

*The
Silk Road*



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Cover photo: *Avalokitesvara-Padmapani*. Cast bronze. H. 8.8 cm. Khotan, 9th century CE. Inv. no. GA-1075. Copyright © 2008 State Hermitage Museum. All rights reserved.

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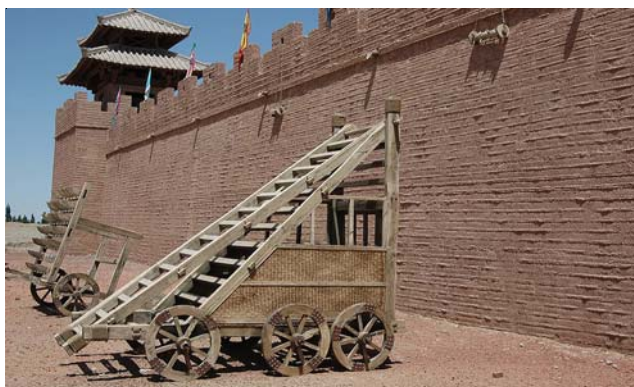
"The Bridge between Eastern and Western Cultures"

Museums, Entrepreneurship and the Politics of Cultural Identity

The wonderful experience I had this summer of participating in the Silkroad Foundation's Dunhuang seminar and the subsequent tour to sites along the "Northern Silk Road" included visits to a number of museums. They ranged from the dusty little box at the Yumenguan west of Dunhuang, through the motion picture set complex at Yangguan, to the magnificent collection of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region Museum in Urumqi. While I did not keep systematic notes, and the visits for the most part were far too short, here are some impressions. I will pay particular attention to the Yangguan museum and that in Urumqi, because they raise interesting issues with regard to purpose, organization, and interpretive strategies. Moreover, the collection in the Urumqi museum is hugely important. As the current jargon would have it, museums are "contested spaces." Much as we would like to think they should educate through a purely "objective" lens, in fact probably none can

museum), I had some basis for comparison. If one leaves aside certain political issues, the progress in "modernization" in China is impressive. Dunhuang itself seemed somewhat forgotten by time back in 1998; today the donkey carts are gone from the streets and it has at least a superficial air of prosperity. Granted, a lot of what we saw there and in cities in Xinjiang may have been stimulated by the national effort to burnish appearances before the Olympics, but the changes surely are much deeper than those inspired by that one-time, highly politicized display of national pride.

I was quite surprised when we visited Yangguan (the "southern" gate at the end of the Great Wall) to discover that instead of the dusty little one-room "museum" that was there 10 years before, a huge complex, apparently created by private enterprise, has arisen phoenix-like at the edge of the desert [Figs. 1, 2]. It includes a reconstructed fortress, complete with replica siege engines; a "nomad" camp where the yurts are sprayed concrete but from a distance might seem to be authentic; and a couple of substantial museum buildings (with, of course, a lavish and expensive gift shop). As visting "dignitaries" we were greeted by elegantly garbed young women and stern-faced young men in replica armor, who burst into song to reinforce the atmosphere of this having been



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Fig. 1. The movie-set fortress at Yangguan with siege engines.

(regardless of where they are located or what the intent of their founders). What is important as we visit them is to understand how the particular biases in selection and presentation affect the ability of the institutions to educate.

Having last been in Dunhuang a decade ago and in Urumqi back in 2005 (just before it was possible to see the new exhibits at the rebuilt



Fig. 2. The movie-set nomadic camp at Yangguan, with the genuine, if decayed, Han watch tower in the background, left of center.



Fig. 3. The welcoming ceremony outside the main gate to the Yangguan fortress.

a site on the vaguely exotic Silk Road of yore [Fig. 3]. The approach here is akin to an installation sponsored by the “Society for Creative Anachronism”—someone’s idea of the Silk Road brought back to life. It is no surprise

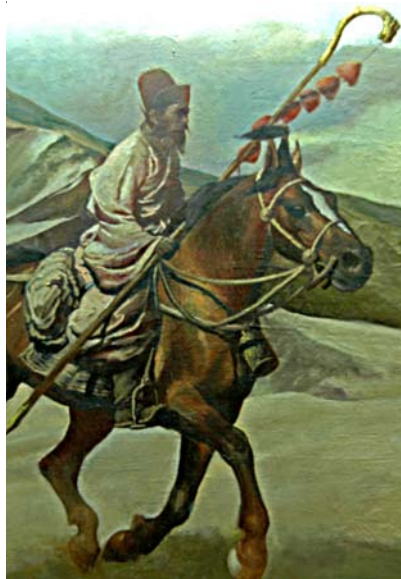


Fig. 4. Zhang Qian rides west in the second century BCE. Detail of painting in the Yangguan Museum. Note the anachronistic depiction of his using stirrups.

that the museum apparently makes money fairly regularly by renting its facilities as a film set. The Yangguan complex seems to have benefited the local economy, although one has to imagine that the vineyards are a more reliable long-term source of income in the oasis, at least until global warming dries up the water supply.

Apart from the Hollywood set atmosphere though, the museum has more serious pretensions which, one hopes, may elicit meaningful support so that it may obtain genuine artifacts in place of what to a considerable degree now are replicas. At least the replicas by and large are labeled as such,

unlike in the deceptive “Silk Road Museum,” another private entrepreneurial undertaking which I visited in Urumqi in 2005. (There, we were told, the objects were authentic, even though all too many of them were highly suspect or obvious fabrications.) Private enterprise to lure the unwary tourist seems to be flourishing in China. At least at Yangguan, there is a serious effort to balance descriptive information with appropriate visuals (e.g., paintings of historic scenes, which, even if romanticized, capture moments such as Zhang Qian’s journey west [Fig. 4]). There are some nice reconstruction models of such things as watch towers, forts



Fig. 5. Model (scale 1:40) of Han Dynasty fort at Jianshuijinguan Pass, Zhangye Prefecture, based on excavation of site.

[Fig. 5] and a Han chariot [Fig. 6]. And there are even a some genuine artifacts, the highlight perhaps being a rather well preserved Bodhisattva statue dating probably from the Song period [Fig. 7, next page].



Fig. 6. Full-scale model of Han Dynasty chariot based on tomb excavations and depictions on tiles.

As one drives north, one may experience a range of museums, from the modest, if at least largely genuine collection in Anxi, to the extensive and well-displayed (absent meaningful descriptive captioning) collection in Hami, where the highlight is one of the excavated mummies and the now rather famous beautiful wool “tartans” found in the cemetery at Qizilchoqa. All this pales though in comparison with the riches in Urumqi at the regional museum.

The visitor to the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region Museum would be well advised to come prepared and to allow a substantial amount of time to absorb all it offers. There seems to be an agenda for normal tour groups (the average tourist likely has little patience for much more), taking them first to see the ethnographic exhibits, then to see the mummies, and leaving little time for the major section of archaeological exhibits on the first floor. If one spends the time the archaeological section requires, the limited captioning and arrangement of the material is more likely to confuse than to inform, unless the visitor has done his/her homework.

The same, of course, might be said about many museum exhibits, but here the challenge is compounded by the museum’s having taken seriously its mission statement, prominently displayed on the wall next to the entrance to the archaeological exhibits on the first floor:

We have [created]...exhibits from the Stone Age to the Qing Dynasty for the purpose to show the contributions the people of all nationalities in Xinjiang have made for safeguarding the reunification of the motherland, for enriching the motherland’s cultural treasure-houses and to make the

masses of audiences receive the education in patriotism.

Indeed, the intention to present the whole history of Xinjiang from earliest times as the story of the inevitable march of a unified, multi-cultural, but Han-dominated China is very much in evidence. While the exhibits themselves in the ethnographic section, arranged by the individual ethnic groups, are interesting enough, the explanatory comments would make most who are sensitive to identity issues today cringe, since about all we learn is that each group is happy and has beautiful customs. Important issues are glossed over, if mentioned at all: the Hui are a distinctive “Muslim nationality,” even though that designation is an artificial creation and within it there is great cultural diversity; that many Tajiks are Ismailis and thus followers of the Aga Khan, who was collecting tithes from them as late as the 1920s, is never mentioned...

We can be thankful for the tastefully conceived new display of the famous mummies on the second floor, a marked contrast to the rather dismal presentation of them in the museum’s old building. Here the curators have been very selective, highlighting four of the mummies, from different cemeteries and periods. There are mannequins reconstructing the original appearance of the individuals, and some care has

been taken to create an attractive setting (for example, the body from Astana Tomb 72TAM215 is set against a reproduction of the painted panels there, which we actually had been privileged to see *in situ* when in Turfan) [cf. Fig. 8]. The selection of artifacts which accompany them though is all too slim, and some of the material illustrated on the walls has nothing to do with the particular burials,



Fig. 7. Statue of a Bodhisattva, Yangguan Museum



Fig. 8. Entrance ramp to one of the tombs in the Astana Cemetery.

even though that would not be obvious to most viewers. Many of the most famous objects excavated from Xinjiang cemeteries are still on tour.

Part of the problem with the mummy exhibit then is its mixing of cultures from different regions and periods. While this may be consistent with the museum's stated educational goal, it works against any effort at real understanding of the fact that even after the initial Chinese penetration of the region under the Han Dynasty, the larger "Xinjiang" (a term coined in the Qing Dynasty) was still very much a disparate collection of regional cultures. They interacted to some extent, yes, but at the same time they maintained distinct regional traditions. At very least it is an oversimplification to assert (as is done in the section of the first-floor exhibits which ostensibly focuses on the Silk Road) that thanks to the Han Dynasty conquests, "here became the place where the civilizations of the world assembled and syncretized." All roads in fact do not lead historically to the P.R.C. To say that, though, should not be construed as questioning contemporary political legitimacy, however much some might wish to do so.

This difficulty created by the museum's interpretive framework is reinforced in the very extensive archaeological exhibits, largely very nicely displayed on the first floor. The arrangement is ostensibly chronological, starting with the early Palaeolithic, but then in any given room one may see items side-by-side which have no particular relationship to each other and come from ecologically very different regions which are far apart on the map. A photograph of the now well-known gold mask unearthed in a nomadic tomb way beyond the mountains at Boma decorates the wall of an exhibit of objects from Astana and Karakhoja in the Turfan region. Unlike the approach that was taken in the Berlin/Mannheim exhibition last year, grouping the artifacts by site, here those from a single site may be scattered randomly through several rooms. Therefore there is no way to obtain any real sense of historical and regional development. A melting-pot of nationalities? Perhaps, but that is a kind of modern construct that may have little interpretive value for our understanding of the richness of what archaeology in Xinjiang has unearthed.

Furthermore, there are distinct biases here, perhaps an understandable legacy of a historic unwillingness in China to recognize the power and legitimacy of its "barbarian" neighbors. We find little that might help us to appreciate the importance of the nomadic Xiongnu or Wusun who at one point dominated large parts of the region. While there are several examples of texts in languages and scripts other than Chinese, there is no clear elucidation of the significance and dominance of those languages in certain periods. Might we not learn that the Kharosthi script in Niya generally was used to write a north Indian language which was a vehicle for administration in the Kushan Empire? But perhaps to hint at possible Kushan dominance of what is now southwestern Xinjiang might undercut the inevitability of "reunification of the motherland." Might we imagine a day when no one would feel compelled to entertain such a thought seriously?

Ideally a museum not only should inform but it should provoke the viewer into thinking long and hard about what he or she is viewing, stimulate a desire to learn more, and present a range of interpretations. In Sweden, a country where a concern over national identity is very much alive, the national historical museum in Stockholm in fact takes very seriously the mission to present alternative interpretations and challenge the viewer to decide which may be right. In the regional museum in Vladivostok in the Russian Far East, I was amazed to discover in 2004 how quickly the ideologically constructed narrative about the inevitable triumph of the Soviet system had been replaced after its collapse by somewhat subtle questions about how in fact one might think about the history of the late 20th century. Unfortunately, as controversies at the museums in Washington, D.C., have shown in recent years, assertive nationalism aimed at presenting a triumphal narrative of the past may end up forcing thoughtful curators to compromise and end up largely avoiding anything which might stimulate the viewer to think.

It would be naive to think that the dominant narrative in Urumqi will change any time in the near future. The more the pity, since the richness of the collections on display there surely will grow, and the ways in which they might be invoked to cultivate an appreciation of the diversity and fascination of the history



Fig. 9. Clay pedestal bowl, excavated at Astana by Aurel Stein. British Museum, Inv. no. CE.1928.1022.110 (Ast.i.1.05)

of the Silk Roads are endless. This could be done, of course, without raising any kind of political or ideological challenge, since to a considerable degree the problems in the museum exhibits as currently mounted

could easily be corrected by rearrangement and more extensive analytical captioning.

Flawed as it is, the Urumqi museum is arguably the single most important one anywhere to introduce the visitor to the early history of Inner Asia. Even though huge quantities of the archaeological treasures of Xinjiang were carted off by foreigners beginning in the late 19th century, the sheer volume and variety of what the excavations of the last half century have uncovered is stunning. I had no

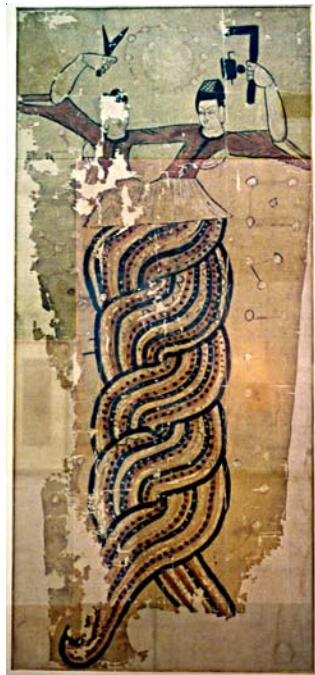
Fig. 10. A silk banner depicting Fuxi and Nuwa, 7th-8th century CE, excavated at Astana by Aurel Stein. National Museum, New Delhi, Inv. no. Ast.ix.2.054.

idea, for example, after seeing so many of the *mingqi* and other grave goods from the Astana Cemetery in collections in London and Delhi [Figs. 9, 10, 11, 12], that the Urumqi collection holds a group of them which is so large and varied.

And the textiles scattered throughout the Urumqi displays are equally impressive in their variety. The more so in that some of the most striking examples were not even there but off in traveling exhibitions [Fig. 13, facing page].

Rather than indulge in listing the other treasures, I would conclude by recommending to those who may never have the good fortune to visit Urumqi some books which can introduce the Xinjiang archaeological collections. On the

occasion of its reopening after the completion of the new building, the museum issued a nicely illustrated catalogue, with text in Chinese and somewhat fractured English (*Xinjiang* 2006). The material is grouped by type



Figs. 11, 12. A mounted soldier and detail of a mounted equestrienne, 7th-8th centuries CE, excavated by Aurel Stein at Astana. National Museum, New Delhi, Inv. nos. Ast.iii.2.021, .024, and Ast.iii.2.016, .022.

Fig. 13. Detail of woven decorative band depicting a winged beast, on a woolen skirt fragment, dating to the Han Dynasty period and excavated at Sampula. Xinjiang Uighur Museum Inv. no. 84LSIM01:361.



of object—ceramics, wood, metal, etc.—not arranged by the order of the displays in the museum itself. For those who read German, the catalogue for the recent Berlin/Mannheim exhibit, reviewed in these pages in our last issue, provides a good many important objects not in the Xinjiang museum catalogue (as well as some which are) and more extensive analytical essays and descriptive cataloguing (*Ursprünge* 2007; Waugh 2008). Smaller selections of some of the Xinjiang material have appeared in other exhibitions, such as that curated by Li Jian at the Dayton Art Institute in 2003 (*Glory* 2003). For the ongoing discoveries at Niya, there is a beautifully illustrated introduction edited by Feng Zhao and Zhiyong Yu (*Legacy* 2000), issued in conjunction with an exhibition at the China National Silk Museum. One-stop shopping, at least in the sense of its geographical coverage and number of illustrations, is the comprehensive *Ancient Culture in Xinjiang Along the Silk Road* (2008), a kind of illustrated encyclopedia arranged by site, with captions and essays in both English and Chinese (the essays in Chinese are more substantial). This remarkable book has everything from architecture to cave murals to archaeological artifacts, with illustrations which, if small, are generally good enough so that they could readily be scanned for incorporation into lectures by those who teach the silk roads (cf. Waugh 2007).

In short, one need not travel the Silk Roads in Gansu or Xinjiang to learn what archaeology has revealed about their cultures and history. That said, studying a book is no a substitute for seeing the Mogao Caves, or wandering

through the ruins of Jiaohe, or, for that matter, slowly and thoughtfully perusing the displays in the Urumqi regional museum.

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Note: I have made no effort to transliterate titles in Chinese but merely provide the information on them from their English titles, along with the ISBN numbers to help those who might wish to obtain them.

Ancient 2008

The Ancient Culture in Xinjiang along the Silk Road. Comp. by Qi Xiaoshan and Wang Bo. [Urumqi?], 2008. ISBN 978-7-228-08667-2.

Legacy 2000

Legacy of the Desert King: Textiles and Treasures Excavated at Niya on the Silk Road. Ed. Feng Zhao and Zhiyong Yu. Hangzhou: China National Silk Museum; Urumqi: Xinjiang Institute of Archaeology, 2000. ISBN 962-85691-2-0.

Glory 2003

The Glory of the Silk Road: Art from Ancient China. Li Jian, general editor. Dayton, Ohio: The Dayton Art Institute, 2003. ISBN 0-937809-24-1.

Ursprünge 2007

Ursprünge der Seidenstrasse. Sensationelle Neufunde aus Xinjiang, China. Hrsg. von Alfried Wiczorek und Christoph Lind. Mannheim: Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen; Stuttgart: Konrad Theiss Verlag, 2007. ISBN 978-3-8062-2160-2; 978-3-927774-21-6.

Waugh 2007

Daniel C. Waugh. "Enhance Your Teaching of Central Eurasia with Images from Art Museum

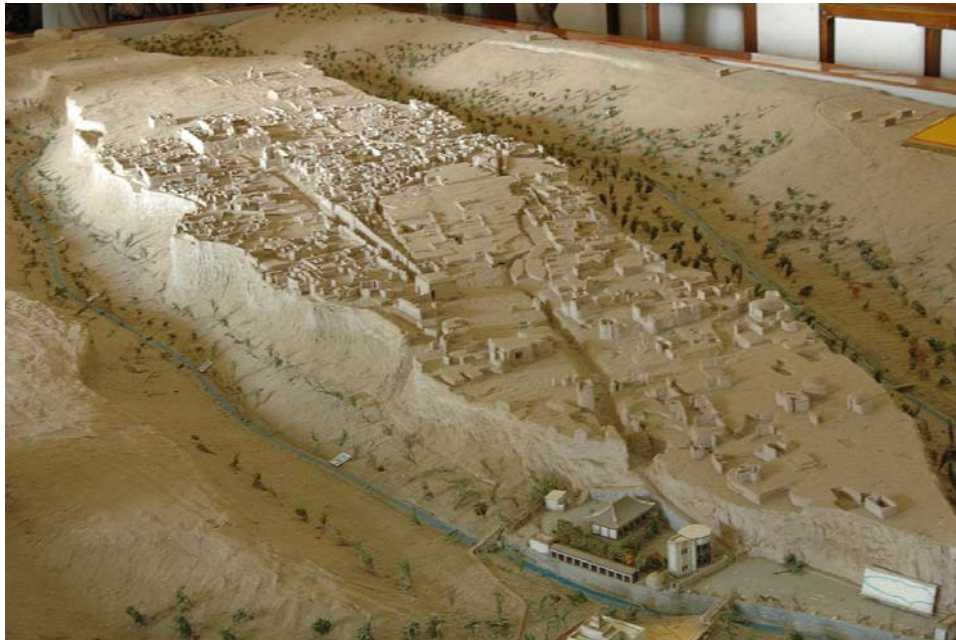
Collections on the Internet." *Central Eurasian Studies Review* 6/1-2 (2007), 48-54 <http://www.cesr-cess.org/pdf/CESR_06_12.pdf>.

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Xinjiang 2006

Xinjiang Uigurs Autonomous Region Museum. Ed. Israfel Yusufu. Urumqi, 2006. ISBN 988-97744-4-5.



(Above): Museum model of Jiaohe on its mesa between two rivers.

(Below): Panoramic view of the vast ruins at Jiaohe, including on the right the Large Monastery.



China and Islamic Civilization: Exchange of Techniques and Scientific Ideas

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Whether by land, along the famous ancient Silk Route, or by sea, along the age-old routes of antiquity through the Persian Gulf (once called the China Sea) [Fig. 1], China seems to have been in continuous contact with the other two ancient and contemporary civilizations of the Indus Valley and Mesopotamia. On the whole those contacts were conditioned by trading exchanges, and yielded a very rich travel literature describing China, its customs, rulers, religions, wonders, etc., that must have entertained the urban centers around what is today the Persian Gulf and all the way up the river to the medieval city of Baghdad and, before

it, Ctesiphon. The earliest recorded lore of this type comes from travel accounts, mostly legendary, as all seamen's records are, from that same area around the Persian Gulf and dating as early as the ninth and tenth centuries CE [Fig. 2, next page]. In almost all of them, China was a land of wonders, far away, and definitely worth visiting. This literature that brought these contemporary civilizations into the imaginary world of the story tellers, rarely developed into more systematic appropriations of scientific or technological ideas from one culture to the other. And yet much of science, technology, medicine and alchemy, to name only

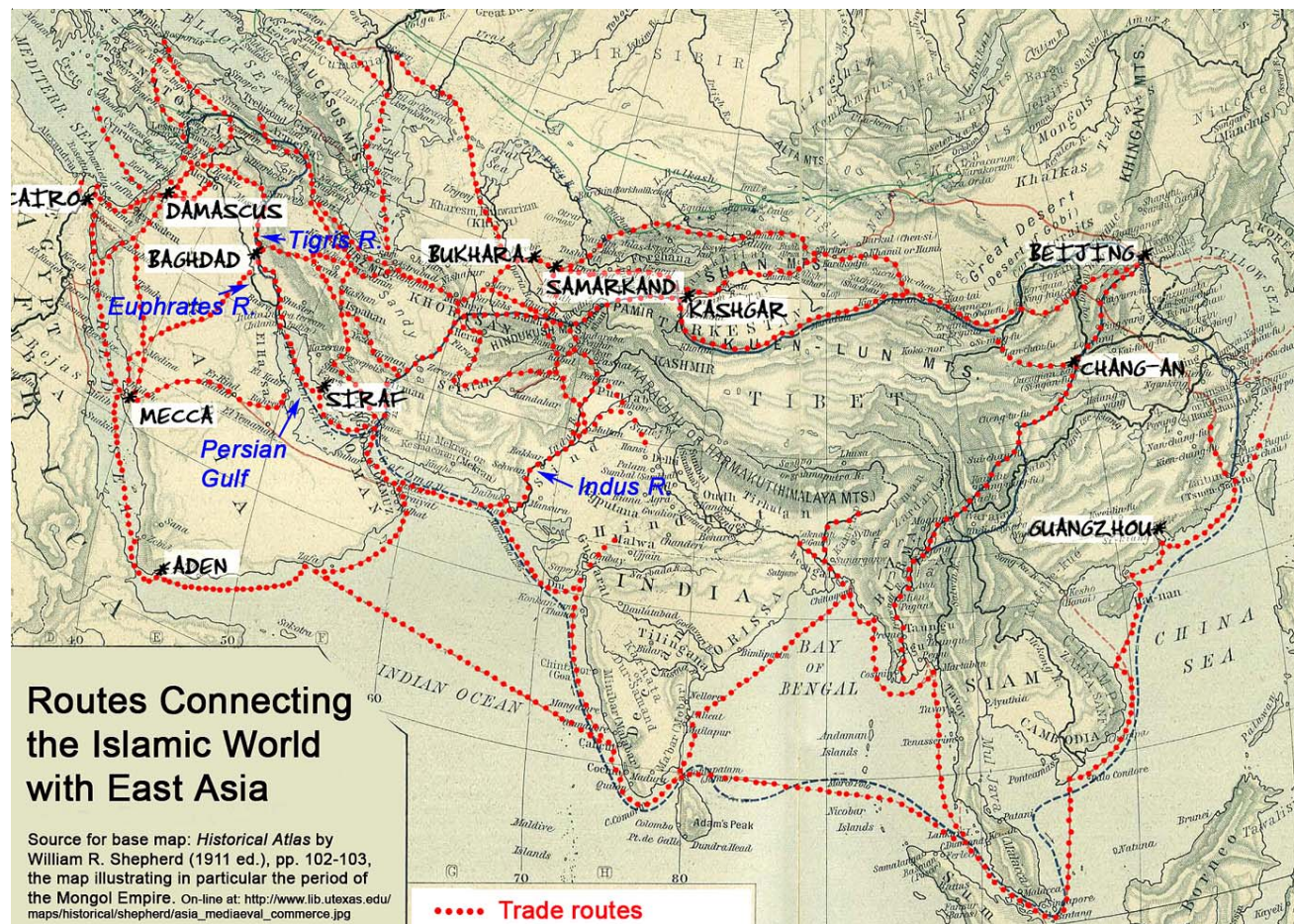


Fig. 1. Routes Connecting the Islamic World with East Asia.

