

The Silk Road

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"The Bridge between Eastern and Western Cultures"

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In This Issue

- The International Dunhuang Project
- Economic and Social Roots of Buddhism
- Byzantine Solidi in China
- Silk Road or Paper Road?
- East Meets West under the Mongols
- Two Travelers in Yazd
- Kyrgyz Healing Practices

Next Issue

A special focus on Mongolia, including:

- Nicola di Cosmo on early nomads
- Esther Jacobson on petroglyphs
- Guolong Lai on Han mirrors in Xiongnu graves
- articles on the summer 2005 Arkhangai excavation

plus

Ulf Jaeger on the Francke-Körber Collection of Khotan antiquities in Munich, and more....

About

The Silk Road is a semi-annual publication of the Silkroad Foundation. *The Silk Road* can also be viewed online at <<http://www.silkroadfoundation.org>>.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions or contributions. Guidelines for contributors may be found in Vol. 2, No. 1 (June 2004) on the website.

The Silkroad Foundation
P.O. Box 2275
Saratoga, CA. 95070

Editor: Daniel C. Waugh
dwaugh@u.washington.edu

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From the Editor

As my e-mail inbox keeps reminding me, technology has dramatically altered the possibilities for meaningful interaction with those who share an interest in the Silk Road. My correspondents range from middle school students doing History Day projects and filmmakers and editors needing information for documentaries or articles to scholars whose expertise on the languages and history of the Silk Road far exceeds anything I would dare to claim for myself. The mere fact that their inquiries come my way and from all over the world is a tribute to the Internet, which has become for many the first choice for information. Is there anyone today with a computer and Internet connection who does not use Google as a reference tool? A name on a web page may identify an "authority" whose brain can be picked with a few keystrokes. Of course as a teacher, I have to keep reminding my students to be critical in their assessment of online sources and about the fact information produced with old-fashioned technology (e.g., ink on paper) is far from obsolete.

In previous issues of *The Silk Road*, articles have on occasion highlighted how technology is transforming the study of evidence regarding the early history of interactions across Eurasia. In particular we have seen how new techniques of analyzing archaeological material have advanced our understanding of material evidence and how innovative mapping of sites can help us to understand their context and relationship to sites in other regions. That said, as I learned from my experience in Mongolia this summer both on the Xiongnu

excavation co-sponsored by the Silkroad Foundation and the Mongolian National University and in independent study of petroglyph sites in the Mongolian Altai, the application of advanced technologies is uneven. Even where they are available, the techniques many not be able to answer some of the basic questions we pose about such key issues as chronology. And in too many cases still, the lack of access to advanced techniques for analysis or preservation of material may be a real constraint on the amount of information which can be learned from an excavation.

In any event, the promise of technology is great, although I hesitate to say unlimited, since I am somewhat pessimistic about humans being able to devise technological solutions to all the problems they create. It is also undoubtedly the case that for many aspects of the historical record, we will never figure out how to fill the gaps, however much the application of new technology may provide us with information and understanding we previously lacked.

Certainly one of the most promising benefits of the technological revolution is that described in our lead article by Susan Whitfield, the Director of the International Dunhuang Project (IDP) at the British Library. Most of our readers are undoubtedly aware of the project and may have visited its web site. Her article highlights the huge accomplishments to date as well as the ambitious plans for its future. Here already is a superb research tool for serious scholars around the world as well as a source of

information for the generally curious. An example of the use of the material may be found in this issue in Connie Chin's article on patronage of Buddhism along the Silk Road: the IDP website provided the images of the documents from which she did some of her translations.

The fact that the IDP is making available resources scattered in the museums and libraries of several countries and doing so in a number of languages is extremely important. To develop the basis for such cooperation and find the funding is in itself little short of miraculous. Those of us who are engaged in more modest Internet projects generally do not have the resources to provide such access to audiences whose languages are different from our own; what we can accomplish is generally constricted by our individual schedules and knowledge. The IDP is an undertaking which also is beginning to contribute in a major way to the ability of educators to transform their curricula by incorporating meaningful material on the history and culture of Eurasia. I am particularly struck by its undertaking to provide curriculum materials for Chinese schools in Gansu. If the historic Silk Road is all about cultural sharing across human and geographic boundaries, then the IDP is in itself a kind of modern Silk Road which transcends boundaries and in fact reaches much farther than the historic Silk Road ever did. As Dr. Whitfield's article reminds readers, the continuing success of IDP is contingent on its funding. I would recommend to all our readers that they consider "sponsoring a sutra" to help support the processing of the material.

Among the other contributions to this issue, Jonathan Bloom's reminds us of the importance of the early technology transfer along what, as he argues, might better be called the "Paper Road," given the significance of the use of paper for human communication down

through the centuries. Prof. Bloom's article and the complementary one by Prof. Sheila Blair on cultural exchange under the Mongols were originally delivered as lectures in the lecture series co-sponsored by the Center for East Asian Studies at Stanford and the Silkroad Foundation. Professors Bloom and Blair are distinguished experts on Islamic art whose books I highly recommend. The Foundation has broadened its sponsorship of public lectures by such distinguished scholars to include several universities; we plan to publish many of the lectures in future issues of our journal.

The other contributions to this issue are quite varied. Professor Lin Ying summarizes her earlier published work on the very interesting phenomenon of Byzantine coins and their imitations in China and suggests new ideas as to how the coins may have been understood there. Jipar Duyshembiyeva's account of some of her field work on Kyrgyz healing

practices offers new evidence about the intersection between traditional practices and Islam. And Frank Harold's article on Yazd evokes the culture of one of the important cities on the historic Silk Roads in Western Asia. Readers will recall Frank and Ruth Harold's photographs from Palmyra, which illustrated our article on that famous caravan city. The Harolds have also contributed generously from their photo archive to Silk Road Seattle.

Looking ahead, we anticipate that the June 2006 issue will be devoted primarily to the archaeology and culture of early eurasian nomads, especially in Mongolia. Included will be information on the excavations at the Tamir River site last summer. In anticipation of our spring issue, readers may wish to visit the excavation website.

Daniel Waugh
Department of History
University of Washington (Seattle)
dwaugh@u.washington.edu

Arkhangai Excavations

<http://www.silkroadfoundation.org/excavation/arkhangai/index.htm>

A four-week excavation and study program near the Tamir River in Arkhangai Province, Mongolia, was co-sponsored by the Silkroad Foundation and the Mongolian National University in July and August 2005. The large team included professional archaeologists from Mongolia, China and the United States, Mongolian graduate students and undergraduates specializing in archaeology, and volunteers primarily from the U.S., some of whom were acquiring their first experience in archaeology. The institute was highly successful as a learning experience for all involved and for its concrete accomplishments in archaeological survey and the excavation of a Xiongnu settlement site and graveyard. A web site, elegantly designed by Fredrich Kahrl and Wendy Tao, participants in the excavation, introduces the results of the Arkhangai Province excavation. The web site includes descriptive essays, maps, photographs, annotated bibliography and much more. Material will be added to the web site over the coming months as analysis of the results of the excavation become available.

The International Dunhuang Project: Chinese Central Asia Online

Susan Whitfield
*British Library,
London*

Despite the excellent work of scholars over the past century, the archaeological legacy of the Chinese Silk Road has barely been explored. There is so much material, with more being discovered all the time, and it covers so many subjects, languages, religions, cultures and geographical areas, that decades will elapse before all its secrets are uncovered. The International Dunhuang Project (IDP) is now facilitating access to and study of this dispersed material by making it freely available on multi-lingual websites. IDP hopes that by encouraging and promoting international collaborations the importance of this wonderful archaeological legacy will finally be fully appreciated worldwide. The Silk Road is part of all our histories. IDP is bringing it online for everyone.

IDP re-launched its web site (<http://idp.bl.uk>) in December 2005 offering more powerful full-text search facilities, greater functionality, educational project pages and the personalised "My IDP" project space. The IDP's web site is now hosted by sites worldwide and in English, Chinese, Russian, Japanese and German versions. After just ten years, IDP already holds information and images of over 50,000 paintings, artefacts, manuscripts, textiles and historical photographs from Dunhuang and other sites in Chinese Central Asia. By 2010 over

80% of the material from Dunhuang and a large part of the material from other archaeological sites will be available, with over 200,000 images, scores of catalogues, translations, educational pages, photographs, maps and research. Chinese Central Asia will be online.



Fig. 1. The northern section of the Mogao Caves at Dunhuang. Photo © Daniel C. Waugh 1998.

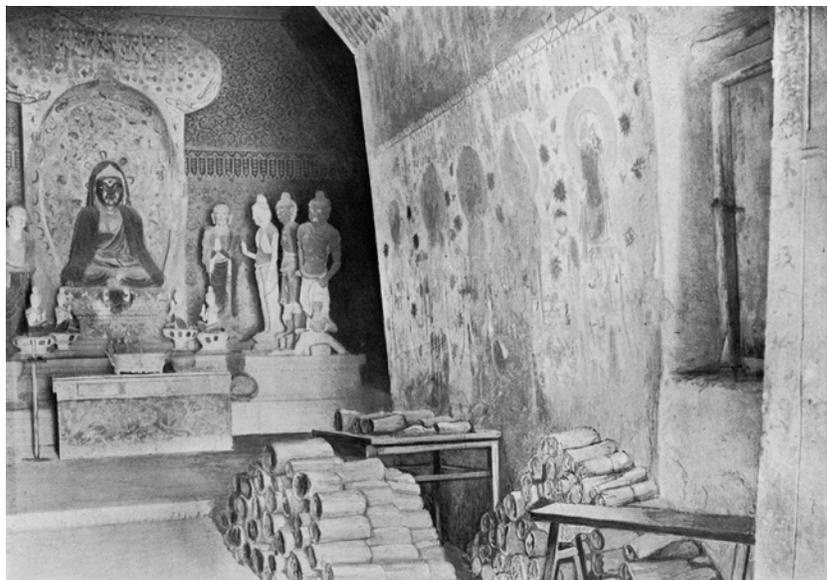


Fig. 2. Aurel Stein's 1907 view of Mogao Cave 16, with a portion of the manuscripts from Cave 17 (on right). Photograph © The British Library, Stein Photograph Serindia Fig. 200, used with permission. All rights reserved.

Background

As Buddhism spread along the Silk Road from India into China at the beginning of the first millennium, monks and merchants adopted the Indian practice of paying for cave temples to be dug out from cliffs as an act of merit. These caves were then painted from floor to ceiling with scenes from Buddha's life and depictions from the sutras, and further adorned with statue groupings showing Buddha with his disciples and guardians kings. The Mogao cave complex at Dunhuang was begun in CE 366, and by the ninth century there were over 500 cave temples with many residential caves for the scores of artisans, painters and sculptors working there [Figs. 1, 6 (p. 7)].

Dunhuang was one among many such Silk Road cave temple sites but is unique because of the discovery in 1900 of a library cave which had been sealed and hidden in about CE 1000 [Fig. 2]. Containing tens of thousands of manuscripts and the earliest dated printed book, this is the world's earliest and largest paper

archive [Fig. 3; for other images of some of these treasures, see the articles below by Connie Chin and Jonathan Bloom]. It also contained hundreds of fine paintings on silk,

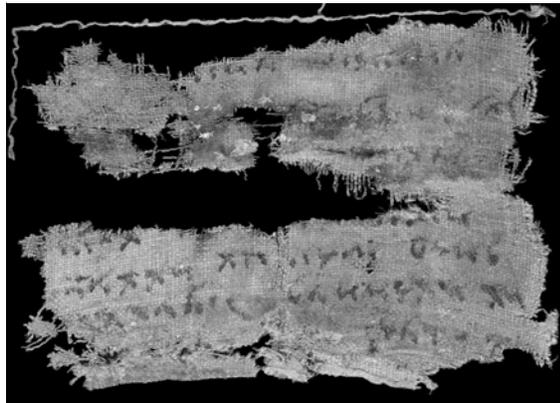


Fig. 3. Detail of the outer "envelope" of Ancient Sogdian Letter No. 2 (BL Or. 8212/99.1), discovered by Aurel Stein in 1907 at Watchtower T.XII.a on the Dunhuang Limes. Photograph © The British Library, used with permission. All rights reserved.

hemp and paper. Numerous other ancient Silk Road sites in Chinese Central Asia yielded other important artefacts, paintings, textiles, coins and manuscripts in over twenty languages and scripts, and this and the Dunhuang material was dispersed to institutions worldwide, making access difficult. The amount of material, its age, fragility and uniqueness also created a problem for conservators. Throughout the twentieth century much remained in need of conservation and therefore also uncatalogued, unpublished and inaccessible.

The International Dunhuang Project — the First Ten Years

The International Dunhuang Project (IDP), with its directorate at the British Library, was founded in 1994 to address these problems by creating a partnership of all the major holders of the material to work together on conservation and cataloguing and to increase access. To achieve the first, IDP organises regular conservation conferences and has a publications programme to disseminate conservation,

scientific and scholarly information (for details see *IDP News* 24, available free from IDP or online at http://idp.bl.uk/pages/archives_newsletter.a4d). To facilitate access IDP decided to create a comprehensive online catalogue of all the material, linked to high-quality digital images and supporting information which would be made freely available to all.

Starting with a grant from the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation and a staff of one, the first few years of IDP were spent designing and implementing a cataloguing and image management database. A British Academy-funded research assistant started adding information about the British Library manuscripts in 1995. In 1997 with a further grant from the Heritage Lottery Memorial Fund, IDP expanded and employed staff to start work on the cataloguing and digitisation of Chinese, Tangut and Tibetan materials from various Silk Road sites, and in October 1998 the web site went online with details of over 20,000 manuscripts.

Other projects followed. A grant from the Higher Education Funding Council for England led to the launch of a map interface to the database in 2000. In 2001, a four-year grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation enabled IDP to establish a digitisation studio with the latest large-format digitisation equipment. Two conservators, three photographers and three Photoshop® operators were employed to work full-time on the Dunhuang material.

Collaboration started with the National Library of China (NLC) in the same year, funded by the Sino-British Fellowship Trust, and the skills learned in London were passed on to the IDP photo-

graphers in Beijing. The Chinese-language version of the web site and online database were launched on a local server in November 2002 (<http://idp.nlc.gov.cn>). Institutions such as the NLC are founding members and full IDP partners. Local staff at the IDP Centre in Beijing add information about their collections into their local database and local photographers digitise the collections, using mutually agreed IDP standards and procedures (published online on http://idp.bl.uk/pages/technical_resources.a4d). Data are synchronised between the Chinese and English servers. The NLC images, apart from the reference thumbnails, are also kept on the NLC server.

IDP acts as a host for some institutions' collections. For example, the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin and the Freer Gallery in Washington DC both have three items from Dunhuang. They supplied IDP with large-format photographs of these, which IDP then scanned and added to its web site with cataloguing details. IDP also hosts images of the paintings from Dunhuang held in the British Museum and is just starting to add images of the textiles from the Chinese Silk Road in the Victoria and Albert Museum and other artefacts from the British Museum. In all cases the holding institution retains copyright on the images and there is a clear link on the IDP site to the institutions' own websites. Information on the participating institutions and their collections is on the advanced search page.

Other collaborations launched during the past two years involve the Institute of Oriental Studies in St. Petersburg, Ryukoku University in Kyoto, and the Staatsbibliothek and Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Berlin. The online Russian, Japanese and German versions of the IDP site are hosted by these institutions. IDP hopes to start similar collaborations with the Dunhuang Academy, the National

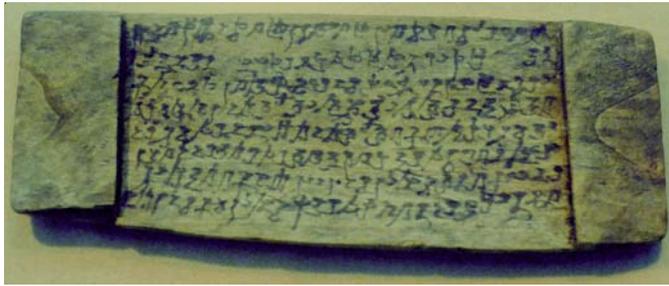


Fig. 4. Administrative document in Kharosthi script, found at Niya by Aurel Stein. National Museum, New Delhi. Photograph © Daniel C. Waugh 2001.

Museum, New Delhi [Fig. 4], the Museum for Indian Art, Berlin [Fig. 5], the Musée Guimet and the Bibliothèque nationale de France. At present, over 20,000 high-quality images are being added annually to the database, but this figure will be doubled if funds can be secured to upgrade equipment and expand existing staffing in the UK, China and Germany. IDP will add more institutions and include in its database small and private collections throughout the world.

Systematic cataloguing of this material is essential if it is to be a useful scholarly and educational resource. The Chinese Section at the British Library has been collaborating with Chinese scholars for three decades to make material more accessible. As a result, the previously unconserved and uncatalogued fragments from Dunhuang (Or.8210/S.6981 onwards) were all conserved in the 1980s and cataloguing taken on by Professors Rong Xinjiang (non-Buddhist material) and Fang Guangchang (Buddhist fragments). The first catalogue was completed in 1999 and Professor Fang's is nearing completion. Professor Sha Zhi has also recently completed his catalogue of Chinese fragments. Dr. Jake Dalton and Dr. Sam van Schaik's catalogue of the Tibetan tantric material is now online and will be published next year, Professor Tsuguhito Takeuchi has catalogued other non-Buddhist Tibetan material, and Professor Oktor Skjaervø has catalogued the Khotanese fragments. Work is now starting on the Sanskrit material. These are just some of the major projects on the British Library

and Loulan in the British Library collections. IDP has also started digitising Sanskrit, Khotanese and Tangut manuscripts and continues digitisation of the thousands of historical photographs and maps of the Silk Road and its sites made by Aurel Stein and others. IDP has achieved far more than it could possibly have expected when founded a decade ago, but the collections are so rich that much remains to be done.

All these scholars have agreed that their catalogues be available online, and the relaunched IDP website enables users to browse a catalogue and carry out full-text searches. It is important to apply internationally-accepted metadata to the online catalogues, and more will come online during 2006 as IDP staff complete this (the catalogues are prepared as XML documents). The catalogues offered will include "legacy" catalogues — those published from as early as the beginning of the twentieth century. Although some of the scholarship in these might now be superseded, they all contain much useful information and are an essential resource for any scholar. So, for example, by the middle of 2006 Stein's original entries on the Dunhuang paintings will be accessible alongside Fred Andrews' 1933 catalogue and Professor Roderick Whitfield's detailed 1982-1985 Kodansha publication. Moreover, any scholar working on items in the database is welcome to submit his/her research for online publication, and an XML template and instructions are available (http://idp.bl.uk/pages/technical_resources.a4d).

Apart from the continuing digitisation of Dunhuang Chinese materials in collections worldwide, work has been completed on the Tibetan woodslips from Miran and elsewhere, Chinese Hand-dynasty wood shavings from the Dunhuang limes, Tocharian tablets, and Kharosthi material from Niya

and Loulan in the British Library collections. IDP has also started digitising Sanskrit, Khotanese and Tangut manuscripts and continues digitisation of the thousands of historical photographs and maps of the Silk Road and its sites made by Aurel Stein and others. IDP has achieved far more than it could possibly have expected when founded a decade ago, but the collections are so rich that much remains to be done.

In addition to conservation and digitisation, IDP continues with scholarly work. In 2005 it completed a three-year collaborative research project to catalogue and digitise the Tibetan tantric manuscripts from Dunhuang. Carried out in conjunction with the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, this project by Dalton and van Schaik uncovered many surprising results, including the possibility that most of these manuscripts were transcribed in



Fig. 5. Leaf from a 8th-9th-century Manichaean book. Qocho, Temple K. Museum für Indische Kunst, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, MIK III 6368. Photograph © Daniel C. Waugh 2004.

the latter half of the tenth century by a small group of scribes. The manuscripts were previously generally assumed to date from the period of the Tibetan occupation of Dunhuang, from the mid-eighth to mid-ninth centuries. These results will form the basis of the just-started palaeographical research programme (see below).

Educational Outreach in the Years Ahead

Now the infrastructure and a significant body of material has been established, IDP is planning to reach out into the wider community by creating web-based educational resources — in local languages and with local teachers — and not only for higher education but also for school-children from Shanghai to Sacramento. One of the first IDP educational resources to go online was a history of Chinese book-binding, illustrated by Silk Road manuscripts and written and designed by Colin Chinnery. This continues to prove one of the most visited pages of the web site. Web pages on Dash, Stein's canine travelling companions, and on Buddhism in Central Asia, have been added in the past few years and also proved popular. The second of these has now been adapted by Sam van Schaik following his teaching of the subject at the School of Oriental and African Studies and will form the opening project on the "My IDP" personalised web space in early 2006. Educational outreach projects will be started with the Dunhuang Academy and the National Library of China for Chinese schoolchildren.

