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Introduction: Turfan as a Silk Road Community

The T'ang dynasty is justly famed for its openness to Indian, Iranian, and Central Asian cultures. Ch'ang-an, the T'ang capital, lay at the east terminus of a network of trade routes, now commonly known as the Silk Road that linked China with civilizations farther to the west. The writings of famous officials and the surviving funeral figurines depicting non-Chinese traders and handlers of pack-animals provide vivid proof of cultural exchange with other societies, but they offer little information about the day-to-day existence of non-Chinese living along the Silk Road. Turfan, an oasis on the northern route around the Taklamakan Desert, now in modern Sinkiang, commands our attention because of its many primary materials on exactly that topic.

Unlike archeological sites in China, which often give us a grave of individual or a single family, the graveyards of Turfan contained an entire community, in over 3,000 tombs. Lying outside the walled capital city of Kao-ch'ang 高昌 kingdom, the Astana and Karakhoja graveyards held graves of the descendants of Chinese settlers who came to the oasis in the third, fourth, and fifth centuries (see appended list of geographical terms).

Since 1959, Chinese archeologists have excavated 465 tombs in the Astana and Karakhoja graveyards, 205 of which yielded documents. The earl

ALL THE authors in this issue express their thanks to the Henry Luce Foundation, which fur the three-year joint U.S.-Chinese project, "The Silk Road Project: Re-uniting Turfan's Scattered Treasures," and supported the research appearing in this issue. The Foundation's funds made it possible for Professors Zhang Guangda 張廣達 and Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 to spend a semester each as visiting scholar at Yale University. The authors would also like to thank the Chinese institutions for making their collections available to project members during a site visit in May, 1995: The Sinkiang Archeological Institute (Hsin-chiang k'ao-ku so 新疆考古所), the Sinkiang Museum (Tu-lu-fan ti-ch'ü wen-wu chung-hsin 吐魯番地區文庫博物館), and the Turfan Museum (Tu-lu-fan ti-ch'ü wen-wu chung-hsin 吐魯番地區文庫博物館). Finally, the authors would like to thank the Committee on East Asian Studies at Yale University, the Center for Middle Period History at Peking University (Pei-ching ta-hsüeh Chung-kuo chü-shih yen-chiu chung-hsin 北京大學中國中古史研究中心) for co-sponsoring the project, and four papers appearing here were first presented at the Silk Road Project in July, 1998.

Conference proceedings of The Third Silk Road Conference at Yale University, in a volume photocopied packet, are available from RIS-Yale University, 155 Whitney Avenue, Haven, CT 06520, fax: 203-432-6274. Abstracts of the conference papers are on the project web-site: <<http://www.yale.edu/ceas/main.html>>. Other papers from the project will appear in the following journals: *Orientalism: The Magazine for Collectors and Connoisseurs of Asian Art* 30.4 (1999), *Journal of Asian Studies* 58.1 (1999), *Taiwan-hua yen-chiu 敦煌吐魯番學* 4 (1999), and *T'oung Pao* 85.2 (1999).

document dates to the third century AD; the latest, to the eighth. The Chinese settlers in Turfan buried their dead with hats, belts, and shoes – unusually, all were made from paper. Because writing materials were scarce, they recycled paper that had writing on one or both sides, sometimes painting the characters over. They cut up both discarded official documents, such as imperial orders and household registers, and private records like contracts, family letters, and writing exercises. Like pieces of a puzzle, these paper fragments must be joined together before they can be read, and one of the greatest feats of Chinese scholarship in this century has been the transcription and publication of these documents. The volume at hand demonstrates the value of linking these documents to objects that have been found in tombs and hoards – coins, figurines, and textiles. These materials from Turfan make it possible to write a grass-roots history of an entire Silk Road community during the time when China looked west, to India, to Central Asia, and to Iran.

From a Chinese point of view, Turfan was one of the farthest outposts of the T'ang empire. By the year 500, Turfan's population consisted largely of Chinese settlers. In the first article in this issue, Professors Zhang Guangda 張廣達 and Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 show that for much of the oasis's long history the Chinese did not exercise direct rule. The one exception was the period between 640, when T'ang-dynasty troops conquered the oasis, and 803, when the T'ang relinquished control. After 803 a series of different Uighur (Uyghur) and Mongol dynasties governed the oasis until 1756, when it once again came under direct Chinese rule. But it was during the seventh and eighth centuries that local officials performed the numerous bureaucratic duties required by the Chinese state. Turfan is so far the only site in China to have produced so much documentation about the fiscal system of the T'ang period.

