

Religion and Chinese Society

Volume I: Ancient and Medieval China

Edited by
John Lagerwey

*A Centennial Conference of the
École française d'Extrême-Orient*



The Chinese University Press



École française d'Extrême-Orient

2004

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Religious Life in a Silk Road Community: Niya During the Third and Fourth Centuries



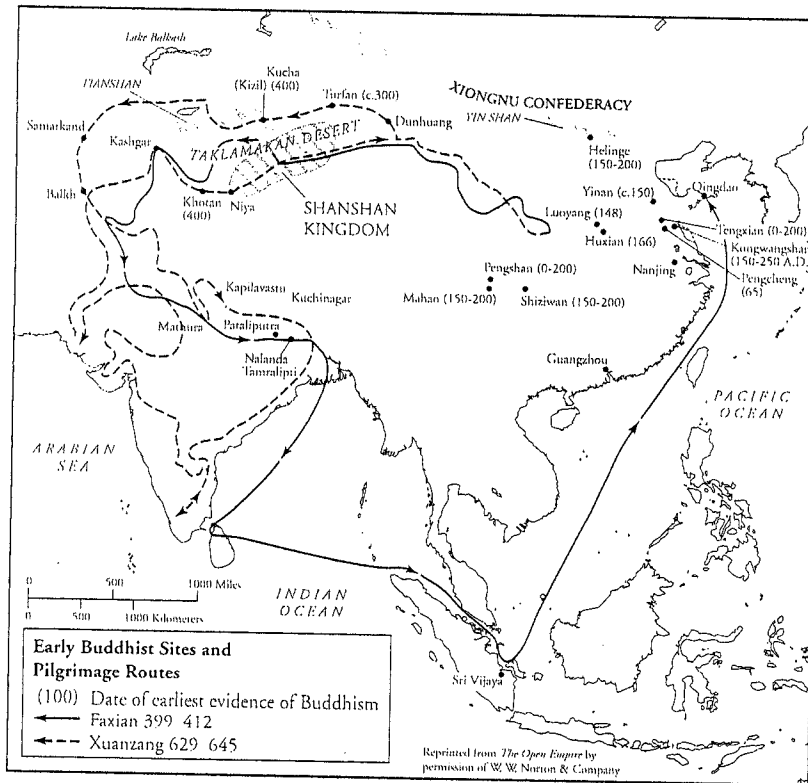
Valerie Hansen

The history of Buddhism in China before A.D. 400 remains poorly understood.¹ Pathbreaking work by Tang Yongtong, Kenneth Ch'en, and Erik Zürcher has shown that small groups of Chinese devotees clustered in Luoyang and other cities around teachers from India and Central Asia. They worked together as a team to produce the first renderings of Indic texts into a stiff, difficult-to-understand Chinese. Our text-centered picture of early Buddhism derives, of course, from the sources in the Buddhist canon, which contains the successive translations of certain key texts. It is all too easy to assume that the earliest Buddhist communities before 400 resembled the monastic, celibate groups so well-documented for later periods (Tang Yongtong 1983; Ch'en 1973; Zürcher 1959, 1972).

What happens when we consciously put aside the Buddhist canon and look, instead, to the archeological record? Two of the richest sites — both for texts and for artifacts — lie far from central China: Loulan and Niya (Jingjue 精絕, 50 miles north of modern Minfeng) in today's Xinjiang. Both lay on the southern Silk Route, which ran along the southern rim of the Taklamakan Desert. There we glimpse a strikingly different type of Buddhist community in the pivotal third and fourth centuries A.D.² Members of the Buddhist clergy, called śramaṇa (conventionally translated as "monk"), lived at home with their wives and children, owned property, and donned Buddhist vestments only for occasional ceremonies. They may have recited Buddhist texts, but they did not identify themselves as belonging to distinct Buddhist schools. And, although Buddhist monuments dominated the landscape, the local people continued to

prepare their dead for the afterlife much as they had before the arrival of the Buddhists.

Kroraina (as it was called in the Indian Prakrit of the original documents, or Shanshan 鄯善 in Chinese) stretched from Loulan in the east to Niya in the west.³ (See Map 1). Archeological evidence points to a culturally homogeneous, if not always politically unified, area in the third and fourth centuries. Three important sites within the kingdom — Niya, Miran, and Loulan — produced over one thousand documents in Chinese and Indic scripts.⁴ These documents were sometimes found in organized official archives, more often in waste pits. Accordingly, they provide on-the-ground (as opposed to canonical) evidence — filtered through the eyes of administrators and their scribes — about the activities of early Buddhists as well as a few tantalizing mentions of local religious practices.



Map 1

Indigenous Burial Practices Before the Arrival of the First Buddhists

Who were the indigenous residents of the Kroraina kingdom? Because evidence of racial type so rarely survives from the past, serious analysts usually sidestep this question. But in the case of the Tarim Basin, situated in the middle of the Taklamakan Desert, the desert climate has preserved over one hundred ancient corpses. All excavators in the region, from Sven Hedin in 1900 (Bergman 1939) to the joint Sino-Japanese project members of the 1990s,⁵ have marveled at the excellent state of preservation of corpses whose light skin, fair hair, and heights over 1.8 meters mark them as caucasoid.⁶ Both Stein and Hedin used the term “non-Mongolian” to indicate that the corpses did not look Chinese or Indian: at Loulan Stein found one corpse with “fair hair,” while another had a “red moustache” (Stein 1928: pp. 288, 743).

During his 1900 expedition Hedin met a local resident named Ördek, who was one of several people who told him about the ancient site of Loulan, the ancient capital of the Kroraina kingdom (Hedin 1996: p. 271). In 1933, when Hedin returned to the region to do a survey of road conditions for the Nationalists, he ran into Ördek, then a man of seventy-two. In April of the following year, Hedin led a canoe party along the Qum-darya river, which fed into Lop Nor. Ördek explained that, perhaps twenty years earlier, he had found a grave site with silk-robed corpses, written documents, and many wooden coffins. Intrigued, Hedin assigned the professional archeologist Folke Bergman to locate the mass grave — which Bergman dubbed “Ördek’s Necropolis.”

Because it dated to a period before the arrival of either Chinese or Indian settlers (sometime around the year 1), and before any evidence of Buddhism, Ördek’s Necropolis turned out to be one of the most important sites in the entire Kroraina kingdom. At different places on the hill were standing wooden posts, 4.25 meters tall, whose submerged bases were all painted red; Bergman assumed the exposed surfaces had also been painted red, “the colour of blood, i.e. life.” Some of the upright wooden objects resembled the oars still in use by the local people in 1934. Ördek reported that, at the time of his earlier visit, a simple house with walls and ceilings of planks had been standing, but it had collapsed in the intervening twenty years.

The “strange, curved, heavy planks” (Bergman 1939: p. 61) that initially puzzled Bergman turned out to be the sides of coffins. Of 120 coffins at the site, he found only 8 intact. Grave 5A was the only burial that had not been disturbed (Bergman 1939: pp. 68–70). A coffin made from a hollowed-out tree trunk contained “a mummified young man” with “long dark-brown hair.”

Two halved tree-trunks had been placed facing each other and then covered with ten boards, which were in turn covered with ox-hides. Like the other corpses found at Ördek's Necropolis (and throughout the kingdom), the figure was buried in a giant body bag; he wore a loincloth, a white felt hat with feathered pegs inserted into it, and simple foot-coverings of ox-hide tied around the ankles with feathers knotted in the strings. The hat and shoes had never been worn. The deceased was found with a small bag of grain, an opal bead, a basket with the remains of cooked millet porridge in it, and four headless arrow quivers. One hand held a tamarisk twig, and the body was covered with grain and ephedra twigs, as were several other corpses. Ephedra is a small desert evergreen shrub, whose properties Bergman thought the local people wished to pass onto the dead.⁷ He suggested the same motivation for the grain: because it could sprout, it represented fertility in the next world. He found several wooden phalluses, one filled with pieces of lizard skull (Bergman 1939: Plate 8).

While the deceased in Grave 5A was buried alone, small human effigies accompanied other burials. One corpse from a different cemetery lay buried in a coat. Under his coat was attached an unusual naked felt doll that had pubic hair attached to its crotch (Fig. 1). It might, Bergman suspected, be a female companion for the deceased (Bergman 1939: Plate 6). Larger wooden figurines were found at Ördek's Necropolis: a single "once ithyphallic" male (134 cm tall) (Fig. 2), and two females (Bergman 1939: pp. 67–68, Plate V). They were carved from wood and painted red, like the posts at the site. Because these were too tall to bury in graves, Bergman suggested they might be depictions of gods.

It is always risky to speculate about beliefs solely on the basis of archeological evidence and in the absence of texts. Yet, that is the only way we can approach the religious beliefs of indigenous, illiterate peoples. We may infer that the original inhabitants of the region conceived of an afterlife to which the dead could travel in boats resembling those they used to negotiate the waterways that crossed the Taklamakan Desert. They placed the deceased in wooden plank houses very like their own, if Ördek's description of the site as he found it can be trusted. They equipped the deceased with food, clothing, new boots, and sometimes companions in miniature. With them, they also buried goods, whether wooden phalluses or ephedra branches, that could bring fertility. The wooden images of deities they placed in their graveyards guarded the graves of the deceased. Because the graves at "Ördek's Necropolis" did not contain any Chinese- or Indian-manufactured goods, we can conclude that the people buried at "Ördek's Necropolis" did not have trade relations with either the Han empire to the east or the Kushan empire to their south.