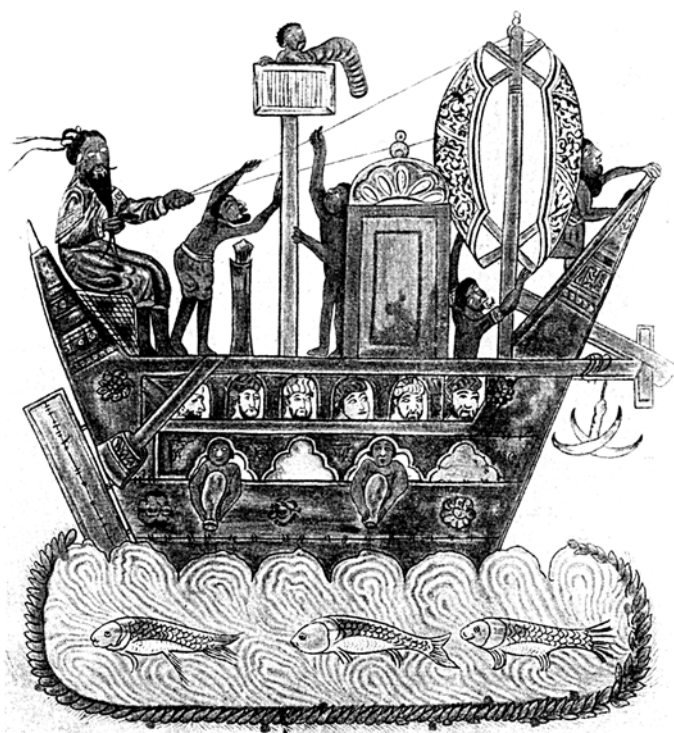


Fig. 2. A sailing ship at sea, illustration to Buzurg ibn Shahriyar's 10th-century "Book of the Marvels of India" (Kitab 'Aja'ib al-Hind). After I. Iu. Krachkovskii, *Izbrannye sochineniia*, Vol. 4 (1957), Fig. 13 facing p. 145.

a few, eventually crossed the same borders as did the merchants.

Even earlier, around the time of the advent of Islam in the first half of the seventh century CE, China's image was already invading the imagination of people inhabiting the maritime ports and urban centers all around what is today's Middle East. The image was that of a distant land; yet it must have made a powerful impression on people who were witnesses to the rise of the great civilization of Islam which was destined to become today's world civilization. Once a civilization carves a niche for itself in people's imagination, it will stay there forever, and only grows with the change of historical circumstances that govern civilizational dialogue. As evidence of this conquest of the imagination, one could find, for example, in the very heart of Arabia and within the lifetime of Islam's prophet, statements preserved in the prophetic traditions themselves, urging the Muslim believers to "seek knowledge even if it takes you as far away as China." About two centuries later, one could

still hear of someone saying that a specific book is so valuable "that it is worth a trip to China to get it." All these traditions and references seem to stress the immense remoteness of the distant land of China. But they say very little about what one would find once he got there. That information was to come later on.

In Islam's holy book, the Qur'an, the mythical lands of Gog and Magog were also supposed to be located in China, at the farthest edge of the East, that is, at the ambiguous semi-legendary frontier of the known world just before it would fade away into the surrounding sea of darkness. The same colorful and legendary references even mentioned how one of the legendary biblical tribes of the children of Israel which was supposed to have converted to Islam and believed in the mission of the prophet of Islam, reportedly resided on the farthest eastern edge of China. All those impressions simply paint a picture that was quasi-legendary, which most certainly reflects the poorly known reality of old Chinese contacts with the civilizations of the ancient Middle East. Only a faint memory of those contacts seems to have remained well into the early days of Islamic civilization.

As Islamic civilization began to define its own contours and project its map onto the globe with its rapid spread in the seventh and eighth centuries and China came into direct contact with the Islamic Empire, legends began quickly to give way to historical realities. As it happened, this new Islamic civilization was fast spreading along the western frontiers of China itself, and had very swiftly encompassed all the lands from the western border of China, in modern-day Central Asia, all the way to the Iberian peninsula, the underbelly of Europe. In that new setting, more realistic visions of the respective cultures of China and the Islamic world began to emerge, despite the fact that the sources in both cultures still spoke of the immense distances between the two.

The historical narratives which began to characterize those visions included, for example, the famous account that spoke of an encounter between the Great Chinese Khan, as he was called in the Arabic sources, with the ambassador of the last Persian King Yezdigird III (d. 651). There is almost universal

agreement among historians that this account could very well portray a real historical event. In his account of the twenty-second year of Hijra (= 644 CE), the great Muslim historian Tabari (?838-923 CE), a native of Tabaristan in the Caspian Sea region of Persia, relates the following (here quoted in paraphrase in order to avoid the dry historical narrative):

When the Muslim armies began to press eastward against the borders of the Sasanian Empire, the last Sasanian monarch, Yezdigird III, fled eastward in order to avoid capture. In his despair, this Yezdigird apparently sent an ambassador to China in order to seek the help of its king in fending off the Muslim invasion. In that encounter the Chinese king and the Persian ambassador were supposed to have had the following conversation:

He [the Chinese king] first said, 'Although it is the duty of kings to come to each other's aid, I still want you to describe those people to me, for you say that they were few and they managed to expel you from your country, despite the fact that you were a multitude, and that could only mean that they were onto something good, while you were onto evil.'

[The ambassador] then responded, 'Ask me and I shall tell you.'

The king asked, 'Do they fulfill their promises?'

He responded, 'Yes, they do.'

'What do they ask of you before they fight you?,' [the king asked].

The ambassador responded, 'They ask one of three things: They either ask us to adopt their religion, and if we accept they would treat us like them. Or they ask us to pay tribute and seek their protection. Or they fight us.'

[The king] then asked, 'How do they obey their chiefs?' to which the ambassador said, 'They are most obedient to their spiritual guides.'

'What do they forbid and what do they allow?' [the king asked].

The ambassador told him.

The king then asked, 'Do they ever permit that which was forbidden to them, or forbid that which was permitted?'

The ambassador said, 'No.'

The king then said, 'These people will never be defeated until they permit that which was forbidden and forbid that which was permitted.'

Then he asked the ambassador, 'Tell me of their dress.' And the ambassador told him. 'And their mounts?' To which he responded, 'Arabian horses,' and he described them to him. To which the king said, 'What marvelous defenses these [horses] are!!' Then [the ambassador] described for him the camels, and how they kneel and rise with their loads. To which the king said, 'This is a description of mounts with long necks.'

The king then sent with the ambassador a letter to Yezdigird that said, 'I did not refrain from sending you an army whose front could be in Merv and its rear in China because I was ignorant of my obligations to you, but because these people, who were described to me by your ambassador, could destroy mountains if they so wished. They could even remove me from power. So my advice is that you deal peacefully with them and accept to live with them and do not stir them up if they don't stir you up.'

This anecdote about a possibly real event portrays the Chinese king in a very positive light, the same kind of light one would usually reserve for an ally. One does not suspect any ill intention towards the Chinese, this despite the fact that those same Chinese were described in the same sources as being polytheists. Furthermore, one cannot fail to detect the mutual respect with which the early Muslims treated the Chinese. Other stories confirm this by referring to the Chinese king as the epitome of justice and fairness, and never recount a bad word about him. All the while he is portrayed as being very far away, and thus was in no position to constitute an immediate threat.

Yet, despite the impression of distance, the presence of each culture in the imagination of the other became more immediate during Islamic times. We are told, for example, that the second Abbasid caliph al-Mansur (754-775 CE), laid down the foundations of his new city Baghdad in what is today Iraq and at that specific geographic site simply because he thought he would gain a tremendous advantage on account of its proximity to the Tigris River. Since the river empties into the Persian Gulf,

he emphasized that this gave him ready access to trade with China. The other reason was to collect taxes from the western Muslim lands through the equally nearby Euphrates River. For those reasons, and for many others as well, that very same city, Baghdad, was destined to become later on the bustling center of the Islamic Empire for some seven centuries.

Al-Mansur's dream of locating his capital at the start of the Chinese trade route seems to have borne fruit. Two centuries after the foundation of his city, a biographer and intellectual historian of Baghdad, al-Nadim, recounts a captivating story in his famous book *al-Fihrist*, a veritable encyclopedia of what an educated gentleman of the time should know drawn from an almost exhaustive record of names of authors and books. He spoke of a Chinese student who appeared in the city of Baghdad towards the beginning of the tenth century. There he requested that the famous Muslim physician Abu Bakr al-Razi (Latin: Rhazes) [Fig. 3] dictate to him the works of the Greek physician Galen as fast as he could, so that the student could take a copy of those works with him back to China.

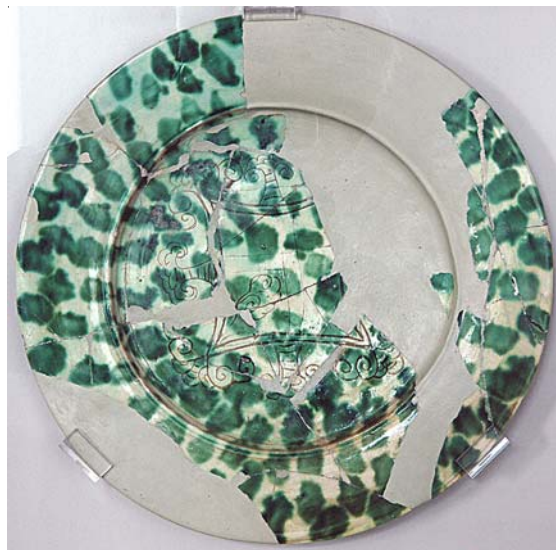


Fig. 3. European depiction of the Arab doctor al-Razi, in Gerardus Cremonensis "Recueil des traités de médecine," 1250-1260. Source: Wikipedia Commons, after, Samuel Sadaune, Invention et découvertes au Moyen-Âge.

The story may be completely apocryphal. Yet it confirms a frame of mind of a Baghdadi intellectual who was apparently full of admiration for the ability of the Chinese student to write down every word in his short-hand system. Now, whether the student carried Greek medicine back with him to China remains in the realm of legend, to say the least. My suspicion, and Joseph Needham's as well, is that he did not. Chinese medicine remains to this day quite independent of the philosophico-medical tradition of the Greeks.

On the cultural level, and irrespective of the story's scientific validity, it certainly confirms the sense of the immediate presence of Chinese culture in the imagination of the early Muslim intellectuals. It also confirms the other reports that are preserved in the various Arabic sources about the amazing skills of the Chinese, in almost every field they undertook. In the words of the fourteenth-century geographer and belletrist Qazwini, we are told that the Chinese have magnificent skills in the crafts (*lahum yadun basitatun fi al-sina'at*). The ninth-century Jahiz had already reported that God had endowed the Chinese with the very special skill for the crafts, and goes on to say that it was probably the only gift they were given.

This widespread fame for excellence in artifacts could have also been strengthened by the marvelous techniques that the Muslims brought back from China along with their trade objects [Fig. 4]. Deservedly so, Muslims



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Fig. 4. T'ang Dynasty earthenware plate found in the 9th-century CE remains of Samarra, upriver from Baghdad. Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin, Inv. no. Sam. 839.

regarded these trade objects with the utmost admiration. The trade required skills in navigation, a flourishing field in which there clearly was a debt to the Chinese. Navigational instruments came to include the magnetic compass, which was first invented in China, quickly modified in Islamic lands, and later passed on to Europe.

The acquisition of paper followed a similar route, in that this Chinese invention was appropriated by the Muslims towards the middle of the eighth century and passed on to Europe as well. The manufacture of fine silk and art objects in Islamic lands similarly imitated and adapted Chinese examples, as did the development of block printing in complete imitation of the Chinese practice. Gunpowder did not become a military tool until slightly later, but it too passed on from China to Europe through Islamic lands. Wherever one looked in early and medieval Islamic times, one could not help but notice the fascination with things Chinese that circulated widely in the society. It was such impressions of the superior Chinese craftsmanship which must have given rise to a widely disseminated Arabic adage — reported even by the seventeenth-century Andalusian author al-Maqarri, in his *Nafh al-tib* — which said: “God has granted his beneficence to three human organs: the brains of the Greeks, the hands of the Chinese, and the tongues of the Arabs.”

Naturally some Chinese inventions and craft works had greater influence than others. For example, it was quickly realized that paper was of momentous importance. As a result, it spread very quickly in Islamic lands. Arguably it was responsible for the genuine revolution of knowledge that took place in the Islamic world during the late eighth and early ninth centuries. Incidentally, the same person who reported the story of the Chinese student coming to Baghdad to study medicine with Razi was also called *al-warraq* (= the paper maker/ or paper consumer; by his time this could also mean a bookseller). The fourteenth century bureaucrat and encyclopedist, al-Qalqashandi, enumerated six different Arabic names for paper, and then classified their qualities starting with the Baghdadi paper as the best, and the European paper as the worst. More importantly, he did not forget to mention that paper was invented in China, before he went on to speak of his



Fig. 5. Illuminated Qur'an, Shiraz (Iran), ca. 1560-1575 (not on Baghdadi paper). The pages are open to the end of Sura 113 and beginning of Sura 114. Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin, Inv. no. I.42/68.

intimate knowledge of the paper culture. He classified all kinds of paper that he knew — he had to know a lot of them as a bureaucrat — and he specifically stressed that the Baghdadi-type paper became the preferred medium for the writing of the Qur'an, because, unlike vellum, it could not be easily erased and changed [Fig. 5]. That very same feature may also explain the reason why the caliph Harun al-Rashid (786-809 CE), of the *Thousand and One Nights* fame, would give an order at the beginning of the ninth century to have all the government records be transferred onto paper [Fig. 6].

Other sources, and there are great numbers of them, speak of Chinese objects in such superlative language that one gets the impression Muslim authors were enamored with the fantastic technological skills and inventions imported from China to the



Fig. 6. Gold dinar of Caliph Harun al-Rashid, AH 174/CE 790-91. Collection of the Münzkabinett, Bode-Museum, Berlin.

lands of Islam. Those stories point to the conclusion that the material objects stood as brilliant witnesses to the technical accomplishments of the Chinese artisans. The

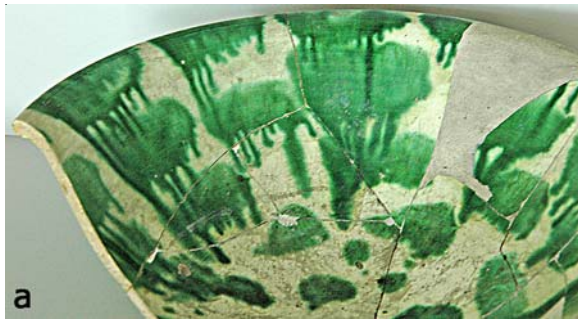


Fig. 7 a) T'ang Dynasty ceramic bowl, found in the 9th-century CE remains of Samarra, uprigger from Baghdad, and b) its Islamic imitation. Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin, Inv. nos. Sam. 784a, 748. Photos © Daniel C. Waugh, 2004

admiration for those artisans began to inspire the Islamic artists themselves to produce their own wares in the Chinese style, as any respectable collection of Islamic art can easily testify [Fig. 7].

When it came to the theoretical sciences, the story was slightly different. In contrast to the quick dissemination of Chinese technological inventions in the Muslim world and the eventual passage of those inventions on to Europe through its Muslim contacts, the theoretical sciences seemed to have faced a virtual "wall," one not far removed from the physical China wall. Even if we were to believe the story of the Chinese student managing to copy down, in one month as the story went, the whole of the Galenic medical works that were circulating in tenth-century Baghdad, we are still pretty certain that Galenic medicine did not make much of an impact on the independent Chinese medicinal system.

The "wall" might block exchange in both directions, as we can see from the example of the very sophisticated astronomical system of the ancient and medieval Chinese, which used our very modern equatorial coordinate system instead of the ecliptic system of the Greeks and the Muslims who followed them. Chinese astronomy could not pass westward

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Fig. 8. Although not one of the instruments purportedly sent to China, astrolabes, like this elegantly decorated one in brass with silver inlay, made in AH 638/CE 1241 by Abd al-Karim al-Misri, exemplify the superb craftsmanship of Muslim astronomical instruments. Collection of the British Museum, Inv. no. ME OA 1855.7-9.1.



through that wall, until perhaps the most recent times, well after the Jesuits had landed in China in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Despite the Chinese sophistication in astronomy, a deliberate attempt to transfer to China some of the latest state-of-the-art astronomical instruments of thirteenth century Muslim lands [Fig. 8] was an apparent failure. A medieval source describes how around the year 1267 a Persian astronomer Jamal al-Din (Cha-ma-lu-ting, in the Chinese sources) carried to China from the famous Ilkhanid observatory in Maragheh in northwest Iran a dozen or so astronomical instruments, together with their detailed description in Chinese. Yet, as Needham has carefully documented, the Arabic names of the astronomical instruments were transliterated into Chinese rather than translated. So one must concur with Needham's observation that despite the great efforts to initiate this transfer of astronomical knowledge from the lands of Islam into China, "the direct effect [of those instruments] upon Chinese astronomical practice seems to have been nil."

The reason for the celebrated success of the transmission of Chinese technological innovations westwards and the apparent total

failure of transmitting fundamental scientific ideas eastward to China itself deserves some re-emphasizing. The explanation may lie in the manner in which Chinese science itself had developed, and even more importantly in the very antiquity of that science. China came in contact with Islamic civilization during the seventh and the eighth centuries, at the very time when Islamic civilization was open to all sorts of other scientific traditions. Chinese scientists, whether in mathematics, astronomy, medicine, or chemistry (then called alchemy), were already set in their ways and had already formed a coherent explanation of the universe around them. Unlike Islamic civilization, which at the time had no world-view of its own with which to oppose incoming ideas, Chinese civilization

was already of a great antiquity and had achieved the required harmony between its social and scientific needs. At that stage foreign ideas would naturally have little, if any, effect.

But this did not mean that a technique here or a solution of a specific problem there could not be passed from one culture to the other. All it means is that individual technological ideas that do not incorporate a change in one's world-view could actually be adopted without greatly affecting the normal practice of science or the fundamental scientific beliefs and concepts that lay at the very foundation of science itself. The Chinese could adopt, as they did, the screw, or the clock, or the crankshaft, as has been so abundantly demonstrated by Needham, without having to change their minds about the nature of the heavenly bodies, or the five elements of which the world was made, all in total variance with Aristotelian views.

None of the travelers who went to China from the Muslim lands during the Middle Ages ever seems to have brought back impressions of scientific ideas or actual scientific texts that could cause a fundamental change of scientific attitude in either culture. But they always

brought back scores upon scores of medicinal substances and drugs (rhubarb and ginger immediately come to mind), as well as metallic and porcelain objects, which became abundantly popular and imitated in Islamic civilization [Fig. 9]. They also brought descriptions of items of clothing as well as the cloths themselves. The techniques used to craft the objects could be emulated in the Islamic world and improved upon, as was done with the production of paper, in which linen and rags replaced mulberry bark.



Fig. 9. Stonepaste ceramic bowl with dragon design. Iran, 14th c. Copy of design on Chinese Blue-and-White porcelain. Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin, Inv. no. 5380.

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Naturally, those visitors and merchants brought back as well many, many stories of the exotic lands which they had visited. The twelfth-century geographer and traveler al-Idrisi lists some twenty-five trade items brought by sea from

China to Aden in southern Arabia, starting with iron and ending with lead, and including such things as spices, camphor, coconuts, and items of fine clothing and velvet. When he spoke of Chinese rhubarb, which was apparently regularly imported by Muslim merchants, he spoke of it as the best, both for its physical as well as its medicinal qualities. The Muslim merchants who imported the plant obviously learned about its medicinal value from the Chinese themselves during their sojourn in China. Thus it was only in such cases that one could say that some hard-core scientific knowledge was passed on as well.

The most famous Muslim traveler, Ibn Battuta, brought word in the fourteenth century of the Chinese innovation of paper money, which was used nowhere else. He also brought back stories of the huge Chinese chickens that were much larger in size than the geese with which he was familiar. What seems to have impressed him most, however, was the fantastic ability of the Chinese to paint the likeness of a person, and to do so with such incredible details that such paintings were used to locate and arrest foreign visitors if they committed crimes. This

was something probably similar to our modern mug shots, but apparently with much better fidelity. Their kings, just like the Indian kings, says al-Idrisi, were highly interested in painting and took care to teach this art to their children. They even went as far as choosing the best painter among their children to succeed them.

In other scientific areas such as alchemy, Chinese theory and practice did not owe much to the Islamic, nor did the mostly Hellenistic-based Islamic alchemy apparently owe much to the Chinese. Islamic alchemy was on the whole attempting to transmute the base metals in order to produce gold, as one could reasonably expect to do if one based his work on an Aristotelian theoretical basis. Chinese alchemy was seeking a drug, called the elixir, that would lead to longevity or even ensure immortality. The two systems were essentially incompatible

One has to wonder about the direction of transmission of ideas when such concepts as elixir began to appear in both cultures almost at the same time, slightly after the early Muslim ships first landed in China in the early part of the eighth century. Thinking in terms of comprehensive world views and major coherent systems of thought, one would assume that cultures with such deeply diverging orientations regarding the purpose of alchemy would have little to borrow from one another. Techniques and individual concepts and processes might be quite another matter. It is plausible that the early Muslims who heard of that Chinese enterprise would themselves attempt to prepare the elixir, as long as it did not require a major shift in their system of thought. Lacking a well formulated system of scientific and philosophical thought, early Islamic culture could freely borrow such ideas and techniques. In contrast, the deeply ingrained Chinese world view prevented analogous borrowing from the Islamic world.