Yet, from an Iranian point of view, Turfan was also the farthest outpost of Iranian civilization because it contained a large settlement of Sogdians. The homeland of the Sogdians, Sogdiana, was the region around Samarkand, in modern-day Uzbekistan, and the Sogdians spoke and wrote a dialect of middle Persian. The Sogdians were heavily involved in commerce, and many traded with the Chinese oases on both sides of the Taklamakan Desert. Some settled in Turfan, while others came on frequent business trips. The fall of the Sasanian empire to conquering Islamic forces in 651 and the exile of the Sasanian Prince Firuz to Ch'ang-an prompted further Sogdian settlement in T'ang China.

A corpus of fragments of official documents makes it possible to have a glimpse of the equal-field system in action. The provisions of that system applied to both the Chinese and to the non-Chinese residents (mostly Sogdian)

of Turfan.¹ At the stipulated times local officials entered the names of non-Chinese residents on household registers, assessed and allotted land to them, and recruited them to perform labor service. Some Sogdians received official titles and served in the T'ang bureaucracy.

Sogdians not resident in Turfan also played an important role in the life of the oasis. They had access to the court system, by which they could bring suits against their countrymen and also against Chinese, although they may have depended on an interpreter to do so. An entire infrastructure developed to host the merchants who came to the oasis to trade. Local officials issued the requisite travel documents, while tradesmen provided places to stay. One legal dispute from Turfan concerns the death of a non-resident merchant who died while staying with a Sogdian innkeeper. The list of occupations pursued by Sogdians illustrates the extent to which they participated in local life. As could be expected, there were Sogdian traders and farmers, but Turfan was also home to Sogdian coppersmiths, painters, leather-workers, iron-mongers, and even one veterinarian with the curious nickname "Ostrich."

The articles in this issue of *Asia Major* concentrate on the interaction between the Chinese and the non-Chinese in Turfan. The authors find very little evidence of Indian influence at Turfan. What little there was dates to the fourth century AD, when the local rulers of Turfan patronized Buddhists. The articles do show, however, just how important and influential the Sogdian community was, especially in the years after 500.

Jonathan Skaff's paper skillfully combines an analysis of the Chinese-language sources with a close examination of the numismatic evidence in order to sketch the economic activities of the Sogdians. Most of the silver coins found at Turfan were minted either by the Sasanians or their Arab successors. These coins have been found either in hoards, dating to the fourth century, or in the mouths of the dead buried at the Astana and Karakhoja cemeteries.

Aurel Stein, who arrived at the cemetery site on January 18, 1915, was one of the first Westerners to document the custom of placing coins in the mouths of the dead, which he attributed (wrongfully) to the influence of the Greeks, who had also placed coins in the mouths of the dead so they could pay the ferryman who took them over the river to Hades. Stein hired a man named Mashik, an experienced grave-robber, as his chief digger. Mashik assured Stein that every single one of the tombs at Astana and Karakhoja had already been

¹ Wu Chen [Wu Zhen] 吳震, "A-ssu-t'a-na Ha-la-ho-cho ku-mu-ch'in k'ao-ku tzu-liao fa-hsien te hu-jen" 阿斯塔那哈拉和卓基群考古資料發現的胡人, in the proceedings of The Third Silk Road Conference at Yale University, and forthcoming in *T'ung-huang Tu-t'ia-fan yen-chiu* 4 (1999).

disturbed, but that he could guide him to the tombs that were less disturbed than the others. In addition, Mashik had developed his own ingenious measures for finding artifacts unnoticed by earlier intruders:

Mashik, our special cemetery assistant, whom long practice in searching the dead had relieved of all scruples, by breaking the jawbones of the skull recovered from the mouth cavity a thin gold coin. ... Mashik claimed the distinction of having been the first to learn by experience to look for coins of gold or silver placed in the mouths of the dead, though his search was but rarely rewarded.²

Archeologists working since Stein have continued to unearth these coins from the mouths of the dead. The coins, interestingly, are not distributed evenly over time. Coins first appear in the mouths of the dead late in the sixth century, peak in the 620s through 650s, and disappear by about 710. The majority of the coins found at Turfan were minted by the Sasanians or by the Islamic regime that conquered the Sasanians in 651. Tang-dynasty copper coins did not circulate in the oasis until the 680s.