In 2005 IDP collaborated with the Gansu Basic Educational Project (GBEP; <http://www.gbep.org/en/about.asp>) to produce a bilingual booklet and DVD containing text, images, music, and video telling the story of Dunhuang. This is now being distributed to primary-school teachers in the poorest townships of Gansu and will give school-

children an opportunity to learn about their local history. This DVD uses some of the resources prepared by 12-18 year-olds as part of the 2004 Silk Road exhibition educational project. Next year IDP will collaborate with a European Union-funded project for children in schools throughout the EU. Also coming online in early 2006 will be the "Silk Road Quest," a web adventure for older children devised by Gizella Dewath.

In doing such projects IDP hopes to bring a greater awareness of this rich cultural legacy to the people of the region and others worldwide. The web database will be made even more accessible through the addition of the personalised web space, an interactive map interface, photographs, music, video clips and translations. We are looking to make new partnerships with organisations and institutions with expertise and presence in the region to maximise access and understanding of this material.

Cataloguing will continue, and during the period 2006-2008 IDP will also work with scholars and universities worldwide to create a new field of palaeographical studies for East Asian manuscripts. This will include a database of millions of Chinese characters and tens of thousands of Tibetan syllables digitally "cut out" from the manuscript images, along with full details about the physical aspects of the manuscripts, including laid and chain lines, type, colour and size of papers. The dataset will be freely available and be used by IDP used to test hypotheses about the date and provenance of the manuscripts. The tools prepared on this project, such as the cutting-out software, will also be freely available for others scholars to use.

Funding

From its inception, IDP has been an externally-funded project. The generosity of our supporters has enabled IDP to accomplish all that has been achieved to date,

and we would like to take this opportunity to say again how grateful we are for this. We are particularly delighted by the number of donors who have renewed their grants or made additional gifts.

In 2005 three major grants came to an end, and IDP has been actively fundraising to enable it to achieve its programme for the next five years. It has grants promised from the Leverhulme Trust (for the palaeographical project), the Ford Foundation (for promoting scholarly interaction between India, China and Russia), the Pidem Fund (for general IDP work) and from several other foundations for smaller amounts. In addition to grants from organisations, individual donations remain a vital element of IDP's funding (for a list see <http://idp.bl.uk/pages/supporterslist.html>). For example, these donations have given us the flexibility to enhance the catalogue in response to new technologies and requests from our users — as illustrated by "My IDP," the personalised IDP web space. Similarly, "Sponsor a Sutra" (<http://idp.bl.uk/forms/sponsorSutraChoice.a4d>) donations have enabled us to conserve and digitise a number of unique and fragile manuscripts, ensuring they can be accessed by scholars and the wider public now and in the future.

IDP now has a skilled and committed staff working worldwide and is within sight of its primary objective of finally making the Dunhuang and other Silk Road manuscripts, paintings, textiles and artefacts readily available to all. However, IDP urgently needs to secure further funding to realise this. IDP can celebrate its achievements of its first ten years. It is hoped that funds are soon forthcoming to ensure that the full potential of these is realised over the next five.

About the Author

Susan Whitfield is Director of the IDP and author of several books,

including *Life along the Silk Road* (1999), *Aurel Stein on the Silk Road* (2004) and a forthcoming *Historical Dictionary of Exploration of the Silk Road*. She edited the catalogue for the British Library's Silk Road exhibition which she helped organize in 2004, *The Silk Road: Trade, Travel, War and Faith*, a volume which contains a number of stimulating essays presenting the results of new research in the material IDP is making accessible.

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How you may support IDP

Details of IDP's funding appeal can be found on http://idp.bl.uk/pages/about_funding.a4d. All donations are greatly appreciated and put directly to the work of IDP. It is possible to make a donation to cover a specific area of IDP's work, such as sponsoring a digitisation team, sponsoring a new camera for China, or sponsoring conservation and digitisation of a specific group of items, such as Khotanese manuscripts, textiles, Chinese sutras, Kizil murals, Tibetan pothi or Tangut fragments. Please contact Susan Whitfield at the address below if you would like to discuss these or other areas of sponsorship. We need your support.

IDP, The British Library,
96 Euston Road,
London NW1 2DB, UK
tel: +44 (0)20 7412 7319,
fax: +44 (0)20 7412 7858,
email: idp@bl.uk
<http://idp.bl.uk>



Fig. 6. Façade of Mogao Caves, including Cave 96, photographed in 1908 by Charles Nouette. Source: Mission Pelliot en Asie Centrale. Les Grottes de Touen-Houang (Paris: Geuthner, 1914; facsimile ed. 1997).

Monuments in the Desert: A Note on Economic and Social Roots of the Development of Buddhism along the Silk Road

Connie Chin
Stanford University

To develop into a social institution, a religion must have economic as well as religious roots. This paper will discuss material, much of it found at Dunhuang, which demonstrates the economic base on which the Buddhist religion grew and became an integral part of life along the Silk Road. Along the way it was flavored by diverse ethnic groups, languages, and gender relations, as is revealed in the archaeological, art, and documentary evidence.

Beginning as a reaction against Hinduism and rejecting attachment to all things, Buddhism, paradoxically, spread along the routes of commerce and began to develop into a facet of urban, commercial culture in the Kushan empire, that covered a territory which is now northern India, western Pakistan, and Afghanistan. During the transition to Mahayana Buddhism in the Kushan area, the Buddha began to take on supernatural power; thus worshipping relics of the Buddha could bring blessings to the faithful. Stupas built to contain the Buddha's relics spread across northern India. Though the monks in these days were forbidden to worship relics, the laity was encouraged to pay for the construction of stupas and their decoration, as well as for the fundamental requirement to provide food and housing for the monks.

Some Mahayana scriptures, such as the *Mahavastu*, claimed that worship of and donations to a Buddha offered tangible benefits. For example, a king who built a

palace full of precious things for the Buddha could claim Buddhahood from this act of merit. In this text, the main items used in honoring a Buddha consisted of the exotic merchandise later traded extensively along the Silk Road: pearls, coral, lapis lazuli, and other precious substances were used as religious gifts [Liu 1988, p. 93]. The decoration of Buddhist monuments with silk was encouraged by the *Mahavastu* as well, leading believers to decorate stupas with thousands of silk banners. The items most valued in society changed to include the seven treasures needed for Buddhist worship. The worship of bodhisattvas, future buddhas who could use their accumulated merit to help the faithful, by extension implied that merit, like goods, could be transferred to others or exchanged for good deeds or donations.

Buddhism had spread rapidly across the trade routes all the way to China by the Han Dynasty. In the first century, however, Buddhist communities seem to have been mostly foreign families dwelling in urban centers. By the second century CE, missionaries were translating the sutras in Luoyang. The noted translator-monk Dharmaraksha's ancestors were Yuezhi people who had immigrated to Dunhuang a few generations before. The Parthian merchant An Xuan joined An Shigao, a monk, in translating the sutras, a reminder of the commercial nature of the foreign community and the close relationship between Buddhist

missionaries and merchants [Liu 1988, p. 140]. The Parthians, Yuezhi and Indians mentioned from this time probably all came from Kushana and followed the commercial routes through Central Asia into China.

Construction of Buddhist caves and statues increased during the third and fourth centuries, reaching its peak during the Northern dynasties. There is a historical record of cave cutting in 397 CE in Liangzhou, and the Dunhuang caves were started in the fourth or fifth century. The first caves were sponsored by the Former Liang, a dynasty that administered a vast territory from the Hexi corridor, beyond Dunhuang, stretching into Gaochang (Turfan). In this area resided diverse peoples, including Han, the Turkic Xiongnu and Xianbei, Jie (who were perhaps Indoscythians), Qing and Di, who were related to Tibetans and Tanguts [Howard 2000, p. 242]. As stations along the Silk Road, the Former Liang cities were places where differing cultures interacted.

There are fourteen votive pillars dating to the Liang period which portray the synthesis of



Fig. 1. Votive pilla, Qocho Ruin E (MIK III 6838). Museum für Indische Kunst, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin. Photograph © Daniel C. Waugh 2004.

Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism that developed in the third century. For example, one artifact [analogous to that in Fig. 1 (p. 8) but not shown here], was donated by a patron named Gao Shanmu and dated 428 CE. It has several sections, with a bottom frieze showing four males and four females; incised above each is a trigram from the *Yijing*, a Confucian text. The writing above that is an early Buddhist text, the *Ekottaragga* sutra. Above that is a band of Buddhas, and it is topped by the constellation of the Dipper (a Daoist symbol) on its rounded summit [Howard 2000, p. 255; Juliano and Lerner 2001, pp. 152-155].

This cultural melding is reflected in some of the earliest caves. Wenshushan [Fig. 2] in Hexi and later, Cave 285 at Dunhuang, include cells on the sides, which were likely used as meditation enclosures similar to the Indian site at Ajanta. Syncretic Daoist, Indian, and Buddhist themes crowd Western Wei Cave 285, which is dated 538 and 539 CE. On the ceiling, a central jewel is flanked by serpentine beings, one holding a builder's square (Fuxi) and the other a compass (Nuwa), early Chinese deities [Fig. 3]. Thunder gods, birds and phoenixes, some with Daoist immortals riding them, sweep across the ceiling. Indian deities,

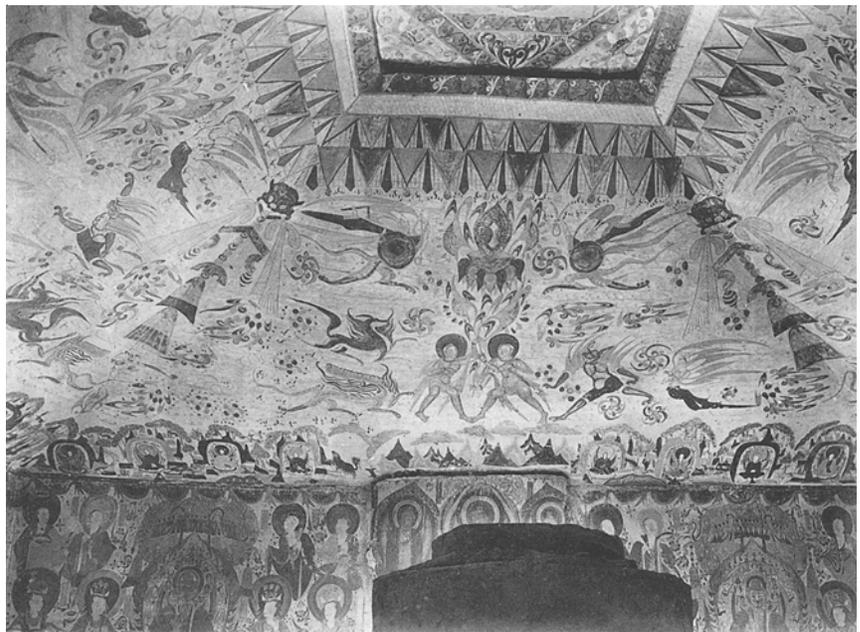


Fig. 3. East slope of ceiling of Mogao Cave 285, photographed in 1908 by Charles Nouette. Source: Mission Pelliot en Asie Centrale. Les Grottes de Touen-Houang (Paris: Geuthner, 1914; facsimile ed. 1997).

including Siva, Vishnu and Ganesa, flank the main Buddha niche on the west wall. The dated inscriptions on the wall are flanked on the right by male donors in Tuoba Xianbei-style clothing, and on the left, by women in long, striped skirts, with larger figures of monks [Whitfield 1995, p. 42].

As time went on, Buddhism became more and more integrated into Chinese society. Although there was a brief period of persecution, in the Northern Wei

dynasty, the Xianbei rulers used Buddhism to lend themselves legitimacy. Buddhist institutions, in turn, garnered political and economic support from the Northern Wei emperors. Much Buddhist building activity took place. The Northern Wei emperors honored Buddhist teachers as they tried to control them. Emperor Dao Wu appointed Faguo as Head of Monks, and Faguo responded by calling the emperor the modern-day Buddha. The rulers and the monasteries generally lived in harmony because the Buddhists submitted to the government. As the years passed, the number of monks and monasteries began to increase, and the Wei rulers found it difficult to rein them in. In the early 460s a monk from Liangzhou named Tan Yao became Head of Monks. He began the excavation of the earliest caves at Yungang, and had five gigantic statues of Buddha carved out of the cliff, thought now to represent the five emperors of the Northern Wei as incarnations of the Buddha. He requested permission from the Wei emperor to take war captives from Shandong as tenants for Buddhist monasteries, and called them



Fig. 2. Wenshushan. Photograph © Daniel C. Waugh 1998.

"sangha households." Each of these households paid "sangha grain" to the local office of monks. Tan Yao also asked to convert some criminals and slaves to "Buddha households," whose members cleaned or cultivated land for the monasteries [Wei Shou, tr. Hurvitz 1956, p. 73].

Emperors and empress-dowagers patronized Buddhism by building monasteries and conducting ceremonies. The first monastery built by the Northern Wei rulers was the Yungningsi in Pingcheng in 476 CE, a landmark of the capital city with its seven-story stupa. Princes of the royal family contributed the largest amount of money for monastery construction. In the Northern Wei capital of Luoyang, some residences were changed posthumously into monasteries. The many royal widows and concubines were sequestered in nunneries when the princes or rulers died, a frequent occurrence due to the constant warfare of the time. Government ministers, eunuchs, and even the imperial guards built monasteries. Of six monasteries built by eunuchs in Luoyang, five were nunneries [Yang, tr. Jenner 1981, p. 231].

The adoption of Buddhism in China opened up new roles for women. Traditionally confined to the roles of daughter, wife, mother, and mother-in-law, women were offered in Buddhist institutions new alternatives outside family life. In Buddhist nunneries women could be educated to read and copy sutras, to manage businesses and keep accounts, as well as fulfill their primary duty of worship and meditation. As Yang Hsuan-chih describes the Hu-tung Nunnery (Nunnery of the Chief of Tuoba Monks) founded by the aunt of the Northern Wei empress dowager Wenming, "The nuns here were among the most renowned and accomplished in the imperial city, skillful at preaching and discussing Buddhist principles. They often came to the palace to lecture on Dharma for the empress dowager,

whose patronage of Buddhists and laymen was without equal" [Yang, tr. Wang 1984, p. 56].

The de facto ruler of the Northern Wei dynasty at the time Buddhism became a state religion was Empress Dowager Wenming, who was Chinese. Empress Dowager Wenming was the driving force behind the imperial chapels at Yungang. A later Empress Dowager, Lady Ling, was a central figure in Northern Wei court politics, from making policies to appointing officials. She also was a lavish benefactor of Buddhism before a coup resulted in her being thrown into the Yellow River and drowned. Of course, the greatest woman ruler in China was Empress Wu Zetian. During her rule in the Tang dynasty, the largest Buddha statue in Dunhuang, which faces the visitor upon approaching the Mogao caves, was constructed [Fig. 4]. This 99-foot high image of the future Buddha Maitreya



Fig. 4. Head of the Maitreya Buddha of Mogao Cave 96. Photograph © Tese Neighbor.

reveals a woman's bodily form and clothing [Fig. 5; Ning 2004, p. 115]. Ning Qiang has argued that Cave 96, containing the huge sculpture, is a local confirmation about the legitimacy of the rule of Wu Zitian and an example of how social and political issues were addressed through religious art.

Basing their activities on the Indian models of the Kushan state, the monks of the Northern Wei dynasty spent their time encouraging donations and conducting rituals. Faxian and other Chinese

pilgrims witnessed Buddhist ceremonies in India, visited monumental buildings dating back to the Kushan king Kanishka, and carried Buddhist writings back to China. The information they brought back encouraged Chinese Buddhists to finance rituals, cave temples, and statues.

The Buddhist monasteries launched a large-scale votary movement. The Northern Wei donors expected to receive benefits for their future lives and for their deceased relatives in return for their donations. One of the favorite subjects of murals was the Tushita heaven, or the Western Land of Bliss of Amitabha, themes that are common subjects in cave art of the time. From a study of dated inscriptions of the Northern dynasties, we find the most common expected beneficiaries were the donor's direct relatives, especially parents. The second group of primary beneficiaries was emperors, and other statues were dedicated to empress-dowagers, court officials, local administrators, religious teachers, and lay associations. While the royal family and ministers and officials patronized the large-scale construction, in one study it appears that common people donated 48% of the statues, followed by monks and nuns (19.7%) and donors' collectives (18.9%) [Sato Chisui, "Study of Votive Inscriptions on Buddhist Statues in the Northern Dynasties," cited in Liu 1988, p. 163]. The Buddhist associations were



Fig. 5. The Maitreya Buddha of Mogao Cave 96, from below. Photograph © Tese Neighbor.

organized to collect donations. Some associations had strong family and territorial ties, while some appeared to be urban-based groups, but they seem to have incorporated several social strata in their ranks.

Buddhist institutions played a role in social activities, such as festivals, and were widely supported by the society. A description of a Buddha's Birthday celebration in Northern Wei depicts a thousand images from various monasteries paraded through the streets of Luoyang, attracting large crowds as they competed in splendor with each other [Yang, tr. Wang 1984, p. 46]. The golden carriage of Jingxing nunnery was covered by a canopy hung with golden bells and beads of the seven treasures, so valuable that the imperial guards were called upon to carry it. As the parade of images stopped at the gate of the palace, the emperor bestowed flowers upon them. Acrobats and dancers accompanied the images, as the people emptied out the marketplaces in order to see the parade.

Monasteries had received land from donors as early as 420 CE, when an official named Fan Tai built the Qihuan Monastery and donated sixty *mou* (about .14 acre) of fruit and bamboo groves for its upkeep [Gaosengzhuàn 7, T 50.368c, in Ch'en 1973, p. 126]. The Sui Emperor Wen donated 100 *qing* (one *qing* equals 100 *mou*, or about 14 acres) of land to the Shaolin Monastery at the foot of sacred Mt. Song [*Chin-shih ts'ui-pien*, 77.16b, in Ch'en 1973, p. 126]. The monks themselves were forbidden to till the land [*Pai-chang ch'ing-kuei, Record Sayings*, in Ch'en 1973, p. 148].¹ The Buddhist *Vinaya, Rules of Discipline*, prohibits farming by monks, on the grounds that farming harms living things in the earth, and even watering plants harms life contained in the water. This meant that in most cases cultivation was done by tenant farmers or temple slaves, sometimes called *qing ren*,

or "pure people" because they spared the monks the impure tasks of farming, handling gold and silver, and trading in goods.

In the early part of the Northern Wei dynasty, the local monasteries at Dunhuang must have been modest and rather inconspicuous [Soper 1958, p. 157]. Dunhuang was not yet a great pilgrimage center, and the monks must have toiled away at their tasks in relative isolation, a few miles south of the great east-west trade route of the Silk Road. However, by the mid-Tang dynasty, as elsewhere in China where Buddhist institutions controlled so much land that they were regularly attacked in memorials to the throne as parasites on society, the Dunhuang monasteries had become an important part of the local economy, owning land, lending money, and operating grain mills and oil presses.

Documents from the famous Library Cave of Dunhuang, carried off by Marc Aurel Stein and Paul Pelliot to Europe, demonstrate the role that Buddhist institutions played in the Dunhuang economy. For example, there is evidence that monks and nuns owned and bought property, including slaves. A contract from the Library Cave [Pelliot 1297, in Wang 1983, p. 59, tr. Ernest and Connie Chin] reads,

Year of the sheep, spring, Shang Liesang and Shang [illegible] at General Headquarters. Bhiksu (monk) Zhang Benjia from Caiduo tribe... purchased a horse. It is a young horse, with a white forelock and color pattern like leaves and spots on a domino. Should any dispute regarding the horse arise, Jiazala Zan will be the responsible party. In order to forestall disagreements we make this contract. If the horse's body has no disfigurement or damage, it will be immediately handed over to the monk Zhang Benjia. If the horse changes hair color or pattern in the summer, one of

the witnesses will immediately be found to modify the contract. This transaction is acknowledged by both parties. Silver of recognized purity, five ounces, is to be paid to the seller. In case Zan is dispatched on state duties or is not at home, a witness can act on his behalf. The old contract will be kept by Monk Benjia.