Although in later centuries there are borrowings touching some theoretical medicinal concepts, their exact circumstances are far from being well understood. In other fields such as astronomy, we may witness similar approaches to the techniques of observations and observational instruments, but may look in vain for analogous influences in more theoretical fields such as planetary theories.

One could easily trace scientific developments in both cultural spheres and at times see similarities that invite speculation as to who was borrowing from whom. But given the current state of our knowledge about either culture, it is impossible to determine the direction of such influences if there were any. However, one thing seems certain: technological inventions which were definitely produced in China during the first thirteen centuries of the Common Era, such as the discovery of earth magnetism and the use of the compass for navigation, invention of paper, printing, gunpowder, the wheelbarrow and the like, all seemed to have swept through the rest of the world thanks to the mediation of the vast Muslim empire on the western border of China. Precious little of hard-core scientific knowledge followed.

Note: This essay is based on a lecture co-sponsored by the Silkroad Foundation and Iona College, New Rochelle, New York, where the talk was presented May 3, 2008.

About the author

George Saliba, Professor of Arabic and Islamic Science, Columbia University, works on the history of Arabic/Islamic science in general and particularly the history of planetary theories from antiquity to the Renaissance. He has a special interest in the transmission of science, and particularly the transmission of Islamic science to western Europe during the Renaissance, the subject of his most recent book *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance* (MIT Press, 2007). One of his earlier publications about the transmission of science, which was published on the Internet under the title *Mediterranean Crossings*, was later translated into Chinese and published in the Chinese journal *Horizons*, vol.1 (2000): 46-63. For more information visit his website at <<http://www.columbia.edu/~gas1/saliba.html>>.

Recommended readings

Apart from the author's own publications, which may be consulted for additional bibliography, note Arun Bala, *The Dialogue of Civilizations in the Birth of Modern Science* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). In Joseph Needham's

magisterial, *Science and Civilization in China*, 7 vols. in 27 (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1954-), alchemy is covered in vol. 5, pts. 2-5; medicine in vol. 6, pt. 6. On the importance of paper in the Islamic world see Jonathan M. Bloom, "Silk Road or Paper Road?" *The Silk Road* 3/2 (2005): 21-26, which summarizes his elegant book *Paper Before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Pr., 2001). A good many (but by no means all) of the important Arabic sources are available in English

translation. Note in particular the translation of *The History of al-Tabari / Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk*, 40 vols. (Albany: State University of New York Pr., 1985-); *The Fihrist of al-Nadim: a Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, Bayard Dodge, ed. and tr. (New York: Columbia Univ. Pr., 1970); *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, A.D. 1325-1354, tr. H.A.R. Gibb [Works issued by the Hakluyt Society, 2nd ser., nos. 110, 117, 141, 178, 190], 5 vols. (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1958-2000).

On the Road:

Caravan Routes of Iran

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Photographs by **Ruth Harold**

For travelers and merchants of the middle ages, Iran was unavoidable. The great caravan roads that linked China and India to Rome or Constantinople passed through Persian lands, and the sea-lanes terminated at ports in the Persian Gulf. Iranian rulers took full advantage of their geographical opportunities: they taxed foreign trade, and made every effort to keep East and West from making direct contact. Merchants chafed at the exorbitant tolls, but there was little they could do about it; efforts to by-pass Iranian spaces, either by land north of the Caucasus Mountains, or via the Red Sea, had only limited success. Iran's relative prosperity from medieval times through the 17th century was due, in no small measure, to revenue from trade.

Iran is a large country, with a continuous history of some 2500 years as a nation and a state. The major caravan routes, which trace back far into antiquity, remained in use into the 20th century, and geography dictates that modern roads must generally run parallel to those of the past. In consequence, Iran's abundant legacy of art and architecture is quite accessible, or would be but for recurrent political frictions. The present article is the fruit of a

long road journey in 2000, when tensions abated for a time, which took us diagonally across Iran from northwest to southeast, roughly following the route of Marco Polo's journey in 1273 CE. The world of the caravans is vanishing fast, but those who look can still find places where the roar of automobile traffic has not yet drowned out "the whispers of the desert-wind, the tinkling of the camels' bell."

The world of the Arab geographers

We are remarkably well informed concerning the historical geography of Iran, thanks chiefly to a small band of Muslim scholars, writing mostly in Arabic, who recorded in detail the state of the region in the 10th and 11th centuries CE. At that time, Iran was at least nominally part of the Abbasid Empire (though in practice much of the country was ruled by local dynasties or by the Seljuk Turks), and Baghdad was the center of the universe. This was the city glorified in "The Thousand and One Nights" (known in English as "The Arabian Nights"), a glittering metropolis of palaces, mosques and schools, hospitals and bazaars, that covered some five square miles and held more than a million souls.

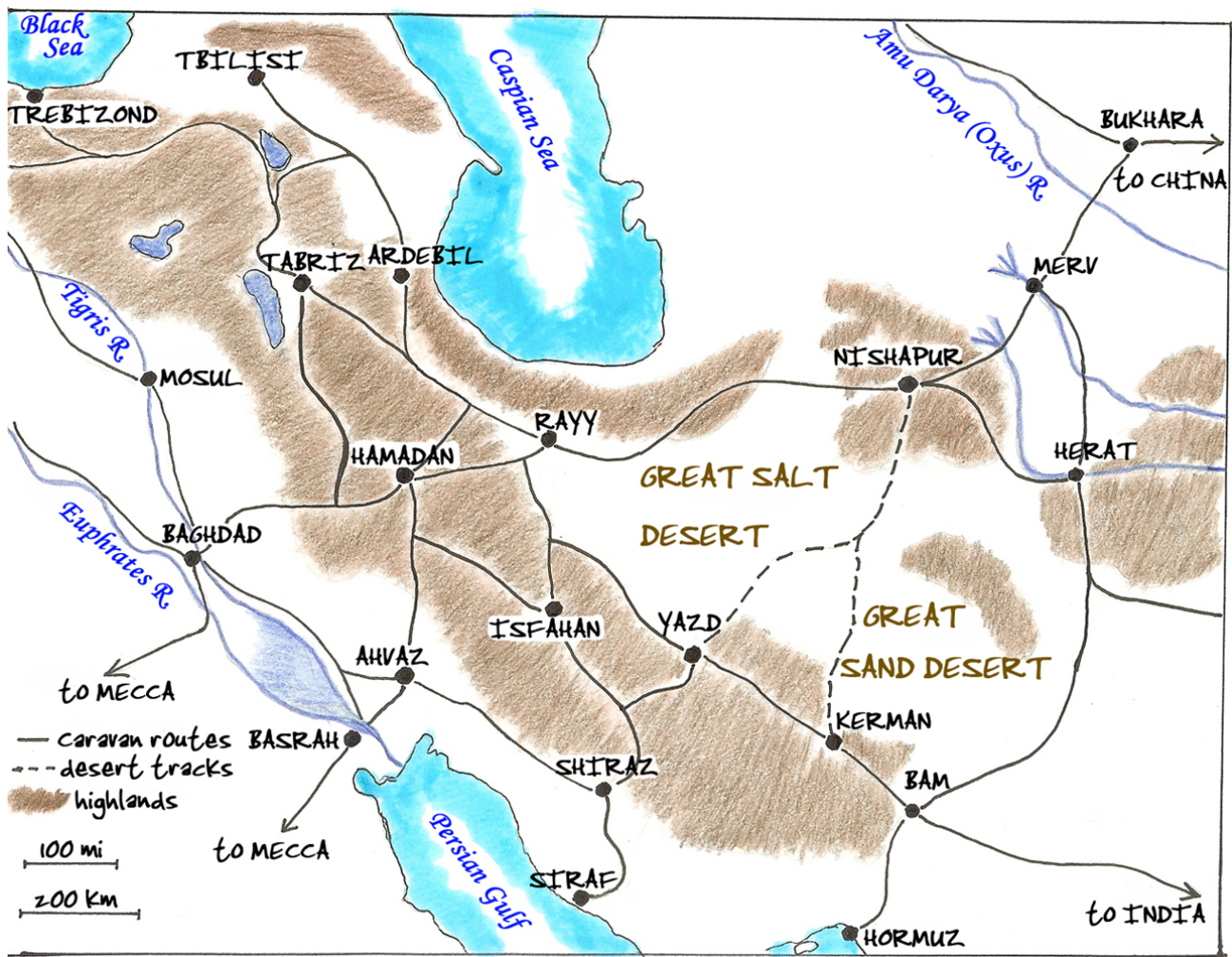


Fig. 1. Towns and trade routes of medieval Iran, 10th – 11th centuries.

As the focal point of an empire that stretched from China to Spain, Baghdad was a magnet that drew luxury goods from all over the world, and the Caliph's court had no equal for wealth, prestige and display.

The Arab geographers were a much more sober lot than the brilliant fabulists who invented Aladdin and his lamp. In the early years of the 10th century Estakhri, a native of Iran, traveled extensively and recorded his journey, with emphasis on Fars and western Iran. This pioneering work was augmented and incorporated into that of his successor, Ebn Hawkal, a native of Nusaibin in Syria, who roamed the Abbasid world for thirty years as a merchant and missionary, and compiled his observations in a book entitled "Configurations of the Earth." The grand master of geographical science of that day was their younger contemporary Muqaddasi, a well-educated son

of Jerusalem, who produced a systematic treatise intended to be useful to merchants and educated men. In the following century Nasir-i-Khusraw, an Ismaili Persian from a land-owning family in Transoxiana, embarked on a pilgrimage to Mecca that lasted for seven years, and came to include Syria and Egypt as well. His account is one of the earliest in Farsi. These pioneers and their successors described an extensive web of roads, radiating from Baghdad, that knit together a vast region that was reasonably well ordered and prosperous, and whose life was linked to faraway lands beyond the bounds of the Eastern Caliphate. The map shown in Fig. 1 has been purposely simplified, omitting several of the known routes so as to emphasize the chief lines of communication across the Iranian plateau.

The chief thoroughfare of that time was the Great Khorasan Road, by which travelers could

proceed to northern Iran, across Central Asia (a region Iranian in speech and culture, and part of Khorasan, land of the sunrise), and eventually to China. The route was already ancient, antedating the coming of Islam by more than a millennium. The armies of Cyrus and Darius had marched that way, extending the rule of the Great King across Afghanistan as far as the Indus River. Alexander the Great followed in their footsteps. Goods from China had come by the Khorasan Road since the time of the Han, the Parthians and the Romans in the first centuries CE. So long as strong government was entrenched in Chang-an, and the rambunctious Turks were under control, the Khorasan Road was the premier artery of long-distance trade and matches our common perception of the Silk Road. And after the Arab conquest, pilgrims from the cities of Central Asia took the Khorasan Road on the annual Hajj to Mecca in Arabia.

Going eastward, the Khorasan Road climbed onto the Iranian Plateau, crossing country inhabited chiefly by Kurds, and passed through cities that have endured triumph and disaster from antiquity to the present day. Then as now, Kermanshah was the chief city of Kurdistan, noted for its many trees, abundant fruit and the rock-cut alcoves of Tagh-e-Bostan with their spectacular Sasanian sculptures. Darius' triumphal inscription on the cliff of Bisitun was well known, though perhaps not fully understood: Ebn Hawkal read the panel depicting Darius with the tributary kings as the representation of a school-house, with the master and his boys. Hamadan, once capital of the Medes, was described as a fine and large city that had recovered from the destruction inflicted during the Arab conquest. The road then went by the important center of Rayy (see below), today a suburb of sprawling, smoggy Tehran. It then followed the southern foot of the Alborz Mountains to Nishapur, the chief city of Khorasan, described in detail by both Ebn Hawkal and Muqaddasi. Like other large towns of that time, Nishapur consisted of a fortress, the town proper and a suburb. All three were defended with walls, pierced by numerous gates that gave access to the extensive markets. No town in all of Khorasan was healthier or more populous than Nishapur, or more celebrated for its rich stores of merchandise and the wealth of its merchants.

Continuing east, the road passed through Tus, a few miles north of today's Mashad (which did not yet exist), an important regional center that was home to the poet Ferdowsi who flourished around 1000 CE. Here, on the fault-line between Iran and Turan, Ferdowsi composed the *Shahname*, Iran's national epic. Nothing of Tus remains, except for the bleak ruins of its citadel. Turning northward, the Khorasan Road dropped down into the Kara Kum desert, making for the oasis city of Merv. Watered by an extensive network of canals, Merv is believed to have held a million inhabitants when the Mongols took it, and butchered every one. Of the splendors of Merv, only confused ruins and the mausoleum of a Seljuk sultan survive today. Beyond lay Bukhara, Samarkand and eventually, across the high Pamirs, half-legendary China.

Well-traveled branches diverged from the Khorasan Road at many points, of which only the chief ones are shown on the map. From Hamadan one could journey southward onto the Mesopotamian plain, or southeast to the ancient city of Isfahan, several times the capital of Iran. One could also head north for Qazvin, there to pick up a western branch of the Silk Road for Tabriz, Dabil (not far from today's Yerevan in Armenia) and eventually the port of Trebizond on the Black Sea. A further branch led northward to Ardebil, Tbilisi and the Caucasus. Nishapur was the point of departure for a track southward, between the parched basins shown on the map as the Great Salt Desert and the Great Sand Desert. And from Merv, routes led to Balkh, Herat, Kandahar and India.

Little enough remains today of Rayy, the Greeks' Rhages, which was a major hub of commerce and transport, and considered by some the finest city east of Baghdad. Rayy was the starting point for the major caravan route that skirted the western and southern side of the central deserts, on the way to the Persian Gulf or to India. Way stations still featured on maps include Qom, Kashan, Na'in, Yazd, Kerman and Bam, several of which we shall visit below. From this road, also, branches led forth. Several routes led to Isfahan and Shiraz; the latter began as an Arab foundation that grew into an important center, and today rules the South. Shiraz could also be reached from Baghdad, via Ahvaz. Several routes led northeast, across the central desert. Most important, here was the

access to ports on the Persian Gulf. Much of the trade with India and China was conducted by sea. Basrah has been the key to this commerce from antiquity to the present, with direct links by water to Baghdad and destinations to the west. Even the Iranian Plateau received imported goods via Baghdad, though it did also have ports of its own. In the 10th century CE, the chief harbor on the eastern shore of the Persian Gulf was Siraf; that town was utterly destroyed in 977 by a powerful earthquake, from which it never recovered. Siraf's place was taken by Hormuz, and eventually (in the 17th century) by nearby Bandar Abbas, which remains an important harbor to this day.

Caravans

Those were tracks and routes, of course, not proper roads, that crisscrossed the uplands and assured Iran a central role in the commerce of western Asia. Wheeled vehicles and made roads all but vanished from the Middle East after the Arab conquest, not to be seen again until the 19th century; and in Iran, true roads had hardly ever existed. Indeed, caravans of pack animals — most often camels, but sometimes mules or large donkeys — were better suited to the circumstances: vast spaces, sparsely inhabited and infested with robbers, where wells were few and far between and a vicious storm might blow up at any moment. Caravans have been the engines of trade since antiquity (remember those double-humped camels depicted on the bas-reliefs at Persepolis), allowing men and goods to travel in relative security on fixed routes and on a predictable schedule [Fig. 2].

There was nothing haphazard about the trade caravan, which would spend weeks or months on the road to multiple destinations, and required careful organization. The animals, sometimes hundreds of them, were linked together in strings of twenty or so, each in charge of a leader. A large booming bell announced the

caravan's approach, "the insignia and alarum of the leading camel alone" (Curzon). The enterprise as a whole came under the command of a chief, who made all the necessary arrangements and chose the route and halting places. Individual travelers paid the chief a lump sum for each animal, which covered a share of the cost of fodder, guides and guards. Goods were bundled into packs weighing up to 200 lbs each; passengers could be carried in panniers. The route was generally well established, sometimes marked with cairns or poles, with halts determined by the location of settlements or wells. But the track was not always obvious, and so caravans employed local guides familiar with the terrain. The danger of attack was always just over the horizon; travelers went armed, and caravans were accompanied by guards. Individual travelers must perforce attach themselves to a caravan and take care not to fall behind.

Caravans were of several sorts. Most of them were engaged in trade, and much of the traffic was local. Everything moved on animal-back: grains, dates and dried fruit, dried fish from the Caspian Sea and the Gulf, firewood and salt and cooking oil. Certain manufactured goods were distributed across Iran and were also exported: Nishapur was famous for its black-on-white ceramics, cottons came from Fars, Rayy, Bam and Khuzestan. Silk was spun in Yazd, Nishapur and Transoxiana; Ardebil and Qom produced leather goods. Carpets (the chief furniture of the East) traveled all over, and remote Baku was known for a useful medicinal substance, petroleum. Even the winter's snow was in demand, to cool the palaces of the Caliph and his ministers during Baghdad's torrid summers.



Fig. 2. Caravan country: Taft, in central Iran.

It's the long-distance trade that conjures up the romance of the Silk Road. Goods of high value but low bulk were carried across Iran to destinations far to the west or east — Constantinople, Baghdad or Chang-an. Few individual mer-

chants ever traveled the whole route; instead, goods changed hands many times along the way. From China came silk, of course, but also porcelain and paper; turquoise and lapis lazuli were shipped from the oasis cities of Central Asia. In exchange, the West sent woolens, brocades and colored glass, but much of what Europe imported was paid for in gold. There was active trade with the Volga basin and points north, from whence came furs, amber, honey (the sweetener of antiquity), beeswax for candles and especially slaves. Iran paid chiefly in silver coins, which have been found in large numbers in both Russia and Scandinavia. Trade with India and Southeast Asia was conducted by sea. Arab dhows brought rubies, musk and perfumes, indigo and a miscellany of spices to the port cities of Siraf and Hormuz; pearls, coral, weapons and even horses traveled the other way.

Pilgrims made a large contribution to the traffic on the caravan routes. Muslims are enjoined to make pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime, and many thousands did so every year. One caravan that left Isfahan for Mecca in 1715 CE was said to number 30,000 men and women, plus an untold complement of beasts! Pilgrims from Central Asia and Iran made their way to Baghdad, and thence to Aleppo and Damascus, where they were joined by another stream from Anatolia and Istanbul. Shiites also traveled to the holy cities of Najaf and Kerbala on the plains of Iraq, sites of the martyrdom and burial of the Caliph Ali and his son Hussein. Shah Abbas, in the 17th century, promoted the pilgrimage to the shrine of the Imam Reza in Mashad, and to that of Shaikh Safi in Ardebil, as alternatives that avoided the territories of his chief rival, the Sunni Ottoman sultan. In the 19th century, the pursuit of salvation took a macabre turn: it became fashionable for pious Shiites to be buried near the holy precincts, and huge caravans were formed to transport corpses from one end of Iran to the other.

Along the major routes travelers could expect to find caravanserais, spaced a day's journey apart — 30 to 40 km on the flat, more closely in the mountains. Many were substantial, even

forbidding buildings designed to hold off bandits and marauding tribesmen. Caravanserais were typically square or rectangular, with towers at the corners and along the curtain walls, but no windows. The single projecting entrance block featured a doorway tall enough to admit a loaded camel, barred with a heavy wooden gate. An open courtyard contained a well, occasionally a small mosque, and provided working space to load and unload animals. An arcaded portico surrounded the courtyard, with rooms for travelers behind; these were raised above ground level to keep animals from straying into the guest quarters. Stables and storerooms were placed into the corners or against the outer walls. Large caravanserais offered an upper story to accommodate official and affluent travelers. Outside the walls were likely to be market stalls where travelers could purchase cooked food, firewood and medicines, and make repairs to harness and packsaddles.

Hundreds of caravanserais were built all across Iran (Wolfram Kleiss located and measured some 500 of them, some of them pre-Islamic), and quite a few have survived [Fig. 3]. Some were put up by charitable



Fig. 3. Safavid caravanserai near Yazd.

bequest, but most of the caravanserais were constructed by designated government officials, who were also responsible for bridges, dikes and forts, and for the security of the roads. The state of the caravan net was always a reliable indicator of the government's effectiveness. Regardless, local rulers collected tolls, custom duties and bribes, especially in the towns. The road net probably reached its zenith in the 11th and 12th centuries, under the Seljuk sultans whose realm stretched from Afghanistan to Syria, with Rayy as the hub of trade. The system was wrecked by the Mongol tsunami, but



Fig. 4. Safavid bridge near Kermanshah.

recovered in the 14th and 15th centuries. Strong central rule under the Safavids stimulated commerce, and construction boomed. If you ask the age of a bridge, fort or caravanserai [Figs. 3, 4 and 5], you may well be told that it was



Fig. 5. 19th-century fort near Yazd.

built by Shah Abbas the Great (1587 – 1629 CE). However, since the caravan trade continued into the 20th century, much of what one sees is likely to date to more recent times.

Towns grew up at the nodes of the road net, each with a surround of mud-brick walls, a citadel where the ruler dwelled, and a bazaar at its economic heart. The bazaar was, and remains today much more than a shopping center: it was the home of commerce, manufacture and civic life rolled into one. The traditional Iranian bazaar takes the form of a vaulted tunnel built of brick; small domes pierced by skylights enliven the roof and admit shafts of light [Fig. 6]. Small shops and workshops line the sides; they are too small to

step into, and crammed with merchandise. Business is transacted in front, amidst the bustle of shoppers and gawkers, porters and donkeys and boys scurrying to and fro carrying trays with tiny glasses of tea. Merchants are loosely grouped by trade. Baths, mosques, schools and inns open onto lanes leading off the main bazaar, and add to the din and the congestion. Money makes this world go 'round, but for its inhabitants it is also the center of social life, religion and politics. To this day bazaaris, the permanent merchants, make up a cohesive society that wields real power.

Through Western Eyes

Then as now, trade waxed and waned with the political weather. Long-distance commerce prospered when powerful empires guarded the main roads, but withered when central authority faded and banditry made travel too dangerous. The Silk Road flourished in the first centuries CE, when the Han held sway in China, the Parthians in Iran and the Kushans in between. Another florescence came in

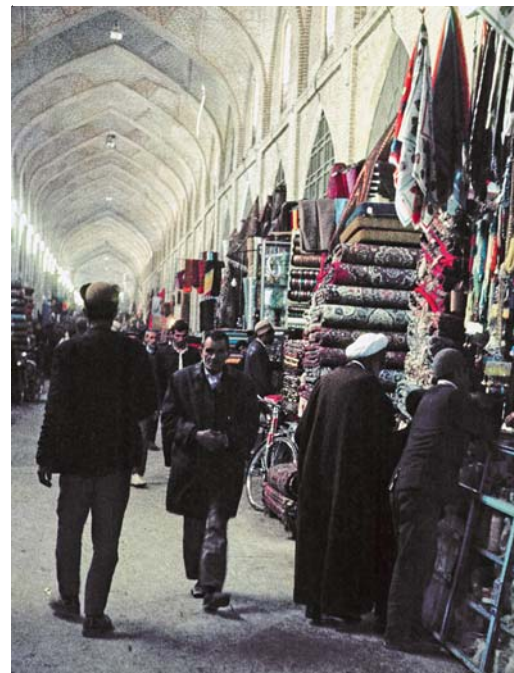


Fig. 6. In the bazaar, Shiraz.

