ANCIENT CENTRAL ASIAN NETWORKS. 
RETHINKING THE INTERPLAY OF 
RELIGIONS, ART AND POLITICS ACROSS 
THE TARIM BASIN (5TH–10TH C.)

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ERIKA FORTE
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CONVEYING INDIA TO THE PAMIR AND FURTHER AWAY: ON
DIVINE HIERARCHY AND POLITICAL PARADIGMS IN BUD-
DHIST TEXTS

CRISTINA SCHERRER-SCHAUB

Abstract

While relatively early we see that some of the prominent Indian gods and diis mi-
nores are current interlocutors of the Buddha, at some point epic’s characters are
introduced in Buddhist narrative and become even ‘divinized/deified’ figures, some
of them as mere name, other with a subtle reference to their original and specific
physiognomy if not pedigree. On their part, the lords of land essentials in regulating
social order were possibly the first agents with whom the Buddhists entered mundane
transactions with the hosting society for the sake of installing the institution. And the
success of the enterprise was depending upon the subtle ‘coalescence’ of their re-
spective common law and/or juridical system. The hierarchy of the various divinities
attested in epigraphy and in secular documents while in a way indicates the degree of
reciprocal permeability of the Buddhist institution and the outer society, equally
informs the historian about the possible itineraries taken by texts and their conveyors.

1. The Problematics and its Complexity

As noted very long ago by Alfred Foucher, terrestrial presiding gods and
celestial divinities, as well as all other sort of beings, were present in
Buddhist textual and plastic narrative since its beginning as an integral
part of the generic representation of the world. These entities were pos-
sibly perceived as such until their respective role was, metaphorically or
effectively, transposed into a new religious/ideological conspectus. And
this was certainly not done once for ever since, following the variety of
societies where Buddhism moved along its history, that multitude of
divine beings tended to acquire a new and distinct agency and, above all,
this process modified the hierarchy of gods and divine beings. While
some of the prominent gods, such as Indra/Śakra, Brahmā,
Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa or Śiva/Maheśvara, but also nāgas, yakṣas, and other

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Pamir and further Away”
diis minores were current interlocutors of the Buddha, at some point the epic’s characters were equally included in the Buddhist narrative and, with time, even became ‘divinized/deified’ figures—some of them as a mere name, others with a subtle reference to their original and specific features.

On their part, local presiding (and protecting) gods, the lords of the land, essentials in regulating the social order, were possibly the first agents with whom the Buddhist religious directly or indirectly entered the necessary practical transactions for the sake of installing the institution in a precise ‘place of earth’ where Buddhism was not yet installed. And the modalities of mutual agreement, and even competition, between the two institutions in matter of political and social control were naturally depending on the subtle ‘coalescence’ of their respective common law and/or juridical system. The precise organisation and distribution of territory in ancient time is not easy to envision. The treatises on politics, economics, and administration may guide our general understanding, and the rules governing the monastic institution, particularly when they are confronted with public (and dated) records, may reach a plausible assessment of historical facts.

In the perspective of the normative narrative and of its casuistry, Gregory Schopen cites the case of the Mūlasārvāstivādin Vinaya, which contemplates the worship of territorial lords/local deities dwelling in a particular place, here called naivāsika. The same term is also applied to a monk who is a ‘permanent resident’ of a particular monastic site (cf.

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1 Exemplary in this respect and well-documented is the case of Japan, where the minor and major local gods, the kami, are present everywhere, cf. Hōbōgirin., vol. IV, 327–329a. See also Bernhard Faure, David M. Moerman, and Gaynor Sekimori, ed., Shugendō. L’histoire et la culture d’une religion japonaise. Shugendō. The History and Culture of a Japanese Religion (Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 2009), 5–6 (and notes), which contains important contributions illustrating the problematics of the kami-buddha relationship.


the Latin *residentarius*), as it appears in the “likewise Mūlasarvāstivādin commentary Āgamaksudrakavyākhyāna of Śīlapālita” cited by Jonathan Silk in his detailed analysis of various categories of bhikṣu. Later ritual manuals detail the ceremony of ‘taking possession of the earth’ that includes a mode or a particular form of contract in reciprocity between the officiant and the territorial lord/local deity—be it a *vrksadeva* or whatever other owner of the place—a fact that the *jātaka* narratively illustrate.