Witnesses from Jiaza tribe

Mazhu (owner of the horse)
thumb print

Ying nuo ren (purchaser)
thumb print

Yadengsu Zan
official seal

A legal dispute about a young slave named Li Yang Bei showed that he was also purchased for five ounces of silver [Pelliot 1081, in Wang 1983, p. 48]. While lengths of cloth, grain, and oil were the currency used for lesser purchases, apparently horses and people were bought with silver.

Another legal document depicts a lawsuit against a nun, in which intergenerational tensions are revealed as much as a property rights dispute [Pelliot 1080, in Wang 1983, p. 48, tr. Ernest and Connie Chin]:

The case of nun's adopted daughter

"In the past, in the Year of the Rabbit, near two tribes, Yufanbo and Tuihun, many people suffered from cold and hunger, waiting to die. When it was snowing in the city of Shazhou, a poor person carrying a bundled up one year old baby came to my door and said, 'The baby's mother has died and I have no strength to raise her. She will die in a few more days. You can take her as your adopted daughter or take her as a female slave, either is all right.' Out of pity I adopted her. Like a twinkling of an eye, twenty years have passed. The girl is now twenty-one. Now, because of [?], the Kung family

has instigated the girl's changing her mind and she has threatened me, saying, 'My maternal uncle is Ni Baitso.' A woman came from the Tongjia Yamen [office concerned with matters between Han and tribal peoples], and the girl claimed it was her mother. They talked like people insane. The girl also was not keen on working as hard as before. Because of this I appeal to you to render judgment that the girl belongs to me as designated by the agreement. No one will be able to ask for her, and no one should do harm. I earnestly ask you to issue an order with the official seal."

Instruction: "According to the adoption agreement, she is not free to select a master. She must follow the original agreement."

Because of the availability of scribes and the moral authority lent to contracts signed there, temples in the ancient world were a main site for writing contracts, exchanging money, and lending money. This was true in Greek temples, the temple in Jerusalem, and in Buddhist monasteries. The *Mahasanghikavinaya* sutra justifies this kind of commercial activity, saying that if goods donated to the sangha were not consumed by the monks and nuns, the surplus could be sold or loaned out to earn a profit, to be used to support the sangha and Buddhist facilities.

This was the scriptural basis of the *wu-jin-tsang*, or "Inexhaustible Treasury," a kind of Buddhist savings bank of donations by the faithful which became a flourishing commercial institution in the Tang dynasty. The revenues of the Inexhaustible Treasury were used to repair Buddhist temples and monasteries, to relieve the sufferings of the poor, and for offerings to the Buddha [*Taiping kuang-chi*, 493.4047 (Peking 1959), in Ch'en, 1973, p. 163].

Many documents from the Library Cave at Dunhuang give details about commercial

transactions at the monasteries. Examples are a contract for the loan of beans, with an interest rate of 50%, and a contract for a loan of silk, with a default penalty, which was double the amount borrowed [Stein 1475 and Pelliot 3004 and 3472, cited in Ch'en 1973, pp. 165-167]. Perhaps, as in central China, the Dunhuang monasteries served as pawnbrokers, or repositories where local patrons could keep their wealth. One document from the British Library Dunhuang Archives website is an inventory of cloth and grain, perhaps of donations. Part of it says [Fig. 6; IDP, BL Or. 8210/S.5691/R.1, tr. Ernest and Connie Chin]:

Zhang Yangde
presents
diagonal weave coarse wool
cloth, 2 *zhang* 2 *chi*

Zhang Ande
total presents
diagonal weave coarse wool
cloth, 2 *zhang* 5 *chi*
diagonal weave coarse wool
cloth, 1 *zhang* 2 *chi*

Monk Dingxing
total presents
Gaocheng coarse wool, 2
zhang 7 *chi*.²

Early industrial projects were carried out either by rich and powerful families or by monasteries, which had access to the large amounts of capital which were required. One of the most profitable and widespread enterprises was the water-powered mill, or *nien wei*, which ground grain to produce flour.

Several Dunhuang documents are accountants' reports on income derived from mills owned by local monasteries.³ For a ten-year period between 924 and 945 CE, Pelliot manuscripts 2032, 2040, 2049 and 3234 show rent earned by Qingtu Monastery from its milling installations yielded more than 60 *shih* of flour annually [Gernet 1995, p.146].⁴ In addition, it received 18 *shih* of bran used as feed for horses and 5-18 *shih* of coarse flour (*tsu mien*) that the gauze sieves had not allowed to pass, which was used to feed the female workforce at the monastery [Gernet 1995, p. 355].⁵ Gernet estimates that half of this amount would have provided the needs of the religious community at Qingtu with its population of fifty to seventy monks at that time.

The flour was also used as a medium of exchange and sold to the laity. The monasteries had to

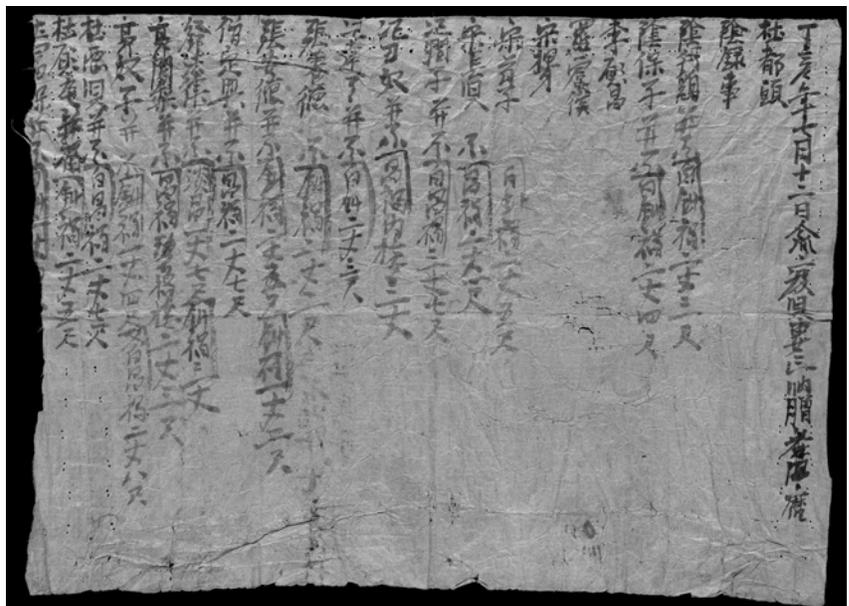


Fig. 6. Account Note, BL Or. 8210/S.5691/R.1. Photograph © The British Library, used with permission. All rights reserved.

pay artisans, hold banquets for officials and lay associations, and provide for monks traveling through the region. There were many feast days on the Buddhist calendar, which involved not a trivial amount of expense.

The mills were owned by the monasteries, but maintained by professional millwrights. Banquets, to which the millwrights were invited, celebrated the end of repair work and opening of the sluice gates. A document from Anguo nunnery shows the accounts of the abbess for the year 886, including expenditures of .3 *shih* of millet, .5 *sheng* of oil, and .1 *shih* of wheat for a banquet on the occasion of the opening of the sluice gates [Pelliot 3107, in Gernet 1995, p.147].

Oil presses at Dunhuang were another source of income for the religious communities. Oil was one of the most precious commodities,

much in demand for lamps burning in the Buddha Hall, illuminations that frequently took place at the monasteries, and for cooking. In addition, oil served as currency. According to documents from Dunhuang, one Chinese liter of oil was worth 30 *chi* (feet) of cloth. A foot of cloth was worth six liters of cereals, so the value of a liter of oil was approximately 180 liters of millet or wheat [Gernet 1995, p. 355]. The oil presses were operated by specialized households, which paid the monasteries rent spelled out in contracts [Pelliot 2032, 2040, 2049, 3234, in Gernet 1995, p. 355]. An example of expenditures denominated in oil comes from Pelliot 3234: .0015 *shih* for a quilted gown and a meal; .05 *shih* of oil for the sculptor-artisan Ling Hu and workers who coated the walls [Gernet 1995, p. 151].

Cave 317 at Dunhuang (Middle

Tang, 825-830 CE) has a lovely wall mural showing these commodities as used in daily life in the courtyard of a monastery [Whitfield 1995: Vol. 1, p. 214]. At the back of the courtyard is a Buddha figure with bodhisattvas on either side. Two monks sit in the corners, one reading from a sutra. In the middle of the courtyard a long silk banner flies from a pole, and a monk stands beneath the banner reaching up to place an oil lamp on a five-wheeled candelabra, preparing for an illumination. A huge amount of food, including noodles and flat cakes, is piled on a large table to one side, attended by laymen

carrying bowls. The people in the mural are probably preparing for a vegetarian feast, one of the activities sponsored several times a month by lay organizations.

The Buddhist lay associations were attached to monasteries and assisted in various programs to spread the religion among the populace. They helped organize and fund the numerous festivals, often centered around popular sutra lectures by eloquent monks. The Dunhuang manuscripts are replete with papers and fragments which contain information on the lay societies and their activities. A whole category of manuscripts on the British Museum's Dunhuang Archives website is devoted to this type of material, which they label "club circulars." A typical one reads [Fig. 7; IDP, BL Or. 8210/S.6066/R.1, tr. Ernest and Connie Chin]:

You gentlemen are invited on the 24th of this month in the early morning (6-8 AM) to meet at the door of Yaming Temple to present contributions. If late, the fine will be one beaker of wine. If no show, the fine will be one half container of wine. This notice must be passed on quickly with the accompanying document. If late, you will be fined.

Ren Zhen Year, 4th month, 23rd day

Clerk Kung

Notice copied to 13 names listed.

Another such notice was sent to the membership of a lay association on the occasion of Buddha's Birthday [IDP, BL Or.8210/S.5813/R.1, tr. Ernest and Connie Chin]:

Circular

Second month. Buddha's Birthday Celebration.

From officer in charge of the association, Kung Zi Sheng:

On the 20th day of this month before evening, deliver one *dou* and five *sheng* of wheat and two *sheng* of millet. This notice must be immediately circulated

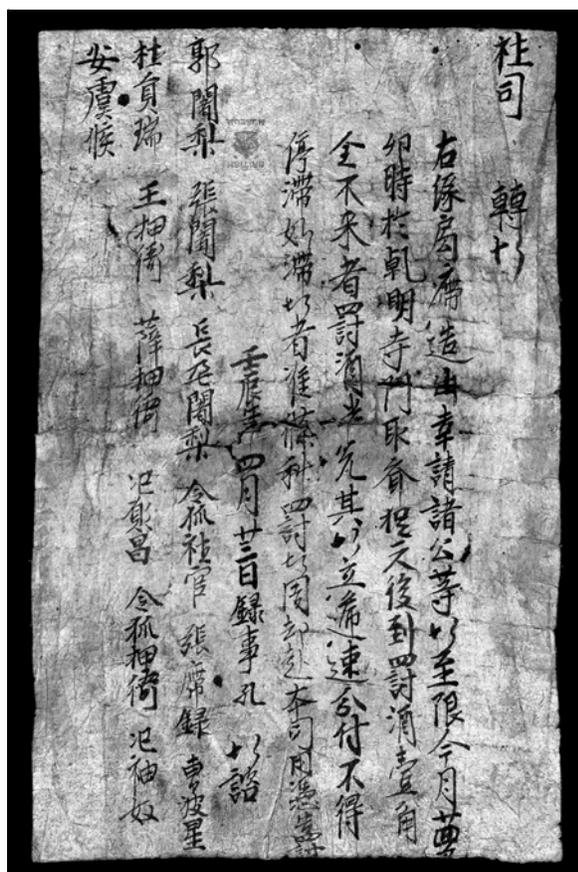


Fig. 7. "Club circular," BL Or.8210/S.6066/R.1. Photograph © The British Library, used with permission. All rights reserved.

and must not stop or you will be fined.

Signed

She Guan (officer of association), Song

She Zhang (officer of association), Zhang.

Both Song and Zhang have initialed it with the word *zhi* 知 "acknowledged."

Most lay supporters, of course, were ordinary people. One document in the British Library describes a society of fifteen Buddhist women founded by a nun for the promotion of friendship among women [Stein 527, in Ch'en 1973, p. 288]. Dated 959, the document opens with a statement that

our parents give birth to this body but friends increase its value; in times of danger we support each other; in times of misfortune we rescue each other. In dealing with friends, our words are to be trustworthy. Older members are to act as older sisters; young ones as younger sisters, paying deference to the older ones. The regulations are established with the mountains and rivers as witnesses.

On feast days, members were required to contribute oil, wine, and flour.

In the first moon the society devotes a day for ensuring happiness. On this day, each member is bound to give a bundle of millet and to fill an oil lamp. The group then proceeds to produce stupas by molding and to place images of Buddha on the sand in order both to render a great homage to the ruler and to accumulate blessings for parents [Hou Ching-lang, 1984, p. 46, in Whitfield 1995, p. 282].

The document adds that, having joined the group, a member would be bamboozed three times if she wished to leave, and forced to give a feast for the others.

Indeed, it is striking how many women donors appear in wall murals in the caves. Often there are as many women donors depicted as there are men. Women appear in nomad dress in the earlier caves, and in Chinese dress in some later caves. They are both lay and monastic, wealthy and ordinary people.

The Buddhist peoples of Inner Asia and China, like the Greeks and Romans, early Christians and many others, apparently also felt the need for a female deity or deities. The most important feminine icon, the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, or Guanyin, was transformed from a male to a female on the long trip along the Silk Road and over the centuries. Two Tang Caves at Dunhuang, 45 and 194, show the Bodhisattva's different genders. In Cave 45 [Fig. 8, p. 15] Avalokitesvara is male, protecting a merchant caravan "carrying valuable treasures by a precipitous road in an infinity of lands full of bandits" [Cartouche quoting the *Lotus Sutra* in the wall painting in Cave 45, tr. Whitfield 1995: Vol. II, p. 316]. In Cave 194 Avalokitesvara is depicted as the epitome of plump female beauty, arrayed in the most elegant of High Tang feminine apparel, with only a faint green moustache showing the transition from the other gender. Thus the bodhisattva of mercy not only appealed to women, but became a woman.

This is just one of many aspects of a changing society depicted in the thousand-year history of Buddhist grottoes along the Silk Road. In the material from Dunhuang we can trace the symbiotic development of the Buddhist religion and economic and political changes that occurred along the nearby trade routes over the centuries. Buddhist teachings affected what was carried along the Silk Road. These trade goods include precious stones and silk banners used in worship, and minerals used in Buddhist art. Rulers used Buddhist tenets to acquire legitimacy for themselves,

and Buddhist institutions flourished under their patronage, becoming an integral part of society and economy. People from all walks of life were involved in Buddhist institutions, participating in rituals, donating goods and time, and enjoying feast days. Many women took part, and developed in roles outside the family as Buddhist institutions granted new spaces for them in society. Acts of Buddhist devotion, patronage, and politics caused works of great art to be created and sustained, finally to be left buried in desert sand, a panoramic fusion of the cultures of many peoples who lived and traveled along the Silk Road.

About the Author

Connie Chin works at the Center for East Asian Studies at Stanford University. A graduate of Oberlin College, she studied Chinese at Chinese University of Hong Kong while writing for the *South China Morning Post*. She also taught English at Tunghai University in Taiwan, where she began to study classical Chinese. She is intrigued by Silk Road cultures and loves to read early Chinese history. E-mail: <csquare@stanford.edu>.

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Notes

1. An exception to this was the Chan school, whose leader, Huai Hai, had a slogan, "One day no work, one day no food."
2. One *chi* is about 30 cm. One *zhang* is 10 *chi*, or 3 meters.
3. Such reports were presented at the end of each year to the assembly of monks at the relevant monastery. The famous Japanese pilgrim monk Ennin described such a session at the Zusheng Monastery in Chang-an in 840.
4. A *shih* (or *dan*) is about a bushel, the amount a person could carry on his back.
5. Pelliot 2049 contains the amount of *tsu mien* in the year 930 which was expended on women who were employed to sew canopies and make a bonnet for the head of a bodhisattva in Qingtu Monastery.

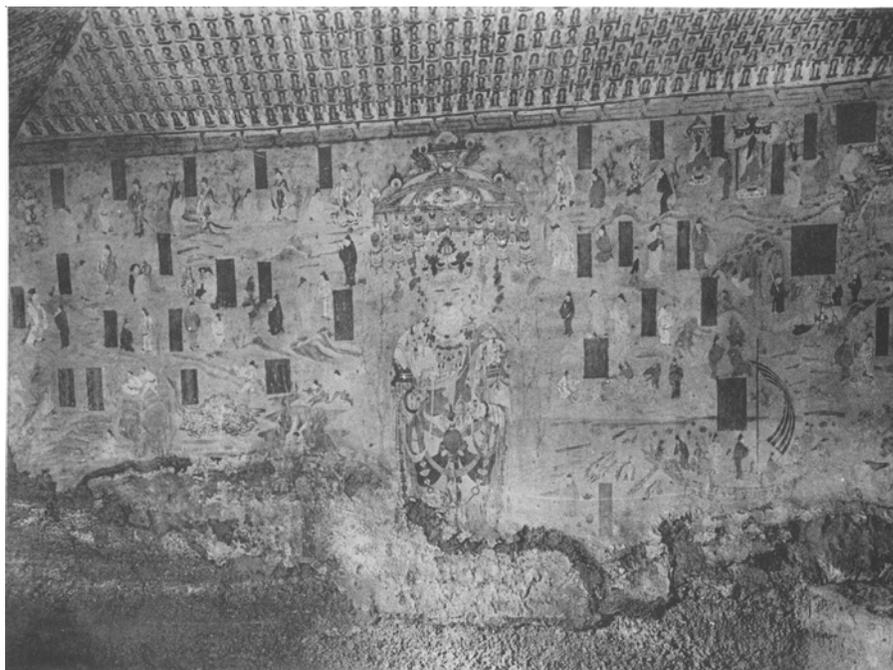


Fig. 8. Avalokitesvara with scenes of the bodhisattva's miraculous intervention, illustrating the Lotus Sutra. Dunhuang Mogao Cave 45, photographed in 1908 by Charles Nouette. Source: Mission Pelliot en Asie Centrale. *Les Grottes de Touen-Houang* (Paris: Geuthner, 1914; facsimile ed. 1997).

Solidi in China and Monetary Culture along the Silk Road

Lin Ying 林英
Zhongshan University,
Guangzhou, China

In the summer of 1953, a group of archaeologists from the Shanxi Institute of Historical Relics and Archaeology arrived at Dizangwan, a small village near Xianyang city, where they excavated the tomb of Dugu Luo (534-599), a high official in the Sui period (581-618). The yellow soil yielded a small gold coin [Fig. 1], quite different in

from a seventh-century hoard, the others are all from tombs. The tomb occupants who once owned these gold coins were of various social classes, ranging from a princess of the Rouran (Juan-Juan) qaghanate and leader of the Central Asian immigrant community to a small landlord or wealthy citizen. Their chronology

circumstances were they sent from Constantinople? Who carried them to the Far East and for what purpose? How did the contemporary Chinese treat these exotics?

From 1959 to 1977 Xia Nai published on these finds three articles in which he examined the chronology and epigraphy of these coins and discussed their significance for studying Byzantine relations with China in the early middle ages [Xia Nai 1959; 1961; 1977]. In 1988, the Japanese scholar Otani Nakao examined for Central Asia and China the burial custom of the obolus, that is, the coin in the mouth of the deceased [Otani Nakao 1990]. Whereas Xia

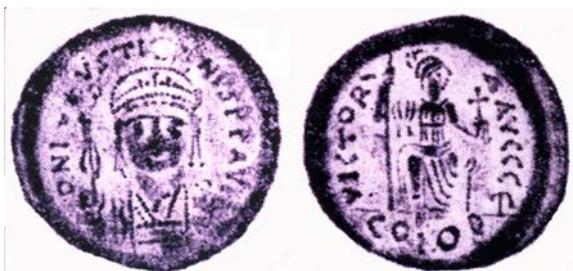


Fig. 1. Solidus of Justin II unearthed at Dizhangwan.