Abbasid times, the 8th through 10th centuries CE, and again when the Seljuks dominated the region in the 11th and 12th centuries, with their capital at Isfahan. Some scholars believe that the Seljuk era saw the zenith of Iran's caravan trade.

A century later catastrophe struck. Bursting out of their remote grasslands in 1217 CE, the savage horsemen of Ghengis Khan and his sons devastated Central Asia, Iran and Anatolia, and punched deep into eastern Europe and the Arab lands. The Mongols were ferocious and bloodthirsty beyond anything the settled realm of Islam had ever experienced before; and nothing could stop their advance. The Mongols wanted pasture for their ponies, not fields and orchards; and so, between 1220 and 1260, cities were burnt to the ground, their inhabitants slaughtered and the cultivated land laid waste. Balkh, Bukhara, Samarkand, Merv, Tus, Nishapur, Rayy, Hamadan, Qazvin and Baghdad all shared the calamity, which lives in the Iranian psyche to this day. It took a generation for the Mongol khans to realize that pasture and ruin paid no taxes, and they began to promote revival. The empire of Qubilai Khan, in the last quarter of the 13th century, stretched from Hungary to China, and was wide open to commerce in goods and ideas. It was a golden age of travel, and the time when explorers and merchants from Europe first discovered the fabulous realm of Inner Asia.

The Mongol khans who ruled Iran from approximately 1260 to 1400, known as the Ilkhans, left a surprisingly rich legacy of art and architecture (the 14th century is when glazed tiles first became common), suggesting that cities were reviving and economic life was flourishing again. The ancient network of caravan tracks was not substantially altered, but its focus shifted from Baghdad (which had been pillaged in 1258 CE) to northwestern Iran. The Ilkhans chose to make their capital in Maragheh, and later in the large city of Tabriz. The high road then ran through Erzerum, and the chief port was the Greek city of Trebizond on the Black Sea.

Marco Polo was a lad of 17 when, in 1271, he accompanied his father Nicolo and uncle Maffeo on their second voyage to the court of the Great Khan at Khanbaliq, today's Beijing. They carried a letter from the Pope and a phial of sacred oil,

but the two friars that had been deputed to convert the heathen bailed out early on. The Polos were made of sterner stuff. From Layas, a Mediterranean port near today's Adana, they journeyed north to Erzincan through country inhabited largely by Kurds ("an unprincipled people, whose occupation is to rob the merchants"). The Polos probably intended to make for Khanbaliq by way of the steppes of Central Asia, but a local war barred the way. So they traveled eastward to Tabriz, which they found to be "a large and very noble city ... so advantageously situated for trade that merchants from India, Baudas [Baghdad], Mosul ... as well as from different parts of Europe resort thither to purchase and to sell ... precious stones, pearls etc." Regrettably, "The Mahometan inhabitants are treacherous and unprincipled." From Tabriz the Polos apparently struck diagonally across Iran for Hormuz. Their route is not specified, but we pick up their trail at the desert city of Yazd (cloth of silk and gold), and again at Kerman (turquoise, embroidered cloth, hunting falcons and all sorts of arms and equipment). They intended to take ship at Hormuz, but judged the vessels on offer to be unseaworthy. So north they went again, through the deserts of Seistan and Khorasan, and eventually made their way to Balkh and across the Pamirs. By the time the three Venetians bowed down before Qubilai Khan, they had been on the road for three and a half years. Is Marco's tale true? Skeptics have questioned his veracity from the beginning, and not without reason. Polo's account of Iran has odd gaps, but it also includes much specific detail; it reads to me like the imperfect recollection of firsthand experience.

Marco Polo the merchant tells of trade and manufactures; subsequent travelers had wider interests. An outstanding description of Iran is that of Thomas Herbert, who was all of 21 when he was attached to a mission that King Charles I sent to the court of Shah Abbas in 1627. By then the caravan road to Central Asia was long past its heyday, and foreign trade was conducted by sea; but Iran was orderly and prosperous, and regional trade flourished. Herbert was fascinated and impressed by what he saw, notwithstanding the fact that he fell deathly ill near the end and barely lived to tell of his adventures. Landing near Bandar Abbas ("the most valuable port the King of Persia hast")

they rode to Shiraz ("pleasantest of Asiatic cities"), visited Persepolis and continued on to Isfahan — a journey of three months. Herbert, like later travelers, was enchanted by Isfahan: "most pleasant in its situation, elegant as to building, populous for inhabitants, rich in trade, and noble by being the usual residence of the court." It is also blessed with "air pure and quick." The Shah had decamped to the Caspian Sea, and the embassy followed him there. Politically, the mission was a failure, but it inspired an engaging and informative account of the country and its people, which became a bestseller in England. And Herbert noticed something that would become important later: there was not a fortress or a regiment in the King's domain that would stand up to an English force, and no navy to speak of.

The late nineteenth century was when the going really got good, especially for British travelers who could contemplate adding Iran to their vast holdings. Indeed, Colonels Charles M. MacGregor and Charles E. Yate, traveling in the border regions of Seistan and Khorasan in 1875/6 and 1893 – 1898, respectively, seem to be reconnoitering the country with a view to a future campaign. The most impressive contribution to that literature is Lord Curzon's magisterial opus, *Persia and the Persian Question* (1892). With the security of India at stake, the Great Game is never far from his mind (the eastern countries are "pieces on a chessboard upon which is being played out a game for the dominion of the world"), but Curzon's account of Persia's geography and current realities has never been surpassed. Less lofty but more in sympathy with Iran's long-suffering people is Edward G. Browne's account of his *Year amongst the Persians* (1893). Here is a traveler with a curious and wide-open mind, ready to immerse himself in the literary and religious culture of a country that he came to love, and willing to put up cheerfully with its hazards and discomforts.

The contemporary adventurer, apt to blanch in horror at the thought of brigands and bedbugs alike, can only admire the fortitude of our predecessors of a century ago. They all got their lumps — from the execrable roads, the decrepit and verminous caravanserais, the broken-backed horses and the thieving muleteers. Even sympathetic observers, such as Browne and the American scholar Williams Jackson (1906),

describe a country of dirt-poor people dwelling in half-ruined towns huddled within crumbling walls ("ruin added to ruin"; Browne). Corrupt guards and officials fleece everyone, and bandits skulk in the passes and the dark. The Khorasan Road between Mashad and Tehran was especially at risk from slave raiders, until the Russians crushed the Turkomans in 1881. Fanatical and bigoted mullahs, often flagrantly deceitful (especially in the matter of liquor) stir up ignorant folk to violence against native minorities such as Zoroastrians and Ba'bis (Bahai), and foreigners are their favorite prey. You set foot inside a mosque or shrine at the risk of your life. As to the romance of the journey, "no greater misery can be conceived than that of travelling with a caravan, the de'sagre'mens of which are many and various" (Ferrier, 1857).

Lord Curzon, who knew the state of the Shah's governance intimately, wrote scathingly of the rapacity of a system based largely on corruption, intrigue, extortion and embezzlement (his terms). The results were plain to see in the total absence of public works, and in the dilapidated state of all buildings, from caravanserais to mosques, except in the major cities. To be sure, we are reading European travelers whose critical perceptions were sharpened by the certitude that their own civilization was both materially and morally superior. But they do not mislead us: the latter nineteenth century was a low point in Iran's fortunes, which ultimately spawned the upheavals that would roil Iran in the next century, and spill over into our own time.

Travelers' notebook

The modernization of Iran during the past century has swept away that world of medieval commerce. You may still see an occasional camel, but caravans are no more. Goods go by lorry, pilgrims travel by bus or 'plane and lodge in hotels, not caravanserais. The city walls have all been demolished, because improved security made them redundant and they got in the way of automobile traffic. Even in the thirty years that lay between our yearlong residence in Iran (1969/70) and our return as visitors, the ambience changed quite noticeably. Villages once accessible only by mule track are now linked to the wider world by asphalted road.



Fig. 7. The citadel of Bam before the earthquake.

Muddy streets have been paved, crumbling edifices spruced up, things are tidier and more salubrious. The bazaars continue to function but the craftsmen have gone, and the shops sell cheap mass-produced stuff. Better goods are increasingly found in standard walk-in stores, lining streets choked with traffic. The Islamic Republic takes a distinctly non-Western view of liberty and has a reputation for hard-fisted politics and corruption, but seems also to have done much good. It all looks a lot less like the middle ages, and while the antiquarian in me deplores change, it would be churlish to grumble at what must, by all reasonable standards, count as progress.

This is not to imply that there is nothing left to see in Iran! The country is extraordinarily rich in monuments of the past, and the caravan trade itself has left many traces. Caravanserais are not uncommon by the roadside and in the towns, where they have been converted into workshops, warehouses and occasionally restaurants. Here and there an ancient bridge still spans its stream. Some of the castles that once stood guard over the trade routes still stand. Until recently, the mud-brick fortress of Bam in southeastern Iran was the most spectacular [Fig. 7], but in 2003 a monstrous earthquake snuffed out 26,000 lives in the town and brought the walls tumbling down. The vaulted bazaars are still evocative and photogenic, and the carpets and block-printed cloth as tempting as ever. But what chiefly draws travelers to Iran is the lavish architectural

heritage in brick, stucco and glazed tile. Only in the Iranian world (including its periphery, Iraq and Central Asia) do you find architecture in color. Iran's many mosques and shrines include some of the most glorious buildings ever erected; their tiled domes and minarets glow like jewels amidst the dull duns and browns of their surroundings. And unlike the situation a century

ago, most of them admit non-Muslim visitors.

Individual buildings are like plums in a porridge; what we cherish most are those towns that have managed to retain something of the appearance and the feel of earlier times. Places like this are not common anywhere (Bruges, Salamanca, Bikaner in Rajasthan and Islamic Cairo come to mind), and are especially rare in Iran where earthquakes are frequent, a change of ruler was often an occasion for mass destruction, and preservation of the past was never a high priority. The warren of alleys behind Isfahan's Friday Mosque qualifies, and I recall another in Kerman. The outstanding example of an ancient place that still looks like one is the desert city of Yazd (which we described in an earlier article in these pages; Fig 8), and to a lesser degree the nearby town of Na'in. Yazd boasts narrow mud-brick alleys shored up with arches, a lively old bazaar and one of the finest Friday Mosques in all of Iran.



Fig. 8. The desert city of Yazd.

UNESCO has declared Yazd a World-Heritage site. Na'in [Fig. 9] is similar but smaller, and claims one of Iran's most ancient mosques, built in the 10th century. Finally, let me mention Khiva and Bukhara, out on the fringes of the Persian world. Bukhara is older and has the finer buildings, but no atmosphere. Khiva is much more recent; its buildings date to the 19th century, when the city grew fat on the profits of its slave market, kept stocked with Persian and Russian captives by Turkoman raiders. The Russians at last put a stop to it in 1873, and the life went out of the town. Khiva was heavily restored in Soviet times and turned into a museum. Hardly anyone lives within the walls, but the ramparts are imposing and the buildings gleam with blue tiles. There is about Khiva a touch of fakery. And yet, standing on the palace walls at sundown, you gaze out over a purely Persian cityscape of flat roofs overtopped by domes, eywans and tall minarets [Fig. 10]. I know of no more evocative vision of the Khorasan Road in caravan days.

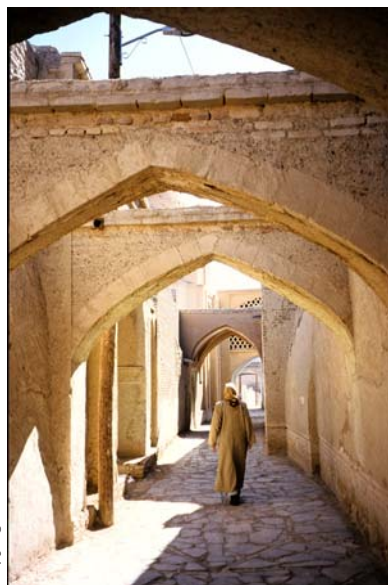


Fig. 9. An alley in Na'in.

A very different facet of Old Persia lives on at the many shrines where pilgrims gather. They no longer travel by caravan but they continue to come, an enduring feature of life in Iran as it was in the European middle ages. Since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, thousands of Iranians have made the hazardous journey to Shiism's holiest shrines at Najaf and Kerbala, undeterred by the risk of stampedes and suicide bombers. Pilgrims flock to Shah Cheragh in Shiraz [Fig. 11, facing page], and find their way to the tombs of the Safavid Shaikhs in Ardebil, up in northwestern Iran [Figs. 12, facing page; 13, 14 p. 28]. The hereditary chief of a militant Sufi brotherhood and endowed with irresistible charisma, Shaikh Ismail was all of twelve years old when he led forth his Turkoman warriors to conquer Iran for Shiism (1499 CE). As the founder of the Safavid dynasty, Shah Ismail is still a potent force and intercessor.

Blessed above all the others is the pilgrimage to the tomb of the Imam Reza, eighth in the line of divinely guided and infallible Imams descended from the Caliph Ali. The Imam died in 817 CE (of poison, Shiites believe), and was buried at Mashad in northeastern Iran; of all the many shrines in the country, his is the most sacred. For most of its history the shrine has been off-limits to foreigners; we were privileged to enter it in 1970, during a brief period when Shah Mohammed Reza ordered it opened (the present status is not clear to me). Nowhere in Iran will you find glazed tiles more lustrous than in the Mosque of Gowhar Shad and the adjoining courtyards. And even the most hardened rationalist cannot fail to be moved by the passionate devotion of the swarms of pilgrims, who have come from all corners of this huge country to bask for a little while in the grace of a long-dead martyr.



Fig. 10. The rooftops of Khiva, Uzbekistan.

About the authors

Frequent contributors to this journal, **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 City College, New York, and the University of California at Berkeley. Now retired from forty



Fig. 11. The shrine of Shah Cheragh, Shiraz.

years of research and teaching, he is Professor Emeritus of biochemistry at Colorado State University, and Affiliate Professor of microbiology at the University of Washington. Ruth is a microbiologist who studied at the University of Arizona and the University of California at Berkeley; now retired, she is an aspiring watercolor painter. The Harold family lived in Iran in 1969/70, while Frank served as Fulbright lecturer at the University of Tehran. This experience kindled a passion for adventure travel, which has since taken them to Afghanistan and back to Iran, across the Middle East, into the Himalayas and Tibet, up and down the Indian subcontinent and along the Silk Road between China and Turkey. They can be reached at <frankharold@earthlink.net>.



Fig. 12. Shrine of Shaikh Safi, Ardebil.

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information; see under "Bazaar," "Camels," "Caravan," "Caravan-serai," "Commerce" and others. Information about the Muslim geographers will be found in that encyclopedia and in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Laurence Lockhart, *Persian Cities* (London: Luzac, 1960) is an invaluable guide to traditional Iran. A series of articles on architectural remains in Iran by Wolfram Kleiss appeared in *Archaeologische Mitteilungen von Iran* between 1975 and 1990.

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The map is based on several sources, especially *An Historical Atlas of Islam*, William C. Brice, ed (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981); and the *Tübingen Atlas des Vorderen Orients* (Wiesbaden: Dr Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1994).

Quotations: "The whispers of the desert wind" etc, from *The Kasidah of Haji Abdu el Yezdi*, by Richard Burton (1880). Others were taken from the sources cited.



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Fig. 13. The "Ardebil Carpet," one of a pair commissioned by Safavid Shah Tahmasp for the Ardebil family shrine, AH 946/CE 1539-40. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Inv. no. 272-1893. For more information: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/asia/object_stories/ardabil/index.html>.



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Fig. 14. A Ming Dynasty Jigdezhen kilns blue-and-white porcelain plate, 1403-1424, donated in 1611 by Safavid Shah Abbas I to the Ardebil family shrine, which housed one of the largest collections anywhere of Chinese porcelain. Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

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

Julia Elikhina

State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

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 engineers 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 semi-precious 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 iconographic 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 *Abhidharma-samuccaya*, the *Abhidharma-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 *Abhidharma-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 Bodhisattvas. The numerous depictions of the Buddha which dominate in the early iconography included standing and seated images, both created under the influence of the Gandharan 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, 4th century CE. Inv. nos. GA-2477, 2523 (restored from two pieces).



Fig. 2. Seated Buddha. Painted stucco. H. 11 cm. Khotan, 4th 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

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Fig. 3. Seated Buddha. Cast bronze. H. 9.3 cm. Khotan, 4th-6th 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 3rd-4th centuries. (Zwalf 1996, Vol. 2, pp. 37-55).



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

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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 so-called "European" pose with the legs, somewhat broken off, extending pendent to a semicircular lotus footstool. This is the pose of *bhadrāsana*, typical only for Maitreya. For the majority of the images of Maitreya in Khotan the characteristic pose

is that of *bhadrāsana*, 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 Gandharan sculptures to be an attribute of Maitreya.

The iconography of Maitreya in the monuments found in East Turkestan is quite 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 (*bhadrāsana*). 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 x 1.7 cm) notwithstanding, the example is well crafted and one can see even on the photographs the smallest details. Maitreya 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 (*bhadrāsana*). 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, 9th century CE. Inv. no. GA-1031.

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Fig. 6. Avalokitesvara-Padmapani. Cast bronze. H. 8.8 cm. Khotan, 9th 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 plaques depicting Avalokitesvara-Padmapani [Figs. 6-9] which come from Khotan and date to the ninth century. Such plaques 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

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Fig. 7. Avalokitesvara-Padmapani. Cast bronze. H. 7.3 cm. Khotan, 9th 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 water-bottle (*kamandalu*). The size of this bronze plaque 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



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



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Fig. 9. *Avalokitesvara-Padmapani*. Cast bronze. H. 4.5 cm. Khotan, 9th 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, 9th 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 Avalokitesvara. 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.

Acknowledgements

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The Buddhist Monuments of Adjina-tepa

Vera Fominikh

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Adjina-tepa, a Buddhist monastery of the seventh century, provides important evidence for the history of Buddhism and its arts in Central Asia on the eve of the Arab conquest. The site is located in southern Tajikistan in the valley of the Vakhsh River, one of the main tributaries of the Panj. This part of the Vakhsh Valley has a long history of human settlement: prehistoric man lived on the upper (fourth and fifth) terraces of the valley. Beginning in the fourth-third centuries BCE, the extensive development of irrigation, especially along the eastern side of the valley, made intensive agriculture possible. The evidence of substantial settlement and prosperity continues through the Kushan period and on down to the time of the Mongol invasion in the 13th century. For the most part life was concentrated on the third terrace, where it attained its maximum width of some 18–20 km in the region of the city of Kurgan-Tyube (Qurghonteppa). Adjina-tepa stands on that terrace.

It is a modest elongated hill, which rises among cotton fields 12 km from Kurgan-Tyube

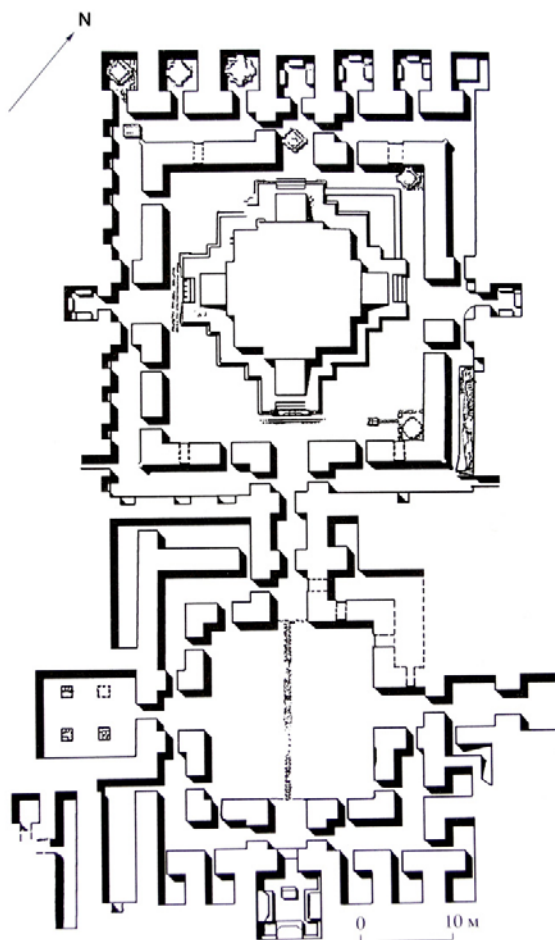
[Fig. 1] and is surrounded on three sides by abandoned irrigation ditches. As Boris A. Litvinskii and Tat'iana I. Zeimal', who supervised the excavations of the site, wrote, "from the road it is an unattractive place — formless mounds, some ditches, thickly overgrown with thorn bushes... Only when one climbs to the top of the hill can one understand that Adjina-tepa is the remains of a complex set of structures. What appears from the road as a formless accumulation of earth reveals when seen from above a rather regular rectangular shape (50 x 100 m), consisting of two equal squares divided by a partitioning wall" (Litvinskii and Zeimal' 1971, p. 14).

In 1960 the archaeologists dug two trenches here which showed that the buildings whose remains form the hill existed in the seventh-eighth centuries. Serious excavations were undertaken beginning in 1961. The features of the architectural layout exposed by the excavations and the remains of painting and sculpture discovered in various parts of the

building show that the ruins of Adjina-tepa constituted a single ensemble of the living quarters and religious structures of a Buddhist monastery [Fig. 2, facing page]. The southeastern half of the monument is the monastery part itself, consisting of structures built in a square around a court (19 x 19 m), which prior to excavation looked like a cup-shaped depression. In the center of the courtyard of the northwest half was a large stupa. The rooms surrounding it had primarily a religious purpose; among them were ones containing small stupas. As the evidence of the floors being on the same level suggests, the two major parts



Fig. 1. Map of Southern Tajikistan showing Vakhsh River and the location of Kurgan-Tyube, to the east of which is located Adjina-tepa. Adapted from: <<http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/tajikist.pdf>>.



After: Fominikh 2003, fig. 1

Fig. 2. Plan of Adjina-tepa.

of the complex probably were built at approximately the same time.

The basis for dating Adjina-tepa is the finds of money: seven years of excavation yielded some 300 coins. The collection contained primarily cast copper coins quite similar to the issues of Samarkandian Sogdia in the second half of the seventh to first half of the eighth centuries. The construction of the monastery seems to have occurred in the middle of the seventh century. The functioning of the site as a Buddhist monastery then lasted about a century, during which time renovations and repairs of the buildings and their decoration occurred. The Arab conquest of the region, which extended over many years up to the middle of the eighth century, led to the abandonment of the monastery, after which the best-preserved part of the buildings was reoccupied primarily as a production center by craftsmen. Coins found in the layer identified

with that final period of its use include Arab dirhams from 741/2, 751/2, and 779/780 CE.