Buddhist textual, plastic, and figurative narrative shows that ‘foreign’ divinities do integrate quite easily a given society. Questions related to these phenomena are also known in Classical Antiquity. In commenting upon a passage of the Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus (ca. 55–116/120), Philippe Borgeaud stresses upon the importance of considering such questions in their historical complexity. Tacitus is possibly among

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4 Jonathan A. Silk, *Managing Monks. Administrators and Administrative Roles in Indian Buddhist Monasticism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 151, n. 22. From a lexicographical point of view, the notion of *naivāsika/āvāsika*, that designates both the tutelary and the resident monk, presents a common feature shared by both referents: their right as ‘temporary’ resident of a place. Cf. the passage drawn from the *Avadānaśataka* (Silk, *Managing Monks*, 191) that narratively shows how a bhikṣu indirectly claims his right when visiting monks jeopardize his privileges. The *naivāsika bhikṣu* of the narrative manifests the same noxious attitude as some ferocious *numiṇa*, one being ‘pacified’ with sanctions, the others with rituals.

5 Philippe Borgeaud, *Aux origines de l’histoire des religions* (Paris: Édition du Seuil, 2004), 72. “Il faut bien reconnaître que ce qui pousse les Anciens à la comparaison, et à ce qu’ils appellent eux-mêmes “traduction” (*interpretab) [= Tacitus *Germaniae* xliii, 4, 5], ce n’est pas d’abord un souci théorique. Mais bien l’expérience historique, incontestable et répétée, de la rencontre, du dépaysement, du choc culturel. La Grèce pas plus que Rome n’est isolée. Elle entretient des rapports de communication constants, commerciaux, conflictuels ou d’osmose culturelle, durant toute son histoire, avec ses voisins d’Anatolie, du Proche-orient, d’Iran, d’Egypte et d’Italie. Le relativisme culturel, quoiqu’en disent ses adeptes, trouve son origine et son expression dans des rapports de force. Il s’inscrit dans l’histoire, il prend forme dans un champ de mouvance et de transformation. Ses apologistes se comportent toutefois comme s’il en allait tout autrement, comme si les entités comparés étaient parfaitement, naturellement, distinctes les unes des autres. Ce qu’elles ne sont pas, bien entendu.” In his article “Note Kuṣāṇa: a proposito di una recente interpretazione di Pharro,” Gherardo Gnoli, while stressing the historical complexity of facts (“una complessa retà storica”, 694) and following the very complicated destiny of Pharro, shows the intricate series of factors that historian must take into account in studying the long journey of peculiar figures that may be subjected to a mediatory mode of transmission. See Gherardo Gnoli, “Note Kuṣāṇa: a proposito di una recente interpretazione di Pharro,” in *Convegno internazionale sul tema: la Persia e l’Asia centrale da Alessandro al X secolo* (Roma, 9–12 novembre 1994), ed. Accademia Nazionale dei
the first intellectuals to use the expression *interpretatio* to refer to the ‘translation’ of the name of foreign gods into comparable figures of the Roman pantheon (*sed deos interpretatione Romana Castorem Pollucemque memorant, Germaniae loc. cit.*).

Sylvain Lévi, in dealing with this subject in the specific context of Nepal, goes a step further:

> A rigid classification which simplistically divided divinities up under the headings, Buddhism, Śaivism, and Vaishnavism, would be a pure nonsense; under different names, and at different levels, the same gods are for the most part common to different confession.¹

It is commonplace to say that in the course of their history, the various cultural and social spheres move in interplay with a relative high degree of fluidity, favouring a process of osmosis as the result of historical interaction between the agents, a fact that is exemplarily illustrated in the practice of texts’ translation and transmission.² But to see these phenomena as a mere fragmented whole would obscure, if not obliterate, the

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polysemic interplay that an entity whatsoever, be it a god, a word, or a narrative motif, may produce or activate under given spatio-temporal circumstances.

