# Some Buddhist Finds from Khotan: Materials in the Collections of the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

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The Khotan collection of the State Hermitage Museum includes more than three thousand objects. At its core is the collection of Nikolai F. Petrovskii (1837-1908), who, beginning in 1874, served as an official of the Russian Ministry of Finance in Eastern Turkestan and then Russian Consul in Kashgar from 1882-1902. Petrovskii knew the local languages well and was interested in the history and culture of the region, although he is best known to the English-speaking world as the representative of Russian political interests during this period of the so-called "Great Game." He published a good many articles and notes (Petrovskii 1892, 1893, 1906 etc.) and maintained close scholarly contacts with the leading orientalists of his time such as Sergei F. Ol'denburg and Vasilii V. Bartol'd. As Ol'denburg wrote, it was Petrovskii "who first encouraged scholars to devote detailed attention to the scholarly treasures of Chinese Turkestan; he was a man of whom Russia rightly was proud" (Ol'denburg 1912, p. 3). In a letter to Academician Viktor R. Rozen, Petrovskii wrote: "the archaeological objects in the collection were obtained through agents from the local inhabitants. The objects come from the territory of the town of Borazan, where they were discovered mainly in the channel of the irrigation canal which watered the soil of the ancient settlement" (IRAO 1882, protocols of 27 March; 1893, protocols of 20 June). The objects in the collection of Petrovskii were a cause for enthusiasm and were obtained by the Imperial Hermitage in 1897. In addition, the collection contains a significant number of finds obtained by Sergei A. Kolokolov, Sobolevskii and the engineeers L. Ia. Liutsh and Belinko. A relatively small number of the objects was acquired from the scholars Nikolai I. Veselovskii and Sergei E. Malov.

A significant part of the collection is objects made of terracotta, numbering more than 2500.

They were found in Yotkan, the location which Petrovskii referred to as Borazan. Similar objects are also in collections outside of Russia. The collection contains some forty intact vessels and more than 800 fragments. Scholars generally date the Yotkan ceramics to the second-fourth centuries CE. The collection includes as well coins, statuettes carved from stone, small bronze sculptures and reliefs, bronze seals and intaglios, painting and written documents on wood.

The question of the history of Yotkan remains open, pending archaeological investigation of the site. Some scholars are of the opinion that it was the capital of the oasis; others consider that it was the location of a cemetery. There were other centers in Khotan besides Yotkan, some of them better documented from the archaeological standpoint: Ak-Terek, Ak-Sipil, Dandan-Uilik and Rawak. We do know that the Kingdom of Khotan maintained contacts with China, the West and the states of Central Asia. This explains why Khotan ceramics have much in common with Central Asian late Kushan and especially Bactrian ceramics (Litvinskii 1995, p. 123). There are some parallels with Chinese bronze dishes and with Classical vases. The figured dishes resemble Classical ones only in their shape. According to Gösta Montell, the dishes with human representations derive from Classical prototypes (Montell 1935, pp. 158-159). Classical and Persian influences were reflected in the intaglios carved from semiprecious stones, in the bronze seals and in small terracottas.

The distinctiveness of Khotan ceramics consists above all in their ornamental compositions. Characteristic is the combination of applied and stamped relief, sculpture, and flat ornament, which is also common in Kushan Bactrian ceramics. Probably the Khotan vases were imitations of metal ones (gold or silver) (D'iakonova and Sorokin 1960, pls. 1-5). In Khotan vases were made of thin clay mixed with loess and after firing took on a bright red or yellowish-red color. The purpose of the vases remains unclear, whereas the other vessels were used in daily life.

Of particular interest are terracotta statuettes depicting men and women in secular dress, which were widespread in Eastern Turkestan in the fourth and fifth centuries. Their purpose remains unclear: they could have been toys, or votive or burial statuettes. They were manufactured in large quantities with the help of moulds (D'iakonova 2000, pp. 229-230). Numerous figures of monkeys also originate in Khotan, their purpose likewise as yet being unclear.

A good many of the objects from Khotan are to be connected with religious practice. Among the local cults, the most widespread was the worship of the god of weaving, whose painted images are to be found on wooden icons. Beginning in the first centuries CE Khotan became one of the major centers of Buddhism; many monasteries were erected there. Hence in Khotan along with monuments dedicated to local cults and cults imported from other areas, there are a great many Buddhist monuments. The art of Khotan featured clay and stucco relief depictions of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, ranging in size from miniatures to very large sculptures. A rather large group of Gandharan Buddhist votive images carved from stone attest to the connections with India. They were imported by pilgrims and monks who moved from one monastery to the next and tend thus to be of small dimensions. The small Buddhist Gandharan sculpture was widespread in the territories of Eastern Turkestan and Central Asia. Monuments of Gandharan sculpture made of stone and elephant ivory were found in Khotan by, among others, the expedition of Aurel Stein (Stein 1907, Vol. 2, pl. XLVII).