The architecture of the monastery embodied the achievements and experiments of Central Asian architects intertwined with the achievements of the architectural schools of neighboring regions and countries. Construction materials included foundations made of large clay blocks, above which were layers of unbaked brick. Baked brick was used on floors and facings. Gypsum plaster was used extensively to cover surfaces such as that of the stupa. Both the stupa court and that of the monastery are faced on all four sides by eywan vestibules. Apart from the eywans, the architecture features vaulted ceilings of corridors and domes over some of the smaller rooms, with squiches at the transition zone connecting the square walls with the round dome. Such features here are amongst the earliest found in Central Asian architecture and probably point toward a close connection between the architecture of Buddhist structures and early Islamic period forms such as those found in domed mausolea and madrasas. The small arched galleries are an innovation designed in part to relieve pressures created by the vaults and domes. In general, one can speak of a creative mastery of architectural forms which looks both back to earlier developments and forward to the Islamic period.

While for the most part the artistic decoration of Adjina-tepa has been preserved only in a fragmentary state, the site yielded more than 500 works of art: sculptures, reliefs, and mural paintings. At one time, the walls and ceilings of almost every room forming the perimeter of the stupa were decorated, as were several rooms in the monastery half of the site. The painting was done soon (or immediately) after the construction of the whole building. In the subsequent stages of renovation during the century the monastery was active, the painting in general was not renewed but simply painted over with different compositions.

The painting fragments include specifically religious imagery, donor images and decorative motifs. It is difficult to reconstruct iconography, except to note that there were scenes of the Buddha and disciples and "thousand Buddha" compositions with rows of seated Buddhas with nimbuses and mandorlas [Fig. 3, next page].



After: Litvinskii and Zeimal' 1971, pl. 14, p. 173

Fig. 3. A seated Buddha. Mural painting from room 28.

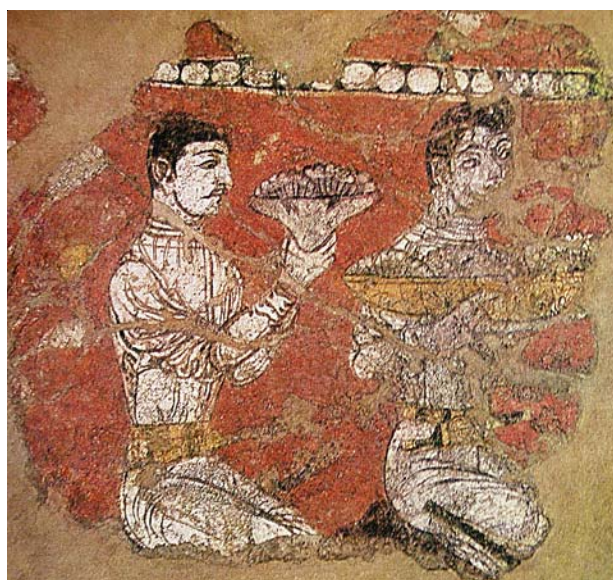
Possibly here were illustrations to the *Lotus Sutra*. The artists' skill in depicting Buddhist images can be seen in the variation of the multiple Buddha images, which do not simply



After: Litvinskii and Zeimal' 1971, pl. 9, p. 169

Fig. 4. A female head. Mural painting from room 1.

reiterate a single pattern. Preserved among the paintings are parts of a composition depicting an elegant female head in three-quarter view [Fig. 4], her hair elaborately coiffed and wearing elaborate gold jewelry. It seems as though the artists were less skilled when depicting the donors, where the models may well have been members of the local population of Tokharistan. In the rubble under the floor was a sizeable fragment showing two male figures in white clothes in a pose of deep genuflection [Fig. 5]. Their hands extended forward and to the right hold gifts in gold and silver bowls. A pearl-decorated band can be seen above the heads, separating them from whatever the now lost figures were in the upper register.



After: Litvinskii and Zeimal' 1971, pl. 4, p. 165

Fig. 5. Two donors. Mural painting from room 31.

The rubble with sculptured remains and fragments of murals covers the floor of the room in the sanctuary in a thick layer as much as 75 cm deep. The compactness of the rubble and its richness allows one to posit that it was intentionally formed: sculptures which stood on pedestals were toppled onto the floor and broken. All that remained of figures at one time arrayed on pedestals were parts of the folds of garments which draped over the walls of the facade of the sanctuary. In the southern corner of the room (between two pedestals) was found the upper part of the head of a large sculpted figure with appliqué curls of hair in spirals, painted in blue. The diameter of the head was about 90 cm. Apparently a huge statue of a divinity was in this room. Judging from the size



Fig. 6. Head of a Bodhisattva. Moulded clay. From room 27.

After: Litvinskii and Zeimal' 1971, pl. 47, p. 193

of the head, if this statue was a seated one, its height would have been about 4 m; if a standing figure, it would have measured about 7 m. Moreover, there were other less sizeable sculptures: the head of a Buddha, the head of a Bodhisattva [Fig. 6], etc., all of which provide important

the renowned sculptures from the Monastery of Fondukistan in Afghanistan [cf. Figs. 7, 8].

The best known archaeological discovery at Adjina-tepa was the clay statue of the Buddha in Nirvana. The excavation in 1966 of the circumambulation corridor (room 23) unearthed a larger than life-size clay statue of a Parinirvana Buddha, whose lower parts from the waist down and left arm and hand (extending down along the body) were largely well preserved [Figs. 9, 10, next page]. Only fragments of the upper body, head and right hand were found. The original length of the figure was approximately 12 m. The robe was draped over the body in artfully sculpted folds and painted red, with the exposed skin of the face, hands and feet painted white.

The statue was removed in 72 pieces and preliminary conservation undertaken initially under the supervision of and primarily following methods developed by P. I. Kostrov for preserving paintings and clay sculpture at Panjikent. The restoration work was continued by L. P. Novikova. When the statue was removed, the underlying support structure of brick was left in place: that is, it was the layers of moulded clay which were saved for reassembly.

There was a long hiatus in the reconstruction work, which was resumed in the year 2000 under the supervision of the author of this article (Fominikh 2003). Since the drying out of the fragments over more than three decades had led to distortion of the original shape, and since the processes used to preserve the paint had resulted in differential coloring of various pieces, the restoration process was extremely complicated. The sculpted layers were re-mounted on a



(left) after: Litvinskii/Zeimal' 1971, pl. 40, p. 188; (right) © 2007 Daniel Waugh



Fig. 7 (left). Torso of a Bodhisattva. Moulded clay. From room 25.

Fig. 8 (right). A Naga king. Moulded clay. Ghorband Valley, Afghanistan, Fondukistan Monastery, Niche D, 7th century CE. Musée Guimet, Paris.

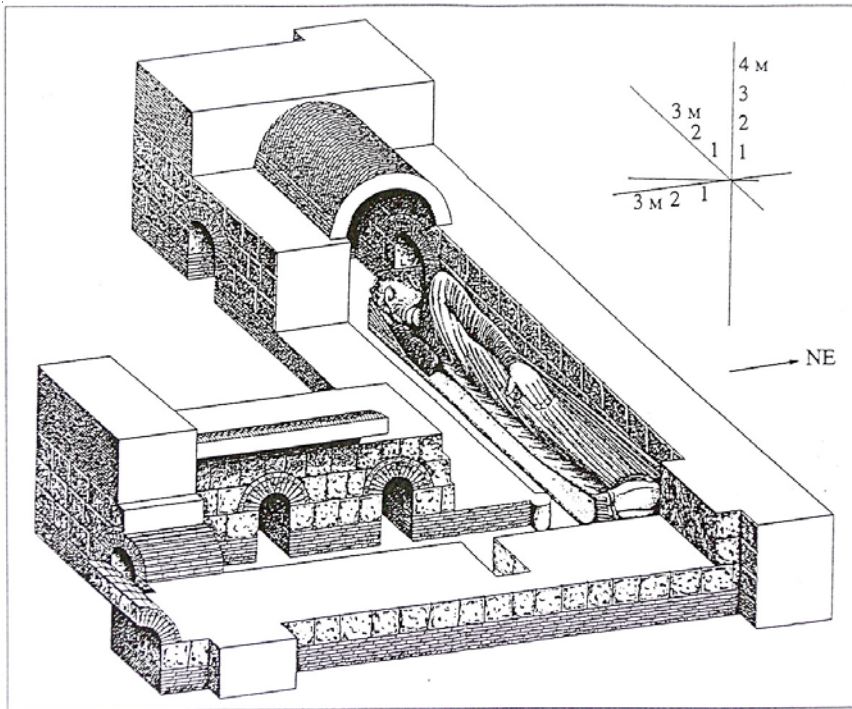


Fig. 9 (top). The Parinirvana Buddha — drawing reconstructing its original appearance and location.

Fig. 10 (middle). The Parinirvana Buddha in situ during excavation.



After: Litvinskii and Zeimal', pl. 3, p. 164

wooden frame, the missing sections filled in with an approximate reproduction, and the seams then smoothed over. As Maurizio Taddei noted, the "most significant comparison, in terms of both typology and chronology" for the Adjina-tapa Buddha is with the somewhat later one found at Tapa-Sardar in Afghanistan (Taddei 1974, p. 114). Despite the fact that the latter is less fully preserved, it helped considerably in the reconstruction of the Adjina-tepa Buddha. The restored statue may be seen today in the National Museum of Antiquities in Dushanbe [Fig. 11].

The architecture, painting and sculpture of Adjina-tepa bear witness to the high level of development of these arts in Central Asia in the region of southern Tajikistan in the early Middle Ages. Its architecture contains innovations which anticipate buildings in the Islamic period. The painting and sculpture bear witness to the flourishing Buddhist culture of southern Tajikistan on the eve of the Arab



conquests. The monumental Parinirvana Buddha is a particularly important example of Buddhist sculpture which deserves to be better known.

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About the author

Vera A. Fominikh has worked as an artist-restorer in the the Laboratory for the Scientific Restoration of Monumental Paintings in the State Hermitage Museum since 1983, where she is now the lead senior restoration specialist. For 17 years she participated in the Central Asian expeditions of Boris Marshak, working in Panjikent, Paikent, Samarkand and Dushanbe. Since 1994 she is a member of the St. Petersburg Union of Artists.

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Fig. 11. The reconstructed Parinirvana Buddha, on display in the National Museum of Antiquities, Dushanbe.



After: Fominikh 2003, pl. 7b

Mediating the Power of Dharma: The Mongols' Approaches to Reviving Buddhism in Mongolia

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The methods of the Buddhist revival in Mongolia, which began in the late 1980s, demonstrate not only what can happen to the Buddhist tradition after seventy years of suppression, but also how the tradition copes with the challenges presented to it. The features of the revival of Buddhist cultural heritage in Mongolia also reveal the ways in which the contemporary Mongols see the revitalization of the Buddhist knowledge and practices as connected to the renewal of the traditional values of the pastoral society and national identity.

Destruction of Mongolian Buddhism

It was only in the late 1980s that the Mongolian Peoples' Republic opened its door to the rest of the world and emerged from its long isolation imposed upon it by Soviet policies. During the seventy-year-long subjection of Mongolia to the Soviet Union and communist campaigns, institutional Buddhism, along with other Mongolian religions, was destroyed. The systematic destruction of Buddhist institutions was carried out from 1921 until 1941 by the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP), which, in large part, adopted the religious policies of the Soviets. Prior to the formation of the Mongolian Peoples' Revolutionary government in Outer Mongolia, there were about 850 Buddhist monasteries with 3,000 temples, and nearly 100,000 Buddhist monks, who comprised about one-tenth of the Mongolian population of that time. Initially, the MPRP's attempts to diminish the economic power of Buddhist establishments were not violent in nature. They primarily consisted of anti-religious propaganda, which disparaged religious beliefs as "unrealistic, cruel, deceptive, and without future," while promulgating a revolutionary ideology as "realistic, true, close to life, and always supportive of workers' rights" (Purevjav and Damshjamts 1965, p. 179). The MPRP carried out its anti-Buddhist propaganda through film, radio, and printed materials, in which it accused Buddhist monasteries of being the last

strongholds of feudalism, damaging to the national productive force. The MPRP produced feature films, portraying Buddhist ideas and practices as corrupt and shameless, while promoting the people's revolution as kind, beneficial, and protective of the common people from the exploitation of high-ranking *lamas*. It also printed its first anti-religious magazine and disseminated it among the lower ranking *lamas*. Despite all of its efforts, it encountered strong resistance from Mongolia's ordained and lay Buddhists, and it soon realized that the religious beliefs of the Mongolian people could not be easily eradicated. One of the greatest obstacles the MPR government faced in its early attempts to develop a revolutionary culture was the lack of support from Mongolia's youth. The overwhelming majority of Mongolian young men were trained in Buddhist monastic institutions, and only a few thousand of them were attending the newly established public schools (Archive 1936). Moreover, during the same period, the number of Mongolian men who constituted the party's cadres was considerably smaller than the number of monks. To reverse this situation, the MPR government established several goals — namely, to weaken economically Buddhist monasteries, to decrease the number of monks, and to attract Mongolia's youth, the lower-ranking monks, and the general public to revolutionary activities. In order to achieve these objectives, the MPR government designed a series of strategic measures.

First, it imposed heavy taxes on the monasteries. Due to the imposed taxation laws, by 1938, only eleven monasteries remained open and the number of livestock owned by all monasteries combined was significantly reduced. The MPR government also imposed taxes on the monasteries' treasuries, and it demanded military taxes from the monks of a military age — that is, from the age of 18 to 45 — unless they enlisted in military service. Likewise, it instituted a law that prohibited boys under the

age of 18 from joining monasteries and forced them to attend public schools. However, parents and monasteries found ways to bypass this law, and the number of monks under the age of 18 continued to grow. Consequently, at the end of 1933, the MPR government began forcibly to take boys out of monasteries and return them to their homes. Young men at the age of 18 were given the option either to join a monastery or to remain laymen. To avoid military service, most young men 18 years of age chose the monastic lifestyle. As a result of this, from 1932-1936, the number of Mongolian monks grew. For this reason, the MPR government imposed a strict law that allowed monastic ordination for only one out of three sons in a family. Consequently, it succeeded in diminishing the number of monks and in weakening monasteries economically. In 1933, when military taxation and military service were first introduced, there were about 41,000 monks of military age. By 1940, there were only 251 monks left in all of Mongolia.

By destroying the monasteries financially, the MPR government forced the lower ranking monks to accept secular jobs and to engage in menial work for the government. Already by 1937, a

large number of lower ranking monks worked in animal husbandry, in factories, in road and bridge repairs, in construction works, in carpentry, and transportation. From 1932-1939, it placed its special agents in monasteries to observe and control the activities of high-ranking monks, who were viewed as counter-revolutionaries and uncompromising enemies of the state. Special agents also supervised the monasteries' accounting and bookkeeping and controlled the allocation of taxes. In 1937, there were still approximately 15,000 high-ranking monks in Mongolia. Therefore, under pressure from Soviet leadership, the MPRP began a more aggressive campaign against high-ranking monks and monasteries. As a result, in 1938, 760 monasteries were either forcibly closed or demolished [Figs. 1, 2, 3]. The MPR government confiscated the monasteries' buildings, their remaining livestock, and statues and ritual implements made of silver and gold. During this period of aggression, 6,000 monks were imprisoned, 2,000 were executed, thousands of others went into exile, more than 18,000 lower-ranking monks fled to remote areas of the countryside, and tens of thousands were forcibly secularized.

By 1940, Buddhism as an institutional religion had entirely disappeared from Outer Mongolia. In 1944, by the decree of Stalin himself, Gandantegchenlin Monastery in Ulaanbaatar reopened on the repeated requests of his General Rokossovsky, who wanted to fulfill the wish of



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Fig. 1 (top left). Manjir Monastery, at the foothill of the Bogd Khan Mountain in Tuv aimag, before destruction (museum model).

Fig. 2 (bottom left). Ruins of the Manjir Monastery.

Fig. 3 (below). Ruins of Demchig Monastery in Ömnövgovi (Southern Gobi) aimag.



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Fig. 4. Reconstructed Dara Ekh (Dolam Ling) Nunnery on the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar. The nunnery was destroyed in 1937.

his Mongolian soldiers. However, the government tightly controlled the activities of the few, old remaining monks in that monastery.

Systematic and aggressive anti-religious campaigns of the MPR government succeeded in abolishing Buddhist education and knowledge and in destroying the Buddhist cultural heritage. Nevertheless, in the minds of many Mongols, Buddhism and the Mongolian nomadic tradition continued to function as symbols of the Mongolian national identity and independence. Despite the demise of institutional Buddhism, the tradition was not completely lost. According to the Mongolian lamas and Mongolian Buddhist scholars whom I had the opportunity to interview over the last seven years, during the communist period, Mongolian people in general knew considerably more about Buddhist doctrinal tenets and practices than contemporary Mongols do. It was not uncommon for people to gather secretly in Buddhist households to discuss particular points of Buddhist theory and practice. They often assembled around a table on which the playing cards or sheep bones used in traditional Mongolian games were arranged in the pretense of playing games in case an uninvited visitor arrived. Children were usually sent outside to stand guard and warn the adults at the sight of an intruder. Similarly, Buddhist healing rights continued to be secretly performed by former lamas who were invited to the home of the sick during the late hours of the night, and many Buddhist practitioners

Fig. 5 (top). Monks carrying a statue of the Buddha into the Idgaa Choinziling Datsan (College) in Gandantegchenlin Monastery, Ulaanbaatar, during its reconstruction. The building was destroyed in 1937.

Fig. 6 (bottom). The building after its complete reconstruction in 2003.

continued to recite their daily *mantras* and read secretly-kept Buddhist texts in the privacy of their homes. Numerous philosophical, ritual, and prayer texts were stored in wooden chests and buried underground for safekeeping. Today, many of them can be seen in Mongolia's flea markets, people's homes, and antique shops. To a scholar, they are a valuable source of information about Mongolian Buddhism of the pre-communist period, as they tell us what type of Buddhist texts were most widespread among the Mongols and what types of practices were most popular.

Revitalization of Mongolian Buddhism

Democratic changes, which started in Outer Mongolia at the end of 1980s, have facilitated the steady revival of Mongolian Buddhism. In the fall of 2000, the MPRP publicly apologized for its earlier religious persecution; and the current President of Mongolia, Mr. Enkhbayar, who at that time was the President of the MPRP, translated two books on Buddhism from English into Mongolian. By the year 2000, several of Mongolia's largest monasteries and approximately 150 temples were restored, and there were about 5,000 monks in Mongolia [Figs. 4, 5, 6]. Although since then the number of



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Fig. 7. Buddhism and the celebration of national tradition: the Naadam festival at Kharkhorin, 2005, dedicated to Zhanabazar (1635-1723), who was the first Jebtsundamba Khutuktu or spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia.

rebuilt temples and monasteries has increased, the number of Buddhist monks has diminished due to the lack of conditions conducive to the monastic lifestyle. While the largest reconstructed monasteries have secured some support from foreign organizations and tourism, smaller monasteries and temples in various areas of the countryside have been rebuilt and supported by local communities. However, a considerable number of monasteries situated in sites that no longer have permanent residents have not yet been rebuilt.

The revitalization of Buddhism in Mongolia is closely related to the Mongols' efforts in developing and strengthening their national identity and pride in their own tradition and culture [Fig. 7]. On the front page of the *Suvarga* Buddhist newspaper [issue No. 1(6), 2000], the former President Bagabandi Natsagiin encouraged the Mongolian people to cultivate their centuries-long faith in Buddhism, reminding them that their Buddhist faith had been the vehicle of their social ethics, customs, art, and philosophy. Even now, when the law of the separation of church and state is in effect, it is clear that in their attempt to define the modern Mongolian nation, the Mongols continue to conceive of their national identity as inseparable from Buddhism. Even the new flag of the Mongolian Revolutionary Party carries a Buddhist symbol of wisdom and method in the center of a red lotus.

However, the Mongols' enthusiasm and efforts to revitalize their religious and cultural traditions have not been without challenges. In 2001, 182 religious organizations were registered at the Mongolian Ministry of Justice and regulated by

the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Among them, 110 were Buddhist organizations, sixty of them were Christian, and the remaining dozen belonged to the less represented traditions of Baha'i, Shamanism, Islam, and Hinduism. When the Mongolian government conducted a survey of foreign missionary organizations two years later, in the spring of 2003, it found that 80% of them had not been registered at the Mongolian Ministry of Justice as required; and it also discovered that the number of Buddhist monks had diminished to 3,000. In an interview with the foreign press in February of 2003, D. Choijamts, the abbot

of the Gandantegchenlin Monastery and the official head of Mongolian Buddhism, expressed his belief that about 70-80% of the Mongolian population is Buddhist. Nevertheless, the most recent survey conducted in 2007 shows that there are only thirty Buddhist centers left in Mongolia, while the number of organizations belonging to other faiths has grown to 300. These numbers may not reflect the true state of affairs, as many Mongolian converts to other religions continue attending Buddhist services and requesting prayers from Buddhist lamas in their times of need, since they do not see any contradiction in keeping their Mongolian Buddhist identity while pursuing other religious goals and interests.

A new constitutional law that guarantees freedom of religious expression has facilitated the influx of diverse religious traditions, denominations, and sects from Europe, America, and Asia. The Mongolian people's material needs and interest in the religions of the prosperous have provided fertile ground for the proselytizing activities of foreign missionaries, especially Christian missionaries, who often disseminate their anti-Buddhist views in ways that resemble those of the old communist revolutionaries, using the slogan "We give, Buddhism takes." It is for this reason that D. Choijamts stated the following in the aforementioned interview with the foreign press: "Many different religions are now entering Mongolia. However, some of them play with people's minds and give food in order to convert people. It would be better if these religious groups would explain their doctrine in a true and open manner" (*Mongol Messenger* 2003).

Conditions of Buddhist monks remain limited as certain state laws that pertain to Buddhist monastic institutions have remained unchanged since the communist period and have affected the conditions of Mongolian Buddhist monasteries. For example, in addition to land taxes, Buddhist monasteries are required to pay 20% taxes on donations received for the prayer readings requested by laity. Another such law requires Buddhist monks of military age to serve in the national army for a year. While at times some monks have been able to receive exemption owing to special requests from their monastic administrations, many have had to enlist in the military.

Although the current Mongolian government has not yet abolished these laws, it has made attempts to preserve the Mongolian Buddhist identity and to revitalize the Mongolian Buddhist tradition. To curb missionary activities in Mongolia, in 2006 the Mongolian government passed a law that prohibits foreign religious organizations from using their English language classes as a conduit for teaching their doctrines. Similarly, Christians are not allowed to pray with patients inside the building of Mongolia's largest cancer hospital in Ulaanbaatar, while both Mongolian and foreign Buddhists are permitted to teach meditation to hospitalized patients.

Even though the Mongolian constitution requires a separation of church and state and prohibits the state and religion from interfering in each other's affairs, representatives of Mongolian government have become increasingly involved in Buddhist affairs and have openly favored Buddhism over other religious traditions. Their dealings with Buddhism indicate their stand toward it as the Mongolian state religion. This attitude of the Mongolian government toward Buddhism has invoked criticism from the holders of the Mongolian Shamanic tradition, who point to the

foreign origin of Mongolian Buddhism, disparage contemporary Mongolian Buddhist *lamas* as incompetent, and hold them responsible for social problems in Mongolia.