2. Documented Microhistory: Mapping History with Fragmented Manuscripts

That texts, like any other artefact, were conveyed from their native Indian milieu to the East via the Central Asian or the Southern maritime routes, is confirmed by several sources.\(^8\)

The interest in investigating the dynamic and functionality of the various itineraries tracing the intellectual and cultural history of texts was revivified in the last decades of the past century, when new collections of Buddhist manuscripts came to considerably increase the preceding findings. The intensive study of the material that followed made accessible a Buddhist ‘virtual mobile library’, a collection of texts transported and diffused at various epochs by masters of the past who contributed to conveying Indian culture and religions beyond their native cradle. The detailed ‘cartography’ sketched by these findings invites the historian to further investigate the modalities of textual transmission and their impact on specific socio-political milieux. It also questions the whereabouts of the geographical proximity of collections of specific texts, as well as the presence and temporal coexistence of identical items located at far distance.

One of the changes in perspective that may arise in considering the text inventory of specific Buddhist sites situated along the so-called North and South Routes of the Tarim basin questions the idea of a North Route ‘all Śrāvakayāna’ and of a South Route ‘all Mahāyāna’, an idea that, to some extent, appears to be less ‘heuristically probative’ than

\(^8\) The recent publication of Paul Harrison and Jens-Uwe Hartmann—*From Birch Bark to Digital Data: Recent Advances in Buddhist Manuscript Research. Papers Presented at the Conference Indic Buddhist Manuscripts: The State of the Field. Stanford, June 15–19, 2009* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften Verlag, 2014)—gives a clear and precious example of the phenomenon.
expected for the study of the micro-history of the Tarim oases. Something that seems rather obvious, given that the two piedmonts bordering the Taklamakan desert maintained commercial relations, constantly favouring the exchange of letters and religious from both parts, often passing via Dunhuang (敦煌). This is magisterially illustrated by the survey of eleven routes (P. 2009) crossing the region of Turfan and connecting the two piedmonts of the Taklamakan desert, dated to the second part of the 8th century. This record attests the refined organisation of the system of communication and traffic in this region, lists the precise locations of ‘transport cafés’, and informs the reader about the practicability of the roads according to season. In 789, Wukong (悟空), on his way from Khotan to Beş Balıq (Chin. Beiting 北庭, near Turfan) via Kučā and Qaraşahr (Chin. Yanqi 焉耆), possibly took one of these paths. We are told indeed that while Wukong was in Beiting, the monks there invited Śīladharma, the high dignitary of Khotan, to [come to Beiting in order to] translate the Daśabhūmi(ka), one of the three texts that Wukong re-

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9 The necessity of studying Buddhism from a broad perspective is, of course, not limited to this particular case. Buddhist religious were also literati and, as such, certainly did not confine their intellectual interest to a limited ‘orthodoxical’ library. We know, for instance, that fragments of the Khotanese Book of Zambasta, whose ‘mahāyānistic’ nature is undeniable, were found in Šorçuq, near Turfan. See Mauro Maggi, “The Manuscript T III S 16: Its Importance for the History of Khotanese Literature,” in Turfan Revisited: The First Century of Research into the Arts and Cultures of the Silk Road, ed. Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst (Berlin: Reimer, 2004), 457, pls. 35 and 36, 184a. In her recent article Duan Qing notes à propos a fragment of Abhidharma found in Khotan that “seems to imply that there was a possible existence of Śrāvakayāna Buddhism in this area”. See Duan Qing, “Indic and Khotanese Manuscripts: Some New Finds and Findings from Xinjiang.” In From Birch Bark to Digital Data: Recent Advances in Buddhist Manuscript Research. Papers Presented at the Conference Indic Buddhist Manuscripts: The State of the Field. Stanford, June 15–19, 2009, ed. Paul Harrison and Jens-Uwe Hartmann (Vienne: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften Verlag, 2014), 269, 278, and 271. Actually, the fact that religious from various obediences were crossing in Khotan, as was the case everywhere, can now be readily admitted. The idea that the existence of texts of Abhidharma are necessarily linked to a particular school is another matter; see the present passage and n. 14.