Fig. 2. Kaiyuan tongbao, Chinese copper coin of the Tang period.

appearance from ancient Chinese coins [Fig. 2]. When it was sent to Beijing the following year to display in a national exhibition of newly discovered artifacts, the noted archaeologist and historian Xia Nai identified it as a solidus of Byzantine emperor Justin II (565-578). Although some evidence of Byzantine coins and their imitations had been unearthed in Xinjiang in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries [Thierry and Morrisson 1994, pp. 110-111], the discovery in 1953 was the first such in central China. Since the discovery of that solidus of Justin II nearly fifty Byzantine gold coins and their imitations have been recovered or collected in China. They are distributed from Liaoning, across Inner Mongolia, Shanxi, Gansu, Henan and Hebei provinces, to Xinjiang, roughly forming a crescent in north China [Fig. 3]. Except for one gold coin

concentrates in the period of Northern Dynasties, the Sui and early Tang, i.e. from the late sixth century to the first half of the eighth century. These Byzantine gold coins have already raised a series of questions deserving further exploration. Under what

Nai had concluded that the burial custom of the obolus, which prevailed from the Han to the Tang periods in Turfan, Xinjiang, had originated in inner China, Otani argued that it came from Central Asia. The discussion of these coins continued in the 1990s when



Fig. 3. Map showing geographical distribution of Byzantine gold coins across northern China. © Lin Ying.

François Thierry and Cecile Morriesson published a detailed catalogue of 27 specimens of solidi and their imitations so far unearthed in China [Thierry and Morriesson 1994]. In contrast to the thousands of Sasanian silver coins excavated in China, the finds of Byzantine gold coins are limited. Given this fact, they concluded that the presence of the solidus in China might not indicate a direct and frequent connection between the Byzantine Empire and China, but instead an uncertain relationship. Since their article of 1994, additional Byzantine coins and studies of them have been published in Chinese, among them the monograph by the present author [Lin Ying 2004].

In general, before the 1980s, most scholars considered these finds as evidence for the frequent connection between Byzantium and China, which could further be associated with the seven visits of Fulin (Rum) emissaries recorded in Tang literature. After the 1980s, more and more researchers tended to connect these gold coins not with official embassies but rather with the prosperous international trade along Silk Road. In their opinion, it was possibly Sogdians, rather than Byzantines, who carried these coins to China in exchange for silk. Clearly the finds in China are not isolated and can be connected with the events along



Fig. 4. Gold solidus of Justin I and Justinian II, 527 CE, found in tomb of Tian Hong (d. 575) at Guyuan. Photograph © Luo Feng, used with permission.

the Silk Road in early medieval times. The route by which they traveled to China began in the Byzantine Empire. However, it is only by examining the various

intermediate links between Constantinople and Chang'an that one can sort out the channels for the eastward flow of solidi and thus understand the role of solidi and their imitations in China.

According to the scholarship so far published, the Byzantine gold coins and their imitations in China fall roughly into three categories:

- (1) official solidi struck in Constantinople, bearing clear images and legends and weighing 4.5 grams;
- (2) imitations of solidi resembling the real ones in weight and image, whose prototypes thus can be established;
- (3) gold bracteates, struck on a very thin flan (unstamped metal disk) or with only one die, weighing less than 2 grams, and unlikely to have had a monetary function.

The first group of coins, i.e. official solidi, were all buried in graves from 575 CE (the seventh year of the Wuping period, Northern Qi Dynasty) to 621 CE (the fourth year of the Wude period, Tang Dynasty). Each grave

contains more than one solidus, the greatest number so far recovered being the five specimens found in the tomb of Tian Hong [Fig. 4; see also Juliano and Lerner 2001, pp. 282-285]. The owners of these coins were either the emperor's trusted officials or relatives of the royal family. Furthermore, the fact that most of the finds are in tombs located in the contemporary political center indicates that Byzantine gold coins

had entered the heartland of China from the mid-sixth century to the early seventh century. It is possible that the qaghans of the Rouran and Turks obtained these solidi as diplomatic gifts from Roman caesars and then sent them to Chinese emperors to show the hegemony of steppe people in Eurasia.

The imitations of solidi in the second group embrace a variety of specimens. The initial discoveries of such were by Sven Hedin in Khotan in 1896 [Montell 1938, pp. 94-95] and by Aurel Stein in the Astana Cemetary in the Turfan region in 1915, where the two



Fig. 5. Imitation of a solidus of Leo I, found in Huangzhou.

examples were used as oboli in the mouths of the deceased [Stein 1916, p. 205; Thierry and Morriesson 1994, p. 111; Wang 2002, pp. 72, 339; Wang 2004, p. 29, fig. 7]. The imitations range from the barbarized rough imitations that follow the official solidi in weight and size to counterfeits that look quite "real" but can be easily recognized by their reduced weight and diameter [Fig. 5]. These finds have raised most interesting questions about the craftsmanship and usage. In order to answer these questions, they need to be compared with similar finds along the entire Silk Road, from Central Asia, the western steppe, and the eastern Mediterranean.

The bracteates of the third group date from the mid-sixth century to the mid-eighth century (from late Northern Qi to the mid-



Fig. 6. Gold bracteate (imitation of a Byzantine solidus), found in tomb of Shi Suoyan (d. 656; buried 664), near Guyuan. Photograph © Luo Yeng, used with permission.

Tang). Hedin found two in Khotan and Stein one at Astana [British Museum n.d.], which is also the location of several other such finds. Indeed, most of the bracteates have been discovered in Turfan tombs in Xinjiang and in the graveyard of the Shi family in Guyuan, Ningxia province [Fig. 6; see also Juliano and Lerner, 2001, pp. 287-288]. They are similar to the bracteates from Sogdiana in weight, size and type [Naymark, 2001, pp. 99-120; Lin Ying, 2003b]. Moreover, most of the tomb occupants in China proper seem to have had a close relationship with Sogdians. Some coins are directly from the tombs of Sogdian descendants, while others were unearthed in the areas where there were flourishing Sogdian communities in the Tang period. Possibly the Sogdians in their mercantile context treated coins in a way different from the Chinese. As a result, Sogdian descendants in China, though having lived for generations in an agricultural society, still demanded western gold coins to express their own concept of a prosperous life. The seventh century witnessed the zenith of Sogdian culture in its homeland and was a time of increasing knowledge and admiration of Byzantium in Sogdiana. This could have caused the Sogdians to imitate the solidus for decorative purposes and funeral offerings. It is interesting to note that Sogdians may have based their imaginative depictions of a Roman Caesar on the representation of the Byzantine emperor on the solidus. This Sogdian

version of a Byzantine ruler's portrait also left its traces in Chinese sources of the Tang period.

If the official solidi were carried into China as diplomatic presents and the bracteates imitating solidi

were used for burial offerings by Sogdians, how then did people in the Far East respond to these small "gold pieces" over a thousand years ago? What idea did they convey to the Chinese people at that time?

It is notable that most of the gold coins are pierced once or twice, indicating that they were once used as pendants of a necklace or sewn onto clothing [Fig. 4 above]. The locations of the small holes indicate that owners of these coins wanted to show the viewer the obverse, i.e. the frontal side depicting the Byzantine emperor.

The portrait of the ruler on western coins had already been noticed by Chinese as early as the Former Han period. *Shiji*, the first standard history written ca. 100 BCE by Sima Qian, records:

An-xi [the Parthian Empire] is thousands of *li* to the west of Da-rou-zhi [the Great Yuezhi—Bactria]...Silver coins are used in this country and bear the portrait of the ruling king. After the death of king, the coins are re-minted in order to depict the portrait of the new king [Fig. 7] [author's tr., modified with ref. to Watson 1993, Vol. II, p. 235].

The images on the coins from *Xiyu*

(the Western Region, a term generally denoting countries west of Ancient China) continued to arouse interest in China in succeeding periods. For example, the *Jiu Tangshu*, the standard history of Tang written in the tenth century, describes coin from Nepala (today, Nepal):

The state of Nepala is in the west of Tibet...They use copper coins. The frontal image of the coin is a human figure, while the image on the back side depicts a horse or cattle. The coin is not pierced [on the central field like Chinese coin].

Down to the eleventh century, the account of western coins can also be seen in the official history:

The coin of Fulin [possibly referring to the Byzantine Empire or the principality established by the Seljuk Turks] is made of gold and silver. The coin is not pierced [on the central field]. On the frontal side is carved the image of Mile Buddha [possibly a misunderstanding for a picture of Jesus]. On the back side is carved the name of the king. The common people are strictly prohibited by law to produce coins.

Thus many Chinese notes about the image of western coins remind us of the story which was widely known along the Silk Road concerning four heavenly sons, understood to be the emperors who ruled the world together. The East was ruled by the emperor of



Fig. 7. Silver drachm of Parthian ruler Artabanus I (ca. 127-124 BCE). Photograph © Bob Rives, used with permission. For an extensive selection of Parthian coins, visit <http://www.parthia.com/parthia_coins_parthia.htm>.

China, the country of human beings; the South was ruled by emperor of India, the country of elephants; the North was ruled by emperor of steppe empires, the country of horses; finally, the West was ruled by Roman or Persian emperors, whose dominions were the country of treasures. The earliest Chinese version is found in Kang Tai's *Waiguo zhuan* (accounts of foreign countries, written in the third century CE). Down to the seventh century, the story was repeated in the travel notes of Buddhist monks, such as Xuanzang's *Datang xiyu ji* (an account of the Western Region of great Tang, written in 646 CE) and Daoxuan's *Shijia fangzhi* (a Buddhist gazetteer, written in 658 CE). According to Tang Chinese sources, the images of the four heavenly sons were also depicted on the palace mural of Kushania, a kingdom in Sogdiana. Later, the Arab geographers of the ninth and tenth centuries re-told the story in a way that reflected the political and cultural realities of their times.

It is interesting to note that the images of four heavenly sons can also be connected with the coins recovered along the Silk Road. During the first century CE when the Kushans extended their control to the Ganges River and came under the influence of Indian culture, Kushan gold coins represented the king sitting on an elephant [see for example Fitzwilliam Museum n.d.]. Both in Kushan times and later, when the Turks established their hegemony over the Eurasian steppe and Central Asia in the seventh century, the image of a horse appeared on Central Asian coins, in the latter examples being featured on the obverse [Coins of Central Asia n.d., "South Sogdiana" SS5-SS7]. Therefore, it seems likely that Byzantine coins in early medieval China, with their image of the Roman caesar, conveyed to Chinese people the image of the emperor of the treasure country in the West.

Clearly, coins along Silk Road were not only currency for long-distance trade but also instruments for political propaganda when they bore the image of a ruler. They thus became an expression of different cultures. From Constantinople to Chang'an, people of different ethnic groups once read these coins in their own manner, adding new content to them, and then transferred the coins and new explanations to the next location along the Silk Road. In this sense, solidi, the gold coins from Byzantium, connect a cluster of stories set in the Eurasian steppe and oasis caravan cities in Central Asia. A thousand years later, it is through these coins that we have an opportunity to relive the past prosperity along Silk Road and understand patterns of cultural exchange.

About the Author

Lin Ying is Associate Professor in the Department of History, Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen) University, at Guangzhou, China. Her dissertation, "*Fulin, the Ruler of Treasure Country: Byzantium and China in the Tang Period (618-907)*," examines how Byzantine culture flowed into the Tang Empire through nomadic people and Central Asian merchants along the Silk Road. She is interested in the eastward spread of Roman and Byzantine cultures through land and maritime routes in the pre-Islamic period. She may be contacted at <hsslyny@zsu.edu.cn>.

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The Cathedral of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople, built under Justinian I.

Silk Road or Paper Road?

Jonathan M. Bloom
Boston College

Well over a century ago, the Austrian geologist and explorer Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833-1905) coined the term *Seidenstrasse*, "Silk Road (or Route)" to refer to the network of land routes that linked China and Europe from the 3rd century BCE to the 15th century CE. Silk, which was traded with the West from the later part of the Zhou period (ca. 1050-256 BCE) was only one of the many commodities traded along these routes, for jade had been brought to China from Central Asia as early as the Shang period (ca. 1600 to ca. 1050 BCE), and Mediterranean glassware reached China during the Qin period (221-206 BCE) [Sørensen and Marshak 1996]. Traders brought exquisite Chinese ceramics to Iraq in the ninth century, when it was ruled by the Abbasid dynasty (749-1258), and Islamic underglaze-painted wares as well as Iranian cobalt were taken to China, where they inspired the development of that quintessentially Chinese ceramic technique of blue-and-white porcelain [Carswell 1985]. Perhaps the most important product carried along this trade network, however, was paper, a now-ubiquitous material which has had a far greater impact on the course of human civilization than silk, jade or glass ever had.

Paper, which is a mat of cellulose fibers that have been beaten in water and collected on a screen and dried, was invented in southeastern China in the centuries before Christ [Tsien 1985; Bloom 2001]. Originally used as a wrapping material, paper began to be used as a writing material around the time of Christ, when it was discovered that this relatively inexpensive, strong and flexible material provided an ideal replacement for the narrow

bamboo strips or tablets that had been used for writing [Figs. 1, 2] and the silk textiles that had been used for larger images, such as maps and drawings. Although the Chinese initially made paper from refuse fibers, they soon found that they



Fig. 1. Han period bamboo woodslip found near Dunhuang, Dunhuang Museum. Photograph © Daniel C. Waugh 1998.

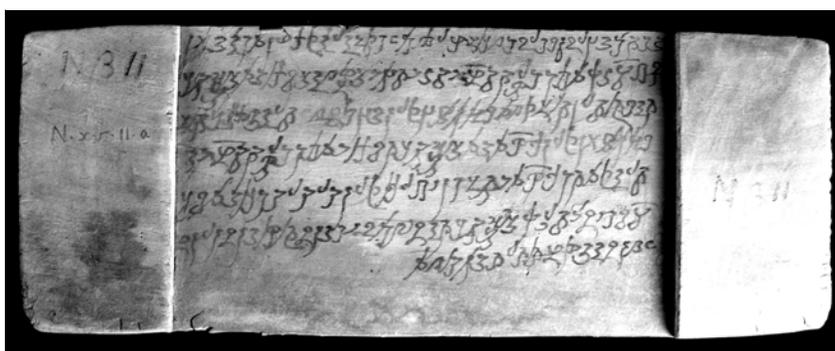


Fig. 2. Land-purchase document in Kharosthi script written on a wooden tablet, found at Niya by Aurel Stein, BL Or. 8211/1494 (N.xv.11.a). Photograph © The British Library, used with permission. All rights reserved. See Silk Road Exhibition online at <http://idp.bl.uk/education/silk_road/SR/krorainia/krorainia_fs.htm>, item 76.

could also make it from the inner bark of several woody shrubs, such as bamboo, paper-mulberry, and rattan that grew well in moist and humid southeastern China, and from then on waste fibers were not normally used in China for papermaking.

Buddhist monks and missionaries, who began to use this medium for copying sutras and other Buddhist writings, carried paper and papermaking from the land of its origin to Korea, Japan and Central Asia, where they stopped on the way to India, the land of Buddhism's birth. The arid Central Asian climate was quite different from that of subtropical southeastern China, and papermakers were forced to find different materials with which to make their product. It seems likely that Central Asian papermakers

were the first to discover (or rediscover) that waste from textiles that were themselves made from plant fibers, including

linen and cotton but excluding wool and silk (which were animal fibers impossible to use in papermaking), could also make good paper [Hoernle 1903]. Indeed, it was often easier to make paper from previously processed fibers because the fibers required less beating. It is likely that at a relatively early date Buddhist travelers also brought paper and knowledge of papermaking to India, but unlike elsewhere, papermaking did not take hold in India for another millennium [Soteriou 1999].

Paper was unknown in Western Asia and the Mediterranean world before the coming of Islam, when the media traditionally used for writing there were papyrus and parchment. Papyrus, which had been used in Egypt from at least 3000 BCE, is made from a plant



Fig. 3. Draft of a petition to the *katholikos* by Aurelios Ammon, *Scholastikos*, fl. 348 CE. Duke Papyrus Archive, P.Duk.inv.18R, online at <<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/records/18r.html>>. Photograph © Rare Book, Manuscript and Special Collections Library, Duke University Libraries, used with permission. All rights reserved.

that flourishes along the banks of the Nile. The stalks of the plant were cut into lengths, the lengths were cut into strips, and the strips laid side-by-side in two perpendicular layers, held together by the gummy sap exuded by the plant [Fig. 3]. Individual sheets were joined together in rolls, which the Egyptians used right to left and the Greeks, who imported the material, used from left to right. The Greeks called papyrus *khartes*, a word that has been transformed to paper-related terms in many modern languages, including *carta* (Italian for paper) and our own card and chart. The Romans called the plant by the Latin term *papyrus*, which has also been transformed into many other paper-related terms, such as paper (English), papier (French and German), and papel (Spanish). The Greek word for a papyrus roll, *biblios*, has given rise to words from Bible to bibliography, while the Latin term for this same thing,

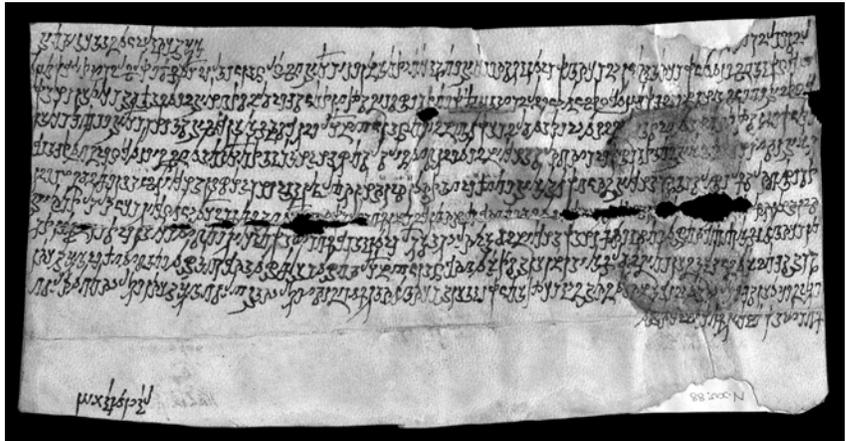


Fig. 4. Letter on parchment from king of Kroraina to local governor in Niya, 3-4 century CE. BL Or.8211/1553 (N.xv.88). Photograph © The British Library, used with permission. All rights reserved. See online Silk Road Exhibition <http://idp.bl.uk/education/silk_road/SR/kroraina/kroraina_fs.htm>, item 141.

volumen, has evolved into words such as volume and volute (on account of its shape). *Pagina*, the Latin term for a column of text on a papyrus roll, has evolved into our word “page,” and *liber*, originally the Latin word for bark, became the generic Latin word for book. Although the most common form of the book was the papyrus roll, sometime in the centuries after Christ a new form of book, with separate folded leaves sewn together on one side, emerged. This was known as a *codex*, from the Latin term for a block of wood.

Parchment, which takes its name from the city of Pergamon in western Anatolia, was the other writing support used widely in Antiquity [Fig. 4]. Made from the skin of an animal which had been soaked in lime, scraped of its flesh and hair, stretched on a frame and dried, parchment had long been used by the ancient Hebrews for copying their scriptures, the Torah. The sheets, made from ritually-slaughtered animals, were sewn together to form long rolls on which the text was written. Since an animal had to be killed to make a sheet of parchment, it was always much more expensive than papyrus, but it could be made anywhere (papyrus could only be produced in Egypt). Furthermore, parchment was more durable than

papyrus in a wider variety of environments; it was especially strong when used in the codex format, for the repeated folding and exposed edges it demanded weakened papyrus sheets.

The origins of the codex are much debated, and it remains unclear whether the triumph of the codex format in the Mediterranean world was directly related to the spread of Christianity [Roberts and Skeat 1983]. For about a thousand years writing-tablets of wood with a thin overlay of wax had been used for note-taking, composition, and temporary writings, and these tablets were often made in hinged pairs or sets, essentially precursors to the parchment codex. Parchment codices allowed both sides of the writing surface to be used (impossible on a scroll) and made it much easier to refer to a particular passage in the text, because the reader did not have to “scroll through” the entire work to find what he or she was looking for. By the time of the revelation of Islam, the codex format was firmly established in western Asia and the Mediterranean world as the preferred format for books, particularly the Christian Bible, with the notable exception of the Hebrew scriptures, which continued to be copied on parchment rolls, and diplomatic



Fig. 5. Quran on parchment, 8/9th century CE. National Museum, New Delhi 59.187. Photograph © Daniel C. Waugh 2001.

documents, which continued to be copied on vertical-format papyrus scrolls.