Fig. 8. Jamsran, a protector of the Mongolian military.

The government's position toward Buddhism as Mongolia's national religion is evidenced in a number of instances. For example, Gandantegchenlin Monastery in Ulaanbaatar, which is the official, representative body of Mongolian Buddhism, has on various occasions performed religious services sponsored by the state. Similarly, the contemporary Mongolian Ministry of Defense and the Mongolian army have returned to their traditional worship of the Buddhist deity Jamsran (Tib.: Icam sring rNam sras), who has been traditionally considered a protective deity of the

Mongolian army and iconographically depicted with a red, ferocious form, holding in his hands a bare heart, which he is ready to devour [Fig. 8]. By sponsoring a ritual dedicated to Jamsran that has been carried out by monks from the Gandantegchenlin Monastery, the Ministry of Defense has re-established the old tie between the Buddhist establishment and Mongolian military.

Moreover, in June of 2003, President Enkhbayar, who at that time served as the Prime Minister of Mongolia, organized a meeting between the members of his cabinet and the Tibetan Buddhist teacher, Lama Zopa, in the Manjusri monastery located at the foot of the holy Bogd Khan Mountain. There he requested Lama Zopa to deliver a lecture on the Buddhist ways of governing the state with compassion and morality to the members of his cabinet.

These events can be seen as precursors of the possible re-emergence of the Mongolian tradition of the dual law — the religious law and the state law, which was upheld by Mongol khans throughout different periods from the 13th century until the communist period.



Fig. 9. Vajrapani Mountain in July.

Mongolia's presidents have also engaged in the rites of mountain worship on behalf of the Mongol state. In this post-Soviet period of revitalization of the Mongolian national and Buddhist identities, Mongolia's former President Bagabandi, like his predecessor, once again publicly recognized the Otgontenger mountain in Zavkhan aimag of the mid-western region of Mongolia as a Buddhist holy site and decreed that it is to be ceremonially worshipped every four years for the sake of the protection of the Mongolian State. The Otgontenger mountain is also known as Vajrapani Mountain due to the widespread belief that the Buddha Vajrapani actually resides there [Fig. 9]. The blue, wrathful form of Vajrapani, known as the Lord of Secrets, was incorporated into the religious and political domains of the Mongols' lives in the 16th century, and since then it has permeated Mongolian folklore, literature, art, and rituals [Fig. 10]. Vajrapani has been traditionally considered by the Mongols as a powerful guardian against the enemies of the state and Buddha-Dharma, as the one who not

only crushes obstacles in the form of enemies, heretics, and demons but also enforces religious and state laws. Through the renewed ritual worship of Vajrapani Mountain, he has been reinstated by the Mongolian government as the protector of the Mongol state, and Mongolia has been once again recognized as the land of Vajrapani, which, together with Tibet, the land of Avalokitesvara, and China, the land of Manjusri, forms the unified landscape of the three well known, Buddhist protectors (*rigs gsum mgon po*) in the Mongols' imagination (Barsbold 2004, p. 46).

The snow-capped Vajrapani Mountain is the highest peak of the Khangai mountain range and is famous for the healing mineral springs on its northern side, for 400 types of medicinal

Fig. 10. Statue of Vajrapani near the mountain.



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plants that grow there, for the five kinds of purifying juniper incense believed to be infused by blessings of Vajrapani, and for the healing golden sand near the lake that surrounds it. It is to this lush and pleasant place that the Mongols invited Vajrapani to reside permanently among them and where they began to worship him with offerings on behalf of the state from 1779 until the communist time [Fig. 11]. In the year 2003, in the restored

Fig. 11. Offerings at Vajrapani Mountain.

ceremonial worship, the former President Bagabandi offered a large bowl of *kumis* (fermented mare's milk) to the mountain on behalf of the Mongolian state. Having placed a bowl of kumis on the lake surrounding the mountain, he and his retinue consisting of government officials and Buddhist monks waited to see whether the bowl would float toward the mountain or would return to the shore of the lake. If the bowl floats toward the mountain, it is the sign that the Buddha Vajrapani accepted the offering, that the country will prosper and its borders will be safe. In the summer of 2007, the current President Enkhbayar also participated in the same ceremony, and in the same year he commissioned a large *thangka* of the Buddha Vajrapani embroidered in silk, which is to be displayed on the front side of the mountain in the repeated ceremony in 2010. The work of embroidery and the donations of the threads of silk have been requested from the residents of Mongolia's twelve districts (aimags), whose participation in creating the image is to symbolize the unified effort of all Mongolian people to preserve the Mongolian Buddhist tradition and protect the state. The commissioned image is to bring merit and security to the state and prosperity to the nation. It depicts Vajrapani in his blue, ferocious form, accompanied above by Avalokitesvara on his right side and Manjusri on the left, and by three great Mongol khans below — Chinggis, Qubilai, and Ögödei, the three paradigmatic figures of stately strength and power. The figure of Chinggis Khan is placed directly below Vajrapani in the center of the painting to reinforce the traditional Mongolian Buddhist view of Chinggis Khan as the first Mongolian emanation of Vajrapani, as the one who laid the foundations for the spread of Buddhism in Mongolia by initiating a *guru-disciple* relationship with Tibetan Sa skya Pandita Kun dga' rGyal mtsan (Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyaltsen) from a distance and by eliminating taxes for Tibetan monks. This identification of Chinggis Khan, the originator of the Mongolian nation, with Vajrapani, the protector of Mongolian Buddhism and state, has also been emphasized in the writings of contemporary Mongolian scholars and Buddhist authors. For this reason, it can be seen

as yet another attempt on the part of the Mongolian political leadership and intelligencia to reaffirm the inseparability of Mongolian Buddhist and national identities.

Similarly, Sharavjdorj, who converted to the Nyingmapa (rNying ma pa) school of Buddhism while he served as Mongolia's Minister of Defense until the winter 2007, has used his political connections and his own funds to facilitate a restoration of the sacred site of Shambhala and temples in the nearby Khamryn Khiid monastery in Dorngovi aimag. Believed to be situated exactly below the Pure Land of Sukhavati, the Shambhala site is seen as the epicenter of spiritual energy, the future refuge of the believers and the sole connection to the Buddha-Dharma at the time of the impending dangers of the conflict of global proportions. Nowadays, as a constant flow of pilgrims from different regions of Mongolia and even from other parts of the world rushed to Shambhala for the sake of empowerment and merit for rebirth in Sukhavati, this isolated part of Mongolia has been already transformed into an important center of the Buddhist world.

The aforementioned events and re-emerging views point to the fact that Buddhist ideals have already begun to enter Mongolian political discourse as well as to inform the creation of identity in the modern Mongolian state in its search for moral politics.

Moreover, in contemporary Mongolia, one's affiliation and loyalty to the Revolutionary Party and one's publicly professed Buddhist identity



Fig. 12. Ger erected by the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party at the gates of Gandantegchenlin Monastery in Ulaanbaatar during the elections of 2004. The party's symbol of the red lotus and the sign of wisdom and compassion in its center can be seen on the tent.

are no longer seen as contradictory. On the contrary, members of the Mongolian parliament and of other governmental bodies have openly received Buddhist initiations and have advertised their individual sponsorship of Buddhist rituals and rebuilding of Buddhist temples, stupas and statues. The fact that they have often publicized these activities during elections to demonstrate their efforts in restoring the Mongolian Buddhist tradition indicates the growing importance of Buddhism in the Mongolian public life and its close association with Mongolian national pride [Fig. 12, facing page].

This connection between the renewal of Mongolian Buddhism and Mongolian national pride emerged in the early phase of the democratization of Mongolia. An example that attests to this fact is the reconstruction of the giant statue of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara in the form of the Migjed Janraisig (The Opener of the Eye of Wisdom), which was first built in 1913 in the Gandantegchenlin Monastery under the auspices of the 8th Bogdo Gegen to commemorate the Mongols' independence from the Qing dynasty and the renewed Mongolian national identity that will be characterized by peace and wisdom embodied in Buddhist teachings. The statue was destroyed in 1937, and in 1942 the dismembered statue was used by the Soviets for making bullets needed in World War II. As soon as democratic changes began in Mongolia, Mongolian intellectuals, enthused with the prospects for reviving the Mongolian cultural heritage, established the Mongolian cultural fund in 1988 and initiated the rebuilding of the statue. Under the decree of the first democratically elected Mongolian President Ochirbat and with financial help from the Mongolian government, individuals, and foreign Buddhist organizations, construction of the statue was completed in 1996. More than 50 artists worked on the casting of the statue from 20 tons of pure copper brought from the Mongolian Erdenet Mountain [Fig. 13]. The statue is gilded with sterling gold and studded with more than 2,000 kinds of precious stones found in the Mongolian soil. The altar of the statue is made of cedar wood brought from the Khangai and Khentei mountains and studded with gems also found in the Mongolian land. The interior of the statue is filled with 27 tons of various types of medicinal substances, 334



Fig. 13. The giant Avalokitesvara statue in the main temple of Gandantegchenlin Monastery, Ulaanbaatar.

volumes of Buddhist scriptures donated by the XIV Dalai Lama, 2 million small books of *mantras*, one entire Mongolian ger with all of its furniture, fiddles made of horse-mane, robes of famous Buddhist saints, and with nine types of precious stones. Thus intentionally made of native Mongolian materials and filled with items characteristic of the Mongolian nomadic lifestyle and Buddhist culture, the statue has once again stands as a memorial of Mongolia's national independence and as a symbol of the distinct Mongolian Buddhist identity.

As one examines the sequence in which certain aspects of the Mongolian Buddhist tradition have been reintroduced since the late 1980s until the present, one discovers the aspects of the Mongolian Buddhist tradition that have been conceived the most important on the national and individual levels and whose reintroduction has been considered the most urgent. It becomes obvious that along with the restoration of the public symbols of Mongolian Buddhism such as Buddhist statues, stupas, and



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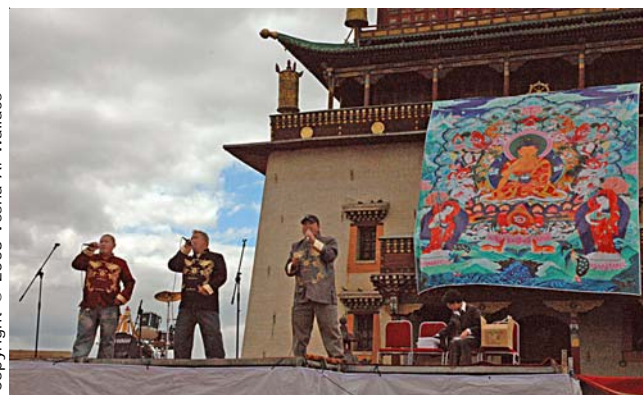
Fig. 14. Young monks in a classroom of Erdene Zuu Monastery, Kharkhorin, Övörkhangaï aimag 2004.

temples, monasticism was also considered the most relevant for the revitalization of the Mongolian Buddhist tradition. However, the rebuilding of Buddhist monasticism, which once was the embodiment of Mongolian Buddhist learning, has required an adequate training of new Mongolian monks and lamas in Buddhist doctrine, ritual, and meditation [Fig. 14].

Due to the absence of learned teachers, the Mongols' monastic training has been in great part dependent on the Tibetan educational, monastic institutions in India and Tibet and on the Tibetan teachers who have been invited to Mongolia from India and Tibet. This dependence on the Tibetan Buddhist system of monastic training has begun to transform the Mongolian Buddhist monastic tradition in various ways. For example, during the first decade of monastic revival, the rituals and liturgies that were performed in the monasteries were characterized by the features unique to Mongolian Buddhist tradition, and are now replaced by distinctly Tibetan rituals and liturgies. This loss of the unique elements of the Mongolian Buddhist tradition has exposed the monastic institutions that have developed close relations with Tibetan Buddhists to criticism and has given rise to anti-Tibetan sentiments among Mongolian Buddhist nationalists. Mongolian Buddhist nationalists like Gurudev, the contemporary incarnation of Zava Damdin, and their followers, look with suspicion at the infiltration of Tibetan Buddhism into Mongolian monasticism, interpreting it as an attempt of the Tibetan government in exile to weaken Mongolian Buddhism and take over the Mongolian land. According to these Mongolian nationalists, the power of the Mongolian state lies in the strength of the Gelukpa (dGe lugs

pa) school of Mongolian Buddhism; and when the Mongolian Gelukpa tradition is enfeebled, Mongolia becomes subjugated by foreign powers. Since their arrival in Mongolia, Tibetan Buddhist missionaries have predominantly served as teachers of Buddhist philosophy in monastic colleges and Buddhist centers within Mongolia's capital. Unlike Mongolian lamas, they are rarely seen traveling in Mongolia's countryside for the sake of performing rituals for Buddhist laity. Most of them stay in Mongolia for shorter periods of time, as they often have no affinity for Mongolian customs and their applications to monastic Buddhist life. However, Tibetan Buddhist missionaries in Mongolia were the first to make Buddhist teachings available to the general public through public lectures, TV and radio programs, magazines, and books translated into modern Mongolian. Ironically, Mongolian lamas, who used to perform rituals and prayers primarily in the Tibetan language for lay communities, began to adopt the Tibetan missionaries' methods of offering teachings to the populace almost a decade later.

Encountering the danger of losing the Mongolian youth primarily to Christianity whose teachings and literature have been available in the Mongolian language, Mongolian lamas have been forced to change their ways and meet expectations of the laity. In hopes of convincing Mongolian youth that Buddhism can be a contemporary, hip religion and not a relic of the past, in 2006 on the day of the Buddha's enlightenment, Gandantegchenlin Monastery hosted a rock concert on its grounds, and its abbot D. Choijamts inaugurated the concert with his opening speech [Fig. 15].



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Fig. 15. Guruvan Buduun rock group at the Saka Dawa rock concert sponsored by Gandantegchenlin Monastery in Ulaanbaatar and held in front of the main temple.

However, Buddhist monasteries and centers are no longer the sole agents in the dispensation of Buddhist teachings; influential intellectuals, artists, and a new class of successful businessmen have been taking an active role in reviving Mongolian Buddhism. Through their efforts, Mongolian Buddhist art and comprehensible translations of Buddhist classics have been made accessible. For example, the famous Mongolian author and social commentator Baabar, who was once an archenemy of Buddhism and now considers himself as Mongolia's Buddhist variant of Martin Luther, organized a translation of the renowned Tibetan classic *Lam Rim Chenmo* into Mongolian from various languages by bringing together a team of the best Mongolian translators. By the year 2007, with the financial support from Mongolian businessmen, he printed and gave away 30,000 copies of the text with the hope to deliver altogether 500,000 free copies to 500,000 Mongolian households constituting the entire Mongolian society. Likewise, the nomads and small town residents across the Mongolia's steppes and deserts have been offering their resources and volunteer labor in building stupas and temples in order to transform their home regions into the restored territories of Dharma [Fig. 16]. In the meantime, newly proclaimed Siddhas, *yoginis* and emanations of Buddhist deities have been emerging in various parts of the country, and the rumors of their extraordinary abilities have been publicized throughout Mongolia.

These are only a few of many examples that evidence the endeavors of all strata of Mongolian society to shape the Mongolian land, culture, and national identity in accordance with their envisioning of Mongolian Buddhism. It remains to be seen how the re-emerging Mongolian Buddhist tradition, which is caught in between different political ideologies, modernity, and foreign missionary zealots, will solve its predicament in a country with social and economic problems and to what degree the state and Buddhist church will continue to collaborate in the pursuit of common interests.

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Fig. 16. Rebuilt stupas at Erdene Zuu Monastery, Kharkhorin.

Tricky Representations: Buddhism in the Cinema during Socialism in Mongolia

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The socialist state regarded religion as an obstacle to modernization and an opiate of the masses. From late 1937 through early 1939, Mongolia eliminated religion along with the intelligentsia, the upper classes, and political leaders. In the span of about 18 months, 800 Buddhist temple compounds (5,953 buildings) became ash heaps [Fig. 1]. Of 85,000 lamas, 20,356 were killed and the rest were jailed, sent to labor camps, or forced to adopt lay professions. By 1939 there were no official categories of religious practitioners registered in the census, and Mongolia became a classless and atheistic society (Baabar 1996).



Fig. 1. The ruins of the Manjir Monastery, Tuv aimag.

Yet the destruction of the tangible structures of Buddhism did not eliminate religion from the people's minds. While the state was able to eradicate the public practices of religion — its institutions, ceremonies, and overall presence in major events — it was also paranoid, and rightly so, about the existence of religion in private spaces and belief, an intangible entity that could challenge the power of the secular state. The people's beliefs were the hardest to change. Aware of that, the socialist state delegated the task of eradicating religion from the minds of people to cultural production: to literature, arts, and cinema amongst many other

venues. The idea that all societies go through the same stages of development once propagated by the European enlightenment theorists was reinforced in Mongolia as a part of socialist revolution in the 1921 and subsequent nation-building processes. Ideologically, religion was seen as a remnant of the past and primitive superstition that impeded modernization and progress. In order to succeed the socialist state needed devoted and dutiful followers who believed in the ideology of socialism and nothing else. The state sanctioned mass media and art to shape people's minds, to produce culture that would transform the populace from devoted Buddhist to atheist citizens of a modernizing socialist country.

Yet the making of anti-religious propaganda films was a complex task and required an immense creativity on the side of the filmmakers. That is because Buddhism was not just a spiritual domain, but a complex cultural mechanism through which people made sense of their daily lives, maintained family memory, and constituted a core of individual and national identity. In order to eliminate religion in its entirety, the state needed to create new identities and tools that substituted for religion. In other words, the elimination of religion was as much an act of destruction as an attempt at the creation of a new culture. The filmmakers' tasks therefore were more complex than it was originally perceived. Many films inevitably offered a redefined understanding of religion, history, and national identity that were beyond the mandate and the expectations of the state. The anti-religious propaganda art had to create something new that was equally if not more convincing and truthful than religion. The socialist government was attempting to alter the minds of the Buddhist nation that had been shaped for almost three centuries in a matter of a few decades. Therefore, in order to

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comprehend the specific creativity on the side of the filmmakers in representing a redefined understanding of Buddhism beyond a simplistic atheistic message, it is helpful to revisit briefly the penetration of Buddhism to Mongolia.

Buddhism's path in Mongolia

Buddhism in Mongolia fought a centuries-long battle with the local shamanic and other folk religious practices in order to become a major religion, one that also carries local variations. It is known that Buddhism was introduced to Mongolia in the 13th century to the ruling elite. Although it did not spread among the larger populace, different local branches of Buddhism, mostly different versions of the Red Hat sect, (the Nya-ma-pa sect) seeped over the border from Tibet and deposited its specific teachings and practices in various corners of Mongolia. Thus, often different monasteries in various locations had maintained their specific local and historical identities and became integrated with the oral histories of the local population. The Red Hat sect is also seen as a derivative of Bon-po, Tibetan shamanism. Its resemblance with Mongolian shamanism, especially rituals of possession, also made it popular among ordinary people.

Since the 17th century, the Yellow Hat sect of Mahayana Buddhism began its mass conversion with support of the institution of the Dalai Lama in Tibet, the ruling elite of Mongolia, and the Manchu Qing colonial administration. In its

battle to win the devotions of the populace, Buddhism had been transformed to fit the expectations of the Mongols and replaced magic rituals, oral narratives, medicine, theatrical performances, and many other venues of social life. It took several hundred years, violent and peaceful measures, creative remodeling of

existing rituals, economic and legal support by the local princes and the institutions of Dalai Lama and many other ways for Buddhism to become a major religion.

By the end of the 19th century, there were about 800 monasteries and over a hundred thousand lamas in a country with a population of less than 700,000 people. The history books indicate that a son from every family became a monk (Heissig 1980). Besides being almost the sole spiritual force, the Buddhist church also became the main economic and political power in the country.

The local monasteries owned large portions of land and livestock. And the monarch, the Holy Enlightened Bogdo Khan [Figs. 2, 3] was more of a spiritual leader than a political one. More specifically, the third Dalai Lama requested that the Mongol khans destroy *onggots* (the images and figures that represented shamanic spirits) and punish shamans and their clients by taking away their livestock (Heissig 1980). To attract believers, the lamas took

on the roles of shamans by offering the rituals of healing, magic, and exorcism. The latter were adopted from Bon-po (Tibetan shamanism) where the lama oracles go into trance and were



Fig. 2 (above). Mannequins of the 8th Jebsumdamba Khutugtu or Bogdo Khan (1870-1924), the theocratic ruler of Mongolia, and his wife Dondogdulam (1870-1923). National Museum of Mongolian History, Ulaanbaatar.

Fig. 3 (below). The winter palace of the Bogdo Khan. Painting by B. Sharav? (copy by D. Djadambaa), early 20th century. Museum of Fine Arts, Ulaanbaatar.



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meant to substitute for Mongol shamanic spirit possession. The Buddhist missionaries also replaced the functions of shamans by incorporating the rituals of worship of mountain cairns (*ovoos*) [Fig. 4], and by introducing various deities who protect livestock and life. Buddhism also offered individual identifications with the personalized Lamaist deities which replaced the shamanic guardian spirits and ancestors. The lamas taught *tarani* (magic spells) for individuals' protection, destruction of evil, good luck, and healing of illnesses. For each illness and body organ there was a separate *tarani*. Lamas prescribed healing packages consisting of *taranis*,

herbal medicine, and rituals of cleansing and deflection that the clients could perform at home. Buddhism promulgated itself as a more advanced spiritual practice as it operated not through the spirits of the deceased or animals and nature, but by communicating with gods and deities (*sahius*). The missionaries prohibited shamanic blood sacrifice as cruel and barbaric, and instead, propagated Buddhism with its dairy offering as a more humanistic, gentle, and superior practice. Unlike in shamanism, which only has a celestial realm, Buddhism's upper (heaven) and lower world (hell) were meant to induce terror among non-believers.

By the early 20th century, Buddhism became so strong that the Revolutionary Mongolian government did not even consider abolishing it until the Soviet leaders pushed them to do so. In his paper about the measures that the state took to pave its road to violence in 1937 and thereafter, anthropologist Chris Kaplonski (2008) notes that the Mongolian government considered abolishing the power of the Buddhist church, but they were also afraid, to a certain extent, of the backlash it would cause. He pays particular attention to anxieties that Buddhism was causing the Soviets and the fledgling Mongolian Revolutionary Government. "In [a] 1934 meeting with Stalin, Prime Minister Genden remarked that a lama who had been



Fig. 4. The top of a Mongolian ovoos, incorporating a Buddhist prayer flag and the Wheel of the Law.

previously arrested had to be released after only a year because of 'unrest among the people' over his incarceration" (Damdinsüren et al. 2005, p. 102). Perhaps the most telling phrase between Stalin and Genden that encapsulates the power of the Buddhist church is the following. In an interview in 1934 with Genden, then the prime-minister of Mongolia, Stalin noted "It looks as if there is a state (*uls*) within your state. One government is Genden's government. The other is the lama's. But the lama's government is strong" (Damdinsüren et al. 2005, p. 102).