Information on Buddhism in Khotan has come down to us from three sources: from the descriptions of Chinese pilgrims, from fragments of Buddhist texts found in East Turkestan and from works of art.

The Chinese and Tibetan sources date the penetration of Buddhism into Khotan to the third century BCE. The first reports were written by the Chinese monk Zhu Shixing, who arrived in Khotan after the year 260 when seeking fuller versions of the "Prajnaparamita". He found this work and made a copy of it on birchbark (Zürcher 1959, Vol. 1, pp. 61-63).

When Buddhism first established itself in Eastern Turkestan, the most widespread school was the Sarvastivada (Vorob'eva-Desiatovskaia 1989). According to Margarita I. Vorob'eva-Desiatovskaia, there was a transition period in Khotan between the predominance of the Hinayana school and adherence to the Mahayana. One consequence of this was an early emphasis on icongraphic depictions of the Buddhas rather than Bodhisattvas (Williams 1973, pp. 125-129).

In 401 CE the Chinese pilgrim Faxian spent three months in Khotan; in his travel account he emphasized that without exception all the inhabitants were Buddhists. The number of monks was huge, and they were primarily of the Mahayana school. There were fourteen large monasteries plus many smaller ones. The largest monastery contained 3000 monks. To the west of Khotan was another large monastery. The columns beams, doors, and window frames were all gilded, and the cells of the monks richly decorated. In describing the monastery he mentions also wood carving, mosaic, and interior details decorated with silver. The rulers of the six regions of Khotan would send as gifts to the monasteries the rarest of precious stones. "The monastery is so decorated and magnificent," writes Faxian, "that it is impossible to describe it in words" (Faxian 1957, pp. 17-18; Litvinskii 1992, pp. 454-455).

When famous Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang (600-664) visited Khotan in 644-645, he took special note of large monasteries. While there, Xuanzang explained to the local Buddhists the texts of the Yogacarabhumi-sastra, the Abhidarma-samuccaya, the Abhidarma-kosa and the Mahayanasamgraha-sastra. Every day he spoke to an audience of about a thousand; his sermons were attended also by the ruler along with monks and laymen. The Abhidarma-kosa is one of the fundamental works of the Sarvastivada school; the others are part of the Mahayana tradition. Thus, Xuanzang explained to his Khotanese audience primarily Mahayana texts (Men'shikov 1980, pp. 133, 137).

Written texts attest to the popularity in Khotan of Maitreya. A Tibetan work entitled "The

Prophecy about the Li Country [Khotan]" noted that the Buddha ordered eight Bodhisattvas to protect the territory of Khotan. Among them is Maitreya (Emmerick 1967, p. 13). One of the Khotanese kings named Vijaya Sambhava was venerated as the terrestrial incarnation of Maitreya. He ruled for five years beginning 165 years after the founding of the Khotanese state and during his reign built Buddhist monasteries and stupas (Emmerick 1967, p. 25). Another of the Khotanese rulers considered to be a terrestrial incarnation of Maitreya was Vijaya Virya, who likewise was renowned for building Buddhist structures (Emmerick 1967, p. 29).

The following legend is associated with the name of the Bodhisattva Maitreya. Once in the time of the Buddha Kasyapa a stupa was erected on the territory of Khotan. Later on the location of Khotan a lake formed, and the stupa was covered by mountains. Then Maitreya appeared and the lake dried up, the mountains crumbled, and the stupa was freed (Emmerick 1967, p. 31). The king Vijaya Simha built a special monastery dedicated to Maitreya as the protector-divinity of Khotan and erected there his statue (Emmerick 1967, p. 55). The Tibetan text, "The Religious Annals of the Li Country," also names Maitreya as one of the Bodhisattvas who arrived in Khotan.

Common among works of Khotanese art were both miniature and very large sculptures of the Buddhas and Bodhi-

sattvas. The numerous depictions of the Buddha which dominate in the early iconography included standing and seated images, both created under the influence of Gandharan the school. Each of these types included a range of iconography. A standing Buddha [Fig. 1] holds the right hand before the

Fig. 1. Standing Buddha. Painted stucco. H. 18 cm. Khotan, 4<sup>th</sup> century CE. Inv. nos. GA-2477, 2523 (restored from two pieces).