Bergman's excavations revealed an essential continuity between the funeral

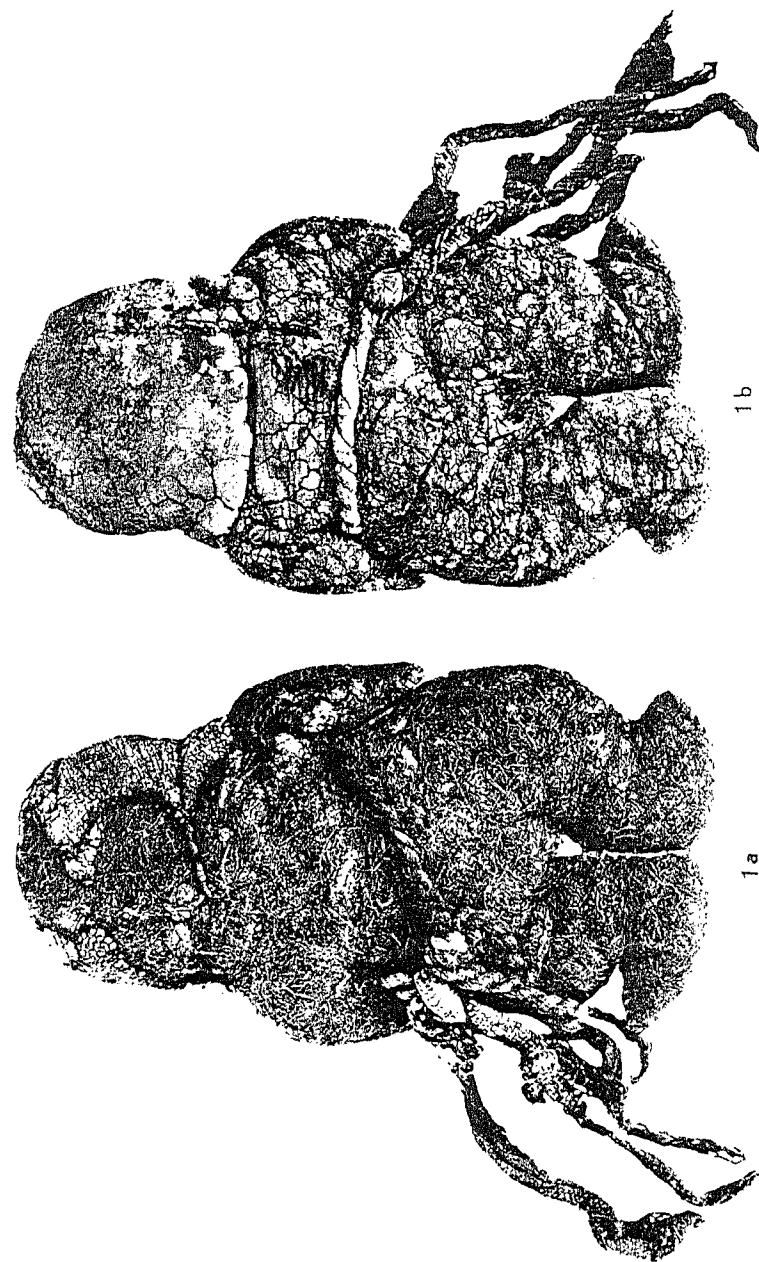


Fig. 1

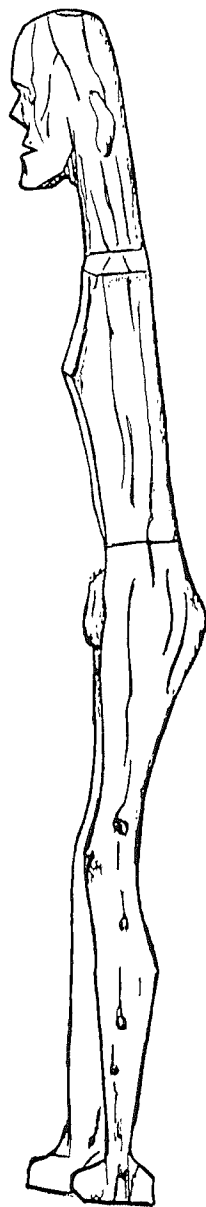


Fig. 2

practices of the region's original residents before and after the arrival of any migrants or traders from the Han and Kushan empires. The sheer variety of burials in a mass grave very near to "Ördek's Necropolis" struck Bergman. Mass Grave 1 had different coffins, better textiles, and different basket patterns, and its burials contained both silk from China and cotton from India (Bergman 1939: p. 117). Surprisingly, one piece of silk had both Chinese and Kharoṣṭhī writing on it. The Chinese read "Silk, ten" (*jin shi* 錦十) with the unit of length missing, while the Kharoṣṭhī said "The Sindhu teacher's roll, 40 [feet long]" a clear indication of both Chinese and Indian prior ownership (Bergman 1939: p. 127). Other graves excavated by later archeologists confirm the pattern first glimpsed by Bergman: as the people of Kroraina came into contact with Indians and Chinese in the third and fourth centuries, they placed more goods of Chinese or Indian origin in tombs whose design and intent resembled those of their ancestors.

Some of the most beautiful export textiles ever found in the region were found near the Niya site in a simple chest-shaped coffin of wooden planks. Like the corpses that Bergman saw at Ördek's Necropolis, the deceased were buried with weapons, utensils, and food for the afterlife. Because their clothing and head gear, made of Chinese silk, were far more elegant than that of the dead at Ördek's Necropolis, Wang Binghua, one of the archeologists who excavated the site in 1995, concluded that the deceased may have been the local nobility or even local ruler (Wang Binghua 1998: p. 179). A body bag for one of the deceased is sewn from a royal blue brocade with a woven floral pattern. Unobtrusively woven into the pattern are eleven Chinese characters. We have no way of knowing whether or not the local people could read these characters, but it seems likely that they understood the meaning: "Kings and lords should marry for one thousand autumns and ten thousand years; they shall have children and grandchildren" (王侯合婚千秋萬歲宜子孫 *wanghou behun qianqiu wansui yi zisun*).⁸ The very high quality of the weave suggests the textile was originally a gift from the Chinese court and almost certainly produced in royal workshops. It may have traded hands after it reached Central Asia.⁹ The medium is very different from the wooden phalluses found at Ördek's Necropolis, but the message — a post-mortem wish for the longevity of the family — is the same.

The Discovery of the Kharoṣṭhī Documents

Although these graves from Niya and Lop Nor show no Buddhist influences at all, a unique body of documents — from the same time period — illuminates

religious life in the period when the first Buddhists came to the area. In January 1901, Aurel Stein arrived at the deserted site that he called Old Niya, which lay to the north of modern Niya. On his first day, Ibrahim, one of his camel drivers, brought him two tablets with writing on them, which Stein identified as Kharoṣṭhī script. Stein immediately realized their importance as “records of everyday life” (Stein 1981: p. 369). Subsequent translation has shown the Kharoṣṭhī documents to be records used by officials, scribes, and local residents. As such, they are the only extant body of historical documents (as opposed to religious texts) written in an Indic language.

A modified form of the Aramaic script of the ancient Achaemenid empire (525–404 B.C.), Kharoṣṭhī script was written from right to left. From the third century B.C. to the third century A.D., Kharoṣṭhī was used to represent the sounds of Gāndhārī,¹⁰ the regional language of Gandhāra, an area that straddled modern Afghanistan and Pakistan. Richard Salomon sees the language of the Niya documents as a “separate dialect of Gāndhārī used far beyond its native region” (Salomon 1999: pp. 3–5).¹¹

Stein hired Ibrahim to take him to the place where the tablets had been found. On January 28, they arrived at the actual house, which Stein numbered N. 1, meaning Niya house # 1. (The rooms inside were also numbered, so that a document found in the first room of the house was labelled N. I. i. The ever-precise Stein also assigned lower-case letters to locations within rooms.) Ibrahim showed him the place he had found the documents the year before, “lying in horizontal rows, possibly with some sort of arrangement” (Stein 1981: p. 316). As was the practice of the time, Stein paid his workers by the find — a practice that often discouraged careful excavation. Because Ibrahim had destroyed the original context of the wooden tablets during his frantic search for antiquities, Stein could only try to reconstruct it on the basis of the disarray in front of him. The wooden slips Stein found at Niya included both randomly preserved materials as well as small, personal archives of individual administrators. Five years later, when Stein returned to the site for the second time, he found a group of documents that had been deliberately placed in a hole underground marked so that their owner could find them should he ever return (Stein 1964: p. 91).¹²

Stein would subsequently find the same distinct type of wooden document in many different sites throughout the Kroraina kingdom: sealed wedge-shaped tablets that consisted of two pieces of wood cut to exactly the same size, ranging from 18–38 centimeters (7–15 inches) long and 3–6 centimeters (1.125 to 2.5 inches) wide, sketched in Stein 1981: p. 349). A hole for a cord was drilled through the two pieces of wood and then exterior grooves were cut through for

the cord. After the cord had been wrapped around the two tablets, it was sealed with clay on the top to prevent anyone from opening them. Stein was particularly struck by the very Western motifs he found on the seals at Niya, including Greek gods like Pallas Athena, Eros, and Heracles (Stein 1964).

As he proceeded to decipher the script, Stein realized that the outside tablet served as a kind of envelope with the name of the recipient on it. On the inside were the contents of the documents, which turned out to be government orders. Not all these documents were legible, but those that were almost always began with the same opening formula:

To be given to the cozbo Tamjaka.

His majesty the king writes, he instructs the cozbo Tamjaka as follows:¹³

These official orders came from the king of Kroraina (who was based in Loulan) to the local official, or cozbo, in Caḍ'ota. Caḍ'ota was the ancient name for the site Stein called Old Niya, which lay some fifty miles in the desert north of today's Minfeng. The cozbo, who figures in so many of the documents, was an administrator who heard disputes and oversaw the collection of taxes; he may have had military duties as well.¹⁴ These orders concern a wide range of matters including stolen cows, the sale of slaves, the movements and costs of supplying emissaries sent by the king, adoption disputes, and fights among the local residents. Many of the king's orders contain the same sentence: “When this sealed wedge-tablet reaches you, you must look carefully into the matter” (Burrow 1940: Document #4), which suggests that individuals could bring problems to the attention of the central authorities, who then instructed local officials to follow up on them. These orders make it possible to sketch the economy of Kroraina, which had a largely barter system of exchange. Local people grew grain and herded horses, cows, and camels; they paid taxes in kind, whether in rugs, clothing, or wine (Atwood 1991: pp. 167–169). The documents describe a hierarchical society of free-born, serfs, and slaves, with some movement among these categories (Atwood 1991: pp. 175–182).