Eradicating religion from the people's minds

Besides the devotion on the side of the populace, there were other problems in representing Buddhism in a negative light. The writers and producers of movies operated within an extremely narrow cultural space under heavy censorship; the state allowed only a few stereotyped images in the literature and films about the socialist revolution in 1921 and the following struggle for nation-building. The images included the Buddhist lamas as counterrevolutionaries, as the upper-class exploiting ordinary herdsmen, and amoral and hypocritical individuals who indulged in sex, deception, and corruption. The top clergy were cruel terrorists (*eserguu*), bandits, betrayers of the nation, allies with Chinese politicians and rich merchants. Most importantly, in the films on revolution, the lamas used the most sadistic tortures towards the revolutionaries. The most horrific image is one of lamas worshipping their banners with a heart that was pulled out while the victim was still alive. The heart was still pounding as the lama-terrorist squeezes it in his hands and then splashes the banner with a stream of blood by breaking the heart of a victim.

By producing images of crueller and more hateful enemies, and by dehumanizing the enemy, while humanizing itself, the state justified its violence. It cast itself as a vulnerable

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rescuer of the people. But, as we learn from oral history, the banner worship using the heart of a victim was the practice of the revolutionaries themselves. Specifically, the glorious warlord Khatanbaatar Magsarjav, who led the Mongolian People's Army and who freed the western part of Mongolia from the Chinese and other counter-revolutionaries was indeed known for such practices.

Literature, especially short stories and novels depicting the socialist revolution, has utilized such images and motifs to exhaustion as they became almost standard ingredients in the literature on revolution and state formation. Any major diversion from those types of representations could be interpreted as a religious propaganda, and the producers and writers would be severely punished.

At least partially for that reason, many writers and scholars avoided the topic of religion, and there is a dearth of representation of Buddhism in Mongolian cinema, literature, and arts after the 1950s. The other reason for decline of religion in arts and cinema was the elimination of the Buddhist clergy during the state violence in the 1930s and 1940s. Simply put, how could one represent religion during socialism if it was not supposed to exist any more? The problem was that the state was aware that religion existed in the forms of beliefs, languages, memories, and hidden private practices far beyond its control. Yet the state could not allow the representation of religion in post-revolutionary, socialist, modernizing Mongolia. For one thing, there was a danger that such representations would awaken the memories of religion. And another thing, more importantly, representing religion in modernizing Mongolia would mean for the state to admit its failure to destroy it. Thus, anti-religious propaganda was needed, but in a way that would not provoke memories of the past or much needed spirituality, but only lead people to despise religion.

Within such a narrow space as was allowed for creativity, filmmakers or at least scholars and historians needed to be especially imaginative to come up with a suitable plot. Representing Buddhism in the historical past would be the safest way, but there was also a rather poignant condition that made the production of culture even more difficult overall.

The scholars who had the deepest knowledge of history, the ones educated in the histories of European enlightenment, secularization, and modern democracy, and who could contribute to literature, art, and filmmaking, had been persecuted. In the 1910s and early 1920s several dozen students were sent to study in Germany and France. They spent five to ten years there and became the most educated and progressive professionals in Mongolia. Dressed in the latest fashions of the German upper-class, groomed to perfection, and poised in front of the camera while holding a cane or a pipe, these young professionals epitomized everything that socialism considers to belong to the bourgeoisie who must be eliminated. In the 1930s almost all of them were purged. Religious practitioners were also persecuted and those remaining did not dare to raise their voices. Courage was necessary to produce films and books on religion even in a negative light. And individuals with such courage were rare. The two films that I discuss in this paper are exceptions. One is the film *Tsogt Taij*, which is about the historical past and which develops anti-religious propaganda in an unusual way, and the other is *Awakening* (*Serelt*, 1957), which juxtaposes religion against modernity.

Nationalism and religion: *Tsogt Taij*

A powerful attempt to show the harm of Buddhism was made by a famous Mongolian scholar, writer, and filmmaker Rinchen Byambin in his epic film entitled *Tsogt Taij*. The national film studios, the Mongol Kino, were founded in 1935 with Soviet technical assistance. The films were devoted to the themes of nationalism and heroism, and some were based on traditional epics. Produced in 1945 right at the end of the World War II, the film *Tsogt Taij* is an anti-Buddhist film that also redefines Mongolia's relationship with China, Tibet, and the Manchus, and looks at Buddhism not as an enlightenment project, but as a colonial tool. The film is a historically-based fiction. It depicts the events of the late 16th and early 17th centuries, when Mongolia was falling under the sway of the Manchu Qing Dynasty. It is about a Mongolian prince who fought against Manchu encroachment and against the Mongol princes who were converting to Buddhism in exchange for political and economic powers granted by the Manchus and the Tibetans, particularly, the institution of the Dalai Lama.

The film fulfills the state order to present Buddhism in a negative light, but goes further in explaining the role of Yellow Hat Buddhism that is set against the Red Hat Buddhism in Mongolia. The producer's detailed knowledge about Mongolian history was unequalled by almost anyone in Mongolia. Rinchin was one of the few scholars who had survived the persecutions and he utilized his knowledge and skills as a linguist, ethnologist, historian, and writer. Rinchen unravels the magic of religion, its techniques and circumstances of getting into people's minds, from his perspective as a defender of the Red Hat sect of Buddhism. The film is set specifically against the domination by the Yellow Hat sect of Buddhism but does not have a strict atheist message.

In the film, the Tibetans, who are also interested in dominating Mongolia, conspire with the Manchus about their strategy to seize the Mongolian population using the power of Buddhist deities. Each represents the stereotypes of their identities. The Tibetan missionary is sly, politically savvy, and uses persuasive court speeches. The Manchu warlords are aggressive and domineering. Together, they are a union of military and spiritual conquest.

Yellow Hat Buddhism arrives as the Manchus defeat the last descendant of Chinggis Khan, the Ligden Khan, who dies before getting Chinggis Khan's state seal to Tsogt Taij [Fig. 5], a prince who is fighting for the country's independence. The Mongol princes are divided between Red Hat Buddhism and the followers



Screen shot courtesy of John Wells, Mongolian Cinema/ Mongol Kino <<http://www.kisetsuga.com/mongolkino/>>.

Fig. 5. Tsogt Taij.

of the Yellow Hat sect. Importantly, only Tibetan Buddhism is cast in a negative light. The Red Hat sect in this film is not a religious identity, but a form of cultural identity that is no different from traditional Mongolian identity expressed through long songs, poetry, and wrestling. The film shows no religious ceremonies, practitioners, and doctrines associated with the Red Hat sect.

Mongolia is presented as prey to the Manchus and Tibetans. Tsogt Taij interprets the image of a Buddhist deity Manjusri as the representation of the Manchu Emperor. He warns the Mongols who had gathered in front of the monastery that while today they are worshipping the deity Manjusri, tomorrow they will worship the Manchu Emperor. Tsogt Taij fights against the establishment of the law that states individuals who do not memorize the sacred prayers will be punished with a fine of



Screen shot courtesy of John Wells, Mongolian Cinema/ Mongol Kino <<http://www.kisetsuga.com/mongolkino/>>.

Fig. 6. Tsogt Taij and the gardener drinking wine and singing before the storming of the palace.

three to five head of cattle. Throughout, film shows that Tsogt Taij and his close friends and followers are highly educated individuals. Tsogt's palace is a school for boys and a library, and contains a collection of rare art. His mother also teaches the girls. Their knowledge of poetry, history, and arts is extensive, and an exchange of knowledge is their way of life. The palace is surrounded by a beautiful garden cultivated by a Chinese gardener who is also a poet and a connoisseur of rare wines [Fig. 6].

In contrast to highly educated, compassionate, cosmopolitan, and noble-looking Tsogt Taij and his people, the film

presents the Buddhist lamas as vulgar, bored, shallow, and unkind to the populace. The Buddhist Lamas and their Mongolian followers do not have regard for the local culture, books, and artifacts; so they loot and destroy everywhere they go.

But it is the internal struggle among the Mongol aristocrats — the ambitious princes who fought for greater power on the grasslands — which allowed the penetration of the Manchus and Tibetan Buddhism. The disunity of princes is represented by the struggle between Tsogt Taiji and the Gush Khan even though Tsogt's son Arslan is in a romantic relationship with Gush's daughter Khulan [Fig. 7]. Once the latter



Screen shot courtesy of John Wells, Mongolian Cinema/
Mongol Kino <<http://www.kisetsuga.com/mongolkino/>>.

Fig. 7. Khulan, the daughter of Gush Khan — the traitor who burns the palace of Tsogt Taij — and the beloved of Arslan Taij, Tsogt Taij's son.

burns Tsogt's palace, the relationship between Gush Khan and his daughter Khulan is severed and the latter joins Tsogt to fight against the Tibetans.

The plot of the film culminates when Arslan, the son of Tsogt Taij, a 22 year-old prince who had been sent to Lhasa to fight the Tibetans, fails to carry out the important mission as he falls prey to the savvy politics of conversion and seduction of the Tibetan politicians. Instead of carrying out the attacks on Tibet, he falls for a stunning princess [Fig. 8] who summons him to the courts of the Dalai Lama. There the Mongol prince becomes converted to Buddhism in order to marry the Tibetan princess. The young prince disregards the scolding of the elder general, and leaves his beloved Khulan who fights in his father's army. As Tsogt Taij learns

about the betrayal of his son, he orders his son to be beheaded. The young prince's conversion to Tibetan Buddhism and a withdrawal from the battle against Tibetans decides the faith of the Mongols for the next few centuries. Without the prince's reinforcements the Mongol army is defeated and the country falls under the sway of Buddhism and Manchu domination

The most negative aspects of Buddhism are represented through the institution of the Dalai Lama in Tibet. The Dalai Lama is a young boy who is a captive in his own elaborate palace. When his advisor enters his chamber to inform him about the arrival of the Mongolian prince (the son of Tsogt Taiji), the young Dalai Lama is asleep in his bed. The advisor wakens him and gives detailed protocol instructions for converting the Mongol prince to Buddhism.

A young man will come towards you and bow to you. You should say: 'Did you have a good journey?' The man will come closer and bow to you. Upon my signal you should touch his head with your right hand, just like this [and he showed how to do that]. Now, please tell me what will you do? asks the advisor.

The young Dalai Lama repeats the instructions. And in the next scene we watch the enactment of the conversation, which



Screen shot courtesy of John Wells, Mongolian Cinema/
Mongol Kino <<http://www.kisetsuga.com/mongolkino/>>.

Fig. 8. The Tibetan princess presented to Arslan.

is the conversion of the Mongolian prince to Tibetan Buddhism.

By associating the arrival of Buddhism with colonialism, warfare, and the erasure of Mongol identity, this film achieves a persuasive anti-Buddhist propaganda. We see the destructive nature of Buddhism layer upon layer. To start, Buddhism is a source of individuals' hardship and decline of economic condition, as the clergy and the Mongol elite who support Buddhism establish an order that allows the church to confiscate 3-5 head of livestock from every individual who had not memorized prayers. Buddhism is a source of family fights and destruction of relationships between parents and children. Tsogt Taij loses his only son to the enemy. The girlfriend of the Mongol prince, Tsogt Taij's son, renounces her father who joined the Manchus and Tibetans. Buddhist monks erase Mongolian culture; they destroy the garden of Tsogt Taij's palace, burn books, and kill all the students. Finally, coupled with the Manchus, Buddhism causes internal warfare among the princes, which leads to bloodshed among ordinary people [Fig. 9].



Screen shot courtesy of John Wells, Mongolian Cinema/
Mongol Kino <<http://www.kisetsuga.com/mongolkino/>>.

Fig. 9. A battle scene.

The film was made during World War II, and it clearly has a patriotic aura, set against war, destruction, and violence. The emphasis on the destructive nature of Buddhism had been extended to the concerns of the time when movie was made. The country was fighting with the Japanese. The news about the battles on the Soviet lands had been promptly delivered, adding to the existing anxieties and fears. Mongolia also had just emerged from massive political violence during which almost every

family had been affected. The populace was subdued and terrified. The film was supposed to enhance courage and patriotism and help get through the difficult time.

But the intriguing aspect of the film, and the reason that I chose to discuss this particular one and not any other is that the film celebrates Mongolian identity with long songs, folk tales, poetry, and local intelligentsia. These attributes were also the targets of the socialist state. In the film, Rinchen reminds the audience about their Mongolian identity, while the Soviets had already began their modernizing projects such as building schools, changing the Mongolian alphabet, and clothes and dwellings. While Rinchen propagandizes against Buddhism, he does it not in order to promote socialism or modernity, but to re-establish national identity. The film was also an attempt to represent Mongolia as rich and cosmopolitan (with a Chinese gardener and a Muslim house attendant), not as primitive, stuck in a timelessness, as was usual in the depiction of Asia of that time.

Awakening

While historical movies were important in demonstrating the way religion had come to dominate the masses, the state also needed movies that would glorify modernity and state propaganda against religion. One of the most powerful movies that represent religion against modernity is titled *Awakening*. The movie begins with a doctor finishing surgery in a modern hospital. He is summoned to the countryside, and while he travels in a car with two young people, he tells the story of his youth.

When he was a young boy of about fourteen, his parents gave him as an apprentice to his maternal uncle, a lama. But the boy lives more like a slave to the lama than his apprentice. His lessons are meager, but his housekeeping workload is high. He is constantly scolded and beaten by the lama [Fig. 10, facing page]. Things will gradually change after a young Russian female doctor arrives at a nomadic settlement to volunteer her services to the local population. Despite her comfortable hospital with beds, ironed sheets, and shiny floors, the sick ignore her, and flock to the felt tent of the lama, who cures people with the power of his spells, sutra recitation, and herbal medicine.

One day, the boy's sister, Suren, becomes ill, and the Russian doctor and her Mongolian assistant manage to convince her to stay in their hospital. But the lama uncle gets angry at the parents and they bring Suren to the lama. The daughter's condition worsens as the lama predicts that her days are numbered and interprets it as a consequence of receiving the treatment from the wrongdoer. The parents blame themselves for letting their daughter stay in the Russian hospital and leave their daughter in their extra tent, as she passes out in fever. In the meantime, Suren's boyfriend who was in the Russian hospital, overhears in a conversation between Suren's brother and the doctor that Suren wants to come to the hospital, but her parents had given up on saving her. Suren's boyfriend escapes the hospital and gallops on a horse to bring her from her home to the hospital. Upon leaving the tent where Suren was lying on a bed, her boyfriend knocks over the butter candle. The couple leaves on a horse to the hospital while the tent burns to the ground. Suren's family assumes that their daughter died and was burned with the tent [Fig. 11]. The lama uncle tells them that because of her sins, she is reborn as a lizard in



Screen shot courtesy of John Wells, Mongolian Cinema/Mongol Kino <<http://www.kisetsuga.com/mongolkino/>>.

Fig. 10. The lama uncle holding a stick for beating his disciple.

a desert — a bad fate and a lifetime of suffering.

During the 49th day of mourning, the lama uncle provokes Suren's father to seek revenge on the Russian

doctor by blaming her for the death of their daughter. Suren's father runs to the hospital and tries to stab the doctor with a knife, when Suren, who has gotten considerably better, gets up to save the doctor from her father's attacks [Fig. 12]. Upon seeing the daughter that he had mourned for 49 days, the father loses consciousness. After awakening, the father runs back to the lama's felt tent and threatens to kill him for almost making the family bury their daughter alive.

Suren becomes the Russian doctor's nurse, and the local population now lines up to see the Russian doctor, while the lama receives no patients. Being a coward, he attempts

to kill the doctor by following her during a snowstorm and by causing an accident during which the doctor and her horseman fall into a ditch and their horse dies. But luckily, Suren's father, who was supposed to meet them, helps them out and then captures the lama and takes him to the designated authorities.

The representation of a lama is often comical and ridiculous. The lama constantly eats and drinks while giving very little food to his



Screen shots courtesy of John Wells, Mongolian Cinema/Mongol Kino <<http://www.kisetsuga.com/mongolkino/>>.

Fig. 11. Suren's father, distraught after hearing from the lama uncle about his daughter's supposed death.

Fig. 12. Suren stops her father from killing the Russian doctor.

apprentice. He is a womanizer and uses taking female patients' pulse as a way of approaching them. The lama is also brutal, as he always has a stick next to him with which he brutally beats his disciple.

But the most powerful aspect is the film's plot which unravels the magical powers that the lama claims to have. The lama is a charlatan and a fraud. That becomes clear to the main heroes, who learn that their sick daughter neither died nor turned into a lizard, but was being treated by the Russian doctor.

The film propagates the triumph of biomedicine over traditional healing, the Soviet teachings over Buddhist, and the power of the state over the clergy. Most importantly, the film shows the changes in the people's beliefs about religion through the power of medicine. The film was made in 1957 for the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the October Revolution. It was a token of gratitude to the Soviets for bringing modernization, medicine, and anti-religious teachings to Mongolia.

Whether the state was able to achieve the elimination of religion from people's minds might seem almost irrelevant today when Buddhism has regained its strength after the collapse of socialism. The propaganda movies that presented religion in a negative light during socialism also reminded people what religion was like. There is an ironic aspect to the state's competition with religion for the minds of the people. The state perceived that individuals can have only one religious identity. By trying to eliminate religion, the state ended up transforming itself into a religious entity. The state doctrines are in the history books, poetries, and national anthems, its rituals are festivals and national holidays, its magic is the inspirational speeches of its leaders adorned in the power suits and broadcast through TVs and media. But the more unexpected outcome was that religion remained active in the private sphere. That, however, did not prevent the populace from worshipping the state and having several beliefs, not just one.

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The Tea Horse Road

Jeff Fuchs

Zhongdian (China) and Canada

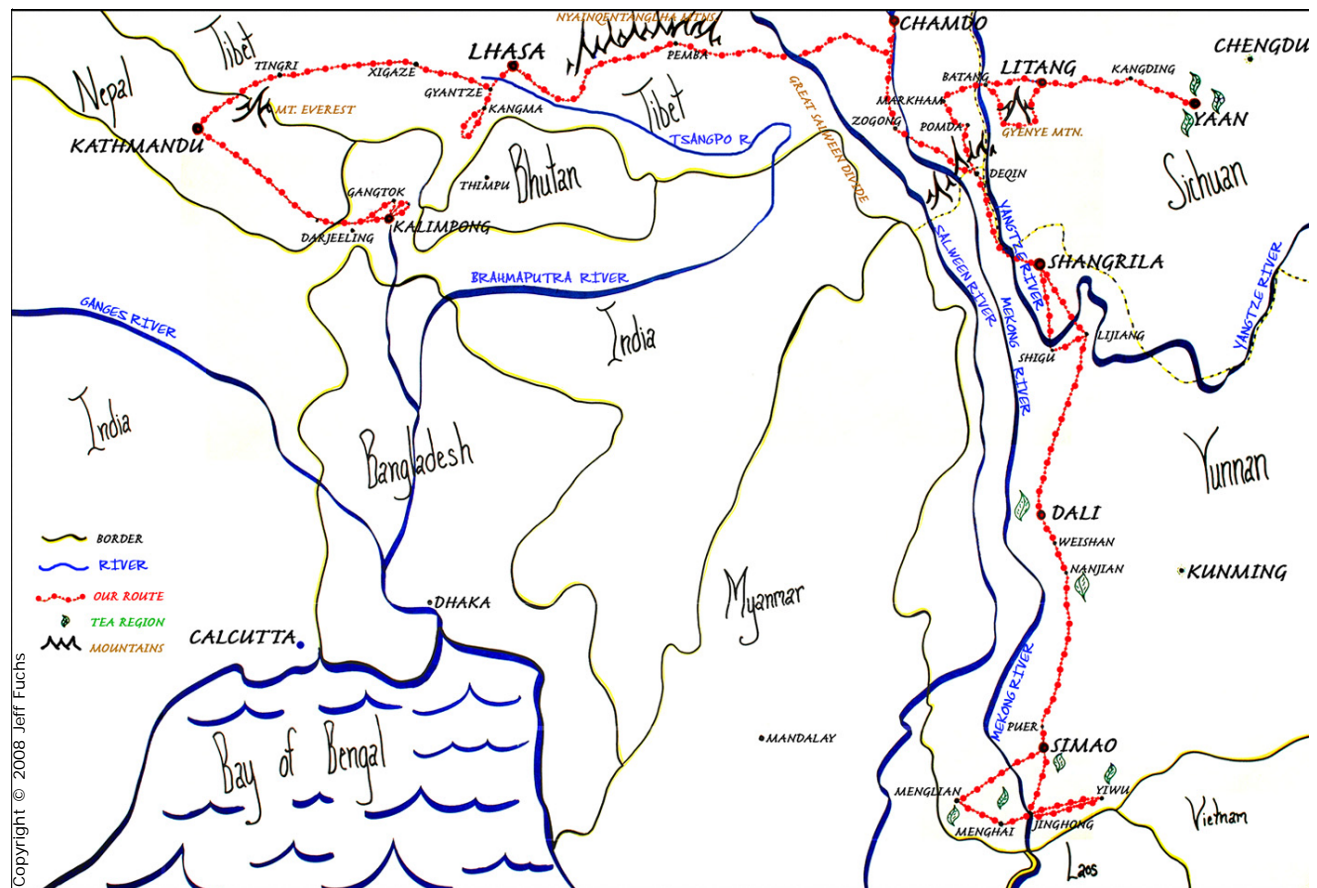
Thick swooping mists, damp and all encompassing, threaded through bent shapes that were in fact trees. Craggy and awkward, these trees appeared stooped and aimless, meters high and slick with moisture [Fig. 1]. Nothing hinted at their identity or their crucial importance in the history of the very fabric of a dozen cultures. Pressed into southwestern Yunnan province I stood amidst a sanctuary of sorts, a point from which the very leaves of the mist-shrouded trees around me were carried to all compass points on the backs of mules in caravans that would travel thousands of kilometers. These ungracious bowed trees that created their own ancient forest were tea trees, which had for centuries been let to wander and expand in a never-ending series of curves. It was here upon Nano Mountain near Menghai



Fig. 1. A harvester from the Lahu tribe in the tea sanctuary of Nano Shan just outside Menghai, Yunnan.

where tea has grown rampant and unimpaired since ancient times in the swaths of tea fields around it, where tea has been collected, dried and packed to be sent into Laos, Vietnam, Thailand and Burma. Here tea is nothing less than revered completely.

Fig. 2. The author's route along the Tea Horse Road from Yunnan to Tibet and beyond.