Several important historical events, Skaff suggests, led to the appearance of the silver coins. At the end of the sixth century, just as Turkic-speaking peoples gained control over much of Central Asia, the Chinese empire was reunified for the first time since the fall of the Han dynasty in 220 AD. Meanwhile, the Sasanian empire produced large quantities of high-quality coins with silver content ranging between 85 and 90 percent. These coins circulated throughout Central Asia. Both the independent kingdom of Kao-ch'ang and the Tang-dynasty government accepted Sasanian silver coins for the payment of taxes in that area.

The high point in the usage of Sasanian silver coins – the seventh century – coincides with the appearance of new types of textile. Angela Sheng's article concentrates on one group of unusual textiles that used complex weaves for simple designs. Although the simple designs have failed to attract the attention of textile historians, some, such as the tree-leaf pattern, could only have come from Iran, and not from China. Sheng proposes that the group of simple-design textiles was commissioned by Sogdians resident in Turfan. Some of the wealthiest had the necessary capital to invest in weaving workshops, and the Chinese or Sogdian craftsmen they hired had the requisite knowledge of weaving to develop such new textiles.

Clearly the Sogdians constituted an important community in Turfan. Yet

² Aurel Stein, *Innermost Asia: Detailed Report of Explorations in Central Asia, Kan-su, and Eastern Iran* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1928), p. 646.

the absence of evidence about their religious practices has long puzzled historians. Mazdeism, or Zoroastrianism, was the official religion of the Sasanian empire, yet no Mazdean temples have been found in Turfan. Zhang Guangda has recently proposed a new interpretation of a little-understood text describing the sacrifice of sheep and oxen on certain festival days.³ These sacrifices were certainly not Buddhist, yet they were organized by the Board of Sacrifices of the independent kingdom of Kao-ch'ang, whose rulers consistently patronized Buddhism. According to Zhang, though, the sacrifices were made to Mazdean deities who included the supreme god Ahura Mazda and the god of the wind.

Although little evidence of Iranian religion in Turfan survives,⁴ the modern tourist sees Buddhist remains everywhere. Turfan is justly famous for its Buddhist cave complexes at Bezeklik and nearby Sengim (Sheng-chin-k'ou 金□), and a towering Buddhist stupa rises above the earthen ruins of Kao-ch'ang city (see appended map 3). In 630, the most celebrated Chinese pilgrim of all, the great monk Hsüan-tsang 玄奘, staged a hunger strike there before the king would allow him to continue his journey overland to India. One would expect that most of the Chinese residents were Buddhist devotees, but the above-ground evidence of Buddhism everywhere does not quite fit with the below-ground evidence surviving in the Astana tombs.

This tomb evidence is the subject of my own article on the paths that Buddhism took entering China. Many of the earliest records of Buddhism – dating to the late-fourth century – concern patronage of Buddhism by the local rulers of Turfan. The latter built monasteries, commissioned the copying of Buddhist texts, and in 382 sent a learned monk to China's northern dynastic capital, where he recited thousands of verses by heart. But the graves of the local residents of Turfan show few signs of Buddhist belief. The dead, the local residents believed, traveled to another world (sometimes over a bridge of judgment like that crossed by Mazdean believers) where they could use many of the same objects they had used in life. They often included inventories of these goods in their tombs.

The first signs of Buddhist belief to be found in the Astana tombs date to

³ Zhang Guangda, "Some Iranian Religious Evidence in Turfan Chinese Texts," in the proceedings of The Third Silk Road Conference at Yale University. A Chinese version will appear in *Tun-huang Tu-lu-fan yen-chiu* 4 (1999) as "Tu-lu-fan ch'u-t'u Han-yü wen-shu chung so chien I-lang-yü ti-ch'ü tsung-chiao te tsung-ch'i" 吐魯番出土漢語文書中所見伊朗語地區宗教的蹤跡.

⁴ Chao Hueshan suggests that many of the cave-temples previously thought to be Buddhist were actually Manichean, although few would agree with all of his claims; "New Evidence of Manichaeism in Asia: A Description of Some Recently Discovered Manichaeic Temples in Turfan," *MS* 44 (1996), pp. 267–315.

