptures seem to reflect a different background, suggesting a more complex picture (Deleanu, 1993, 17–18). Perhaps the clearest example is the *Yin chi ru jing* (T. 603, no. 11 above), one of his most influential translations, which is certainly not Sarvāstivādin (Zacchetti, 2002, 83 n. 50). Research on Gāndhārī manuscripts has shown that the distinctive hermeneutical methodology represented by the *Peṭakopadesa* tradition, to which the *Yin chi ru jing* belongs, was influential in Gandhāra during the first-second centuries CE (Baums, 2014, 34–35; Palumbo, 2013, 212 n. 67). Also the *Shi'er men* corpus preserved in the Kongōji manuscripts (nos. 16–19) seems to represent an anomaly in An Shigao's corpus, given the doctrinal idiosyncrasies it displays, especially in the treatment of the *dhyāna* stages (Zacchetti, 2003, 270–277).

Of course, in the history of Chinese Buddhist translations there are many examples of translators introducing texts of very different backgrounds and orientations, and perhaps An Shigao might claim temporal primacy in this respect, as in some others. Perhaps more importantly, we should be careful not to superimpose rigidly defined labels, as might perhaps befit later developments, onto texts and persons belonging to earlier phases.

While it is impossible to analyse here in detail a textual body as varied as this, we can identify some recurring themes and stylistic features in An Shigao's works. Dao'an, who contributed more than anyone else to determining An Shigao's corpus, played an important role also in its early reception and critical appreciation. His description of An Shigao as a learned Abhidharma specialist, whose translations are notable for their detailed treatment of "meditation and numerical categories" (*Anban shouyi jing* preface, in T. 2145 [LV] 43c19–21) proved influential on subsequent historiography: the catchy characterization employed by Dao'an, *chan shu* (禪數, lit. '*dhyāna* and numbers') is often repeated even in modern studies (Tang, 2000, 47). Indeed, Dao'an is not wide of the mark: the exposition of meditative practices is the focus of several of his most important works (for example, nos. 12, 15–18), and his role in the introduction of this crucial aspect of the Buddhist teaching in China has been acknowledged by both traditional historiography (T. 2059 [L] 400b25–26) and modern scholarship (Demiéville, 1954; Greene, 2014). At the same time, numerical lists of key terms are a widespread structuring principle both in his translations (Harrison, 1997, 279; Zacchetti, 2002, 82, with n. 47) and exegetical texts (Zacchetti, 2004a, 220).

An Shigao was a pioneer in the development of a specifically Buddhist translation idiom (Zacchetti, 2007), and several terms which are attested for the first time in his works have remained to this day part of Chinese Buddhist lexicon. His translation technique is characterised, on the one hand, by a rigid adherence to the structure of the Indic originals at the level of syntax, and, on the other, by a marked propensity towards variation at the lexical level (Zacchetti, 2007, 398–401). With very few exceptions, all terms are rendered into Chinese with semantic translations rather than phonetic transcriptions (whereas transcriptions are a landmark of the corpus of his near contemporary, Lokakṣema), and verses in the originals are rendered as prose (Nattier, 2008, 44). The style of his translations is crude, without any "trace of any concession to Chinese literary taste" (Zürcher, 1991, 283). The results of this technique are not always felicitous, and in spite of the enthusiastic praise piled on An Shigao's translations by early commentators, they are generally among the most obscure texts included in the canon.

While the language of these texts shares with other Later Han translations many of the lexical and grammatical features masterfully described by Zürcher (1977), they contain also several specific features (Zacchetti, 2007; on the language and lexicon of these translations in the wider Han context, Koike, 1987). Studies of An Shigao's vocabulary include Vetter's

monograph (2012) and the appendix to Ui's study (1971, 455–467). The latter includes annotated translations of most of the texts listed under part (a) above (Ui, 1971, 36–436).

In spite of its limited size, the exegetical portion of An Shigao's corpus has a considerable historical significance. The *Ahan koujie shi'er yinyuan jing* (T. 1508, no. 14 above) and the typologically similar commentary on the "twelve gates" (no. 18) probably represent the earliest form of Buddhist commentarial text produced in China for a Chinese audience (Zacchetti, 2004a, 219–221). This particular type of texts, based on highly technical oral explanations and systematically using interlocking lists of terms as a key expository technique, had gone undetected in studies on the development of Chinese Buddhist commentaries (compare Ōchō, 1979, 166–170). It attests to another side of An Shigao's activities (confirmed also, as seen above, by the testimony of his disciple Yan Futiao), that of a teacher introducing the arcana of Buddhist thought to an early Chinese audience.

Another scripture probably related to this earliest exegetical tradition stemming from An Shigao's teaching is the *Da anban shouyi jing*. This is yet another typologically unique commentary possibly based, to some extent, on An Shigao's own explanations, but likely to have been composed at a later stage, in the South-central Kingdom of Wu, by Kang Senghui and Chen Hui (Zacchetti, 2010a, 459–463). The idea that these figures and their work constituted a continuation of An Shigao's doctrinal lineage, or school, has proved influential in Chinese Buddhist historiography, both ancient and modern (Tang, 2000, 104–100; Zürcher, 2007, 53–54). While this traditional interpretation seems, on the whole, grounded in historical reality, the cultural and doctrinal background of this later circle of exegetes was probably more complex (Zacchetti, 2010c, 182–183). But there is little doubt that An Shigao's texts remained influential well into the fourth century in different areas of China: the study of these obscure but important scriptures formed the basis of Dao'an's scholastic education during his formative years spent in the north (Zürcher, 2007, 186).

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Article Summary:

An Shigao, active around 148–170 CE as a translator of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese, is the earliest historical figure of Chinese Buddhism. His biography became the basis of a cycle of colourful stories on karmic retribution.

Key terms:

An Shigao

Chu sanzang ji ji

Gaoseng zhuan

Anxi

Yan Futiao

Lidai sanbao ji

Sarvāstivādin

Peṭakopadesa

Chinese Buddhist commentaries

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