The first copies of the entire text of the Quran, which Muslims believe is God's revelation to Muhammad, were transcribed on parchment codices, although papyrus, which was still produced in Egypt (conquered by Muslim armies in 641), continued to be used for bills, letters and records [Khan 1993]. Muslims visually differentiated copies of their scriptures from the Christian Bible by generally using a horizontal ("landscape") format [Fig. 5]. When Muslim armies conquered Central Asia in the late seventh and early eighth centuries, they encountered paper for the first time. It is often said that Muslim armies captured Chinese papermakers following the battle of Talas in 751, but this anecdote is without factual basis and paper had been known—and made—in Central Asia for centuries. For example, archaeologists discovered a mailbag containing letters written on paper and addressed to a merchant in Samarqand in the fourth century [Fig. 6] [Sims-Williams 1987]. Devastich, lord of Panjikent in Sogdia (now Tajikistan) until his capture by the Arabs in 722, left an archive of 76 writings in Sogdian, Arabic and Chinese on

leather, wood and paper, which Soviet scholars discovered at the remote site of Kala-i Mug [Zeymal' 1996]. A few decades later in 762 the new Abbasid dynasty transferred the capital of the Islamic empire from Damascus in Syria to Baghdad in Iraq; this new eastern focus, combined with the government bureaucracy's soaring demand for records, led to the introduction and quick diffusion of paper in the Islamic lands.

Papermaking was begun in Baghdad itself by the late 8th century. The city boasted a *Suq al-warraqin* (Stationers' Market), a street whose two sides were lined with more than one hundred shops for paper- and booksellers. From Iraq, papermaking was carried to Syria, then Egypt, across North Africa to Morocco and eventually to Spain, where its use there is first recorded by a tenth-century traveler. The first sheets of "Arab" paper appear in Spanish Christian manuscripts of the late tenth century, where the sheets were substituted for the typical, but more expensive, parchment. Eventually other Europeans learned of papermaking from the Muslims of Spain, particularly as Christians began to occupy larger portions of the Iberian peninsula and needed materials on which to record deeds and titles. Similarly in Sicily and Italy, merchants and



Fig. 6. Sogdian Ancient Letter No. 2, ca. 313 CE, found by Aurel Stein at Watch Tower T.XII.a on the Dunhuang Limes. BL Or.8212/95 R. Photograph © The British Library, used with permission. All rights reserved. Nicholas Sims-Williams' translation of the letter is online at <<http://depts.washington.edu/uwch/silkroad/texts/sogdlet.html>>.

notaries began to use paper from the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, although papermaking was not introduced, perhaps from Spain or from somewhere in the Arab world, until the thirteenth. Once the Italians learned the art of papermaking, they quickly superseded their masters, producing large quantities of fine paper more cheaply than anyone else, and they began exporting it to North African and West Asian markets.

Few, if any, early Islamic writings on paper survive in their original format, although many of the texts written on them were recopied and preserved over the centuries. Excavations in Egypt show that paper increasingly replaced papyrus over the course of the ninth and tenth centuries; by the middle of the tenth century papyrus was hardly used at all. Meanwhile, paper spurred a burst

of extraordinary literary creativity throughout the Muslim lands. The increased numbers of texts known from the late eighth and ninth centuries in Iraq testifies to a vibrant literary culture in the major cities of the Abbasid realm. As is to be expected, most of the preserved writings from this period concern the religious sciences and auxiliary disciplines such as the history of the Prophet and early Islam, the grammar and vocabulary of the Arabic language, and pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, which helped scholars understand the context for the revelation of the Quran. But new “secular” subjects increasingly find place in Arabic literature of the ninth century, including works on geography, astronomy, medicine, mathematics, and literature. Indeed, the earliest known manuscript version of the popular tales we now know as the *Arabian Nights* was copied in ninth-century Egypt or Syria, a time when other, new types of really popular literature were also inexpensively copied on paper [Abbott 1938; Rice 1959].

Such texts indicate how widespread paper became in this period. It was used not only by Muslims but also by Christians and Jews. For example, the oldest manuscript on “Arab” paper is believed to be a copy of the *Doctrina Patrum*, produced at Damascus ca. 800 [Perria 1983-1984]. Hundreds of thousands of documents dating from the ninth to the thirteenth century that were discovered in the *geniza* or storeroom of the Ben Ezra synagogue in Cairo document the growing use of paper among the merchant communities of the Mediterranean lands for letters, contracts, inventories, and deeds [Goitein 1967-1994].

The Cordoban library of the neo-Umayyad caliph al-Hakam II was reputed to contain some 400,000 volumes, many of which must have been copied on paper. Similar libraries are reported in medieval Cairo and Shiraz [Eche



Fig. 7. Manuscript of the Quran on paper, Iran, Shiraz ca. 1560-1575. Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin, MIK I.142/68, open to the end of Sura 113 and beginning of Sura 114. Photograph © Daniel C. Waugh 2004.

1967]. The extraordinary numbers of volumes in them, even if exaggerated by a factor of ten or more, testify to the flowering of written culture in the Islamic lands during the medieval period that was made possible by the spread of paper and papermaking. In Christian Europe, by contrast, manuscript books were rare and costly. The library of a monastery in eleventh-century Constantinople, for example, had only twelve books, of which eight were copied on paper, while the library of the Sorbonne in 1338, said to be the finest library in Christendom, had only 338 books for consultation chained to reading desks and another 1728 books available for loan, although 300 of them were listed as lost [Bloom 2001, p. 117].

The oldest known complete Arabic book copied on paper, dating from 848, was recently discovered in a library in Alexandria, Egypt; the second-oldest fragment is a well-known manuscript dating from 866 in Leiden University Library about unusual terms in the traditions of the Prophet. These two manuscripts are valued for their precise dates, but thousands of similar manuscripts must have been produced. Nevertheless Muslims must have initially viewed

paper with some suspicion, because manuscripts of the Quran continued to be copied on parchment well into the tenth century. The oldest dated copy of the Quran transcribed on paper was produced, presumably in Iran, in 971-72 by the calligrapher Ali ibn Shadhan al-Razi, whose name indicates that he came from Rayy, a city located near modern Tehran. These first Quran manuscripts on paper were copied in scripts unlike the stately “kufic” scripts traditionally used for copying the Quran on parchment and more like the cursive scripts used by contemporary scribes for copying literary works on paper. In time it became common to copy the Quran on paper, except in Morocco and Spain, where parchment continued to be used for several more centuries. Over the following centuries, calligraphers continued to develop new and more fluid scripts to copy the Quran and other texts on paper, thereby transforming the art of writing in the Islamic lands [Fig. 7] [Blair 2006].

In the thirteenth century the Mongol conquests in Central and Western Asia once again encouraged trade and communication along the routes linking China to the West, and during the ensuing *Pax Mongolica* men,

materials, and ideas moved back and forth with relative freedom. At this time papermakers in the Islamic lands, particularly in Iran and Iraq developed techniques for making larger and finer sheets of paper which were used not only as supports for magnificent manuscripts but also as for drawings that served as intermediaries between designers and craftsmen. It is tempting indeed to think that the increased east-west communication, documented in a wide range of media and techniques, led to these technical and conceptual developments in the Islamic lands, but the question is not yet settled [Bloom, in press]. Certain techniques, such as the use of pricked drawings and of gridded plans and drawings, can be shown

to have traveled across Eurasia from east to west, but the evidence is moot for perhaps the most important technique in this regard: printing, particularly with moveable type. This technique emerged in fifteenth-century Europe seemingly from nowhere, although printing had been used in China since the 8th century [Fig. 8], and printing with moveable type had been used there since the eleventh. As the use of printing in the Islamic lands before the sixteenth century was restricted to a very few situations, none of them involving the production of books, it is virtually impossible to hypothesize any connection—as tempting as it might be—between the development of printing in China and in Europe.

to Europe was forgotten. Von Richthofen was surely correct that the trade routes linking China to West Asia and the Mediterranean world played a crucial role in human history, but he was wrong to think that silk was the most important good traded along those routes. This brief investigation into the history of one of the most important, but least appreciated, materials carried across Eurasia suggests that it might be time to modify his original idea to reflect the relative importance of the goods and ideas exchanged along these routes. In that case, the network would be more accurately known as the Paper Route.

About the Author

Jonathan Bloom shares the Norma Jean Calderwood Professorship of Islamic and Asian Art at Boston College with his wife Sheila Blair. His many publications include *Paper before Print* (2001), *Early Islamic Art and Architecture* (2002) and the forthcoming *Arts of the City Victorious: The Art and Architecture of the Fatimids*. Among the books he has co-authored with Professor Blair are *Islam: A Thousand Years of Faith and Power* (2000) and *The Art and Architecture of Islam: 1250-1800*, a volume in the Pelican History of Art which appeared to rave reviews in 1994. He may be reached at <jonathan.bloom@bc.edu>.

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When Europeans eventually began to investigate the history of paper, they were initially confused because all the words dealing with paper came from Greek and Latin words for papyrus, and they thought that paper must somehow have been derived from papyrus. The first Europeans to encounter Chinese and Japanese papers in the sixteenth century imagined that East Asians had somehow learned to make paper from the ancient Egyptians. Eventually the matter was cleared up, but the pivotal role of the Islamic lands in the transmission of paper-making from Asia

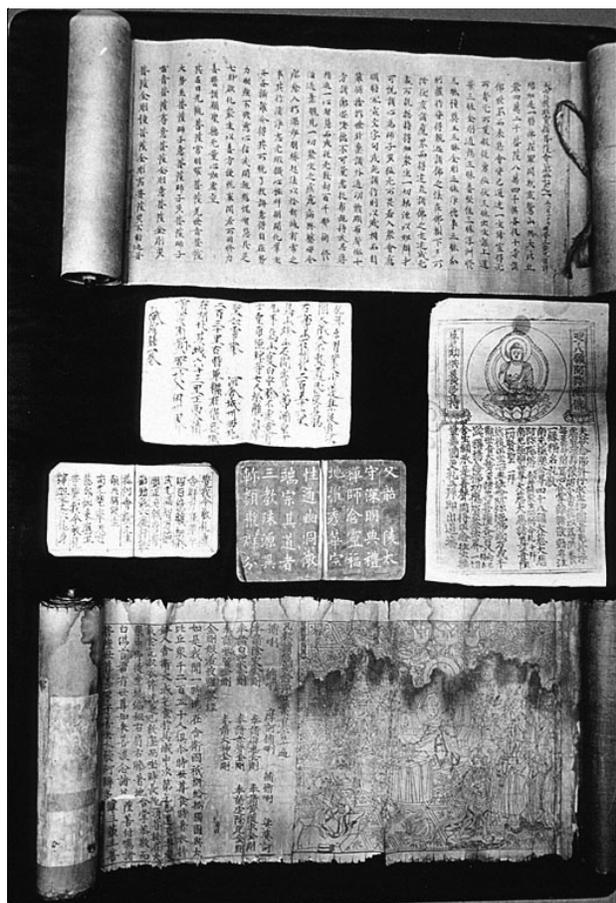


Fig. 8. Manuscripts and prints obtained by Aurel Stein from the "Library Cave," no. 17 of the Mogao Caves at Dunhuang. At the bottom is the earliest complete printed book, a copy of the *Diamond Sutra* dated 868 CE (BL Or.8210/p.2). Photograph © The British Library, used with permission. All rights reserved.

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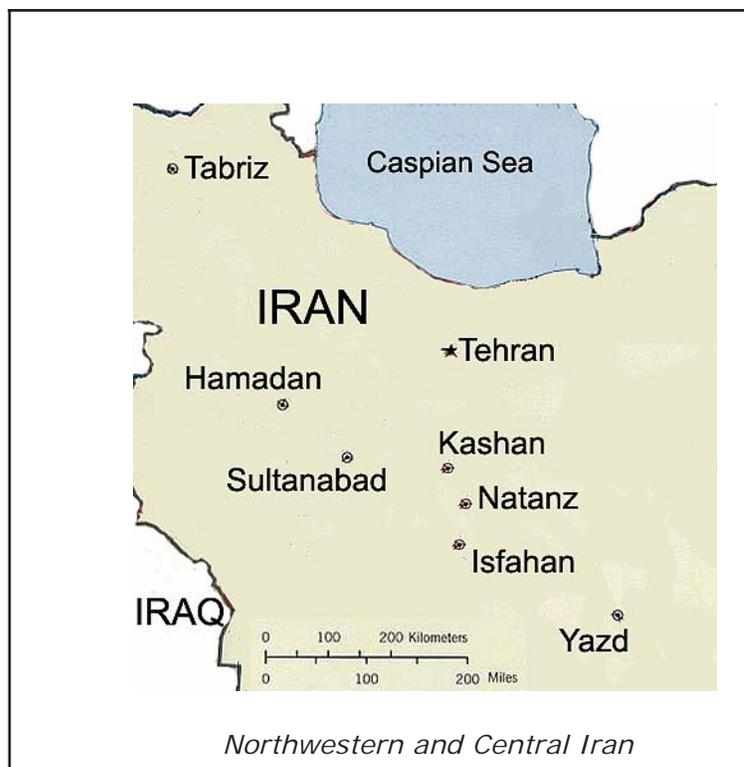
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East Meets West under the Mongols

Sheila S. Blair
Boston College

Most people think of the Mongols only as destroyers, ruthless marauders who slaughtered the inhabitants of cities resisting their military advances, barbaric conquerors who magnified the scale of violence with deadly mangonels and ratcheted up the volume of terror banging on drums as part of their psychological warfare. The Mongols, followers of the warlord Chingis [Genghis] who amassed the largest contiguous land empire ever known, were undisputedly deadly and terrifying. But the Mongol conquests in the first part of the thirteenth century also opened up a commercial nexus across Eurasia, and the century 1250-1350 when the Mongols controlled most of Eurasia is often known as the Pax Mongolica. In the words of the historian Janet Abu-Lughod, it was the age "before European hegemony," a period when trade and communication encouraged the sharing of ideas and visual culture across much of the known world.

Following the death of Chingis Khan in 1227, his empire was divided among his family according to the principle of ultimogeniture, succession through the last-born child. Four major empires were created. The Great Khans, Möngke (r. 1251-60) and Qubilai (r. 1260-94), descendants of Chingis's youngest son Tolui, ruled Mongolia and northern China as the Yuan dynasty from their capitals, first at Karakorum on the upper Orkhon River in Mongolia and later at Khanbalik, now Beijing. They were supported by three collateral branches. The Golden Horde, descended from Chingis's eldest son Jochi, ruled southern Russia from two capitals on the Akhtuba,

the eastern tributary of the lower Volga, first at Old Saray, on the left bank about seventy-five miles north of Astrakhan and then from the 1340s from New Saray (Saray al-Jadid, modern Tsarev), a further seventy-five miles upstream. The Chaghatayids, descended from Chingis's second son Chaghatai, ruled Central Asia from various capitals in Semirechye and Transoxania including the site founded by Kebek (r. 1309-26, with interruption) near Nakhshab known as Karshi (from the Mongol word for palace). The Ilkhanids, descended from Hülegü, brother of the two Great Khans, ruled western Asia from winter and summer capitals in Azerbaijan and Iraq.

The transcontinental trade that took place under these various branches of Mongols is readily evident from reports by the spate of travelers who crisscrossed Eurasia during this period. The most famous, at least to Western eyes, is Marco Polo, the Venetian merchant who joined his father and uncle on a trip to China in 1271 and spent the next two decades traveling around the provinces of China in the service of Qubilai Khan. Marco Polo's travelogue, written after he had returned home and was imprisoned in Genoa with Rustichello of Pisa, tells of the amazing empire of the Great Khan, an urban civilization of dazzling riches and prosperity. This picaresque travelogue offered an immense body of new geographical knowledge to the West and became one of most influential books of the Middle Ages, the foremost work in creating an intellectual climate in which Europeans set out to explore the non-European world.

Marco Polo's account is also a record of an amazing shopping spree. His description of Tabriz, at that time capital of the Ilkhanid domains, sums up his perspective. He begins with the industriousness of the inhabitants and their major handicrafts: many kinds of beautiful and valuable cloths of silk and gold. The city's choice location, he notes, makes it a commercial hub for merchants from Mesopotamia, the Gulf, India, and Europe, especially as it has a great market for precious stones. It is, he specifies, a city where merchants make large profits. The locals, however, are good-for-nothing, a mixture of classes, ethnicities, and religions, including the native Muslims who are evil. He ends his description with the note that the city is surrounded by charming orchards, full of large and excellent fruits. His record of the city is thus a brief commercial prospectus.

Trade was not the only incentive to travel during this period. So was religion. If Marco Polo epitomizes the mercantile traveler, then the Moroccan globetrotter Ibn Battuta represents the religious one. In 1325, at age 21, he set off from his native Tangier (hence he is sometimes referred to as a "tangerine") on the hajj to Mecca. He returned home only in 1349, meanwhile visiting Egypt, Syria, Persia, Iraq, East Africa, the Yemen, Anatolia, the steppes of southern Russia, Constantinople, India, the Maldives, Sumatra, and China. Whereas Marco Polo enumerates the goods available in local markets, Ibn Battuta sets out the diverse (and to his eyes, sometimes slightly scandalous) religious activities he encountered while lodging at local shrines.

In Delhi, for example, Ibn Battuta describes the great tank known as Hawz Khass, a reservoir used to collect rainwater for drinking. It served as a gathering place for musicians. Known as Tarab-abad (the city of music), the area included an extensive bazaar, a congregational mosque, and



Fig. 1. Delhi, Hawz Hass. Photograph © Sheila S.Blair. All rights reserved.

many smaller mosques as well as forty pavilions that served as housing not only for the musicians themselves, but also for singing girls who even, to Ibn Battuta's amazement, took part in prayers during Ramadan. The site still exists [Fig. 1], and during the next generation under the Tughlughid ruler Firuz Shah (r. 1351-77), it was incorporated into a large madrasa, or theological school. The complex comprises two long blocks of rooms perched along the east and south sides of the tank, riveted together by the founder's tomb, a domed square. The two stories contain interlocking blocks of long, narrow pillared halls and dome chambers, with cells on the lower story for residence and more open rooms on the upper story for assembly and teaching. The reservoir has now dried up, but the area lives on as one of Delhi's chic quarters, dotted with boutiques and secluded residences.

As Ibn Battuta's long chronicle shows, such shrine centers were common throughout the Islamic lands. Many were centered on the tomb of a local sufi (mystic) saint. A prime example of the "little cities of God" constructed at the time of Ibn Battuta's travels is the shrine at Natanz, twenty miles north of Isfahan on the slopes of the Karkaz Mountains in central Iran, built by

an Ilkhanid vizier to commemorate the tomb of the Suhrawardi shaykh `Abd al-Samad [Map, p. 26; Fig. 2]. The complex incorporates a congregational mosque with the typical Iranian plan of four iwans and a domed chamber around a central courtyard, the mystic's tomb surmounted by a pyramidal roof, a hospice for Sufis with a splendid tiled façade, and a soaring minaret. The somewhat higgledy-piggledy arrangement of the buildings suggests that they had to be jammed into whatever land was available within the town.

Yet the inventiveness of the vaulting shows how sophisticated the builders of these local shrines were. During this period in Iran, builders shifted their attention from structure to space, developing new and ingenious methods of breaking up a long and dark tunnel vault by using a series of cross arches that are joined by transverse filler vaults. In earlier examples, the crown of the

transverse vault was horizontal along its entire length, but during this period builders played with more complex methods. The south iwan in the mosque at Natanz, for example, has a ramping transverse vault in which the springing lines of the vault are not flat but curve upward and parallel the profile of the cross arches. Built in the first decade of the fourteenth century, the mosque presents the earliest extant example of the break-up of the barrel vault in the Mongol period, but contemporary buildings display similar, and soon more elaborate, methods. Such inventiveness was probably developed at constructions no longer extant in the Ilkhanid capitals in northwestern Iran and then spread southeast to central Iran and thence to Central Asia, where, under the Timurids in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, builders developed the decorative possibilities of transverse vaulting by reducing the load-bearing elements and



Fig. 2. Natanz, Shrine of 'Abd al-Samad, view from minaret. Photograph © Sheila S. Blair. All rights reserved.

opening the room to increased light and applied decoration.

