

Protective Verses for Travellers: Notes on a Leather Fragment of the  
*Diśāsauvastika-gāthās* recovered from the Bāmiyān Region

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Among the Buddhist manuscripts of the Schøyen collection, most of which stem from the Bāmiyān region, 32 Sanskrit fragments written on leather in Brāhmī script are preserved. The choice of this writing surface is a most interesting feature, since it is much more common for Bactrian documents than for texts written in Indian languages and scripts. A sizeable number of these leather fragments preserve texts having a clear protective function, and the present paper will especially focus on one such example, namely the *Diśāsauvastika-gāthās*. These verses represent a rich, though little studied, textual family that probably developed within narratives describing the encounter between the newly awakened Śākyamuni and the two merchants Trapuṣa and Bhallika. Some *Vinayas* transmit them as an independent textual unit, and prescribe their recitation by monks to donors preparing for a journey, as an “assignment of the reward” (*dakṣiṇādeśana*) arising from a gift of food. They indeed grant protection to the traveller, by propitiating various categories of *numina* ascribed to the four directions of the compass. Ornate versions of a *Trapuṣabhallikasūtra* also include these verses as a building block, and they were transmitted in various languages throughout central Asia. It is therefore most significant that a textual unit that appears to be particularly tailored for merchants was recovered from a trade crossroads such as Bāmiyān: the leather fragment probably belonged to a collection of protective texts, and it should be studied within the wider context of Buddhism in the kingdom in the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries. I will moreover demonstrate how the author of this collection drew these verses from the corpus of the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādins, whose textual tradition is well represented in the region. Finally, the comparison between the Bāmiyān recension of these verses and that preserved within the *Mahāvastu* is most fruitful for text-critical purposes, since the latter text is otherwise only transmitted by one group of manuscripts from Nepal.