10 The ms., translated and annotated by Paul Pelliot, was posthumously published by Jean-Pierre Drège; see Paul Pelliot, Les routes de la region de Turfan sous les T’ang suivi de l’histoire et la geographie anciennes de l’Asie centrale dans Innermost Asia (Paris: Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises du Collège de France, 2002).

ceived in his hand together with other relics before leaving Udyāna/Ūḍḍiyāna on his way back to China.\(^1\) Incidentally, two of them are well-represented among the extant collections of Central Asian manuscripts. Fragmented mss. of the Daśabhūmi(ka)sūtra have indeed been found in Gilgit and in Turfan, while several fragments of the Daśabalaśūtra (Samyuktāgama) were found in Turfan, in Dunhuang, and in undetermined sites of the northern route and Central Asia.\(^2\) The reciprocal ‘permeability’ that we see at work among the Buddhist communities

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\(^{1}\) That Śīladharma was called to Beiting may be inferred from the record of Wukong’s “Itinéraire”: “Puis il partit encore de là et arriva dans l’arrondissement de Pei-t’ing; le député administrateur de ce district, le ya-che-ta-fou Yang Si-kou, avec les religieux du temple Long-hing, demandèrent au çramaña supérieur du royaume de Ya-tien (Khoten) Che-lo-ta-mo (Çīladharma), de traduire le Che-ti-king (Daçabhūmi sūtra).” (Lévi and Chanannes, “L’itinéraire d’Ou-K’ong,” 365–366). In this period of political unrest (789–792), the religious link established between Beiting and Khotan might have equally served the political affairs. The three texts in question—the Daśabhūmi(ka)sūtra, the Daśābalasūtra and the *Parināmanas/Parināmacakrap—were the texts that Wukong received in his hand from the abbott of the convent while leaving Uḍḍiyāna for his homeland and that, interestingly enough, are said to have been physically kept in the form of a bound volume, “[Q]ui formaient ensemble un cahier; (il lui donna en même temps la relique d’une dent du grand saint Çakya-Muni; élévant ces objets au dessus de sa tête, il témoigna son affliction et en pleurant les lui remis pour qu’ils fussent des présents pour l’accréditer qu’il offrirait à son saint souverain[…].” See ibid., 359–360. These texts were translated from Sanskrit into Chinese by Śīladharma. The Tibetan translation of the yoṅs su bsno ba ’khor lo is recorded in the Lhan dkar (Ldan dkar) Catalogue (no. 262) among the group of mahāyāna sūtras translated from the Chinese. The canonical version (Tōh. 242) attributes the translation to the bhikṣu and tripitakadharin of Khotan Śīladharma (Tib. Li’i [yul] dge slob sde snod gsun dān ldan pa Śī la dha rma) in collaboration with Ban de rNam par mi rtog (mdo ža, folio 306a7). Paul Pelliot, “Notes à propos d’un catalogue du Kanjur,” Journal Asiatique 4.1 (1914): 135–137, finds confirmation for the fact that the text had been translated in Beiting in the colophon of a ms. that he brought back from Dunhuang (P 3918, T. 998), which reads: “Traduit par Çīladharma de Khotan dans le Long-hing-sseu de Pei-t’ing,” see Pelliot, “Notes à propos d’un catalogue du Kanjur,” 136. rNam par mi rtog is an interesting person. His personal name, dates, and collaboration with Hwa šaṅ Zab mo, with whom he translated the Daśacakraśīṣṭigarbha (Tōh. 239), suggest that he may have been close to the milieu of the Chinese teachers involved in the religious controversy that, at some point, the Tibetan btsan po Khri sroṅ lde btsan, in coordination with other religious, decided to arbitrate and which gave birth to the famous Samye (Tib. bSam yas) debate. He could also have been part of the team that gathered the literary sources of the “Cycle of Khotan”, the texts conveying the Buddhist history of the region.