Like the vaulting, the luxury of the furnishings at Natanz bespeaks the wealth available to decorate these local shrines. The shaykh's tomb, for example, was crowned on the interior by a stunning *muqarnas*, or stalactite, vault [Fig. 3, next page]. Ten tiers of *muqarnas* rise from the piers of the

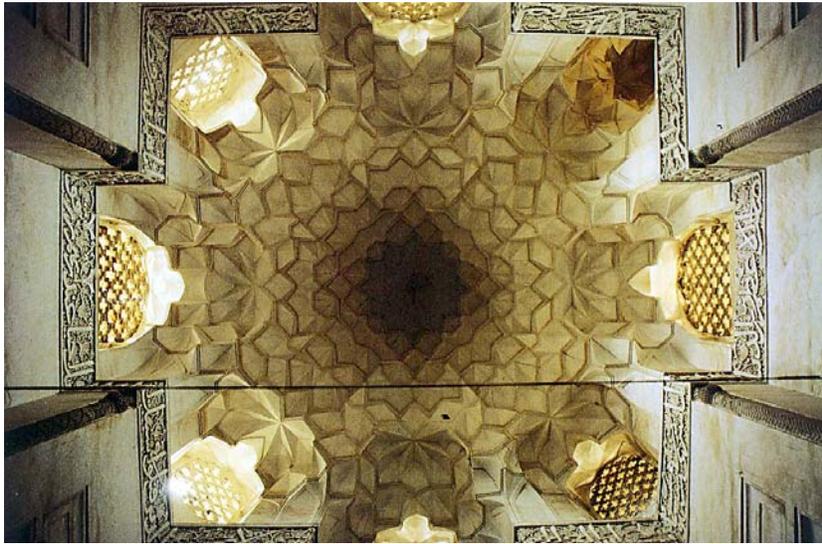


Fig. 3. Natanz, Shrine of 'Abd al-Samad, muqarnas dome over tomb, 1307. Photograph © Sheila S. Blair. All rights reserved.

cruciform room. The first eight are composed exclusively of 45° and 90° pieces, incorporating an eight-pointed star over each window. In order to culminate in a twelve-pointed star at the apex, the builders ingeniously altered the system at tier nine by adding pentagonal elements on the diagonal. As light filters through the stucco grilles and flickers across the vault, it seems to revolve like the dome of heaven.

The lower surfaces of the shaykh's tomb were once ablaze with glazed tiles, many removed by later travelers and now scattered in museums around the world. The mihrab, or niche in the wall indicating the direction of prayer toward Mecca, was adorned with a multi-piece luster ensemble, including a hood now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (71-1885) whose large size (82 cm) and unusual three-dimensional form make it a masterpiece of potting. The lower walls were covered with a revetment of star and cross tiles, in which monochrome turquoise crosses alternated with luster-glazed stars. This dado, in turn, was crowned by a frieze of rectangular luster tiles, decorated with texts from the Koran emboldened in bright blue on a ground of birds perching amidst foliage. At least twenty

such tiles are now in museum collections, many identifiable by the headless birds, defaced by a later iconoclast [e.g. Metropolitan Museum 12.44 and British Museum OA 1122; Komaroff and Carboni 2002, p. 127, figs. 149, 150].

Commerce and religion were not the only cause for travel in this period. So was politics, as shown by the many envoys or officials traveling on government business. To insure their safety, these officials carried a passport or conduct of safe passage known as

paiza, a badge that was worn suspended from belt [Fig. 4]. According to contemporary descriptions and depictions, these passes were made of wood, silver, or gold and embellished with a gerfalcon or tiger at the top, depending on the rank and importance of the



Fig. 4. A paiza from the Golden Horde. State Historical Museum, Moscow. Photograph © Daniel C. Waugh 2005.

holder. The Mongols had long been insistent on the sacrosanct status of their ambassadors. The Khwarazmshah's murder of an official envoy, for example, helped precipitate Chingis's invasion of Transoxania. In order to facilitate communication through the vast empire, in 1234, during the reign of Ögödei, the Mongols set up an official communication system known as the *yam*.

Marco Polo was particularly impressed with the Mongol system of communication and left a long description of it. A system of highways radiated to all provinces from the capital at Khanbalik. Posting stations were spaced twenty-five miles apart to provide a ready supply of horses. When needed, riders, often in teams, were dispatched, each equipped with a *paiza*. Tightening their belts and swathing their heads, the riders set off post-haste. As they approached the next station, they sounded a horn so that fresh horses were readied and riders had only to remount and continue. In this way the envoys could cover as much as two hundred or even two hundred fifty miles per day.

Such passports had already been used under the Liao dynasty in North China (907-1125). One example made of gold inscribed in Khitan "By imperial command, expedite" was found near Chengde in Hebei province [Komaroff and Carboni 2002, p. 69, Fig. 70]. Its oblong form remained typical under the Mongols, who inscribed their *paizas* using a variety of languages that reflect the polyglot nature of society at this time. An early Mongol example made for the Yuan of cast iron inlaid with silver and now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art [1993.256; Komaroff and Carboni 2002, p. 69, Fig. 69] is inscribed in Phagspa—the square-boxlike script devised by the Tibetan monk Phagspa for writing Mongolian and adopted under Qubilai in the 1260s. A silver example excavated near the Dnieper in the lands of the Golden Horde, and now in the Hermitage

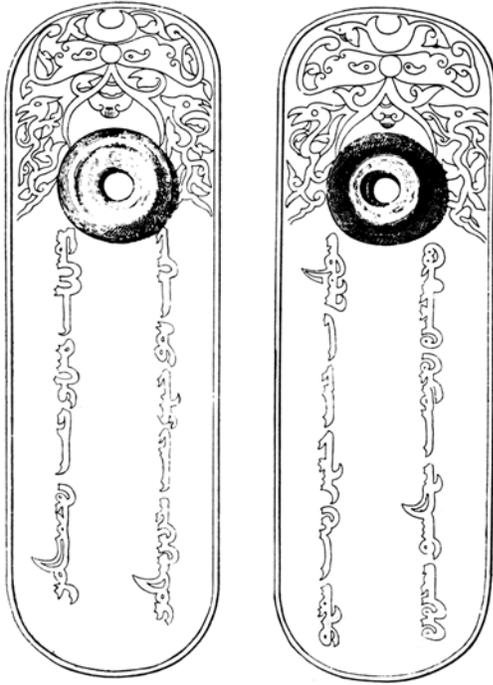


Fig. 5. Paiza in Hermitage Museum collection, St. Petersburg, ZO-295. Drawing originally published in the *Trudy Vostochnogo otdeleniia Imperatorskogo arkhelogicheskogo obshchestva*, Vol. 5.

Museum in St. Petersburg [ZO-295], is rectangular with rounded ends and a hole for a cord two-thirds of the way up [Fig. 5; Komaroff and Carboni 2002, p. 38, Fig. 34]. The top part is fashioned with the stylized face of a dragon so that the hole falls between the creature's yawning jaws. The lower part is inscribed vertically in the traditional Uighur script.

Similar passports were adopted under the Ilkhanids in Iran. One in Tehran [Fig. 6] is a silver-plated copper rectangle with a scalloped end near an attached ring. One side is decorated with a walking figure carrying a three-pronged stick in his left hand and a roll in his right, perhaps indicating a written decree. The plaque is inscribed in Uighur with names of the Ilkhanid sultan Abu Sa'id (r. 1316-35) and the petitioner, the vizier Tudagha. The passport is also stamped with the seal of a certain individual named Outlugh Tegin.

This *paiza* probably represents the type of personal patent that was widely used under the Ilkhanids and deplored by their chief vizier Rashid al-Din. He lamented that by the late thirteenth century in Iran, the communication system had become corrupted and was ripe for reform. According to Rashid al-Din, everyone—from wives, princes, and camp officers to leopard keepers and equerries—thought it essential to use an envoy. The roads became clogged, the envoys rapacious, and the people resentful. Furthermore, many bandits masqueraded as envoys. As a result, real envoys were often prevented from doing their business. All these problems, says Rashid

al-Din as the official spokesman who formulated the party line for the Mongols, led Sultan Ghazan (r. 1295-1304) to lay down reforms to curtail such abuses.

Such communication and travel, together with common roots of authority and prestige derived from descent from Chingis, encouraged a shared visual culture, particularly among Mongol rulers in the various empires. One example is the royal drinking cups made of gold and silver. Such cups are depicted in paintings from the *Jami' al-tawarikh*, or *Compendium of Chronicles*, the history of the Mongols and other rulers of the world compiled by Rashid al-Din. Large double-page scenes that once illustrated the reign of each ruler show the Mongol sovereign seated beside his consort on a throne and drinking from such a cup. No examples survive from Iran; they were probably all melted down in times of need. Excavations at New Saray, the capital of Golden Horde on the Volga, however, have uncovered numerous examples in both silver and gold. Some of these shallow cups have scalloped handles decorated with vegetal motifs. Others have dragon handles that allowed the vessel to be suspended by the loop in the dragon's mouth [Hermitage SAR-1625; Komaroff and Carboni 2002, p. 170, Fig. 197; see also p. 18, Figs. 11, 13].

Such shared culture also extended to more quotidian objects. The typical bowl associated with the Mongols in Iran is the type known as Sultanabad ware, after the city in western Iran on the road from Hamadan to Isfahan where many pieces were found, though no examples have been excavated there. Made of an artificial body known as frit or stonepaste, these deep conical bowls have a wide rim that overhangs both interior and exterior and are underglaze-painted with birds or animals on a ground of thick foliage. Their hemispheric shape, outside decoration with a design of



Fig. 6. Ilkhanid paiza of the vizier Tudagha. National Museum of Iran. Published by Abdallah Quchani, "Pa'iza," *Mirath-i farhangi* 17 (Summer 1997).

radiating petals, and muted grey-green color scheme connects them to Chinese ceramics, both Cizhou and Jizhou wares. Their interior decoration, such as phoenixes typically arranged in groups of three or four with long curving tail feathers that emphasize the revolving design, also reflects Chinese models, transferred through textiles and other media. Ceramics made for the Ilkhanids' rivals in southern Russia, the Golden Horde, and excavated at New Saray show similar designs, but with stiffer drawing and a smoother shape.

Of all the works of art shared between the various branches of Mongols in this period, the most important were textiles, notably those woven with gold-wrapped thread. Known as *nasij* and *nakh* in Arabic and Persian and *panni tartarici* in medieval inventories, these cloths were praised and collected as far away as England: Chaucer mentions "cloth of Tartary" in his "Knight's Tale." From the beginning of the thirteenth century the Mongols deliberately encouraged the production of such textiles. Chingis ordered craftsmen captured in Central and West Asia sent to Karakorum, and by the time of his son Ögödei, three thousand households of weavers from Samarqand were churning out cloth of gold in Xunmalin. Three hundred households were at work in Hongzhou, west of Beijing.

Virtually all surviving examples of such cloth of gold (and there are not that many) combine Chinese and Persian motifs, but based on technical and stylistic grounds, scholars are beginning to divide them into regional groups from North China, Central Asia, and Iran. Silks woven in China under the Mongols continue many features of ones woven there earlier under the Jin. All are brocaded tabbies, or plain weaves, with designs set in widely spaced and staggered rows. In the Jin silks, the brocaded design shows an individual, asymmetrical motif that is flipped from left to right in

alternate rows. Many motifs display distinctly Chinese themes like swan hunts, coiled dragons, and phoenixes soaring among clouds. Other Jin silks incorporate foreign motifs but put them in a Chinese setting. A stunning red silk in Cleveland [1991.4; Watt and Wardwell 1997, pp. 114-115; Komaroff and Carboni 2002, p. 68, Fig. 66], for example, is decorated with the *djeiran*, a Central Asian antelope, in a Chinese setting of foliage crowned by a sun or moon supported by clouds. When the Mongols transported weavers captured from Central Asia to China, they introduced new technical features typical of Central Asia, notably paired warps. In addition, the new weavers replaced the single asymmetrical motifs typical of Jin silks with symmetrical motifs. A bright orange-red silk in Cleveland (1994.293; Watt and Wardwell 1997, pp. 122-123), for example, contains brocaded teardrops in the shape of lotus bulbs. These symmetrical designs are sometimes framed, as in a silk in Paris that displays confronted birds set within a frame. Except for the contrasting color of the selvage warps, these silks woven in China under the Mongols display technical and stylistic features typical of Central Asia.

A second group of brocaded silks seems distinct to Central Asia or eastern Iran. These complex lampas weaves were woven on drawlooms with two sets of warps and wefts for ground and pattern, sometimes with cotton for the ground weft.

They have denser all-over designs, with a patterned ground that fills the space between roundels or medallions. Motifs are set symmetrically and include typical Chinese dragons and phoenixes, but they are given twisted or writhing bodies and imbued with a vitality not seen in the Chinese models. Often these silks have a band near one end with a pseudo-inscription in Arabic written in a distinctive plaited script, sometimes with animal heads on the letters.

Perhaps the most spectacular of these Central Asia silks is a set of large tent panels, each of which measures more than two meters high. Ten are now in the Museum of Qatar and the eleventh is in the David Collection in Copenhagen [Fig. 7; Komaroff and Carboni 2002, p. 45, Fig. 42]. Lampas weaves combining tabby and twill, the textiles are remarkable for

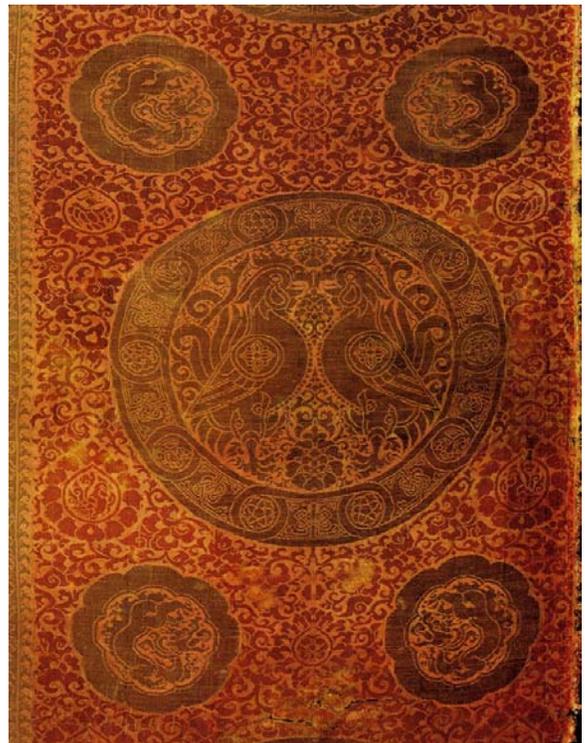


Fig. 7. Fragment of lampas-woven textile. Silk and gilded paper lamella both spun around a silk core and flat-woven. The David Collection, Copenhagen <<http://www.davidmus.dk/>>, Inv. No. 40/1997. Photograph © The C. L. David Foundation and Collection, used with permission. All rights reserved.

their lavish use of gold threads, both silk threads spun with gilded paper strips and flat threads of a gilded animal substrate. Each panel contains a long arched niche enclosing vertical rows of large medallions, each enclosing confronted roosters or ducks separated by a stylized tree of life, alternating with rows of smaller lobed medallions, each enclosing a coiled dragon. The background is filled with vegetal scrolls and stylized peonies and lotus flowers. At the top is a pseudo inscription in the stylized *kufic* script, one of the features that distinguishes this group from the Chinese examples and suggests an attribution to an Islamic land. Similarly, the coiled dragons in the lobed roundels and the birds in frames are hybrids of eastern and western models.

A third group of silks can be attributed to Iran during the Mongol period. The lynchpin for localizing this group is a silk now in the Dom- und Diocesan Museum in Vienna that is inscribed with the name and titles that the Ilkhanid sultan Abu Sa'id assumed after 1319 [Blair and Bloom 1994, p. 21, Fig. 23]. It is a complex lampas with areas of compound weave in tan and red silk with gold wefts made of strips of gilded silver wound around a yellow silk core. The pattern is even denser than those found on Central Asian examples, with four distinct stripes. The first is a wide band filled with staggered rows of polylobed medallions and ornamental diamonds with peacocks in the interstices. Next comes a narrower band of running animals, then a wider one with writing, followed by a repeat of the narrow band with running animals. The inscription shows that this sumptuous textile belongs to the type known as *tiraz*, official textiles woven in state factories and inscribed with the ruler's name. This system had been in operation since early Islamic times, for textiles were often presented to members of courts.

There are good reasons that so few of these sumptuous textiles survive from the Mongol period. There are no burial goods in the Islamic lands where bodies are supposed to be wrapped in plain white shrouds and interred beneath the ground within twenty-four hours of death. The few textiles that do survive attest to the broad network of Eurasian trade during this period. Many of the large and fine examples that have come on the art market in recent years were taken from China and Central Asia to Tibet, where they were preserved until the dissolution of monasteries after the Communist occupation in 1959. Similarly, the one inscribed with the name of Abu Sa'id must have been discarded after the sultan's death in 1335. He died leaving no heir or even a close relation, and the subsequent two decades were filled with chaos and squabbling as a series of ephemeral khans were raised to the throne by competing amirs. Considered worthless in its original context, the textile was probably acquired on the cheap by an Italian merchant who brought it back to Milan where he sold it to Rudolf IV, Duke of Austria and founder of the Austrian branch of the Hapsburg line who turned Vienna into the cultural and intellectual center of the Hapsburg Empire. Rudolf died suddenly from an infection in Milan in 1365, and this sumptuous silk, presumably the finest that could be acquired by this enterprising monarch who went so far as to forge documents and invent fictitious titles and privileges to enhance his personal status and the position of his family, was then sewn up into his burial garment.

This network of trans-continental communication came to an end in the middle of the fourteenth century. By 1353 squabbling and chaos had eliminated all peripheral heirs to the Ilkhanid line, and Iran was carved up among several local dynasties. In 1368 the Ming

replace the Great Khans in China. Plague struck as well, for the nexus of trade and communication was also an axis of evil in the form of rats and disease. The Black Death, as it became known in European history, had begun during the early fourteenth century on the steppes, where a permanent reservoir of plague infection existed among the wild rodents of the region. The pandemic spread south and west, fostered by the easy communication of the Pax Mongolica. It first descended on China and India, then moved westward to Transoxania, Iran and finally the Crimean peninsula on the north shore of the Black Sea. From Crimean ports, merchant ships brought plague to Constantinople in mid-1347 and then to other harbors around the Mediterranean basin. Egypt was infected by the fall of 1347 and Syria by the spring of 1348. But surviving works of art bear witness to the remarkable century of global trade and communication that followed the Mongol invasions.

About the Author

Sheila Blair is the Norma Jean Calderwood University Professor of Islamic and Asian Art at Boston College, a position she shares with her husband and colleague Jonathan Bloom. She has also taught at many universities, both in the United States and abroad, most recently as a visiting professor at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris during May, 2005. Her special interests are the uses of writing and the arts of the Mongol period. Her tenth book, *Islamic Calligraphy*, is due out this winter from Edinburgh University Press. She may be reached at <sheila.blair@bc.edu>.

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1991.4 Brocade with Djeiran Gazing at the Moon <<http://www.clevelandart.org/oci/magnify/1991/1991.4.jpg>>.

1994.293 Brocade with Lotus Flowers <<http://www.clevelandart.org/oci/magnify/1994/1994.293.jpg>>.

TWO TRAVELERS IN YAZD

Frank Harold

University of Washington, Seattle

Photographs by

Ruth L. Harold

A branch of the Silk Road skirts the western and southern edges of Iran's forbidding central desert, passing through a string of small cities — Kashan, Nain, Yazd, Kerman — on the way to India [see map p. 26]. Of these, Yazd is the largest and the most remarkable, a port of the desert from which tracks led to Mashad and on to Merv, north to Ray and south to the Persian Gulf. Always a provincial city dependent on trade, Yazd lacks the royal monuments that lure visitors to Isfahan and Shiraz, but camels still plod through its streets. Yazd remains one of the few strongholds of the Zoroastrian faith, as well as a center of Islamic art and learning. Few Iranian cities retain so well the flavor of a civilization that has flourished for millennia in the narrow strips of irrigable land between the mountains and the desert.

Yazd is today well off the tourist track, but as a halt on what was once the main road, earlier travelers knew it well. In the tenth century, Istakhri found it a prosperous and well-fortified town. It was spared the attentions of the Mongols, and so Marco Polo, who stopped there about 1272 CE, lauded Yazd as a "good and noble city", noted for its fine silks. The Franciscan friar Odoric, on his way home from the Mongol court in the middle of the fourteenth century, commented on the abundance of fruit in this parched place. Tavernier, a French jeweller who wandered all over the Safavid realm in the middle of the seventeenth century, also enjoyed the fruit but reserved his highest praise for the ladies, whom he considered the most handsome in all of Persia (a contemporary visitor must wonder how he made this

judgement, but the beauty of Yazd's women was proverbial). And Robert Byron, who passed through Yazd in 1934, was bowled over by the buildings, which no one seemed to have noticed before: "Do people travel blind?" Our own account is drawn in the first place from notes on a visit in 1970, updated by a return in 2000.