543 - the date of a tomb inventory that clearly uses Buddhist language: a monk reports the death of the tomb occupant, who is identified as upholding the five precepts of the Buddha. Such inventories are clearly based on a form (some are incorrectly filled in), and, as I show, they suggest that Buddhism came to Turfan not from the west, as we might expect, but from the east, the ancestral home of many of the Chinese settlers there.

The above lack of Indian influences on Turfan after 500 reflects the situation of material culture, as presented by my colleagues in this volume. We use varied approaches and different bodies of evidence, but our findings overlap to a surprising extent. In short, we find that most of the evidence of an Indian presence in Turfan dates to the early period before the founding of the Kao-ch'ang kingdom in 500. After 500 the non-Chinese community in Turfan consisted almost entirely of Sogdians. These Sogdians pursued a host of occupations, used Sasanian silver coins to conduct trade, and commissioned new kinds of textiles with hybrid designs. The oasis of Turfan was able to thrive precisely because it offered them a home where they could be Sogdian, even as they lived among the Chinese.

A NOTE TO READERS

Two tables are placed at the end of this introduction. The first gives the alternative spellings of different places and peoples associated with the Turfan area and with Turfan history - terms that the reader may have trouble recognizing or sorting into correct categories. The second gives the names and reign dates of the ten Ch'ü-family kings who ruled the Kao-ch'ang kingdom from 502 to its conquest by the T'ang dynasty in 640.

Also at the end of this introduction are three maps, meant for use throughout the entire issue. Map 1 shows the trade routes connecting China with Central Asia and Sogdiana (in modern-day Uzbekistan). Map 2 is a closer-scaled view of the historical Turfan area. Map 3 is a detailed map of the city of Kao-ch'ang during the fifth to eighth centuries, when it served first as the capital of the Kao-ch'ang kingdom and then the prefectural center of Hsi-chou prefecture under the T'ang.

Table of Selected Geographical and Ethnopolitical Names

ENGLISH	CHINESE (T'ang admin. name)	ALTERNATIVE ROMANIZATION
(Geographic and administrative names)		
Astana	A-ssu-t'a-na 阿斯塔那	Beshbalyq
Beshbalik	(Pei-ting 北庭)	Bukhārā
Bezkeklik	Pal-tzu-k'o-li-k'o 柏孜克里克	Farghānah
Bukhara	An-kuo 安國	Qomul
Ferghana	Ta-yüan 大宛	Qocho
Hami	Ha-mi (I-chou 伊州)	Qarakhoja
India	T'ien-chu 天竺	Qarashahr, or Agni
Kao-ch'ang	高昌 ^a	
also Karakhoja ^b	(Hsi-chou 西州)	
mdn. Turfan	Ha-la-ho-cho 哈拉和卓	
Karashahr	T'u-lu-fan 吐魯番	
Khotan	Yen-ch'i 焉耆	
Kizil	Yü-t'ien 于闐, mdn. 和田	
Kucha	K'o-tzu-erh 克孜爾	
	K'u-ch'e 庫車	
	(An-hsi 安西) ^c	
	Ch'iu-tz'u 丘茲 ^a	
Kushāniyah	Ho-kuo 何國	Kushāniyah
Samarqand	K'ang-chü 康居	Samarqand
	also K'ang-kuo 康國	
Sengim	Sheng-chin-k'ou 勝金口	
Sinkiang	Hsin-chiang 新疆	
Tashkurgan	HO-p'an-t'o 喝盤陀	
Tokharistan (Bactria)	T'u-huo-lo 吐火羅	Tukhārīstān
Tun-huang	Tun-huang 敦煌	
	(Sha-chou 沙州)	
Urumchi	Wu-lu-mu-ch'i 烏魯木齊	Urumqi
Yarkand	Chu-chü-po 朱俱波	
	mdn. Yeh-ch'eng 叶城	
Yarkhoto	Chiao-ho 交河	
(Ethnopolitical names)		
n/a	Chü-shih 車師 / Kur-shih 姑師	
Hephthalites	I-ta 挹怛	
n/a	Kao-chü 高車	Qyrqyz
Kirghiz	Chien-k'un 豎昆, or Hsia-chia-ssu 黠戛斯	
n/a	Shan-shan 鄯善	
n/a	T'ieh-le 鐵勒	
Turks	T'u-chüeh 突厥	
Uighur	Hui-ho (-hu) 回紇 (鶻), mdn. Wei-wu-erh 維吾爾	Uyghur
n/a	Jou-jan 柔然 (Juan-juan 蠕蠕)	
Wakhan	Hu-mi 護蜜	