Fig. 2. Seated Buddha. Painted stucco. H. 11 cm. Khotan, 4<sup>th</sup> century CE. Inv. no. GA-2485.

chest in the gesture of fearlessness (*abhaya mudra*). The left hand, extended along the body, grasps the end of the robe. The seated Buddha [Fig. 2] is in the lotus pose (*padmasana*), the hands held in the gesture of meditation (*dhyana mudra*). Such images are of small size and could have been placed around large statues in temples. In addition to stucco and clay, the depictions of the Buddha were made of carved stone and bronze. There is a bronze Buddha [Fig. 3, next page] seated against the backdrop of a mandorla and with a robe sculpted in flowing folds.

The Khotan collection of the State Hermitage (which includes finds from Yotkan, Dandan-uilik, Ak-Terek, Ak-Sipil and Rawak) has many depictions of Buddhas made of terracotta, stucco, stone, and wood, cast in bronze and painted. One of the first scholarly publications concerning this material was an article by Ol'denburg (Ol'denburg and Ol'denburg 1930, pp. 145-186) about the Gandharan monuments found in Khotan and preserved in the State Hermitage, where a good many of the ones he described are on permanent display. The largest part of the collection, works made of terracotta and stucco, has been published by Nataliia V. D'iakonova and Sergei S. Sorokin (D'iakonova and Sorokin 1960). But many examples have not yet been studied or published. Among them



Fig. 3. Seated Buddha. Cast bronze. H. 9.3 cm. Khotan, 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century CE. Inv. no. GA-1552

are small bronze sculptures, glyptics, seals, carved stone and wooden objects.

A particularly interesting example of such sculpture is the statuettes from a small (H. 12.5 cm) wooden diptych [Fig. 4] in the collection of Petrovskii. The diptych is in the shape of a lotus bud, carved from rosewood (Palisander [Dalbergia]). The lotus in Buddhism symbolizes sanctity and purity. Carved in each of the halves is a special niche in which is placed a miniature (H. 5.5 cm) sculpted image of a Buddhist divinity. The diptych is held together by a metal strap on the outside and closes with a hook on the face. Judging from the condition of the metal, one can surmise that the closures are of later origin. Two other published wooden diptychs from that the same period are held together in similar fashion: in each half a hole has been pierced and the parts are held together by twine. (Sérinde 1995, p. 396). An unusual feature of this diptych is the fact that the statuettes were crafted from a non-traditional material — juniper resin (sandarak). Normally Gandharan sculptures were fashioned from schist or agalmatolite (pagodite), less commonly of soapstone and elephant ivory.

In one half of the diptych is an image of a Bodhisattva seated on a lion throne. A nimbus surrounds his head, the body is extensively decorated, the right hand is broken off to the elbow, the left lies on the knees in the gesture of meditation (*dhyana mudra*). Due to the considerable losses, it is impossible to establish which Bodhisattva is represented here. From the form of the decorations, the pose, and the overall treatment of the image there can be no doubt that this is a Gandharan work of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries. (Zwalf 1996, Vol. 2, pp. 37-55).



In the other half of the diptych is a Maitreya under a triple arch. He is depicted as the future Buddha, without decoration. On the head is the usnisha, one of the marks of the Buddha. He is seated in the socalled "European" pose with the leas, somewhat broken off, extending pendent to a semicircular lotus footstool. This is the pose of bhadrasana, typical only for Maitreya. For the majority of the images of Maitreya in Khotan the characteristic pose

Fig. 4. Diptych. H. 12.5 cm. Kucha, 6<sup>th</sup> century CE. Figures H. 5.5 cm, Gandhara 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century CE. Carved wood and resin. Inv. no. GA-308.

is that of *bhadrasana*, in which the legs of the divinity cross at the bottom. Such an iconography of Maitreya was widespread in China in the fourth-sixth centuries (Watt 2004, p. 165 and passim). In all probability, the right hand formed the gesture of fearlessness (*abhaya mudra*) or possibly the gesture of reasoning (*vitarka mudra*). According to the iconographic canon both gestures are characteristic for Maitreya. The left hand of the divinity has been broken off. Possibly it held a water-bottle (*kamandalu*), known from Ghandaran sculptures to be an attribute of Maitreya.