By piecing together information from the official histories of China and from the excavated documents, historians have been able to sketch the structure of the kingdom. During the third and fourth centuries the kingdom contained at least five subdivisions (*rāya*, literally “kingdom”): the capital at Kroraina (modern Loulan), Calmadāna (modern Qiemo), Sāca (modern Āndirlānggār, previously Endere and Xiaowan 小宛), Niya (modern Minfeng or Niya), and Caḍ'ota (Jingjue 精絕, north of Minfeng), the source of almost all the surviving documents (Atwood 1991: p. 166).

The only figures we have for the population of Kroraina come from a census conducted by the Chinese in 60 B.C., when the kingdom had only three subdivisions.¹⁵

| Kingdom | Households | Soldiers | Population |
|------------------|------------|----------|------------|
| Kroraina | 1570 | 2912 | 17012 |
| Cherchen (Qiemo) | 230 | 320 | 1930 |
| Sāca | 150 | 200 | 1250 |
| Caḍ'ota | 480 | 500 | 3860 |

Of course, these figures predate the time of the documents by more than three hundred years, and they seem high. At Caḍ'ota archeologists have excavated some one hundred dwellings dating to the Han dynasty and fifty from the third and fourth centuries; at least one scholar, Wang Binghua, doubts that the population of Caḍ'ota could have reached 480 households in the first century B.C. (Wang Binghua 1998: p. 178). There are no population figures for the period of the documents, the third and fourth centuries.

During this first expedition Stein found what John Brough later called the “king-pin of the evidence for dating the Kharoṣṭhī documents” in a refuse pit (Brough 1965: p. 599). The pit contained “broken pottery, pieces of matting and wood, straw, rags of felt and a variety of woven materials, pieces of leather, and other promiscuous rubbish” (Stein 1981: pp. 340–341). Intermingled with Kharoṣṭhī materials were some fifty wooden slips with Chinese that provided the crucial clue for dating the site. John Brough suggested that the seventeenth year of King Amḡoka's reign corresponded to 263, when the Jin emperor gave him the title *shizhong* 侍中 (written as *jiṭumgha* in Kharoṣṭhī, probably an Iranian term) (Brough 1965: pp. 599–601).¹⁶ At that time the kingdom of Kroraina became a “client kingdom of the Jin 晉 dynasty” (Atwood 1991: p. 191), whose capital was at Luoyang, Henan. Once the seventeenth year of King Amḡoka's reign was determined, the other Kharoṣṭhī documents could be assigned dates. Brough's chronology has since been adjusted slightly. Most recently, Professor Lin Meicun of the Archeology Department of Peking University has suggested 210 as the year of the earliest document and 359 as the year of the latest.¹⁷

The Presence of Other Peoples in the Kroraina Kingdom

A mere two months after Stein's first visit to Niya, in March of 1901, Sven Hedin and his men also found some Kharoṣṭhī documents — but at the Loulan site at the other end of the kingdom. Loulan, the capital of the kingdom, was

located on the northern shore of Lop Nor. Stein's 1906 discovery of nearly fifty more Kharoṣṭhī documents at Loulan (Burrow 1940: #666–707, 752–757) conclusively demonstrated that the two sites — Niya and Loulan — lay at the eastern and western edges of the ancient kingdom of Kroraina. While documents in both Chinese and Kharoṣṭhī were found at both Niya and Loulan, Kharoṣṭhī documents were more frequent at Niya, and Chinese documents formed the majority at Loulan.

The Chinese materials excavated by Hedin and Stein were directly related to the activities of the Chinese troops stationed in Loulan. The materials include letters (including the often-translated and very moving letter home from a Chinese soldier who worries that his younger siblings do not have enough to eat and sends them food), descriptions of enemy troop movements and requests for reinforcements, accounts of dispensed grain and requisitioned carts. They suggest that the Chinese soldiers, along with their wives and children, comprised a world unto themselves, who may have supplemented their numbers by hiring local residents.¹⁸

This impression that the Chinese presence was limited to the military, based largely around Loulan, is confirmed by the Kharoṣṭhī documents, in which the Chinese appear in Caḍ'ota only rarely, as merchants and as landowners (Atwood 1991: pp. 190–191). When a dispute arose about silk, Caḍ'ota officials postponed hearing it until they could consult Chinese merchants in this area of their expertise: “When the merchants arrive from China, the debt of silk is to be investigated” (Burrow 1940: #35). Clearly, these Chinese merchants did not live in Caḍ'ota year-round but visited only on an occasional basis. This handful of references sheds no light on the religious practices of the Chinese at the time: the word for “Buddha” *foṭu* 佛圖 appears only once in the Chinese documents,¹⁹ alas on a scrap with only four characters whose meaning cannot be made out.

In addition to the Chinese, other social groups occasionally appear in the documents. A small number of Khotanese, whose home was the near-by kingdom of Khotan, some 150 miles to the west, appear as fugitives or slaves. A contract for the sale of a camel is even in the Khotanese language (Burrow 1940: #661). In addition, the Kharoṣṭhī documents refer to “people of the mountains,” who make their living by mining gold, and who sometimes have disputes with the people of Caḍ'ota: “Also the people of Caḍ'ota are to be prevented from doing injustice to the people of the mountains” (Burrow 1940: #386). The official writing this report offers no further details about the people of the mountains.

These different documents from the Niya site describe a mixed population of indigenous peoples, Khotanese, and the people of the mountains, along

with occasional Chinese visitors — all cohabiting in a settlement of only several hundred households. A number of the Niya documents mention battles — with Khotan, the Sāca, and the Supis — and it seems likely that the residents may have fled Cad'ota because of these attacks.²⁰

The Languages of the Niya Documents and What They Reveal about the Political History of the Kroraina Kingdom

The documents found at Niya and Loulan defied — and continue to defy — easy explanation. The coexistence of materials in Chinese and Kharoṣṭhī underlines the unusual location of the kingdom of Shanshan, which lay between two great empires: the Kushan and Han empires, who along with the Roman empire, ruled the landmass of Eurasia between the second century B.C. and the second century A.D.

Much of what we know about chronology and even geographic range of the Kushans is derived from incomplete and extremely partial Chinese records that report that the original Yuezhi homeland was near Dunhuang, Gansu, to the east of the Tarim Basin. Around 175 B.C., the rise of the Xiongnu confederation forced them to leave this homeland: the majority, the Greater Yuezhi, moved to northwest India, while a smaller group, the Lesser Yuezhi settled among the Qiang people in the Nanshan region north of the Kunlun mountains. After the migration, the Greater Yuezhi adopted Bactrian, an Iranian language which they wrote down using Greek letters, introduced by the troops of Alexander of Macedon. The Kushans were one of five branches of a large federation under the Greater Yuezhi, and sometime around 100 B.C., when the Kushan chieftain defeated the four other chieftains, the polity became known as the Kushan state.²¹

Scholars who have studied the Kharoṣṭhī documents can be divided, quite simply, into two groups: those seeing the use of Kharoṣṭhī as evidence of earlier, direct rule by the Kushans in the Tarim basin, and those who do not. Those favoring direct Kushan rule include some of the most formidable scholars in the field: Aurel Stein,²² John Brough (1965: p. 597), E. G. Pulleyblank (1968: pp. 247–258), and, most recently, Douglas Hitch (1988: pp. 170–192). Whether or not one sees direct Kushan rule in the Tarim Basin hinges on one's understanding of “influence,” as John Brough presciently pointed out in 1965. He then explained why he could not imagine cultural influence of this magnitude occurring without direct political control.

Still, the research done since 1965 points to a different conclusion.²³ We can account for the presence of documents written in Kharoṣṭhī without having to posit direct Kushan rule over the Tarim Basin in either the first or second centuries A.D. The political upheavals of the second and third centuries A.D. prompted a wave of migration from the Kushan empire to the Tarim Basin, as indicated in Buddhist sources:

Zhi Qian is also called Gongming. He came from the Great Yuezhi Kingdom (viz. the Kushān empire). Led by his grandfather Fadu, hundreds of his countrymen immigrated into China during the reign of Emperor Ling Di [c. A.D. 168–189] and Fadu was offered an official post...²⁴

Zhi was a surname assigned to people from both Bactria, the so-called Greater Yuezhi, and from the Kroraina kingdom, the Lesser Yuezhi.

Although no documents in the language of the original residents of Kroraina survive, about 1,000 proper names and 150 words from another language appear as transcribed into Kharoṣṭhī. Again, we are in debt to T. Burrow, who lists the different linguistic features of these names and concludes:

We may conclude then tentatively that the population of the Shan-Shan kingdom in the third century A.D. were a branch of the Tokharians probably speaking a different dialect from the two which are preserved for us in much later documents from Kucā and Karasar. If this is so it takes back the history of the Tokharian language 500 years earlier than the existing texts.

The original residents of the Kroraina kingdom may, then, have been speakers of the Indo-European language, Tokharian, who lived in the southern Taklamakan Desert before moving north to Kizil, where we find documents written in Tokharian in the sixth and seventh centuries (Burrow 1935b: p. 667–675, citation on p. 675). If the local people of Kroraina were Tokharian and had no alphabet of their own, they may have adopted Kharoṣṭhī script simply because of its convenience.

Local Religion at Niya

While on his first trip to Niya in 1901, Stein unearthed one of the most informative documents about local religious practices.²⁵ Ly'ipeya bears the title of finance officer (ṣoṭhamgo), but he is one of six men Atwood classes as a “great governor,” who had the right to make legal decisions, who could use their seals without consulting a higher authority, and to whom the king wrote

directly (Atwood 1991: p. 195). After mentioning several other matters in a letter, Ly'ipeya writes:

Also there has been a sacrifice of a cow at the bridge to the god Bhatro.