At first sight, Yazd is not prepossessing. Like other towns of the Persian plateau, it is a maze of narrow alleys [Fig. 1] and built wholly of mud brick. As a concession to the automobile age, the medieval fortifications were demolished and a few wide streets punched across the old city, leaving severed walls standing like survivors of an earthquake. Nevertheless, as soon as one steps off those new streets one is transported into an earlier era. The alleys wind tortuously between blank adobe walls, picturesquely bridged by arches designed to buttress the walls against collapse. The occasional doorways, studded with great copper bosses,

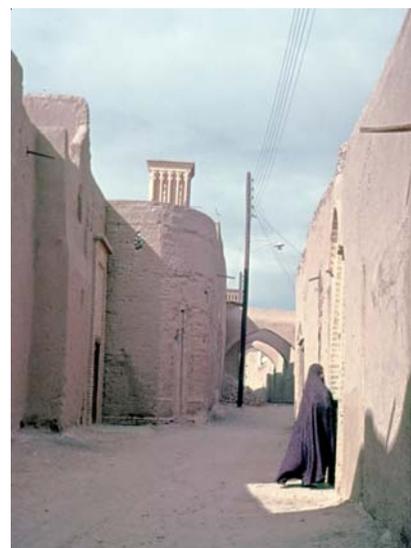


Fig. 1. Typical alley in Yazd. Photograph © Ruth L. Harold 1970.

are always shut. They conceal courtyards and tiny gardens, but of these the passerby has never a glimpse for the Persian home turns inward, away from the street. Few houses boast more than two storeys, but all have flat roofs where great coils of dyed yarn dry in the sun and children peer down at the rare foreigner. It is startling to see a man in suit and tie emerge from one of those doorways. More in keeping with the atmosphere are the occasional women, wrapped in the all-enveloping black chador, and the men whose green turbans proclaim descent from the prophet Muhammad himself.

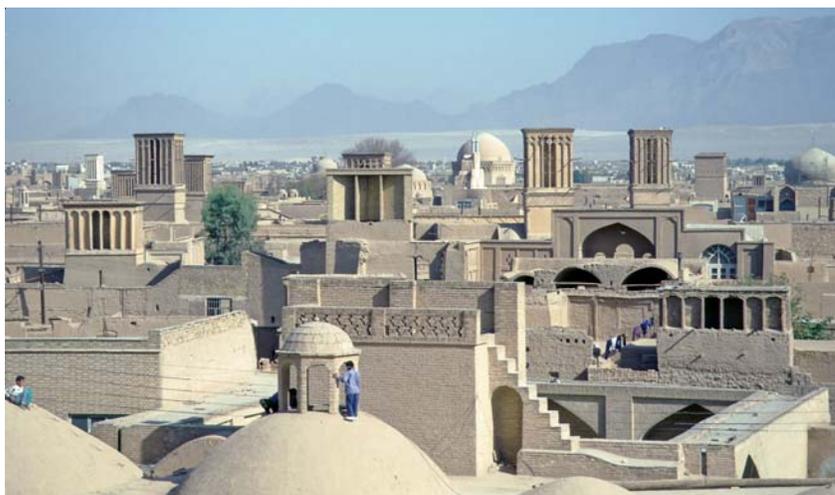


Fig. 2. The skyline of Yazd with its badgirs (ventilation towers). Photograph © Ruth L. Harold 2000.

The flat skyline is broken by hundreds of graceful turrets with narrow vertical slits. No, not chimneys; these are the famous *badgir*, windcatchers, an ancient form of air conditioning [Fig. 2, previous page]. Their purpose is to capture every breath of wind and lead it into the inner rooms, often below ground, where the family takes refuge from the fierce summer heat. Some are quite stylish, statements of individual taste that relieve the bland uniformity of adobe architecture.

Along any street one may come across a broad flight of steps descending into the ground, a hundred feet and more. At the bottom is a water tap, and this prosaic object holds the key to the very existence of a substantial city (pop. 70, 000 in 1970) surrounded by desert: the *qanat*. Visitors to Iran will likely first spot *qanat* from the air, long lines of molehills converging upon town or village. In fact, each molehill marks



Fig. 3. A *nakhl*. Photograph © Ruth L. Harold 1970.

the opening of a shaft that leads to an aqueduct deep underground. This taps water-bearing strata at the foot of mountains that, to the casual observer, look utterly dessicated. The tunnels slope gently and may extend for miles; some of those that supply Yazd come from the Shir Kuh range, 30 miles to the southwest. The water flows into underground storage tanks, recognizable by their mud-brick domes and *badgir*, and then distributed through the city. The siting, excavation and maintenance of *qanat* are highly specialized occupations; they are also quite hazardous, for the loose soil and gravel is forever poised to

cave in. Yazdis are famous for their skills, and in demand all over Iran.

To feel the pulse of a Persian city one must explore its bazaar. This, of course, is the shopping and business district, but it is much more than that: mosques, baths, caravanserais and schools were traditionally built right into the bazaar, making it truly the center of civic life. Conveniently, one of the most conspicuous landmarks of Yazd is the monumental gateway to the bazaar, marked by a pair of tall minarets. But once again, appearances mislead: this building, despite its name, serves

chiefly as a grandstand from which to watch the processions and passion plays at Muharram, the season of deep mourning that commemorates the death of the Imam Hussein at the battle of Kerbala thirteen hundred years ago. At the foot of the gateway stands a huge wooden framework called a *nakhl* (one may come across several of

these, tucked away in courtyards and passageways) [Fig. 3]. During Muharram the *nakhl* is draped with black banners and pennons, and carried through the streets on the shoulders of mourners; others chant and flay their own backs with chains in an ecstasy of grief.

Yazdis have long enjoyed a reputation for industry, even hustle, and the lively bazaar is where these are on display. Like most traditional bazaars it is vaulted with brick, a welcome haven from desert dust and wind. The whitewashed corridors are cool and airy, lined with shops that offer great rolls of cotton fabric and



Fig. 4. An alley in the bazaar. Photograph © Ruth L. Harold 1970.

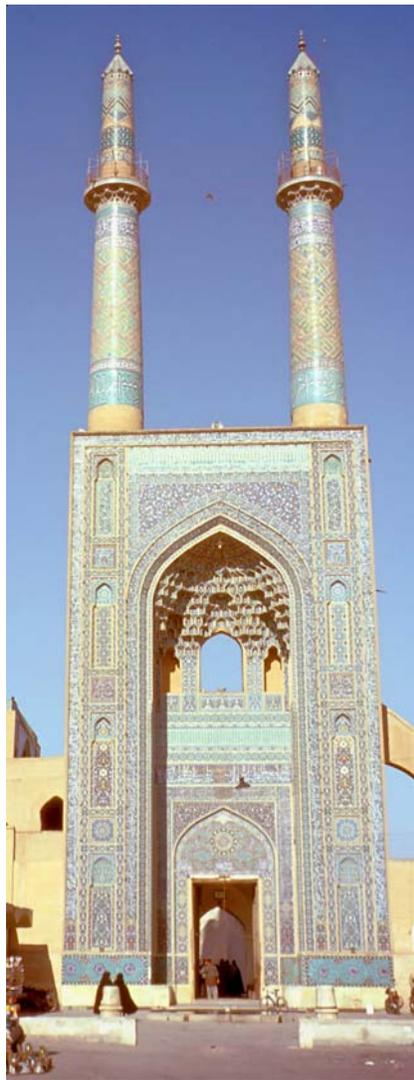
heavy multicolored silk stuffs [Fig. 4]. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the export of silks and carpets to India and Central Asia underpinned a period of prosperity, and these items are still celebrated. At one time Yazd was also known for decorative metalwork. That craft seems to have died out, but a search led to the street of the copper workers, adjacent to a picturesque sunny square loud with the cheerful din of metal striking metal. Here the big copper pots and trays are hammered into shape, and then passed on to a neighboring artisan



Fig. 5. A baker displays his flat bread. Photograph © Ruth L. Harold 1970.

who gives each vessel a final coat of shiny, non-toxic tin. The old crafts are endlessly fascinating: the smith at his forge, the furniture maker turning a lathe with his foot while his helper decorates wooden chests with red velvet and brass nails. A candy boiler labors over a huge tray of crystallized sugar, a baker shows off flaps of fresh stonebread (*sangak*), surely the best bread ever! [Fig. 5, previous page.] Carding, dyeing, spinning and weaving remind one that the textile industry, which once made Yazd famous, is still very much alive.

The lanes of the bazaar twist and turn and eventually lead to the Friday Mosque, the pride of Yazd



and one of the finest in Iran [Fig. 6]. The tall façade, the shallow dome and the interior of the sanctuary hall all sparkle with glazed tile. Most of the tilework dates to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when the art was at its height and the city rich; no cost was spared in assembling thousands of precisely cut pieces of colored tile into large mosaics of geometric or floral design [Fig. 7]. In return for a small tip, the custodian unlocks the steps to the roof, and may even allow one to climb a minaret. In the old days, a muezzin would scale this five times a day to call his community to prayer; his modern successor

understandably prefers to issue the summons from below, with the aid of records and a loudspeaker. Its a long trudge up a tight spiral staircase to the narrow balcony, where we hug the wall while admiring the view. The city sprawls below, dun-colored like the desert that gave it birth. A line of small domes traces the bazaar by which we came; here and there a larger dome, bright with blue tiles, marks a mosque or a tomb.

Tombs of saints and martyrs are prominent in the human landscape of Iran. Many are closed to non-Muslims, but we were admitted to the Imamzadeh Jaafar, a fine example of the genre. Built in the 17th century, the shrine consists of a simple plastered chamber surmounted by a dome, its floor lined with carpets. The carved wooden cenotaph, covered

Fig. 6. Portal of the Friday Mosque, begun in 1325. Photograph © Ruth L. Harold 2000.

with green baize, is set apart by brass railings. We could not learn who this particular Jaafar was, but his memory is still green, honored by women who come to weep and pray at the tomb while a pair of mullahs chants from the Quran.



Fig. 7. Tilework of the Friday Mosque. Photograph © Ruth L. Harold 2000.

The atmosphere of Yazd is that of Islam, but the city harbors remnants of a far older order. Prior to the Arab conquest (642 CE), the dominant religion of Iran was Zoroastrianism, a faith that sees the world in terms of a contest between the principles of good and of evil. The duty of man is to

take part in the moral struggle, and to hasten the triumph of the good by noble deeds, right thoughts and proper worship. The Parsees of Bombay make up the world's largest Zoroastrian community, but active ones survive in Yazd, Kerman and Tehran. Yazd was probably a major religious center in antiquity: the Friday Mosque was erected on the site of a large fire-temple, and the very name of the city recalls that of the last Sassanian king, Yezdegird, who was driven from his throne by the Arab armies. Until quite recently Zoroastrians were regarded as idolators and subjected to various indignities: like the Jews of medieval Europe they were obliged to wear distinctive clothing, forbidden any show of prosperity, and their touch was held to pollute Muslims. They were often persecuted and denied legal redress. But Zoroastrians survived as a community and prospered in business, earning a reputation for honesty and hard

work. Under the tolerant regime of the Pahlavi Shahs, their position became secure. Zoroastrians occupy a quarter in the south of Yazd. Outwardly, this does not differ much from the rest of the city, but its alleys seem more animated. That is due to the presence of women, cheerfully attired in colored shawls and baggy trousers tied at the ankles, in place of the somber black of their Muslim sisters.

Traditionally, Zoroastrians did not bury their dead but exposed them to the vultures in walled enclosures called towers of silence. These are outside the city, and even though the custom is fading, they are off-limits. But there was no objection to our visiting the main fire-temple, a modern building of no architectural pretensions set in a shady garden [Fig. 8]. The walls are hung with oleographs, portraits of the half-legendary Zoroaster (probably sixth century BCE) and of wealthy Parsee donors. In a small room to one side stands a huge brass urn. There smolders the eternal fire, guarded by its priests and perfumed from time to time with sandalwood or aromatic herbs. This is the very focus of Zoroastrian worship. Fire represents the divine essence, the source of life, which burns in the bodies of men and beasts, in the air, even in paradise. Fire is the symbol of the ritual purity to which Zoroastrians aspire, and must never be allowed to go out. In Iran it has burned thus for some 2500 years, dimly at times but never extinguished.

Postscript

We returned to Yazd in 2000, to find that no place is immune to change. The district is now home to more than 300,000 persons, and new residential areas linked by busy roads sprawl across the desert flats. The qanat, long unequal to the demand for water,

have been supplemented with deep wells. The old city, however, has been carefully protected; now designated a UNESCO world heritage site, it is considerably tidier than in was then and less picturesque, but probably more salubrious. Under the Islamic Republic dusty alleys have been



Fig. 8. The Zoroastrian temple. Photograph © Ruth L. Harold 2000.

paved, crumbling shrines restored and the tilework of the Friday Mosque made splendid. The view from the roof is still magnificent, though you may have to put up with the loudspeaker blaring devotional music. The Zoroastrian community, some 12,000 strong, holds its temple and its place in the city. The towers of silence are disused now, and you may look upon them from the foot. The great disappointment, here and elsewhere in Iran, was what has befallen the bazaar. The vaulted halls remain, but the workshops and their craftsmen are gone; in their place, indifferent shops sell cheap imports and mass-produced housewares. Much has been swept away, yet much remains: we cannot think of any other city that preserves so much of the atmosphere of a caravan depot on the Silk Road.

About the Authors

Frank and Ruth Harold are scientists by profession and travelers by avocation. Frank was born in Germany, grew up in the Middle East and studied at the City College, New York, and the

University of California at Berkeley. He is Professor Emeritus of biochemistry at Colorado State University and a member of the volunteer faculty at the University of Washington. Ruth is a microbiologist, now retired, and an aspiring painter. The Harold family lived in Iran in 1969-1970, while Frank served as Fulbright lecturer at the University of Tehran. This experience kindled a passion for Asian travel which has since taken them to Afghanistan and back to Iran, into the Himalayas, up and down the Indian subcontinent and along the Silk Road between China and Turkey. They make their home in Edmonds, Washington, and may be reached at < frankharold@earthlink.net >.

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Kyrgyz Healing Practices: Some Field Notes

Jipar Duyshembiyeva

University of Washington, Seattle

Kyrgyz traditional healing practices display a mixture of Islamic and pre-Islamic practices of the Turkic peoples. Like many of the other peoples of Central Asia, before the spread of Islam Kyrgyz worshipped spirits of their ancestors, different animals, mountains, trees, running water, and fire. Along with Islam, especially in its Sufi forms, some of the traces of this ancient practice still can be found in daily lives of the Kyrgyz. Most of the healers today associate their healing power with Islam; however, the healing practice itself and tools they use clearly show its strong connection with pre-Islamic values and practices. What follows is primarily a descriptive presentation of field work observations from the summer of 2001. Contextualization with a closer examination of the scholarly literature is a project for the future.

The main figure in many of the traditional ritual practices is the shaman. The word "shaman" itself is a Tungus word, and only the Tungus called their shaman by the name "shaman" among all the "shamanist" peoples of the world [Arik 1999, p. 368]. Among Kyrgyz, shamans are called *baqshi*, a word whose exact meaning is disputed. Some sources say that the word derives from Sanskrit *bikshu*, which means "Buddhist

monk, shaman, or healer" [Bartol'd 1963, p. 454]. Other scholars insist on a Turkic origin of the word. They argue that it came from the Turkish word *baqmak* which means "to look after, to take care" [Shani-iazov 1974, p. 327]. Whatever its derivation, among the Kyrgyz the word refers to a person who is believed to possess the power to heal, to find lost or stolen things and foretell the future.¹ Together with the word *baqshi*, Kyrgyz use such terms as *tabip* (from Arabic, "healer") and *közü achik* (lit. "the one with opened eyes"). The latter term generally refers to people who are mostly engaged with finding lost objects or people and fortune-telling. However, they also practice healing.

The role of shamans in Central Asia was especially important before the spread of Islam. They occupied a special place in society, since people considered that they had the ability to communicate with spirits of their dead ancestors. Many shamans were also spiritual leaders of their tribes. Every tribal leader would seek the shaman's blessing before going to war against another tribe. Healing, however, remained the most important part of shaman's activities.

Several sources describe shamanic practices and shamans

among the Kyrgyz before the end of the nineteenth century. Two of the major ones are the accounts by Wilhelm Radloff and Chokan Valikhanov, who traveled to the region to conduct broad research on nomadic people of Central Asia and wrote at length about the shamanic rituals and the role of shamans among the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs. Valikhanov notably tended to downplay the Islamic elements which were already prominent in Central Asian Turkic "shamanism" [Privratsky 2001, p. 11]. Perhaps the best modern study of shamanism, which underscores the idea that it is not a "religion" per se, is Caroline Humphrey's book using the example of the Daur Mongols. Additional material may be found in work by Vladimir Basilov, Bruce Privratsky, and Kagan Arik. A monograph in French by Patrick Garrone deals specifically with the institution of the *baqshi* and is based both on written sources and extensive field work, especially among the Kazakhs.

I undertook my field work in the summer of 2001 as part of my University of Washington M.A. program. The goal was to observe some of the shamanic practices that are alive today and to interview practicing *baqshis*. The observations were made in the region of Kochkor, a small town in northern Kyrgyzstan. My mother is from a nearby village, Komsomol, where I lived until age of five and have visited every year since; my grandmother and my late grandfather also lived in that village. It is there that I made the acquaintance of the healer Kalii, [Fig. 1, next page] famous not only in Komsomol, but also in most of the surrounding region. People even come from the capital, Bishkek, to be healed by her.

When we arrived to Kalii apa's² house, she was seeing a toddler. His mother had brought him to Kalii apa, because he had not slept for several nights in a row and had been constantly crying. Kalii apa had painted the child's face with a

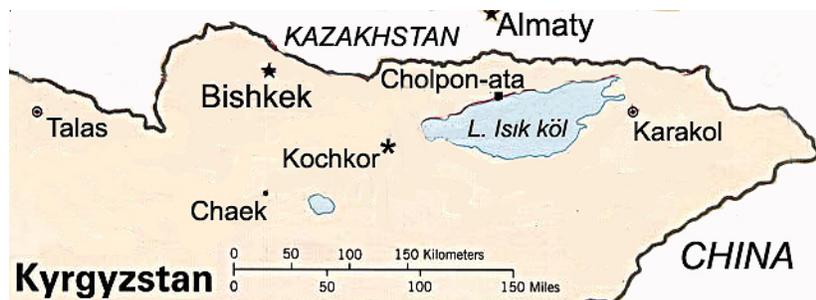




Fig. 1. Kalii apa treating a patient. Photograph © Jipar Dushembiyeva 2001.

paint used for coloring felt rugs. She told me that the bright colors would lure the evil spirits out of the child's body; they would lick the paint and leave the boy alone. This belief also exists among other Central Asian people. However, healers may use different tools in order to achieve the same goal.³ Further, Kalii apa filled a cup with some ashes and covered it with a piece of cloth. Then she touched the body of the child from head to toe with the cup turned upside down. After she was done, Kalii apa uncovered the cup, which was now only half full. She poured the remaining ashes onto the toddler's jacket and left it next to the wood stove where it was supposed to lie for seven days. The boy, who had been crying constantly before the healing, seemed to quiet down now. When Kalii apa handed him over to his mother, I started my conversation with her.

Kalii apa remembers that she began to heal people at the age of twenty-seven when she came to her husband's village. She would often get sick for no apparent reason and would not know what to do about it. She consulted many healers, but nothing helped. She refused to take up the healing profession for as long as possible, but finally she had to give in.⁴ She started with one of the easiest practices that can in fact be done by almost anyone, lifting children's hearts, that is, comforting them when they had experienced a serious fright. She then began to

visit *mazars* (shrines), making sacrifices and staying there overnight and praying. Although she could not explain to me the source of her power or the way in which it operates, she repeatedly emphasized that it helps her to heal people and she follows its directions.

Kalii apa states that she can heal liver diseases, help those who have arthritis, and relieve severe lower back pain by drawing blood. She also takes the pulse [lit. "takes vein"⁵]; that is, by touching the artery she can tell what the person's sickness is and the ways she can help him/her. If, after taking the pulse, she knows that the person is incurable,⁶ she never tries to heal him/her. In that case Kalii apa admits her inability to cure and she advises the patient to find some other healer or see a doctor. However, if she is sure that she can heal the person, she does everything in her power to help. Kalii apa also told us that she has "bio-energy" and uses it in her healing.

Another story told by Kalii apa is quite interesting. A friend of hers in the village had cancer. She called in Kalii apa one day, asking that she take her pulse in order to find out how long she would live. But Kalii apa refused to do so and left. Next morning she asked my grandmother to come with her and see her friend, but it turned out that the latter had died the previous night after Kalii apa left. She says that merely by looking at her friend she knew that "her days were numbered" (*köröör künü az kaldı*).