Tea's journeys south and west, though, were nothing compared to the epic distances and dangers of the journey north and west that tea would take into the daunting black spires and snow peaks of the Himalayas — to Lhasa and beyond, 4000 kilometers away [Fig. 2, previous page]. Tea would travel along a pathway 1300 years old, one which I myself would follow for over seven months: *Cha Ma Dao* (Tea Horse Road) to the Chinese, *Gyalam* (wide road) to the Tibetans. The Tea Horse Road was what one old trader would later describe as "the tea corridor into the mountains." To the West it had remained a mystery, nameless and "hidden," for most of its lifetime. Sometime in China's early T'ang Dynasty (618-907 CE) caravans and tributes of tea began their journeys into Tibet to sate an addiction, soothe monarchs and smooth over perceived insults. It is claimed that tea was introduced into Tibet as part of a dowry of the T'ang's Princess Wencheng on her betrothal to the formidable Songtsen Gambo (617-649). Others point out that Tibetans were already drinking a form of tea and had previous interaction with tea-producing minorities of Southern Yunnan. We know that in the mid-seventh century tea was packed on caravans in ever increasing amounts destined for the top of the world. The tea-laden caravans would continue their journeys for over a thousand years until their petering out in the mid-1950s. Across watersheds, and over 5000-meter, perpetually snow-clad mountain passes, tea would make its way upon the backs of the humble mules. From the damp and mystical valleys of tea, entire arteries of pathways and routes ferried the green leaves to distant landscapes.

As a trade and news pipeline, the Tea Horse Road's importance cannot be overstated. Accessing some of the most remote communities in all of Asia, it was at once a trade route, migration route and strategic military route that linked and provided. Salts, medicines, silver, pelts, jewels and all manner of other goods would in time find their way along the Tea Horse Road making it what some locals called a "conductor of economies."

Dakpa, an old Tibetan friend, and I had arrived in this thick, humid, green zone to seek out the origins of not only the Tea Horse Road but also the origins of tea itself. *Camellia Sinensis Assamica*, known unofficially as the

"big leaf tea" variety and found in a wild state in both Yunnan and Assam, India, has grown relatively undisturbed in these damp southern climes since before anyone can remember. The Dai, Hani, Naxi, Han, Yi, Tibetan and Bai tribes all contributed in some way to the production, transportation, and ultimate consumption of tea. Though their serving styles might differ, they were identical in their dependence on this crop that would dictate trade and social demands for centuries. Dakpa and I had in our time contributed to rampant consumption of tea, and I could find no more fitting partner in "tea travel" than him. Both of us admitted to having a more than a slight addiction to the leaf, but this was the furthest south either of us had traveled in Yunnan. Where Dakpa's Tibetan customs brought the addition of butter and salt into tea's world, the tribes of southern Yunnan added salt, pepper, herbs, spices and even chili peppers to their own modified versions, using tea to treat fevers, wounds, blisters and as a general coolant. Here in the south tea was worshipped with a casual fervency that approached a kind of animism. It was present in all life, and its very longevity was considered an indication of the continued bond between man and this most social of green plant matter.

In this part of Yunnan tea leaves were harvested by hand, dried, fermented and shaped into bricks and cakes. Often fitted into bamboo husks and variously wrapped in bamboo leaves or tree bark to keep dry, tea's plethora of sizes and travel-savvy shapes hint at its long history as a commodity that traveled widely [Fig. 3]. Caravans moving ornately formed tea cakes to the ancient capitals of the Chinese Dynasties



Fig. 3. Puer tea wrapped in traditional fashion in bamboo leaves to ensure its secure travel.

as annual tributes were considered “untouchable” even by bandits, as the repercussions would be murderous. Tea would travel beyond borders into lands that its harvesters would never see — India, nomadic tribal lands, and the vast steppes of Mongolia. Along the Tea Horse Road’s winding length tea was wealth and a form of currency. In time it would surpass porcelains and even silks in economic value. Its unique stature in Asian culture was assured due to its general availability to all castes. Tea had originally been referred to as *tu* (bitter herb); its Mandarin

the minutest of towns, number in the dozens and ensure Dakpa and I are never short on tea distractions. To be considered a “true” *Puer* requires that the tea be the *Camellia Sinensis Assamica* variety (big leafed), that it be grown and produced in Yunnan province, and that it be sun dried. Puer is itself the prime tea-market town of southern Yunnan where caravans would assemble to load their precious cargoes. The “tea-belt towns” of Yunnan included as well Menglian, Menghai and Simao, and their produce, shaped into cakes and often adorned with inscriptions, poems or ribbons, would make up the bulk of teas destined for the Himalayan regions and the market towns along the way.



Fig. 4. Tea fields near Simao in southern Yunnan stretch for kilometers.

designation, *cha*, came only later in its life. So important and exotic was tea that the Mandarin name was exported along with the product and has been preserved down to the present — in India, *chaya/chay*, in Russia, *chai*; in Turkey, *chay*; in Japan, *cha*; in Tibet, *jia*.

For two and a half weeks Dakpa and I had wandered through this “heartland of tea” in a tea stupor of sorts [Fig. 4]. We spent as much time slurping back the heady tonic of musty teas containing polyphenols, amino acids and vitamins, as we did tracing the ancient Tea Horse trails that are being slowly being eaten up by the voracious forests or replaced by roads built according to the blueprint laid down by The Tea Horse Road.

Teas of this southwestern corner of Yunnan are designated *Puer*, sold in shops that, even in

Though at present, *Shou*, artificially fermented (black) *Puer* tea, is the most widely available, the *Sheng* unfermented (green) *Puer* was the tea that traveled. Here in Yunnan’s south it is still the most consumed. Dakpa and I barely cared about the variety, as our only need and hope was that our seemingly inexhaustible tea sources and teashops indeed would never end. Our own route gradually took us northwards along barely visible vestiges of slick cobblestones that at times disappeared under the green torrents of sub-tropical jungle growth [Fig. 5]. It was along such disappearing paths that thousands of hooves of caravans bearing tea would have moved.



Fig. 5. The cobbled path of the ancient Tea Horse Road, which is still used by locals.

Tea's journeys deep into the Himalayan kingdoms and on to India could take up to six months in bamboo holds, shuddering through heat waves, icy blizzards and flooded valleys. During these voyages tea often began to ferment, strengthening the flavours and prematurely ageing the leaves, so the tea that made it to distant market towns was often a potent dark variety, very different from that which began the journey. It was this tea that would become famous to nomads and traders alike as *Jia Kamo* (Tibetan: strong/bitter tea).

My own intended seven month passage along the entire Tea Horse Road would take me through a dozen cultures, twice as many regional dialects and into the lives of some of the last remaining *makutos* (Mandarin: muleteers and porters) and *lados* (Tibetan: muleteers). It would gradually take me from a land of green heat into a land of endless ridges of grey stone — the Himalayas. Spiced and pepper-laced teas would give way to potent butter and salt tea: all lands that lie along the Tea Horse Road are still inextricably linked to tea.

Alone now (Dakpa later would rejoin me), I zigzagged through and over what was left of trade towns on the road north from Puer to Dali, passing the gentle crests of the Yuliang Mountains. Fields of rice, corn, tobacco and tea nestle into neat geometric patterns in the hillsides — entire agricultural economies in plain view. While the market towns built by the Yi and Lisu peoples once anchored the Tea Horse Road, now only the eldest of the elders remembered the chimes and bells of the coming caravans and wove both legend and fact into passionate tales. No discussion was complete without multiple glasses, bowls, cups or pots of tea being shared, slurped and talked about. Indeed, the Tea Horse Road was not simply a trade route but a route that educated and shared. As one observer has noted, "the traders came back with tales of people, towns, languages, and of tea's importance in even the most distant of lands."

Dali once was at the center of the formidable Nanzhao Kingdom which for a time in the ninth century extended its power north into Sichuan and controlled as well another important trade corridor that headed west into Burma and beyond. The Dali kingdom, which succeeded the Nanzhao, finally succumbed to the Mongol

armies of Qubilai Khan in the mid-13th century. The Central Asian features and headscarves worn tight which one sees today in Weishan, south of Dali, may be a legacy of those forces, in which whole divisions were Muslims. Their descendants made the area famous, for it was they who formed caravans that became noted for discipline and being "on time" with their crucial shipments.

The Wei and Yi inhabitants of Weishan became known for their roasted or smoked teas that give off powerful wafts of woody flavor and offer a relief from heat. In the Xiaguan/Dali area, the higher altitudes and longer fermentation times create stronger varieties which would never be unwelcome in the Himalayas. While much of the brick tea that ended up in the nomadic regions was a rough mélange of stems and other vegetation, the important thing was that there be flavor to wring out of the tea during cooking.

The trade routes controlled by the Nanzhou and Dali kingdoms had ancient roots, connecting Yunnan with the powerful Tibetan Tubo empires. Some of the paths led directly between Yunnan and Lhasa, crossing what is now the northern third of Myanmar. Just north of Dali, along the banks of the Yangtze near the town of Shigu, the Yunnan-to-Tibet Tea Horse Road divided into two separate routes, both heading north into Tibet and converging near the Yunnan-Tibetan border at Deqin. One path skimmed along the Yunnan-Burmese border past Judian and Weixi, and the other, further east, made its way through the famed market towns of Lijiang, Shaxi and Gyalthang (present day Zhongdian).

As I meandered further north from Dali through the Cangshan (Cang mountains) I was getting close to my adopted home of Zhongdian, also referred to recently as Shangrila. Leaving the heat of the lowlands behind, my senses and sanity fared better in the cooling winds that announced the proximity of the Great Himalayan Range. Along with the gusts came the unmistakable knowledge that I had moved into landscapes where winds, snow and the ancient Khampa (eastern Tibetan) tribes resided.

Northwest Yunnan has been both the unofficial and official gateway into and out of the Himalayas for travelers, traders and ancient armies alike. The Hengduan Mountains' slow rise introduces the easternmost extension of

the Himalayas, through which until the mid-20th century the only way to travel was by mule or on foot. As the people and land change so too did the Tea Horse Road. It was from Yunnan's northwest that caravans would embark upon their most fierce battles with the elements through punishing terrain.

In Zhongdian, joined again by Dakpa, I would put together a team of mountain-bred locals to negotiate the 1600-kilometer journey west to Lhasa. It was in this same region of northwestern Yunnan that the caravans that traveled the Tea Horse Road would “upgrade” as well, replacing mules that had made the journey from the deep south with ones acclimatized to mountain travel. This was and still is in many quarters the domain of the fearsome Khampas (eastern Tibetans; *Kham* — eastern Tibet, *pa* or *ba* — people), uniquely adapted for a life of travel and survival in some of the most daunting terrain on the globe. It was these people who, after traversing their own lands, couriered tea- and salt-laden caravans through blizzards and bandit-ridden country on to Lhasa and beyond. In Mandarin the term for a muleteer is *makuto*, but here in these lands the term in local Tibetan was *lado* (literally meaning “hands of stone”), which seemed to explain precisely the requisite qualities for anyone considering this vocation.



Fig. 6. An ancient Tibetan muleteer or *lado* (“hands of stone”) sits in his furs.

Our expedition was deliberately geared to try and gain audience to a select few remaining muleteers who had survived [Fig. 6]. These

elders were still actively trading and traveling the Tea Horse Road into the mid-1950s. Unable to write, they preserved their knowledge in keeping with the rich Asian tradition of oral narratives. These fearless muleteers were often paid not in silver or money but in tea. Tea was



Fig. 7. The perilous meter-wide path in northwestern Yunnan.

a currency that knew no recession, and with tea one could easily trade for other goods. Leaders of the caravans in both spirit and fact were called *Tsompun*, and it was they who were ultimately responsible in ensuring that caravans reached their destinations intact.

My own team of six would head northwest from Zhongdian (Shangrila) past the silent magnificence of Meili Snow Mountain (Tibetan: *Kawa Karpo* – White Pillar) on the Yunnan-Tibetan border along the Mekong River, clipping the very northern border regions of Burma. Here trade routes merged with holy routes, as they wound their way through the grey ranges to sacred mountains, temples and towns.

In this area now known as Degin, and known to the old Tibetans as *Jo*, hand carved tea bowls called *porre* would be packed up to join tea, salt, pelts and other trinkets for trade further west, as they were rare gifts in mountains where few luxuries were to be found. Towns still bearing the names of the trading times, Lado (muleteer) and Gyalam (wide road) sit little changed from centuries ago along the wedge-shaped ancient road. The salt wells of Tsakhalo function to this day in a dusty valley lined with trails that make their way to distant villages.

Passing caravans would stop here to pick up sacks of salt that would join their tea brethren to continue north and west into markets.

For a month, combatting frostbite, snow blindness and hunger, our team would plunge further northwest along remnants of tracks that at times seemed to vanish on the mountain slopes. Forbidding and grand swaths of rock gave way to more rock; that in turn gave way to strangely fertile valleys far below our mule team, as it negotiated paths which often measured a meter or less wide [Fig. 7, previous page]. In earlier times — and the threat seemed far from remote today — landslides, blizzards and disorientation had wiped out entire caravans, and bandits lurked in strategic points along the route.

Of vital importance both then and now was the presence and generosity of *netsangs* (host families) along the way [Figs. 8, 9]. Either within villages or within a single nomadic family, they provided supplies, grazing land and food to caravans in return for goods such as tea, salt or other hard-to-access goods. Though much had been forgotten, these families had inherited from their elders knowledge of the necessity to provide for caravans. It was often the generosity of these very caravans that enabled an isolated community to augment its own meager wealth. We depended on the local families for much of our food, which could be characterized as “the sum of all parts yak,” the milk, butter and dried meat all enabling us to



Fig. 8 (top). A netsang (Tibetan: “host”) hosts our team for an inevitable tea break near Dotok at an altitude of 4600 m in the Nyanqen Tanglha Mountains.

Fig. 9 (bottom). Our hosts pack our gear before sending us off.

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function day after day at the energy-sapping altitudes.

Nonetheless, the physical demands of traipsing day in and day out above 4000 meters eventually brought down Dakpa with dehydration. To continue in the unyielding mountains was too risky, and he wisely elected to stop in one town, rest, and then turn back. Our core team of six was reduced to four.

The most brutal travel along the entire route now unfolded against the backdrop of the Great Salween Divide [Fig. 10]. It separates the highest major river flows on the globe, the Yarlung Tsangpo (which becomes the Brahmaputra), and the glacier-fed Salween which flows from the Qinghai Mountains to the north into the Bay of Bengal. The Nup, Shar, and Tro passes, never predictable, were often snow covered year round. The Salween Divide



Fig. 10. The avalanche-prone peaks near the entrance to the Nyanqen Tanglha Mountains in the Salween Divide.

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Fig. 11. Crossing a mountain stream.

Fig. 12. Setting up camp at a site used by nomads near the settlement of Tzachuka.



also marked the boundary between the lands of the Khampa Drokpa (Eastern Tibetan nomads) and the reclusive Abohors tribes, smaller in stature and less forceful (or willing) in dealings with the outside world — a people content to remain hidden. In their lands, banditry had been rife in the heyday of the trade, and the most famous muleteers often earned their reputations and fealty based upon their skills not just as conductors but also as feared guardians of their goods.

Here in eastern Tibet our team once again had a choice of alternate routes, as the Tea Horse Road divided into three branches, northern, southern, and the one we chose in the middle. Ours was the one least affected by outsiders, the sole route unobstructed by roadways and little frequented by travelers. Permanently snow-capped peaks, gorges carved by swollen rivers, and scars of massive landslides created an isolated splendor of landscapes.

Traveling within the blue shadows of the Nyanqen Tanglha Mountains our team of four and two horsemen followed snaking rivers [Fig. 11]. Along them towns consisting of no more than a half dozen homes or nomadic dwellings were the only evidence of a human presence beyond the odd domesticated yak or cow grazing on impossible cliffs.

In the days of heavy caravan travel, distances were broken up into segments determined by landmarks or locations suitable for camps, with little interest in “how many kilometers” were traveled [Fig. 12]. Should two caravans meet upon a narrow strip of path, smaller caravans would defer to the larger, and in such a manner skirmishes were kept to a minimum. Bells, chimes and charms adorned the lead mules warning of their coming. The caravans of eastern Tibetan Khampas often numbered hundreds of mules traveling in kilometers-long processions to the main market centers, unloading, and trading for new products to bring back to sell for a profit [Figs. 13, 14 (following page)].

For 1300 years little changed. The traders and migrating communities along the trail brought to isolated communities knowledge of far off cultures and languages and access to goods that seemed barely real. Corals from the Bay of Bengal and turquoise from the Middle East made their way along pathways that fed into the Tea Horse Road from further west. During our expedition, many nomads showed off colorful earrings that could not have come from any other source but the Tea Horse Road merchants.

Fig. 13. Our mule caravan ascending the Sho La, the first of the major passes on the way to Lhasa. Many mules are muzzled to prevent them from eating vegetation that contains hallucinogenic properties.



Fig. 14. Ascending through freshly fallen snow on a day that began in humid forests and continued to a pass in blizzard conditions at close to 5000 m.

As we journeyed through immense landscapes, where nothing was heard but the ever-present wind, days and weeks disappeared [Fig. 15]. Often our team was without mules, forcing us to consolidate equipment and supplies and leaving no alternative to carrying 30 kg rucksacks upon our backs. Locals, as they have for all time, refused in many cases to risk their animals in deep snow, and in other areas all four legged help was high in the mountains with entire communities that were foraging for the caterpillar fungus (*yartsa gunbu*). Valued as a medicine in Asia, where, transmitted through intermediaries, it might sell in Chinese shops for huge sums, the fungus could be collected only during a precious two-month period in spring. Nothing was as economically valued (not even tea).

Dusty beige ruins of small towns marked the black-ridged landscapes; villages that had existed in a “provider” role for the Tea Horse Road. As trade along the ancient corridor ebbed, so too did the need for the supplies, and with time the last humans moved on to larger towns or eased back into a life of nomadic subsistence.

In preparations for an ascent of one last major pass before Lhasa (Tro La – Crying Pillar Pass, 4916 m), we bedded down in the long forgotten



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nomadic ruins of Gole using yak dung for fuel. Strewn around the old encampment, poking out of the ground in odd shaped lumps, were the discarded horseshoes of previous travelers, giving an impression that the ancient past wasn't so ancient. The sound of distant humming engines filled the air as a rag-tag group of nomads on motorbikes stopped in to demand we pay for the dung that was fueling our fire. In these wind-savaged lands near 5000 meters, all supplies – whether food, medicine or even yak dung – were rare and critical. They moved on after we explained our purpose and made an offering of tea. It was in such a manner that “borders” were enforced in these desolate lands, where few lines or markings denoted property. A peak or stream might serve as the only indication of property rights which even now are observed.



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The various trade routes, snaking in from all directions, met at Lhasa (Tibetan: Holy Land). The unquestioned spiritual center for Tibetans, it was also the great trade center. The northern routes connected it with centers of nomadic power. A natural extension of the Tea Horse Road continued south into India, through the wool strongholds of Loka, pressing

Fig. 15. Nomad tents and yaks dwarfed by the immense landscape in eastern Tibet.

through the market hub of Gyanze, southwest to the border town of Yadong on the Indian border, and on to the trading towns of Kalimpong and Gangtok in West Bengal and Sikkim respectively. On the way into Lhasa, many caravans would stop at monasteries, bringing with them donations and even novice monks arriving to study. Market districts like old Bharkor would have been lined with goods from dozens of lands, and it was here that the caravans of Tea Horse Road would ultimately arrive. Horse markets, often located on the outskirts of town, bubbled over with activity. During the Song Dynasty (960-1127) rugged little warhorses from Naqu become the prime export heading east along a branch of the Tea Horse Road back into Sichuan. The tea and equine exchange reached a massive scale, increasingly regulated by government and controlled by a few important clans of merchants. While stalls selling bricks and woven bamboo containers of tea still can be found in Lhasa, confirming tea's ability to endure, horses are rarely found anywhere today but in distant towns.

It had taken the four remaining members of our team almost sixty days to reach Lhasa from Zhongdian, about the same time it took the old caravans. Unlike them though, we did not face a quick turn-around to retrace our steps after a few days of manic trading. With skin peeling and our bodies worn down by the elements into thin husks, we now could indulge in yet another type of tea in desperate quantities, this one almost violently sweet. The *Jia Kamo* (bitter tea) had given way to *Jia Ngamo* (sweet tea), and butter infusion had given way to a sugar infusion.

While tea has survived intact and essential, activities along the Tea Horse Road have long been given over to motor vehicles that now surge through the mountains in a fraction of the time that it took the mule caravans. Many called the Tea Horse Road, the "Eternal Road," never believing that a time would come when the bustle of trade and travel would end. One elder tradesman called the Tea Horse Road "the great chain through the mountains," a chain which had linked peoples, products and cultures for over a thousand years and whose importance lives on.

About the author

Having lived for most of the past decade in Asia, **Jeff Fuchs** has devoted himself to documenting indigenous cultures, oral histories and fast disappearing Asian traditions. His photos and stories have appeared in many newspapers and magazines, and his photos have been exhibited on three continents. To view more of his elegant photography, visit <www.jefffuchs.com>. His work has inspired programs on Chinese and Canadian television. His recently released book, *The Ancient Tea Horse Road* (Penguin-Viking Publishers, 2008), details his eight-month groundbreaking journey chronicling one of the world's great trade routes. Fuchs is the first westerner to have completed both strands of the route stretching almost five thousand kilometers through the Himalayas and a dozen cultures. He divides time between his adopted home in the eastern Himalayas and Canada and may be contacted at <vandor81@hotmail.com>.

Book notice

A. M. Leskov, *The Maikop Treasure*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2008. ISBN 13:978-1-934536-04-0. x + 294 pp.

Readers of this journal enjoyed a preview of this volume in Dr. Aleksandr Leskov's article outlining the history of the collection which he has, for want of a better term, called the Maikop Treasure (*The Silk Road* 2/2 [2004]: 3-11; oddly, not cited in the book). At the time he wrote for us, the publication of the catalogue was still somewhat uncertain; happily it has now appeared. This is a major work of scholarly detection and analysis, which could have been produced only by a senior scholar of great range and depth. Leskov is arguably one of the most important archaeologists ever to have worked in the rich territories of the early nomads north and east of the Black Sea (see Aleksandr Naymark's appreciation in *ibid.*, pp. 12-16).

The book includes an introduction about the history of this collection, which he demonstrates is that assembled by the French collector M.A. Merle de Massoneau. De Massoneau's collection was subsequently broken up and sold piecemeal over a longish period, the result being that the objects are now scattered in several museums in Berlin, New York, Philadelphia and Cologne, the largest number being in the University of

Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Leskov's task has involved identifying and "reassembling" the collection, which, however, is unified first of all by its having been in the hands of a single individual, not by the provenance and date of the objects it contains. That said, much of the material is from the Maikop region of the Kuban Peninsula and is to be identified with the Scythian culture of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. Some objects date as late as the period of the Mongol Empire. Unfortunately the exact provenance of the items is largely unknown and has to be established by scholarly hypothesis and analogies with similar material from documented excavations.

The bulk of the book is an item-by-item description and analysis of the objects, with illustrations (most in color) of each. While this is essential for scholarly reference, most readers will wish to follow their perusal of the introductory essay by reading the final section of the book, "The Maikop Collection: A Historical Overview," in which Dr. Leskov draws on his knowledge gained from a long and distinguished scholarly career devoted to the archaeology and early history of the Black Sea steppes.

The book is beautifully produced, with good maps, bibliography and index.

— Daniel C. Waugh



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Plaque-appliqué, one of four. Gold, punched, die-formed. 11.2 cm. 5th century BCE. Antikenabteilung, Staatliche Museen, Berlin. Inv. nos. 30.221e 1-4. Leskov catalogue no. 149, pp. 117-118.