The *ari* Kungeya says: "I saw a dream: that sacrifice of a cow at the bridge was not accepted by the god." So the *ari* Kungeya says.

In *nanamciya* Opimta's cow enclosure there is a *vito* cow. He asks for that *vito* cow to make a sacrifice to the god Bhatro; so says the *ari* Kungeya.

This sacrifice is to be made at the farm of the *ekhara* Motgeya. Let no slackness be allowed in the matter of this cow. The *tasuca* Lyimsu is to be quickly sent; along with the *ari* Calamma he will bring the cow. It is not to be withheld. (Burrow 1940: #157)

Although the meaning of several terms (including *ari*²⁶ and *vito*) is unknown, and the overall religious context is far from clear, this document shows that the local people made sacrifices to deities like the god Bhatro, and that they believed the gods did not always accept their offerings. Clearly officials were involved, and they seem to have been responsible for requisitioning the animals to be sacrificed.

A complaint lodged by the same Ly'ipeya includes a mention of witches or holy women.²⁷ After the initial opening formula, one document read:

Ly'ipeya reports that they took out three witch-women. They killed only the woman belonging to him, the remaining women they released. About this matter you received a command from Apg'eya that recompense was to be made to Ly'ipeya for this woman. When this sealed wedge-tablet reaches you, you must look carefully into the matter, ... you must inquire, and according as you the cozbo received oral instructions here at the king's court, in such manner recompense must be made to Ly'ipeya for this woman. (Burrow 1940: Document #63)

Another tablet from the same group provides some clarification of what happened. Apparently government officials killed a woman and confiscated her property on the grounds that she was a witch, and the high official Ly'ipeya, who had owned the dead woman, demanded compensation for a mistaken arrest (Burrow 1940: #58). A different document, written on leather but also found at Niya, confirms that government officials did indeed carry out the "punishment and restraining" of witches, but offers no further details (Burrow 1940: #248).

The Buddhists of the Kroraina Kingdom

The Kharoṣṭhī documents from Caḍ'ota and Loulan use several familiar terms: *śramaṇa* ("monk"), *śrāmaṇera* ("novice in the Buddhist order"), and *bhikṣu saṃgha* ("assembly of monks") for members of the Buddhist community.²⁸ The Niya Buddhist clergy, however, do not behave like monks.²⁹ The clearest departure from Buddhist monastic rules was, of course, marriage and the failure to keep a vow of celibacy. Chinese history offers some well-known examples of non-celibate monks. Most famously, Kumārajīva mated with the ten concubines provided by the ruler of the later Qin, Yao Xing (r. 394–416), and fathered several sons (Kieschnick 1997: pp. 19–20; Zürcher 2002; *Chu sanzang ji ji* 14: 103c). But anti-Buddhist authors seized on examples of monks with wives and children, and Kumārajīva's followers were soundly criticized for their libertine ways.³⁰

At Niya, in contrast, it was taken as a matter of course — at least by the officials drafting the surviving documents — that members of the Buddhist clergy had wives and children. In one case a *śramaṇa* married his daughter to another *śramaṇa*, who in turn married his daughter to a third *śramaṇa*: "The *śramaṇa* Śariputra gave this daughter to the *śramaṇa* Budhavama as his wife in lawful marriage. The daughter of that woman Śirsateyae, Puṃṇavatiyae by name, was given as wife to the *śramaṇa* Jivalo Aṭhama" (Burrow 1940: #418). In another case a *śramaṇa* married a woman without making the necessary bride payments; the investigating official was asked to check "if she was taken in lawful wedlock," so that he could determine whether her children were her legal heirs (Burrow 1940: #474).

One *śramaṇa* gave up his child for adoption, charged a fee (as was common at the time), and then took the child back. They made loans and they borrowed corn and wine from others. They mortgaged, bought, and sold land. Some owned and traded slaves. They could be slaves as well; in one document someone claims to have purchased a one-fourth share of a slave who is a *śramaṇa*.³¹ In short, they acted in many ways like ordinary householders who participated in all aspects of the local economy.³²

What distinguished these early Buddhists from the other residents of Caḍ'ota? The rules for the conduct of the Buddhist order as handed down by the king provide some guidance:

Regulations for the community of monks [*bhikṣu saṃgha* ...] to be carefully kept.

This seal [...]

In the tenth year of his majesty, the great king, Jīṭugha Mahagiri, son of heaven,

in the 12th month, 10th day [...] the community of monks in the capital laid down regulations for the community of monks in Caḍ'ota. It is heard that the novices do not pay attention to an elder, they disobey the old monks. Concerning this these regulations have been laid down by his majesty in front of the order of monks. The elders Śilaprabha and Puṃṅasena (are to be) in charge of the monastery (*viharavāla*). They have to administer all the activities of the community. (Disputes) are to be examined in accordance with the law. All the activities of the community of monks are to be administered by them [...] so that the community of monks shall be content in mind (*atanamna*). Whichever monk does not partake in the activities of the community of monks shall pay a fine of one roll of silk. Whichever monk does not take part in the posatha ceremony, his penalty is (a fine of) one roll of silk. Whichever monk at the invitations to the posatha ceremony enters in householder's dress, shall pay a fine of one roll of silk. Whichever monk strikes another monk, (in the case of) a light (blow the fine is) five rolls of silk, (in the case of) a moderate (blow) ten rolls of silk, (in the case of) an excessive (blow) fifteen rolls of silk. Whichever householder to a monk [...] (Burrow 1940: #489, found at N. xxiii).

The beginning of this document explains that "his majesty," the ruler of the Shanshan kingdom in Loulan, gave these orders to the "community of monks in the capital," who then passed them on to the "community of monks in Caḍ'ota." The date falls in the middle of the timespan covered by the Kharoṣṭhī documents, in approximately A.D. 290.³³ Within the community of monks are elders (*vrddha*) and novices (*navaka*), some of whom may live together in a monastery (*viharavāla*). Significantly, the community has the right to hear and adjudicate its own disputes.

This document then lists four possible infractions: not participating in the activities of the community, not attending the posatha ceremony (Skt. uposatha, a twice-monthly meeting held at every new and full moon at which Buddhist teachings were explained), wearing "householder's dress" to the uposatha ceremony, and striking another member of the community. All fines are to be paid in silk, an expensive commodity in the local economy. The entire corpus of Niya documents contains only one mention of distinctive clothing for the Buddhist clergy: "The monk [*śramaṇa*] Ayila informs us that a woman called Cadisaae burnt his yellow robe" (Burrow 1940: #606), a dispute, interestingly, that he took to the secular authorities, probably because it involved a woman outside the community. Apparently these early Buddhist clergy members did not wear special clothing except when attending specific ceremonies. The documents do not state whether or not the *śramaṇa* had received the tonsure. Given what the other documents reveal about the Niya Buddhist clergy, the

list of infractions seems surprisingly short: the text does not mention either failure to keep a celibate lifestyle or the ownership of property, both of which were common at Niya.

Although the regulations set out by the king are not addressed to *śramaṇa*, other documents confirm the membership of *śramaṇa* in the assembly of monks, or bhikṣu saṃgha, and testify to the separate judicial authority of the Buddhists. In a complicated dispute between two *śramaṇa*, involving the loan of a slave to replace the labor of a third, absent *śramaṇa*, "the community of monks in Caḍ'ota examined the dispute and decided it." This document suggests that such disputes could be appealed to the secular authorities because it begins with a list of officials, including a *cozbo*, who "examined the dispute" (Burrow 1940: #506). In addition, the courts of the Buddhists met regularly to oversee routine transactions. When the two sons of a *śramaṇa* sold a vineyard and another plot of land, they had a contract drafted by a scribe who explained, "This was written in the presence of the bhikṣu saṃgha by me the scribe ..." (Burrow 1940: #419). In another instance, the "community of monks at Caḍ'ota" served as one of several witnesses to sale of land by a Buddhist, sure evidence that the bhikṣu saṃgha did indeed meet as a body (Burrow 1940: #582).

Buddhists also had access to non-Buddhist courts, called the "king's court" in the documents: several disputes involving *śramaṇa* were heard outside Buddhist courts, probably because one of the parties was a lay person.³⁴ To cite just one instance, the secular authorities heard a case in which they supported an agreement reached out of court. One *śramaṇa* borrowed corn and wine from one person, did not pay it back, and then the *śramaṇa*'s slave stole silk, rope, felt garments, and other items from the original lender; the thief and the victim "came to an agreement" because the complainant was "desirous of acquiring merit together with the monk [*śramaṇa*] Anaṃdasena." *Śramaṇa* could also serve as witnesses to legal transactions under the jurisdiction of the secular authorities, and, on at least two occasions they served as scribes in the "king's court."³⁵

Because the Buddhist order could receive donations, it must have had some kind of corporate identity. In one interesting case, a "secret agent" (of an unspecified type) and another man gave a Khotanese man, presumably enslaved, to the "society of monks at Caḍ'ota." One document says "in the monastery," and then lists names followed by amounts of grain, presumably donations to the order. The *cozbo* Larsu once bought "food for the order"; in another, "Corn there has been given by me to the community of monks." Some of the contributions were to individuals. In one instance, an "elder" collected corn

that he then gave to a “monk,” and the “head of the saṃgha” once received the price of a cow as a donation.³⁶ Were these contributions for use within a monastery? or, as in India, did individuals accept contributions for use by Buddhists within their private houses (Schopen 1996)?

Buddhist Places of Worship

Although many different excavators have worked at the Niya site, none has found any structure that resembles a monastery. A brick stūpa over six meters tall dominated the skyline of the site in Aurel Stein’s day and does so even today. The core must have contained some kind of relic, long since removed by robbers. The only large structure at the site, it convinced Stein of the importance of Buddhism at Niya (Rhie 1999: pp. 359–360). Perhaps the greatest discovery of the Sino-Japanese expedition was a square Buddhist monument two meters square, with a passageway around it, 1.1–1.4 meters across, that devotees could use for circumambulation (Fig. 3). On the outer walls survived one painting of an individual Buddha, with an Indian-style narrow face and elongated ears (Fig. 4). Excavators also identified four wooden statues as Buddhist.³⁷ Like Niya, Loulan had several stūpa, but no structure resembling a monastery (Rhie 1999: pp. 400–402).