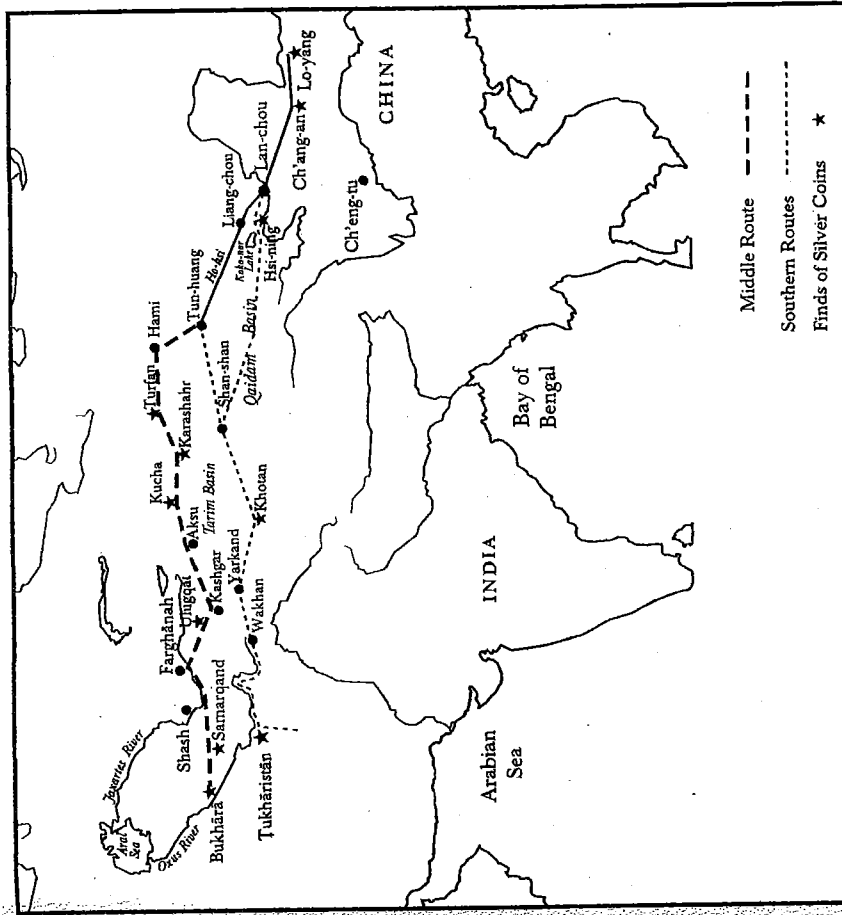
^a Indep. kingdom before T'ang conquest.

^b Name used under Uighurs.

^c I.e., An-hsi tu-hu-fu (protectorate).

Table of Ch'ü-Family 魏氏 Rulers in Kao-ch'ang

GEN'L. ORDER	NAME	REIGN NAME	DATES
1	Ch'ü Chia 魏嘉	Ch'eng-p'ing 承平 I-hsi 義熙	502-09 510-25
2	Ch'ü Kuang 魏光	Kan-lu 甘露	526-30
3	Ch'ü Chien 魏堅	Chang-ho 章和	531-48
4	Ch'ü Hsüan-hsi 魏玄喜	Yung-p'ing 永平	549-50
5	Ch'ü ?	Ho-p'ing 和平	551-54
6	Ch'ü Pao-mao 魏寶茂	Chien-ch'ang 建昌	555-60
7	Ch'ü Ch'ien-ku 魏乾固	Yen-ch'ang 延昌	561-601
8	Ch'ü Po-ya 魏伯雅 usurper	Yen-ho 延和	602-613
	Ch'ü Po-ya	I-ho 義和	614-19
	Ch'ü Wen-t'ai 魏文泰	Yen-ho 延和	619-20
9	Ch'ü Wen-t'ai 魏文泰	Ch'ung-kuang 重光	620-23
	Ch'ü Chih-sheng 魏智盛	Yen-shou 延壽	624-40
10	Ch'ü Chih-sheng 魏智盛	Yen-shou 延壽	640



Map 1. Trade Routes Connecting China and Central Asia via the Silk Road