Kalii apa also claims that she has the ability to find lost or stolen things and has the ability to foretell the future with the help of forty-one stones.⁷ When telling fortunes, she never tries to make a person avoid a certain event. She insists that everything is controlled by God, and there is no way to avoid one's own fate. However, since she advises people how to act in a certain situation, they come to her with their various daily problems.

She relates an incident in the 1970s in the same village which almost persuaded her to give up fortune telling. My grandmother and Kalii apa are very close friends, and their houses are situated not far from each other. The son of their close neighbor went to serve in the army. While they were waiting for his return, with the help of the stones, my grandma and Kalii apa tried to predict the exact time of his arrival. When spread out, the stones would always show a coffin, a prediction which they did not dare tell the boy's mother. Yet he returned home safe and sound to much rejoicing, only to die two months later. After that my grandmother swore never to touch the stones again. For a time Kalii apa refused to tell fortunes, but finally she again gave in to those asked for her help.

In addition to her pulse taking, predicting the future, and healing little children using traditional ways, Kalii apa also draws blood. My grandmother still remembers how it all started. Kalii apa came to their village in 1964 when still very young, some twenty-two or twenty-three years old. Nobody knew that she had the ability to heal illnesses or relieve somebody's pain. When children took ill, people would not know what to do. To visit to a good doctor was costly and the distance too far; so people looked for more immediate help. There were some elderly people in the village who could help, but not much. Whenever Kalii apa came to visit my grandmother's house and would touch a sick child's head the child would feel better. As her reputation for healing grew, people started taking their ill children to Kalii apa. From just touching a person she slowly switched to healing with the help of the ashes, knives, paper, etc.

My grandmother remembers that at that time she started having constant headaches. She tried taking some pills but developed allergies to them which caused her face to swell. Her visit to a doctor in Karakol (a town at

the east end of Lake İsik Köl) did not help. On the way home, she thought of asking Kalii apa to draw her blood. Kalii apa, who had never performed the procedure before, was terrified and refused my grandmother's request. She said that she had seen her grandfather do it but was afraid to try herself. Finally she gave in. My grandmother shaved a small area on her head, and Kalii apa made several cuts on her head through which the "bad blood" came out. My grandmother says that since then her head never was cold, and the constant headaches stopped.

Nowadays, due to my grandmother's advanced age, Kalii apa does not make cuts on her head. Instead, twice a year, Kalii apa makes small cuts on her back. Another thing that my grandmother remembered was that a while ago doctors told Kalii apa's daughter she had a high blood pressure and wanted to put her in a hospital. Unwilling to trust the doctors, Kalii apa said she would cure her daughter herself; she combined all the leeches⁸ that my grandmother and she herself had and put all of them on her daughter's back. According to my grandmother, "they sucked off all the blood that was causing pain." The next day the girl went to the hospital where doctors found out that she did not have any high blood pressure and was fine. When the daughter started having constant headaches, medicine did not help. Again her mother convinced her to have her blood drawn, which relieved the pain. Since then, she said, she comes twice a year to get rid of her "spoiled blood."

I witnessed the blood drawing on one of these visits. The procedure involved the use of glasses, buttons, a piece of cloth, matches, a little bucket, and a razor. Having prepared everything Kalii apa took a blade and made three one-inch cuts on both sides of her daughter's back. Then she wrapped the buttons in two small

pieces of cloth, placed them close to the cuts, and lit them with the matches. After that she quickly put glasses on top of the flaming buttons. Once the buttons were covered, blood started coming out of incisions.⁹ After 1-3 minutes she took the glasses off and wiped the blood from her back. She repeated this procedure several times making cuts in different places. After a considerable amount of blood had been drawn, she stopped the procedure and wiped her back with a piece of cloth soaked in alcohol.

It is not easy to watch the procedure of blood drawing especially if seeing it for the first time. Furthermore, for a person used to ideas about the importance of a sterile environment, the procedure would be disturbing. The tools she was using were very basic, the piece of cloth she used for wiping the cuts was quite dirty; she did not seem to bother about the cleanliness of her tools and disinfecting them and her daughter's back before making any cuts on it. Only at the end of the whole procedure did she use some alcohol to wipe her daughter's back with the cloth soaked in it.

Blood drawing was the last procedure that Kalii apa performed that day. Towards the end she felt quite tired and looked exhausted. She explained to me that during the procedure she thinks about the patient's illness and takes it onto herself. She mentioned that sometimes she gets sick for a while herself, because she gives all her energy to the patient. She does not take anything for her services; "I take only whatever my patients bring me, what comes from their hearts. I never ask for anything specifically, I don't ask for money, and if they brought anything, they leave it on the table," she said. Later, I found out that she is the sole supporter of her family. Her youngest son and his wife and children stay with her, but there is no job in the village for them. They keep a small number of sheep and have some cattle. People who visit

her bring tea, bread, candies or cookies; some of them leave money.

I next visited the Kochkor Ata shrine located in the northwestern part of Kum Döbö village. It is called a *mazar*, or a shrine, a term used to refer to graves of venerated Muslim saints. The activities at the shrine pointed clearly to the fusion of Islamic belief and practice on the one hand and traditional, non-Islamic practice on the other.

The shrine consists of two low hills which are joined and people say resemble from a distance a resting camel. It is visited by many people, often from distant parts of Kyrgyzstan. Some come every Thursday to pray for their deceased relatives, others come to make a sacrifice in their ancestors' honor; a third group comes to find some cure for their illnesses. One can also meet married couples who cannot have children and for whom this is their only place of hope. Another significant group of visitors are *baqshi*. Experienced ones bring their patients, because it is a general belief that there is a greater chance of a cure if the performance is conducted at the holy places where the spirit of the ancestors is strongest. Younger *baqshi* come to Kochkor Ata shrine for the initiation ceremony, usually accompanied by more experienced ones, and they spend a night there.

There is a small three-room building next to the shrine. People who bring food or slaughter a sheep for sacrifice use the building as a place to gather other pilgrims, share their food and recite the Quran at the end of the ceremony. A local *mullah* (Muslim religious authority) maintains the place and makes it his task to take people around the shrine. The major part of the ceremony consists of going around the hill, making some stops on the designated areas along the way and reciting the Quran. There are several caves in the mound where candles are set at nighttime.

There are many legends about Kochkor Ata and why that place became sacred. Some people say that Kochkor Ata was a Muslim saint and was buried in that place after his death. Since then, the place of his burial became a place of pilgrimage for many people. Others connect the history of Kochkor Ata shrine with Kyrgyz folklore. Thus, Kazakh ethnographer Chokan Valikhanov mentions that Kazakh sultan Barak, who lived at the end of eighteenth century, "became careless, and showing off his strength he invaded the sacred place of the Kyrgyz, Kochkar Ata." The Kirghiz became angry, attacked Barak's camp, and pursued his army as far as the Ili River. "The Kirghiz," writes Valikhanov, "attributed their enemies' escape to the holiness of Kochkor Ata" [Valikhanov 1985, p. 375]. There is another legend told by a man from Cholpon Ata, who said that Arslanbab (a mazar in Southern Kyrgyzstan) had seven children. And the seven mazars, Oisul Ata, Karakol Ata, Shing Ata, Manzhil Ata, Cholpon Ata, Kochkor Ata, Oluia Ata, were built in their honor [Abramzon 1975, p. 304]. It is worth noting that in the Soviet period, as part of the effort to discourage Islamic practice, the authorities undertook severe measures to prevent worship at mazars.

I went to Kochkor Ata with my family. We brought some bread, fruits and vegetables, and some sweets to the shrine. Since we went on Thursday, the local mullah was expecting a large number of people to come that day. We were the third group to enter the house near the shrine. It was full of visitors already. A group before us had slaughtered a sheep not long ago and the meat was boiling outside in a big *qazan* (cauldron). We were invited to join others for the meal. After we finished the meal, the mullah recited The Quran and took all of us outside the building. He led us to the hill, where we started our journey.

There was a certain path one had to follow. The mullah was in front of us constantly saying *La Illaha Il-Allah* which means "None but Allah is worthy of worship." He made stops on the way at several places, usually next to the big rocks, in order to recite The Quran. After the recitation people kissed the stone and touched it with their foreheads.¹⁰ The whole process took us forty-five minutes. We saw many pilgrims who were sitting down and praying during our walk, and it was quite a busy place. Finally, we reached our starting point where our mullah recited The Quran for the last time. It was there that I met my next informant, Kümüş Zhanibek kizi, another *baqshi* from the nearby village, who brought her patients to the shrine to perform her healing rituals in ways which very much resembled shamanic practices described from earlier times.

Kümüş approached the shrine with five of her patients just when we were done with our ceremony. Their behavior was submissive, and they followed her instructions carefully. They brought some bread, watermelons, pilaf, and some vegetables to the house next to the shrine. She was leading her group towards the hill when I started a conversation with her; she allowed me to videotape her performance.

Kümüş led them to a place surrounded by small rocks close to the hill. They knelt down, and one of the men in the group recited The Quran. After he finished, Kümüş began her ritual. She recited The Quran, and after that she spread her palms and started saying rapidly the following:

My kind God, my kind God, my kind God, *Bissimilla Rahman Rahim*,

I devote This Quran to Kochkor Ata,¹¹ Shaban Shorobek Ata, to all the spirits surrounding Kochkor Ata, to all those who have passed away, to all children who died young, to

those who were buried with their clothes, to the blind, and to the great khans.

Bissimilla Rahman Rahim,

I devote my prayer to my Zhungal Ata, Tosor Ata, Baba Ata, İsik Ata, İsik Köl Ata, Cholpon Ata, and to my generous Manas Ata, and his forty companions, to those holy fathers and mothers who perished between the East and the West, to the old people, to the widows and orphans, to the mother lake and father lake, to the sacred shrines surrounding the lake,¹² to the masters of those shrines, to Manzhil Ata, to his sacred supporters, to Kalighul Ata.

[I devote my prayer] to the seven forefathers of the people who came here to visit [the shrine], to the common spirits, to all those who passed away, to all children who died, to their seven forefathers and seven foremothers.

Save from the evil eye and evil word of others your creatures who came here saying your name and asking their wishes be granted. Forgive the one mistake that they made in their lives unknowingly. Grant their dreams and wishes. May their enemies be far from them and their friends close to them. Provide a cure for the illness of these people. Open the white path to those who came asking for it. If they gave their heart to you, grant their wishes.

Oomiin, Alohu-Akbar.

Upon finishing her prayer, Kümüş began her healing. Her patients sat down in a row facing Kochkor Ata shrine with their heads down. Kümüş held a whip in her hands; she started walking back and forth in front of her patients while singing aloud the following song:

Dear Allah, blessed Allah, Kochkor Ata, please help, Allah, To a person who came saying "Allah"
Open his white road wide.

Allah oh, Allah eh...

Provide a cure for your creature
Who came in illness.
Give cure for [his] sickness.
My first hill, double hill.
Kochkor Ata, please help.
My second hill, double hill.
The one which a horse circled.
Allah oh, Allah eh...

I'll call you, saying "Allah"
Kochkor Ata please heal
[them?].
I'll call you, saying "Allah"
Zhumgal Ata please come.
Take my white wishes.
Allah oh, Allah eh...

I'll call you, saying "Allah"
Ak Mazar Ata, please come.
Give them their white paths.
Allah oh, Allah eh...

Creator Allah, [sacrifice], Allah
I'll spread my white beard.
Ak Mazar Ata, please come
Give your help.
Allah ho, Allah eh...

Manas Ata, please help.
I called you, saying "Allah."
Please, you, yourself always
help.
Allah eh, Allah oh...

Creator Allah, bless Allah,
Ak Mazar Ata did you come?
Baba Ata, you yourself purify.
Put [them] in the right path.
If he sinned without knowing,
Tosor Ata, please purify.
Allah eh, Allah oh...

CHUPH, CHUPH, CHUPH...

Several times during the ceremony Kümüş hit some of her patients with the whip she was holding [Fig. 2]. After she was done with the song, she started to 'spit' on her patients and make circular movements with her hands above their heads as if she was lifting invisible objects from their shoulders.¹³ She ended her ceremony with the words, "All of you spread your palms, and invoke Kochkor Ata. Tell him the wish with which you came." She pronounced a prayer in Arabic and said "Oomiin" [Amen].



Fig. 2. Kümüş with her whip.
Photograph © Jipar Dushembiyeva
2001.

After Kümüş was done with the healing ceremony, I asked some questions regarding her performance. She gave me an explanation of what she had to go through to become a healer and her healing method:

I would get very sick often. In 1993 I went to Chaek¹⁴ to a certain old woman. She was a famous healer in that village. I had not been able to give birth for sixteen years. Once I had entered this path [i.e. began practicing healing] I helped people who had cancer and epilepsies. I helped the ones who came out of Chim-Korgon.¹⁵ Here is the boy who could not get well in that clinic. [She pointed at one of her patients.] He was released from the clinic not so long ago. I also help those who have come under the "evil eye" and who have some minor illnesses. All my ability is from God. With his help I help other people. It has been eight years [since I started healing]. There are some people who got well. Among the people who came to me there were people with cancer, and after several séances they got well.

After I started my healing practice, I was able to give birth to two children. Had it not been

for them, I doubt whether I would have started healing. My practice is closely connected with medicine and also with religion.¹⁶ If people do not get well we send them to the doctor. We ask them to have the laboratory analyses. The first year when I started examining¹⁷ people, I did not know how to recite The Quran. After that, in my dream I was told to recite Quran, and that is how I started.

As one can see, Kümüş also connects her healing ability to a power, but unlike Kali, she knows that it comes from God. She clearly states that she did not have any intention to practice healing. However, since she was not getting well from her illnesses, the only way she could be cured was to take up healing, a phenomenon typical for other practitioners. Almost all of them state that "seeing" people became a necessity for them: healing provides relief, and they start feeling better. Kümüş was the most vocal one of all healers I met. Unlike their predecessors, modern healers prefer not to advertise their talents. In contrast, Kümüş was very outspoken, and she was very animated, expressing her emotions during the ritual. Along with pre-Islamic rituals, Kümüş also incorporated Quranic verses into her practice. The syncretic relationship between Islam and pre-Islamic practice was reinforced by the location of the ritual in the open air next to a shrine.

My third informant, Saripbek kızı Saiasat,¹⁸ came from Talas region and now lives in Bishkek. As often seems to be the case with healers, she notes that the practice ran in the family, where her grandfathers and grandmothers were also healers even though her parents were not.¹⁹ She strongly believes that her ability to heal had been passed down to her from her grandparents. None of her eight siblings is a healer.

Of particular interest in my interview were her observations about the relationship between Islamic and non-Islamic practice. She helps people by reciting *surahs* from the Quran. Kyrgyz call the practice *dem sal*, which, if one translates it literally, means "putting breath," or giving to a person life by helping him breathe. When asked how she learned this practice, she responded:

In my dream somebody told me that I should heal with "si". I didn't know what it was, but later one person showed me *surahs* from the Quran and there was a *surah*, which would start with "si". My healing is connected with religion. Shamanism and healing are different. It is not shamanism. I am supposed to use only my prayer beads and prayer rug for healing. However, I am used to using other things, or maybe they came from my teacher.

She went on to explain that certain practices are definitely not Islamic; in fact her preferred instruments for healing are prayer beads.

According to Sharia, one cannot use stones, and fortune telling is also wrong. The use of the stones, knives, whip, etc. is not allowed in Islam. When I take the prayer beads, I can see everything as if I am watching a TV. ...With the help of the prayer beads I can tell what kind of sickness a person has and where that sickness came from. Other than that I also take people's pulse. When I don't have my prayer beads with me I diagnose with the help of ashes. It is really difficult to explain that. I use the stones when I am too tired. I use up all my energy when I give prognoses using prayer beads, and I get tired and sick after that. In order not to send the next patient back I use the stones.

During the conversation Saiasat also explained the purpose of each tool that she uses for

healing. She uses a whip (*qamchi*) for very severe sicknesses, psychological sicknesses or when a person is 'possessed' by evil spirits. She circles the whip around her patient's head and it brings them great relief. She uses the small whip for children and people with pain in their lower back. Sometimes it is used for the people who complain about their sleep and anxiety. Her knife is used for lifting one's heart. She uses prayer beads for her daily prayer and for healing people as well. She also widely uses different kinds of herbs in healing stomach pain and various skin diseases.

One can find a great number of healers today in Kyrgyzstan. Their practice surfaced in more obvious ways after the country gained its independence. It is apparent that the healing tradition stayed very much alive during the Soviet regime; after all, it had existed for many centuries preceding the Soviet state. However, most of the time it was practiced in secrecy. Not many *baqshi* admitted their engagement with supernatural, afraid of being punished for it. The new era created many opportunities for true healers and imitators alike. People started frequenting sites like Kochkor Ata located in different parts of Kyrgyzstan; they began to take refuge in alternative medicine. This demand also helped to spawn many charlatans, who saw "healing" as a quick way to make money. It is clear though that there are many who believe sincerely in their art and their healing abilities.

During my short trip to Kyrgyzstan I was able to meet with only three practicing *baqshi*, only a small portion of the numerous healers in the country. Each one of them has her own unique techniques, her own tools and methods. They perceive their healing as a gift from above which they cannot resist, and each one of them has her own patients who believe in her power. It was not my goal however to decide which

one of the healers possesses true healing ability and which does not, or whether they have any such ability at all. My intention was to observe a complex phenomenon that is still alive and needs further study.

About the Author

Jipar Duyshembiyeva received her M.A. from the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization at the University of Washington in 2002. She currently works in the University of Washington libraries and plans to return to graduate school for Ph.D. work on Central Asian literature and culture. She may be reached at <jipar@u.washington.edu>.

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Notes

1. For the Kazakhs, Bruce Privratsky distinguishes several categories of healers. The *baqshi* is a shaman in the narrow sense of one who may engage in ecstatic behavior in invoking spirits. What we describe in this essay for the Kyrgyz is more akin to the *tawip* or healer, generally a woman connected with the Islamic tradition but not necessarily versed in its textual aspects. The several categories of activity observed among the Kyrgyz *baqshis* are shared by the *tawips* and also to greater or lesser degrees are observed among the other categories of Kazakh healers. See Privratsky 2001, p. 194, and more generally his chapter 6. While the semantic distinctions in Kyrgyz seem to parallel those Privratsky has described, among the Kyrgyz the term *baqshi* seems not to be quite so specific.

2. Her first name is Kalii; the term *apa* means mother in Kyrgyz and it is usually used as a term of respect for older women.

3. For instance, a Tajik healer used goat's blood to help her patient who was suffering from stomach pain. See Sukhareva 1975, p. 62.

4. It is said that if a chosen person refuses to be involved with healing, he/she might get sick and even can die later. *Manaschis*, the singers of the traditional epic *Manas*, similarly report experiencing illness when they are being "called" or initiated into their profession. Another *baqshi* whom I interviewed, Kümüş, likewise reported illness and dreams as part of the initiation process.

5. *Tamir karmait* in Kirghiz. This is the common procedure for certain of the Kazakh healers [Privratsky 2001, p. 204].

6. Kalii *apa* used the word *tigindei bolup kete turgan ubak bolso*, meaning if the time has come for him to become like that, instead of the word to die.

7. In the Kazakh case, often 41 sheep pellets are used [Privratsky 2001, p. 212].

8. Leeches are also used to draw "spoiled blood." [Although this seems bizarre to those whose perspective is modern Western medicine, the use of leeches was widely practiced in the Soviet Union, not just in Central Asia. During his final illness in 1953, Soviet doctors applied leeches to Stalin—ed.]

9. Since the flames consume the oxygen in the air trapped by the glass, suction is created within the glass which pulls the blood out of the incision.

10. The mullah could not give an explicit answer to the question of why one had to kiss the stone.

11. *Ata* means father in Kyrgyz. It is more understandable if you read Father Kochkor, Father Zhumgal, etc.

12. By "the lake" she probably means Lake Isik Kol.

13. Privratsky notes a similar use of the whip by Kazakh healers and also the ritual of spitting [Privratsky 2001, pp. 206, 210-211].

14. Another village in northern Kyrgyzstan. See map, p. 38.

15. A psychiatric clinic in Kyrgyzstan.

16. It is obvious that by the religion she means Islam.

17. She uses the word "seeing."

18. *Saiasat* means "politics" in English.

19. Although, she did not say it openly, it is obvious that her parents lived during the anti-religious politics of the Soviet regime, and therefore, even though they knew how, they were not able to practice healing.