Wang Binghua, the archeologist with the greatest experience excavating in Xinjiang, suspects that a monastery may lie under the sands nearby, but the Sino-Japanese expedition was unable to find it (Wang Binghua 1998: p. 176). It is equally possible, of course, that there was no monastery per se at Niya — or that the place where certain local Buddhists lived looked just like a house, and not a monastery.³⁸

Two ruins could well have been the residences of local Buddhists: ruin N. xxiii, where Stein found the royal order recognizing the assembly of Buddhists (quoted above), and ruin N. xxiv, which produced the hidden archive of nearly one hundred documents (numbered 507–595 in Burrow’s translation). The building had ten rooms (illustrated in Stein’s drawing), one of which was twenty-five by nineteen feet. Accordingly, Stein wondered if “the house must have been that of a well-to-do person” (Stein 1921: p. 226). In one passageway he found “an oblong board, N. xxiv. vi. I, nearly three feet in length ... on both sides of which was writing by different hands suggestive of drafts or office memoranda.” At three feet, or nearly one meter, this particular board was much longer than the other documents Stein uncovered in Rustam’s archive. The wooden board (renumbered #511 in Burrow’s translation) uses a hybrid Sanskrit to urge both members of the Buddhist community and their patrons

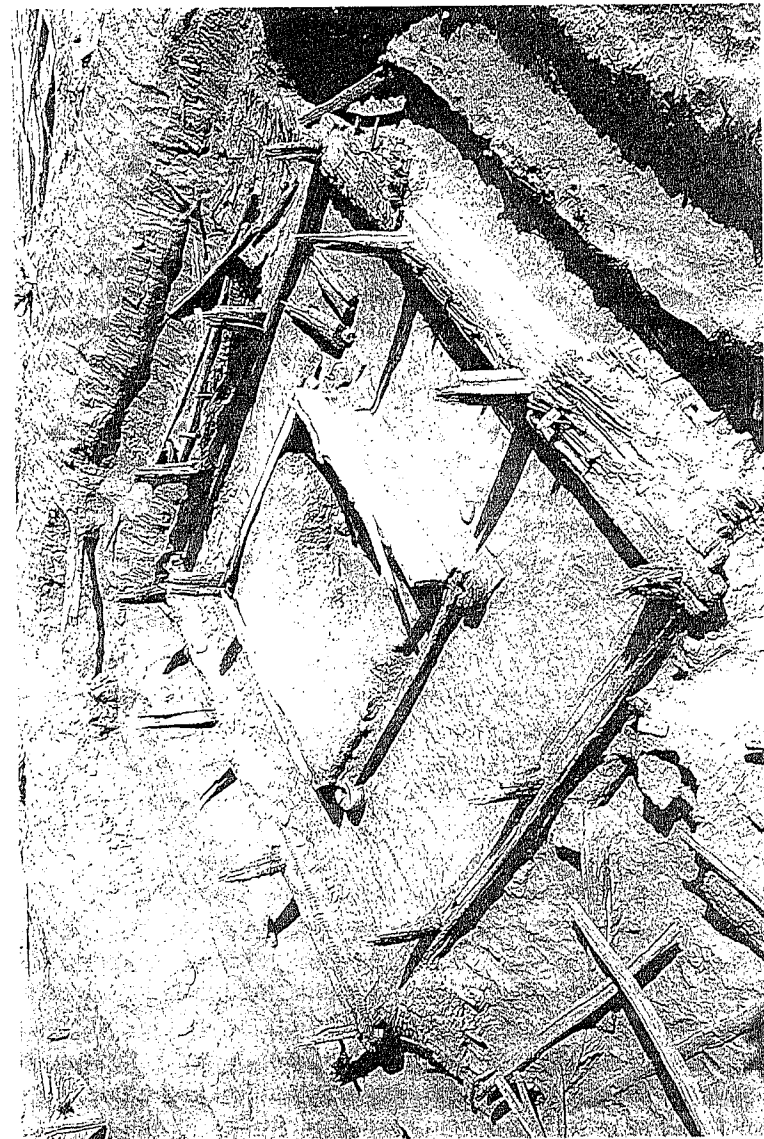


Fig. 3

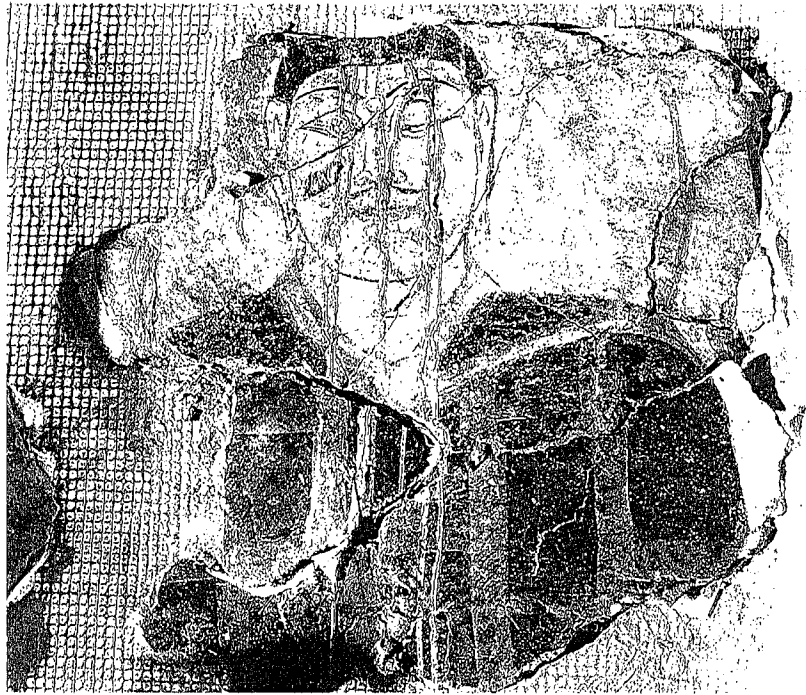


Fig. 4

to bathe the image of the Gaṇottama, the most excellent of teachers, that is, the Buddha.³⁹

All the Sanskrit texts found at Niya were buried in the hidden archive in N.xxiv. They include a fragment of an arapacana syllabary, possibly a mnemonic device for remembering certain teachings (#512),⁴⁰ a section of the great epic *Mahābhārata* (#523), and a *prātimokṣa* text (#510), to be discussed below. The use of Sanskrit suggests authorship by someone who had come from India — and not a local.

The long wooden plaque promises many benefits to those who follow its elaborate instructions:

Whoever performs the bathing of the Gaṇottama [most excellent of teachers] becomes pure in the eyes, bright, pure in the limbs, tender and of good complexion.

Whoever performs the bathing of the Gaṇottama does not have boils and pimples, elephantiasis, (?), or the itch. Pure, he acquires a sweet-smelling body.

Whoever performs the bathing of the Gaṇottama becomes big-eyed and bright, golden-limbed and of pleasing aspect, and sets off (?).

A gift in this matter is the best, the most excellent of gifts. In the works connected with baths it is an example of action. Let there be honour to the Jinās, the Tathagathas who take delight in the good of beings, and vision of supreme truth.

Let there also be honour to those who exist in themselves, the *pratyekabuddhas* who have sought solitude, who take delight alone in the mountain caves, devoted to their own aims, delighted in continence and virtue.

Also let the disciples, those dear to the Jina who have passed by in this interval of time, be honoured, of whom he from the Koḍ'inya family was first and Subhadra the last.

Let those (who make) gifts on this point enjoy (the reward even) when the chief king of Gaṇas, the Elders, the middle, and younger monks have not arrived, and when they have arrived, let them be perpetually enlightened.

May the monks who are assembled in this gathering, who bathe in the *jaṃḍāka*-baths and honour and love their teachers, be pure in their current duties, with minds free from hatred (or fault).

In this (matter of) baths let both he who provides material for removing dirt, he who provides oil for rubbing, and he who provides a dry bath, be free from fault and impurity.

I am devoted to the Vihāra, to the law of the Tathāgata and his excellent virtue: as a result of removing dirt, let their minds be calm, and let them undertake the lawful protection of men.

All creatures that exist from the bottom of Hell up to the summit of being, on entering the doctrine of the Tathāgatas, make an end of birth and death.

Let there always be good begging and plenty: let Indra the lord of sacrifice increase; let the crops come up and the king (go forth) to victory. May he long abide in the law of the Blessed One.

The first four sections proclaim the benefits of bathing an image, and subsequent paragraphs make similar promises to donors who provide bathing materials.⁴¹ The text also recognizes *pratyekabuddhas*, those precursors of Buddhism who sought salvation on their own. The speaker states his devotion to the *vihāra*, or monastery, and mentions the law of the Tathāgata, but does not say more.

Notice that he explains that people who join the Buddhists can escape the cycle of birth and rebirth.

The Buddhist Complex at Miran

In only one place in the kingdom of Kroraina did Stein find a structure large enough to be a monastery: Miran, which lay on the eastern edge of the kingdom, midway between Loulan and Niya. Uniquely, it was a large Buddhist complex consisting of fifteen different structures, one of which, M2, was 14 meters long and 11 meters wide. Along one side were large niches that had held Buddhist images, whose giant heads had since fallen to the ground. The remaining bases of these images were two meters across. Because, unlike either Niya or Loulan, Miran did not contain ordinary dwellings, it may have been a religious center that devotees visited only seasonally. Unusual wall paintings in two non-monastic structures at Miran particularly intrigued Stein. The first, M3, was "square outside but circular within. It had once carried a dome and enclosed a small stupa." A circular path led devotees around the central stupa at the M3 Buddhist ruin. The rubble under the fallen roof contained a votive offering of an intact cotton picture with a sacred lake and flowers made from cotton and silk attached to it (Fig. 5). Also in the rubble were cloth offerings with Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions expressing the wishes of their donors for the health and well-being of their family members (Boyer 1911). On the basis of the Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions, Stein concluded that the first occupation of the Miran site dated to the third and fourth centuries, to the same time period as when Kharoṣṭhī was in use at Niya. Stein also found a palm-leaf manuscript written in Brāhmī script, which came into use in Central Asia around A.D. 400. He concluded that the use of the site continued into the late fourth and early fifth centuries (Stein 1980: pp. 485–492).