The iconography of Maitreya in the monuments found in East Turkestan is guite varied. He can be depicted both as a Buddha and as a Bodhisattva, standing and seated in various poses: in the lotus position (*padmasana*) and with pendent legs (bhadrasana). See, e.g., a sixth-century panel from Kucha, Bibliothèque nationale, Paris; a fifth-century stone Chinese example, Musée Guimet (Sérinde 1995, pp. 263, 265). Similar representations of Maitreya are found in Khotan. The mudras also may be quite varied. He is shown as a Bodhisattva on wooden panels from the collection of the British Museum and the National Museum in New Delhi published by Joanna Williams (Williams 1973, pp. 129-130). Ol'denburg published two images of Maitreya from Khotan (Ol'denburg 1898, pp. 0106-0107). One of them, which he dated fourth-sixth century, is a terracotta stamped image given him by Petrovskii. Its small size  $(2.5 \times 1.7 \text{ cm})$  notwithstanding, the example is well crafted and one can see even on the photographs the smallest details. Maitreva is shown as a Bodhisattva. The right hand of the divinity is in the gesture of reassurance, *abhaya* mudra, and in the left he holds a bottle. A second image of Maitreya was found in Khotan in 1899 but, according to Ol'denburg, is of Nepalese origin, as evidenced by epigraphy, and dates to the tenth-eleventh centuries. It is a miniature stone relief of schist (?) (6 x 5 cm). Maitreya is represented as a Bodhisattva, his right hand is broken off, the left rests on the knee, and he is seated with legs pendent (bhadrasana). The fate of these objects is unknown (they are not in the collection of the State Hermitage); they are described here only from the photographs.

Of interest on the Hermitage's diptych is the shape of the arches under which the divinities

sit. The form of the triple arch under which Maitreya sits is found among Gandharan monuments from as early as the third century (*Sérinde* 1995, p. 108). There is another Gandharan example, now in the collection of the Museum in Kamakura, Japan — a stucco relief depicting the "Great Departure of the Buddha," dating from the third-fourth centuries (*Sérinde* 1995, p. 237).

Other elements of the iconography, such as the lotus thrones, sometimes with lions, are characteristic both for Gandhara and for Hadda. Typical as well for Gandhara is the rhomboid decoration of the throne. In Central Asia such rhomboid decoration is specific to the Kucha oasis: sixth century examples from there are to be seen in many wooden statuettes and a fragment of wooden carving in the collections of the British Museum, the Musée Guimet and the State Hermitage. Of particular interest among these sixth-century Kuchean wooden objects is an image of the Buddha Sakyamuni, decorated in the upper part by the same rhomboid ornament as our reliquary (collection of the Musée Guimet; Sérinde 1995, p. 160).

On the basis of the above, one can hypothesize regarding the Hermitage diptych that the statuettes were made in Gandhara in the third-fourth centuries, whereas the case was specially made for them later in the sixth century in Kucha. Taken together, the good state of preservation and the distinctive nature of the

materials used make this diptych unique among the works from Eastern Turkestan preserved today in the Hermitage.

Also of great interest in the Hermitage collection is a group of bronze statuettes and relief plaques originating in Khotan. Among them is a ninth-century bronze statuette of Maitreya [Fig. 5], 9 cm high. It depicts a Bodhisattva standing erect in the pose of samapada (i.e.,



Fig. 5. Maitreya. Cast bronze. H. 9 cm. Khotan, 9<sup>th</sup> century CE. Inv. no. GA-1031.



*Fig. 6. Avalokitesvara-Padmapani. Cast bronze. H. 8.8 cm. Khotan,* 9<sup>th</sup> century CE. Inv. no. GA-1075.

with the forearms extended forward), whereas the more characteristic pose for a standing Maitreya is with the S-shaped stance of the body (*tribhanga*). In the right hand, extended along the body, he holds a water-bottle; the left hand is held against the chest.

Archaeological discoveries, frescoes and Buddhist texts all attest to the spread of the veneration of Avalokitesvara in Eastern Turkestan. In the collection of the State Hermitage are bronze relief plagues depicting Avalokitesvara-Padmapani [Figs. 6-9] which come from Khotan and date to the ninth century. Such plagues are of two types, depicting either a seated or a standing Bodhisattva. In the Hermitage collection there are seven images of the seated Bodhisattva cast in a single style. Among them are both intact images (measuring 8.8 x 6 cm) and fragments. The Bodhisattva is seated on a lotus throne in the position of lalitasan ("royal ease") [Fig. 6]: the right leg extends down from the throne, and the left rests on the throne, bent at the knee. The head is Fig. 7. Avalokitesvara-Padmapani. Cast bronze. H. 7.3 cm. Khotan, 9<sup>th</sup> century CE. Inv. no. GA-1550.