On the lower sections of the outer walls of the passageway, Stein discovered one of the most startling artistic remains of his career: twenty-four winged angels with distinctly Western features (Fig. 6). These angels formed the lowest tier of illustrations, and the collapsed upper tier was so damaged that it was hard for Stein to make out more than one wall painting of the Buddha standing with six disciples. He concluded that the original paintings must have shown successive scenes from the life of the Buddha: this narrative pictorial program differed considerably from the wall paintings of individual Buddhas found at Niya.

Only sixty meters from this building Stein unearthed another building, M5, with a rotunda over a stupa and a passage with wall paintings around it



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

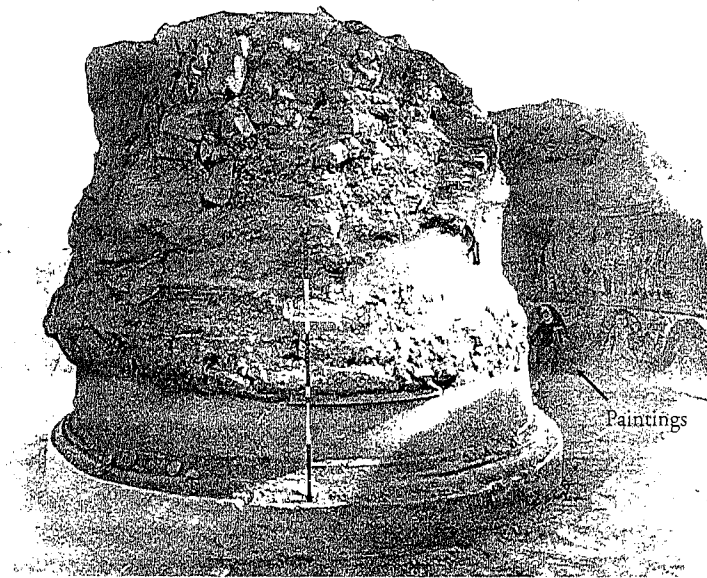


Fig. 7

(Fig. 7). On the northern side of this building were paintings and statues of men and women in whose features Stein detected both Greek and Oriental elements. “With that cycle of youthful figures before me, I might well have felt tempted to believe myself rather among the ruins of some villa in Syria or some other Eastern province of the Roman Empire than among those of a Buddhist sanctuary on the very confines of China” (Stein 1964: p. 110). When Stein looked at the paintings on the southern end of the building, he saw a “procession representing the Jataka legend of Prince Vessantara,” one of the Buddha’s previous incarnations (Fig. 8). To Stein’s delight these paintings carried the signature of the artist, in Kharoṣṭhī script on the leg of a white elephant, and the amount he was paid (Stein 1921: I, p. 530). Because he was named Tita, Stein concluded he was an itinerant Roman artist named Titus. M3 and M5 both provided firm evidence of stūpa worship by devotees, who left different types of votive offerings in the pathways decorated with visually stunning wall paintings.

Buddhist Teachings at Niya

Although the physical remains unearthed at Niya provide some indication of Buddhist practice in the Kroraina kingdom, we know very little about the actual teachings of the Buddhists there. Certainly, distinct Buddhist schools existed in India even before the time of the Niya documents (Lamotte 1988: p. 517–548; Potter 1996). A second-century text, the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, spells out the disagreements between the Sarvāstivādin school and its rivals, and it subdivides the Sarvāstivādin school into regional groups, one based in Gandhāra. Each school had its own distinct ordination practices and *vinaya*, or regulations, which varied slightly from one school to the next (Bareau 1955: p. 133).

Scholars have long recognized that the Sarvāstivādins were very active in Central Asia (Sander 1991; Brough 1962). Richard Salomon has recently published a series of birchbark texts, probably from Afghanistan, found in jars labeled with the names of both the Sarvāstivādin and Dharmaguptaka schools. Photographs of the undisturbed pots show the texts in a jar labelled “in the possession of the Dharmaguptakas.” The texts date to the first half of the first century A.D. (Salomon 1999: p. 21). One document from Niya, 510 in Burrow’s numbering system, persuaded Franz Bernhard that members of the Dharmaguptaka school may also have been active at Niya.⁴² This document, also in Sanskrit, is a *prātimokṣa* text, or a *vinaya* text, instructing monks how to behave. The document contains the injunction, in Ron Davidson’s translation, “not to do bad but to do good, and to purify your mind, that is the teaching of

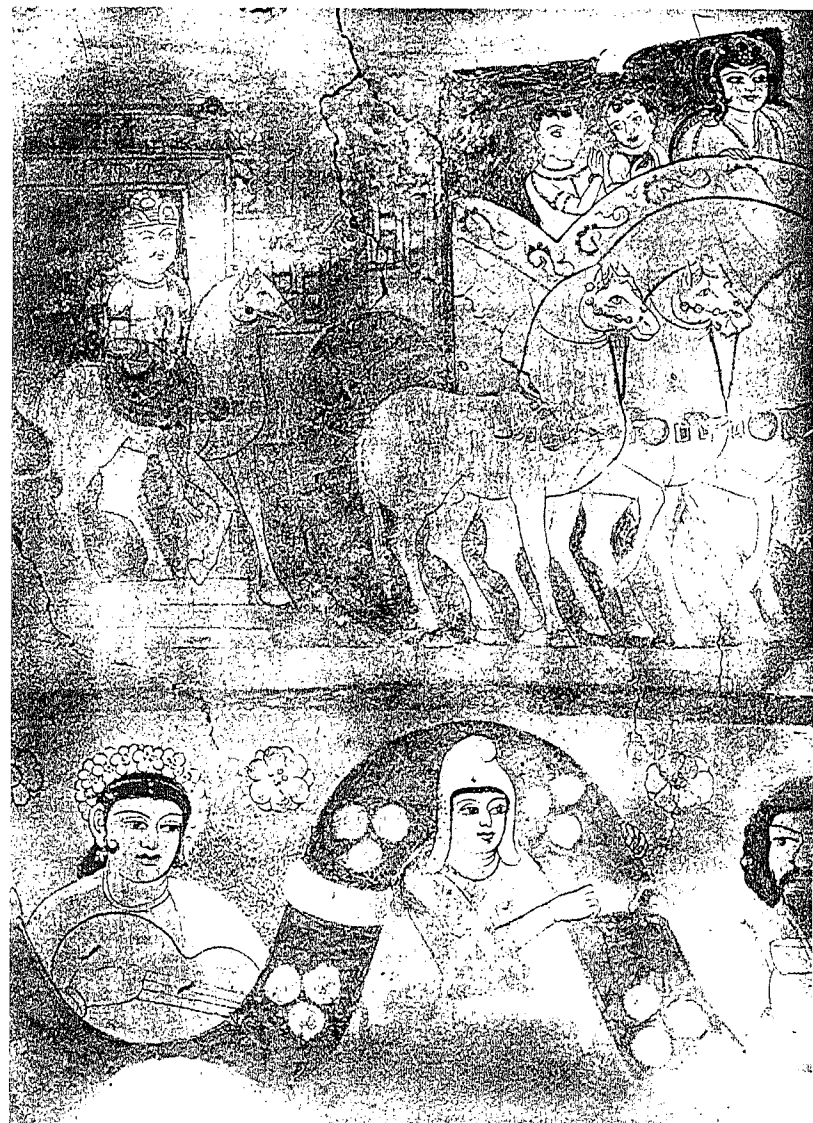


Fig. 8

the Buddhas.” Although this sentence does indeed occur in the Dharmaguptaka *prātimokṣa* text as later translated into Chinese (the only surviving version), it also occurs in the *vinaya* of other Buddhist schools.⁴³

One can hardly posit the existence of distinct Buddhist schools at Niya on the basis of this slim thread. Out of a corpus of nearly one thousand texts only one — possibly — points to a Buddhist school, and it does not even identify that school by name. The Kharoṣṭhī documents describe most of the Buddhist community as residing in their own households, with perhaps a small group living in a setting where Buddhist elders could discipline younger Buddhists. As we have seen, the texts refer over and over again to *śramaṇa*, *śramaṇera*, and the *bhikṣu saṃgha*, but they do not mention the Dharmaguptakas, the Sarvāstivādins, or any other Indian school.

In any case, the main differences among these schools would have been most evident at the time of ordination into a given monastic order. Given that the Niya Buddhists had no monasteries, and that the majority of Buddhists lived at home, it is “very hard to know what ‘ordination’ would have meant to such a community,” as Daniel Boucher explains.⁴⁴

Two documents may shed some light on the nature of Buddhist belief at Kroraina: significantly both are letters to governor generals (the highest of the positions denoted by the term *cozbo*). The first reads:

At the feet of the master, dear to men and gods, honoured by men and gods, the Bodhisattva in person, the great *cozbo* *Soṃcaka*, the *cozbo* *Yili* and *Namig'aae* pay respect and send the health of his divine body, much, immeasurable and such is our statement. (Burrow 1940: #288)

The body of the letter says the authors, themselves also *cozbo*, but presumably lower officials, are sending a *śramaṇera* to convey wishes of good health to the *cozbo*, to whom he will bring a present. The most notable phrase, of course, is “the Bodhisattva in person,” which suggests an acquaintance with Mahāyāna teachings. The second letter uses the term *Mahāyāna* itself, again as part of a list of praises to the *cozbo*:

At the feet of the great *cozbo* *Ṣamasena*, beloved of men and gods, honoured by men and gods, blessed with a good name, who set forth in the *Mahāyāna* who is of infinitely pleasing aspect, the *tasuca* [. . .] makes obeisance, and sends the health of his divine body, much, immeasurable. (Burrow 1940: #390)

While the use of these terms suggests that both terms (*bodhisattva* and *Mahāyāna*) were circulating in the community, neither of these documents

reveals more about Buddhist worship at Niya. These letters remind us, once again, that the Kharoṣṭhī documents reflect the vantage point of the local administrators, not Buddhist teachers. We cannot expect them to provide many insights into Buddhist doctrine. Their unique value lies, instead, in the extensive documentation they provide about the community at Niya.

The Decline of the Kroraina Kingdom

The historical record affords one more glimpse of the kingdom, a few generations after the last Kharoṣṭhī records. On his way to India, the Buddhist monk Faxian visited the kingdom in 400:

The land is uneven and infertile. The clothing of ordinary people is coarse and the same as in the land of the Han people. The only difference is in felt and coarse cloth. Their country's king worships the dharma. It is possible that there are over four thousand monks; all are adherents of Hīnayāna. The ordinary people of various countries and the *śramaṇa* all carry out the dharma of India, but to a greater or lesser degree.⁴⁵

His estimate of 4,000 monks seems too high, but it is interesting to note his impression that the Buddhists he saw were affiliated with the major schools of Indian Buddhism. It is not clear which settlements Faxian visited: by 400 the capital at Loulan was no longer occupied.

Not long after Faxian's visit the kingdom of Kroraina entered a period of decline, as evidenced by the abandonment of so many houses in the desert. The Northern Wei defeat of the kingdom in 444–445 accelerated the migration from the kingdom (Rhie 1999: pp. 354–355). The exact reasons for the kingdom's decline are not known and include warfare or the shift of the trade routes to the northern route. Kroraina, the source of our earliest documents along the Silk Road, then drops from the historical record for fifteen hundred years until Sven Hedin and Aurel Stein uncovered its ruins at the beginning of the twentieth century.

After a full century of studying the archeological record and the Chinese and Kharoṣṭhī documents, scholars have come to appreciate Niya as the best-documented Buddhist site along the silk route of the third and fourth centuries. When we think of early Buddhism, should we imagine the early Buddhist communities clustered around translators that are described in the Buddhist canon? Or should we see a community like that at Niya? There, Buddhists worshipped stūpas and bathed Buddhist images but recorded few, if any, texts. Few members of the Buddhist clergy renounced family life or moved into

monasteries. And most, cherishing hopes of perpetuating their families generations into the future, continued to bury their dead as they had before the arrival of migrants from northwest India.

Some of the earliest evidence about Buddhism from central China deserves reconsideration in light of the Niya materials. Consider the well-known example of the grain official Zhai Rong at the end of the second century in Pengcheng, Jiangsu. Zhai built a large building to house a Buddhist image covered with gold. Over five thousand people gathered to hear Buddhist sūtras recited and to witness the bathing of the Buddha's image. But nothing in the extant description points to a large, celibate clergy.⁴⁶ Similarly, the entry for Dharmakāla in *Biographies of Eminent Monks* describes the state of Buddhism in northern China around 250:

There were many monks who had not accepted the religious rules. They only distinguished themselves from the laity by the tonsure, and when performing [the ceremonies of] fasting and penitence they just imitated the [non-Buddhist] sacrificial rites.⁴⁷

The biographer explains that, under such circumstances, Dharmakāla opted to write a summary of the monastic regulations rather than to produce a full translation. The Niya materials provide an instructive parallel; in our mind's eye we can conceive of Buddhist clergy members living at home with their families and donning Buddhist vestments only at certain ritual occasions.

In short, let us revise our picture of early Chinese Buddhism to include both the Luoyang model of devotees working with translators as well as the Niya pattern of Buddhists who remain very much engaged in this world.

Notes

1. I could not have written this chapter without the help of my learned colleague and friend Stanley Insler, a linguist who enjoys an extraordinary command of the Iranian and Sanskrit materials. We have discussed many of the ideas in the chapter over countless lunches. Ronald M. Davidson, of Fairfield University, joined us for one particularly incisive lunch on December 7, 1999, and sent me several very helpful emails. The members of my Silk Road seminar (spring 1999 and spring 2001) prepared class handouts on the Niya documents: Brian Vivier's work on the Niya economy was particularly useful. Thanks to the following people for their comments and suggestions: Gérard Fussman, Robert Kritzer, James Robson, Angela Sheng, Kevin van Bladel, and the participants at the International Conference on Religion and Chinese Society: The Transformation of a Field and Its Implications for the Study of Chinese Culture, held at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in June

2000. Daniel Boucher of Cornell University met with me and sent countless follow-up email responses to my queries. Chapter 2 of Mariko Namba Walter's unpublished dissertation (Walter 1997) gave me a good start for this project. Professor Lin Meicun of Peking University generously donated copies of the Sino-Japanese excavation reports to Yale's library. Finally, let me thank Erik Zürcher who provided several important references in the copious and generous comments he gave on the next-to-last draft of this paper. Funding for the study was provided by the National Endowment of the Humanities and Yale University.
2. Buddhism did travel direct from India to China without first being established in Central Asia (Zürcher 1990; Hansen 1998).
 3. There is a good map in Brough 1965: p. 593.
 4. Boyer et al. 1920–1929, published 764 Kharoṣṭhī documents excavated by Stein (including six found by the American geographer Ellsworth Huntington); perhaps 100 more have been found since Stein's excavations (see Lin Meicun 1996 for a detailed bibliography). Conrady 1920 gives the text and German translation of 35 Chinese documents on paper and 120 wooden slips in Chinese, and two documents in Kharoṣṭhī, which Conrady left untranslated. The Chinese documents found by Stein have been published by Maspero 1953: #169–252; Chavannes 1913: pp. 721–950; and Stein 1981: pp. 537–542, in which Chavannes translates 57 documents.
 5. The Sino-Japanese excavation has published two reports: the first, Zhong Ri gongtong Niya yiji xueshu kaocha dui 1996, covers 1988–1993, while the years 1994–1997 are covered by the three volumes of the second report: Zhong Ri gongtong Niya yiji xueshu kaocha dui, 1999.
 6. Other expeditions to the Lop Nor included those led by the Russian Prejaval'sky in 1876–1877, the American geography professor from Yale, Ellsworth Huntington in 1906, Count Ōtani in 1908–1911, Aurel Stein in 1914, Huang Wenbi in 1930 and 1934, the Xinjiang Archeological Institute in 1959 and again in 1980–1981, and the joint Sino-Japanese team who made the NHK documentary with Kitarō's haunting score in 1988. Some of these expeditions are described in Mallory and Mair 2000. Wang Binghua 1998, provides a thorough survey of all excavations at Niya. A brief history of exploration in Japanese is also given in the catalog (no author) 1992 *Rōran ōkoku to yūkyū no bijo*.
 7. Stein thought ephedra was a stimulant, as does Elizabeth Wayland Barber (1999: pp. 161–167).
 8. Shown in the frontispiece of Zhong Ri gongtong Niya yiji xueshu kaocha dui 1999.
 9. Angela Sheng, personal communication, May 2000.
 10. Harold Bailey coined the name, "Gāndhārī," for the Middle Indo-Aryan language spoken by the people of Gandhāra (the modern area including Bamiyan, Gilgit, Peshawar, Kabul, and Taxila); the native speakers of this language did not use the word themselves: Bailey 1943–1946.

11. See also Salomon 1998: pp. 42–55, for a more detailed description of the Gāndhārī language, which earlier scholars sometimes called Northwestern Prakrit. Salomon maps the distribution of Kharoṣṭhī documents in Map 1 (p. 45) and summarizes the differences between the Gāndhārī of Gandhāra and Kroraina on p. 79. See also Fussman 1989: pp. 433–501, especially p. 439; and Daniel Boucher's review of Salomon 1999 (Boucher 2000).
12. Stein describes the find in more detail in Stein 1921: volume 1, pp. 225–234.
13. This quotation is from document #1 in Burrow 1940. Most scholars simply cite the number of the document as given by Burrow, who translates those documents whose text is long enough to be deciphered. Each document, including those not translated by Burrow, is transcribed in Boyer et al. 1920–1929. Boyer, Rapson, and Noble provide both the original identification number assigned by Stein as well as the new sequence numbers (1–764) used by Burrow; they also give the relevant page citation from Stein's site reports for the individual documents.
14. *Cozbo* is also spelled *cojhbō*. Because the Kroraina language does not have a letter for the Iranian "z," the Kharoṣṭhī script uses a "j" with a superscript (transcribed by the editors as jh) to write the letter. Almost certainly an Iranian word, cozbo is the most common official title appearing in the Niya documents with some forty different people bearing this title (Burrow 1937: pp. 90–91). Atwood 1991: pp. 195–196, provides a very useful list of the cozbo by name and the document numbers in which they appear. Atwood (p. 195) also points out that the title cozbo has three different meanings: "governor of a province," "a specific subordinate officer," or "a very vague sense meaning essentially official."
15. Table from Walter 1997: p. 58, citing *Hanshu* 96: 3875–3881.
16. Michael Loewe expressed some doubts about Brough's dating, which he thought too early, and proposed shifting all of Brough's dates some twenty years later, when the Jin dynasty was more powerful (Loewe 1969: pp. 91–103). John Brough refuted Loewe's suggestion by pointing out that the award of the title *shizhong* did not necessarily mean that the awarding dynasty had any genuine presence in Central Asia (Brough 1970: pp. 39–45). Since their debate, two Chinese scholars, Ma Yong and Lin Meicun, have argued, on the basis of seal evidence and several new documents, that Brough's dating was slightly early, and they prefer a date of 273 for the awarding of the *shizhong* title. See Rhie 1999: p. 352, n. 57, for a concise summary of the scholarly debate.
17. Although scholars concur that the documents date to the third and fourth centuries, the exact dating is still the subject of debate (Lin Meicun 1998: p. 198).
18. Brough discusses a Chinese document with the phrase "Yuezhi guo huzhi" 月支國胡支, which he understands as Zhi [Missing first-name] "of the Yuezhi country," which makes him think they are local "mercenary soldiers hired by the Chinese." He makes the interesting suggestion that the label *Yuezhi*, sometimes abbreviated as *Zhi*, refers to the local residents, and not to the people of Bactria (Brough 1965: p. 605).