inclined to the left. In the right hand Padmapani holds the stem of a lotus, on which is placed a miniature figure of the Buddha Amitabha. The Bodhisattva is the emanation of the Buddha Amitabha, which is why Amitabha is generally included in his icons. The left hand with palm upwards in the varada mudra (gift bestowing gesture of compassion) rests on the knee. On the back are traces of fastenings. The second type of image is the standing Bodhisattva



[Fig. 7]. Its body is in the S-shaped stance (*tribhanga*). In the tall hairdo can be seen another nimbus, characteristic for the iconography of Avalokitesvara, where normally such a nimbus contains a miniature figure of the Buddha Amitabha. In the given instance, due to poor preservation, it has been broken

off. The right hand is raised to the breast and holds the stem of a lotus; the left hand, extended along the body, holds a waterbottle (kamandalu). The size of this bronze plague is 7.3 x 2.3 cm. The collection also contains two small statues (7.5 x 2.5 and 4.5 x 1.5 cm) of Avalokitesvara [Figs. 8, 9 (facing page)], likewise in a poor state of preservation. Their iconography is

Fig. 8. Avalokitesvara-Padmapani. Cast bronze. H. 7.5 cm. Khotan, 9<sup>th</sup> century CE. Inv. no. GA-1078.





Fig. 9. Avalokitesvara-Padmapani. Cast bronze. H. 4.5 cm. Khotan, 9<sup>th</sup> century CE. Inv. no. GA-1073.

> completely analogous to the second type. Similar statues are in the British Museum and in the National Museum of Korea in Seoul (Chungang 1986, p. 51, fig. 41). Such iconography of Avalokitesvara is also found on the carved wooden example of a reliquary from Dunhuang preserved in the Musée Guimet (Sérinde 1995, p. 276).

The images of Avalokitesvara were widely used as decoration for Buddhist temples in the Khotan region. He was venerated as one of the eight Bodhisattvas who resided in Khotan and is mentioned in the list of the eight Bodhisattvas in the Tibetan text "Prophecy about the Li Country" (Emmerick 1967, p. 13) as one of the protectors of Khotan. The temple of Avalokitesvara was located on Mt. Gosrnga, which was specially venerated in Khotan. The name of the Bodhisattva appears in Tibetan and Khotanese Saka texts, especially in *dharani* (mantras) devoted specifically to Avalokitesvara (Emmerick 1979, p. 38), to whom believers turned for help. The Saka texts especially emphasize his connection with light (Williams 1973, pp. 130-131).

The statuettes and bronze plaques from the collection of the State Hermitage form a significant supplement to other evidence for the Bodhisattva's veneration there: other museums around the world preserve only seven Khotanese representations of Avalokitesvara in frescoes and on wooden panels (Williams 1973, pp. 130-131), two reliefs in stucco and one statuette (*Chungang* 1986, p. 51, pl. 41; p. 60, pl. 50; p. 61, pl. 51).

Another of the Hermitage collection's standing Bodhisattva images is a 9 cm high relief sculpture of Vajrapani [Fig. 10], who symbolizes strength and manhood. His body stands in the Fig. 10. Vajrapani. Cast bronze. H. 9 cm. Khotan, 9<sup>th</sup> century CE. Inv. no. GA-1071.

S-shaped pose (tribhanga). The high coiffure is typical. The right hand, which is raised to the breast, holds a vajra; the left rests on the hip. In Mahayana Buddhism, Vajrapani is mentioned only infrequently, but various legends are connected with him: he accompanied the Buddha when the latter departed from Kapilavasa; he was present at the time the nagas came to the



Buddha. The "Annals of the Li Country" do not list Vajrapani as one of the protectors of Khotan. Thus, unlike the case with Avalokitesvara, who is listed there, it should probably not surprise us that this relief seems to be the only extant depiction of Vajrapani originating from Khotan, at the same time that the cult was otherwise widespread throughout Eastern Turkestan.

The objects from Khotan in the collection of the State Hermitage thus broaden considerably the evidence of written sources and works of art recorded in other museum collections concerning the veneration of certain Buddhist deities. In particular, we find reinforcement for what we knew already regarding the worship of Maitreya and Avalaokitesvara. The representations in the bronze plaques and miniature sculptures of the Hermitage collection have practically no analogy in other collections and deserve to be better known.

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