19. #28 on paper, Conrady 1920. James Robson points out that *foṭu* can, by extension, take on the meaning of *stūpa*, where the departed but still present Buddha is located.
20. Burrow 1940: #86 (Khotan), #123 (Sāca), #351 (Supis).
21. We would do well to remember John Brough's caution: "We should at least be ready to admit that the traditional story may, to a greater or lesser extent, be a theoretical construct, designed to explain the continuing presence of Yüeh-chih (distinguished as 'Lesser Yüeh-chih') in regions to the east of the Pamir" (Brough 1965: p. 585). The relevant Chinese passages appear in *Shiji* 123: 3157–3158; *Hou Hanshu* 88: 2921 (Zhonghua shuju edition). Several generations ago, two great Japanese scholars raised doubts about these passages: Kuwabara Jitsuzō 1968; Haneda Toru 1957. For a succinct discussion of the complex literature about the Yuezhi, see Boucher 1996.
22. Stein leaned toward this view but expressed some reservations (Stein 1921: I, p. 243).
23. In 1967, John Rosenfield observed, "The paucity of Kushan coins in the area [of the Tarim Basin] and the absence of other substantial evidence, literary or archeological, make it likely that Kushan interests were strategic or commercial and that they did not rule directly over much of the region for any considerable time" (Rosenfield 1967: p. 43).
24. Lin Meicun 1996: p. 189, citing *Chu sanzang ji ji* biography of Zhi Qian (T 55, #2145, juan 13, 97b)
25. Three documents (#109, 157, 195) mention sacrifices but provide no further information (Atwood 1991: p. 173, n. 9).
26. If *ari* is the same as Sanskrit *ārya*, it means "sir" (Burrow 1937: p. 76).
27. T. Burrow explains his reading of *khakorna stri* as "witch" in Burrow 1935a.
28. I give the standard Sanskrit spellings for these terms, which are spelled in several different ways in the Niya documents. Those who are interested can check the transcriptions in Boyer et al. 1920–1929. Burrow often includes the transcription in Burrow 1940.
29. Agrawala 1954: pp. 173–181. This useful topical survey of the relevant references concludes, "In short their activities were contrary to what Lord Buddha had preached and lived for."
30. Hao Chunwen 郝春文 has recently demonstrated that, in the ninth and tenth centuries, monks and nuns at Dunhuang frequently lived at home even after taking their vows, a finding supported by Ennin, who also mentioned several instances of monks living at home. See chapter 2 of his magisterial study of the life of monks and nuns in Dunhuang from the late Tang to the early Song (Hao Chunwen 1998: pp. 74–88).
31. Burrow 1940: #553 (adoption), #500 (loans), #345 (slave ownership), #473, 549, 582, 652, 655 (land transactions), #506 (slave trading), #152 (purchase of slave).

32. Dunhuang monks also made loans, bought and sold slaves, and otherwise fully participated in economic life. See Trombert 1995.
33. Rhie 1999: pp. 350–351, gives a list of kings and the approximate lengths of their reigns.
34. Burrow 1940: #345 (dispute about the *śramaṇa* and his slave), 386, 473, 474.
35. Burrow 1940: #209, 415, 588, 589, 592 (*śramaṇa* as witnesses); #331, 575 (*śramaṇa* as scribes).
36. Burrow 1940: #322 (gift of Khotanese man), #345 (grain donations), #703 (corn donations), #477 (gift of corn from elder), and #122 (gift of cow).
37. "93A35 (N5) de diaocha" 93A35 (N5) 的調查 [An investigation of 93A95 (N5)], in Zhong Ri gongong Niya yiji xueshu kaocha dui 1999: Chinese-language volume, pp. 55–68. For excellent photographs, see *Xinjiang wenwu guji daguan* 1999: figs. 0105–0109. The joint Sino-French expedition found a similar square structure with wall paintings of the same type at Keriya: Debaine-Francfort 1994: pp. 34–52.
38. Erik Zürcher makes the comparison with China: "We must keep in mind that also in China large monasteries with great numbers of monks always have been quite exceptional. According to the numbers of monasteries and clerics mentioned in an early Tang source (Falin's *Bianzheng lun*, seventh century), the average number of inmates in a Buddhist monastery/temple was 13.5 during the Eastern Jin and 11.9 in A.D. 477." (letter dated March 10, 2001)
39. Daniel Boucher, email dated January 8, 2001.
40. Salomon 1990, with a discussion of Niya document 512 on pp. 265–268.
41. For an introduction and translation of a seventh-century Chinese text, see Boucher 1995.
42. Salomon 1999: pp. 167–168; Bernhard 1970. But see Daniel Boucher's review of Salomon in Boucher 2000, in which he suggests how weak the evidence is for this identification and provides references to several other studies of Niya document #510.
43. Ron Davidson, email dated Jan. 13, 2000. Hasuie Toshitaka 1997: pp. 183–187.
44. Daniel Boucher, email dated Jan. 4, 2001.
45. Faxian, *Gaoseng faxianzhuan* (T. 51, No. 2085: 857a). Compare Beal 1981: p. xxiv. See Rhie 1999: p. 354, for a discussion of Faxian's route.
46. *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (History of the Three Kingdoms) (Zhonghua shuju edition) 49:1185. Discussed in Tsukamoto Zenryū 1985: pp. 72–75; Ch'en 1964: pp. 40–42.
47. Erik Zürcher's translation of T. 50 (2059) *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 1: 324b–325a, in a letter dated March 10, 2001. He comments, "Here we get an impression of a rather 'amateurish' king of sangha, monks not wearing classical garb and ignorant of their ceremonial duties. It resembles the disorganized state of the sangha at Niya."

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Contents



VOLUME I

| | |
|----------------------|----|
| Introduction | ix |
| <i>John Lagerwey</i> | |

Part I. Religion in Ancient and Medieval China

| | |
|---|-----|
| 1. The Making of the Ancestors: Late Shang Religion and Its Legacy | 3 |
| <i>David N. Keightley</i> | |
| 2. Burial Practices as Seen in Rulers' Tombs of the Eastern Zhou Period: Patterns and Regional Traditions | 65 |
| <i>Alain Thore</i> | |
| 3. Mortuary Behavior in Pre-Imperial Qin: A Religious Interpretation | 109 |
| <i>Lothar von Falkenhausen</i> | |
| 4. The Concept of Ghost in Ancient Chinese Religion | 173 |
| <i>Mu-chou Poo</i> | |
| 5. The Ascension of the Spirit: Toward a Cultural History of Self-Divinization Movements in Early China | 193 |
| <i>Michael Puett</i> | |
| 6. Technical Traditions in Ancient China and <i>Shushu</i> Culture in Chinese Religion | 223 |
| <i>Marc Kalinowski</i> | |
| 7. The Place of the <i>Scripture on Great Peace</i> in the Formation of Taoism | 249 |
| <i>Barbara Hendrischke</i> | |

Religion and Chinese Society

Edited by John Lagerwey

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École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2004

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The Chinese University Press

The Chinese University of Hong Kong
SHATIN, N.T., HONG KONG

Fax: +852 2603 6692

+852 2603 7355

E-mail: cup@cuhk.edu.hk

Web-site: www.chineseupress.com

ISBN 962-996-123-7 (Set of 2 volumes)

École française d'Extrême-Orient

22, avenue du Président-Wilson

75116 Paris, FRANCE

Web-site: www.efeo.fr

ISBN 2-85539-635-2 (Set of 2 volumes)

Printed in Hong Kong

8. Religious Life in a Silk Road Community: Niya During the Third and Fourth Centuries 279
Valerie Hansen
9. The Silkworm and the Bodhi Tree: The Lingbao Attempt to Replace Buddhism in China and Our Attempt to Place Lingbao Taoism 317
Stephen R. Bokenkamp
10. Buddhism and the Chinese Marchmount System: A Case Study of the Southern Marchmount 341
James Robson
11. Changing the Audience: A Pivotal Period in the Great Sutra Carving Project at the Cloud Dwelling Monastery near Beijing 385
Lothar Ledderose
12. De quelques effets du bouddhisme sur la problématique taoïste: aspects de la confrontation du taoïsme au bouddhisme 411
Isabelle Robinet

VOLUME II

Part II. Taoism and Local Religion in Modern China

13. Scientific Knowledge in Taoist Context: Chen Zhixu's Commentary on the *Scripture of Salvation* 519
Alexei Volkov
14. Wudang Shan: The Origins of a Major Center of Modern Taoism 553
Pierre-Henry de Bruyn
15. Taoist Writings Packaged in Ming Popular Encyclopedias and Their Editing Strategies 591
Richard G. Wang
16. The Longmen School and Its Controversial History during the Qing Dynasty 621
Monica Esposito
17. The Quanzhen Clergy, 1700–1950 699
Vincent Goossaert

18. The Sociology of Local Religion in the Lake Tai Basin 773
Richard von Glahn
19. Religious Festivals in Northern Guangdong 817
Tam Wai Lun
20. Village Community and the Reconstruction of Religious Life in Rural North China 837
Thomas DuBois
21. Divine Justice in Late Imperial China: A Preliminary Study of Indictment Rituals 869
Paul R. Katz
- Appendix: Original Conference Project Description 903
- Contributors 913
- Article Summaries 917