\(^{2}\) See Harrison and Hartmann, From Birch Bark to Digital Data, 109, 196, 206, 231, 238 and 249.
studded along the two piedmonts partially reflects what we know from the course of religious study that was practised in Khotan at the end of the 7th century and recorded in the life of Devendraprajñā.\(^{14}\)

In the light of the texts of the Gilgit collection that “grew over a long period of perhaps about a century” (from the end of the 6th to the beginning of the 8th century),\(^{15}\) and that contain, among other items, some “ancillary treatises” on medicine and grammar,\(^{16}\) it may be useful to recall that these regions, particularly Taxila and the Sindh, were the cradle of Indian culture, where impressive figures such as Pāṇini (5th c. BCE) or Caraka (first centuries CE)\(^{17}\) spent their floruit. This is certainly not to

\(^{14}\) See Antonino Forte, “Le moine khotanais Devendraprajñā,” *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient* 66 (1979): 290. “Devendraprajñā était originaire de Khotan où il était éminent par sa doctrine dont Tche-cheng fait ainsi l’éloge: “Pour ce qui concerne ses études, il était à même de pénétrer dans le Grand et dans le Petit [Véhicule]; pour ce qui concerne ses élucidations, il se servait soit des [vérités] réelles soit des [vérités] communes. De la technique des dhāraṇī et des théories des dhyāna il avait une compréhension parfaite” Cf. by contrast supra n. 9. Incidentally, the fact that the *Book of Zambasta* (Z) chooses a particular set of texts in support of the teaching about the advantages and disadvantages of being a śrāvaka or a mahāyānist, besides painting a peculiar type of śrāvaka that metaphorically opposes him, a merchant, to the noble Mahāyāna, “as noble as the royal class” (Z 13.30–33), indicates that the discussion closely concerned the Khotanese. See on that Ronald E. Emmerick, *The Book of Zambasta. A Khotanese Poem on Buddhism* (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 184–211. The narrative related to king Vijaya Dharma\(^1\) (+746–756+) in the ‘légende de fondation’ inserts a passage that seems to suggest that when the Mahāsāṃghika and the bhikṣu Dhammānanda, brother of the king, came to Khotan, “eight vihāras belonging to ‘Dro tir and eight vihāras of Kam śe” were yield by/granted to the Mahāsāṃghika Nikāya (mahāsāṃghika'i sder gtogs ⇒ gtogs : samdāḥ); Ronald E. Emmerick, *Tibetan Texts Concerning Khotan* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 40–41.


\(^{17}\) Cf. Wille who lists, among other things, the Aṣṭādhyaī of Pāṇini, declension exercises, grammar related to Kātantra, Kātantra of Śrīvarvarma; the Chandovicitti (on metrics); a list of synonyms on śloka (lexicography); names for the signs of the zodiac used in Eastern Asia (astronomy and astrology); on politics, the Laghucāṇyakarājanitiśāstra; treatises on medicine (conspicuously present in Khotan) the Bhedasamhitā and Siddhasāra of Ravigupta. See Klaus Wille, “Survey of the Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Turfan Collection (Berlin),” in: *From Birch Bark to Digital Data: Recent Advances in Buddhist Manuscript Research. Papers Presented at the Conference Indic Buddhist Manuscripts: The State of the Field. Stanford, June 15–19, 2009*, ed. Paul Harrison and Jens-Uwe Hartmann (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften Verlag, 2014), 84 and notes.
say that the Gilgit treatises were necessarily written in the region rather than to see, once again, how the large area around Gilgit, surrounded by the Himalaya, Hindukush, and Pamir, appears as the ideal hub of the multidirectional spread of Indian culture. In this scenario, the Āyurvedic tradition, whose propensity to preventive medicine, favouring health education versus treatment, known by the authors of Antiquity, Chinese records, and other sources outside India, became central to the history of Khotan. This scholarly tradition, as it is known, is often accompanied by the fluidity that we have alluded to previously, and the fact that Buddhist religious were also literati, we may note that the vidyāsthāna practiced by the bodhisattva are praised in Mātṛceta’s Varṇārthavartna, a text largely diffused in Turfan—see Wille, “Survey of the Sanskrit Manuscripts,” 208—and in other collections of Central Asia (such as Schøyen, Hoernle, Pelliot, etc.).


by ‘traditional’ medicine of an *atharvanic* character that appears in daily and life-rituals to regulate evil in society, and that may be linked with the territorial protectors/deities subsumed by the textual tradition under various generic denominations, such as ‘nāga’. An interesting case that illustrates this complex scenario and shows the subtle interaction between medicine, *numina*, and Buddhist institution, is recorded in the *Rājataraṅgini*. Here we are told that a physician, the son-in-law of Cāṅkuna, the minister of Lalitāditya Muktāpīḍa (ca. 725–761/762), after having propitiated a nāga, built a vihāra in Śrīnagar as an offering in fulfilment of his vow:

The physician Īśānacandra, a son in law of the minister Cāṅkuna, built a vihāra after obtaining wealth through the favour of Takṣaka.21

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19–21. A fragmented ms. of the *Siddhasāra* of Ravigupta is kept in the Śrīnagar collection together with several fragments of medical texts, and of Agnivesa’s *Carakasamhitā*, see “Additional Notes by Klaus Wille” in von Hinüber, “The Gilgit Manuscripts,” 113. 20 Other ‘divinised/deified’ cosmic agents intervene in daily practices, such as the nakṣatra, in case of labour, illness, etc. Inherited from the Vedic tradition, the invocations to the terrestrial, aquatic, and celestial protectors continue in the Brahmanic and Buddhist milieu. Medical treatises admit the invocation of Brahmanic deities on specific occasions in the Buddhist milieu, and vice versa; cf. the previous note.

21 Marc Aurel Stein, *Kalhana’s Rājataraṅgini*. A Chronicle of the Kings of Kaśmīr (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1987–1989) 3 vols., cf. I.220 and IV.216; Skr. text ibid. vol. 3, 10, 52. On the nāga Takṣaka, see ibid., vol. 1, 10, 1.220, footnote: “The Takṣaka Nāga is worshipped to this day in the large pool of limpid water situated close to the village of Zevan (or Jayavana, see VII.607) in the Vihi Pargana, 74°58’ long. 34°3’ lat. It is happily described by the poet Bilhana, who was born in the neighbouring village of Khonamūsa (Khun*moh), in his *Vikramāṅkavedavacarita* xviii.70 (as translated by Prof. Bühler): ‘At a distance of a gavyūti and a half of Pravarapura (Śrīnagar) lies a place with high-rising monuments called Jayavana (Zevan), where a pool filled with pure water, and sacred to Takṣaka, lord of snakes, cuts like a war-disk the head of Kali bent on the destruction of Dharma.’” The Nāga Takṣaka reappears in the *Li yul luṅ bstan pa* where, together with Deva Jinarāja and Devī Asoka, the nāgarāja Takṣaka guards a sacred place destined to the meditation of the Āryas to come (Emmerick, *Tibetan Texts Concerning Khotan*, 38). Incidentally, mahānāga Takṣaka is listed in the *Mahāmāyūrī* together with Manasvin, Apaḷāla, etc., all of whom are very present in Kāśmīr and the neighbouring regions. Amazingly enough, Manasvin is here assigned to Suvasu/Swat (see Sylvain Lévi, “Le catalogue géographique des Yaks dans la Mahāmāyūri,” *Journal Asiatique* 11.5 (1915): 67–68 and § 19.4), while a fragmented ms. from the region of Bajaur has preserved a version of the *Manasvinagarayasutra/Skr. *Manasvināgarāj-sūtra*, see Harry Falk and Ingo Strauch, “The Bajaur and Split Collections of Kharoṣṭhī Manuscripts,” in *From Birch Bark to Digital Data: Recent Advances in Buddhist Manuscript Research. Papers*
Still another case of the textual ‘stellate itineraries’ that the findings of mss. illustrate is represented by a Gilgit fragment22 of Indian narrative that preserves part of the 20th apologue (‘Dharmabuddhi and Pāpabuddhi’) of the first section (Mitrabheda) of the Pañcatantra, a collection of edifying tales that presents some affinity in scope with the famous “Sūtra of the Wise and the Foolish” widely diffused in Central Asia, directly and indirectly transmitted in several languages, and whose “Central Asian text (huben) [had been obtained] in Khotan and translated in Qočo”, that is Gaochang (高昌) near Turfan.23 As a matter of fact, the

Presented at the Conference Indic Buddhist Manuscripts: The State of the Field. Stanford, June 15–19, 2009, ed. Paul Harrison and Jens-Uwe Hartmann (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften Verlag, 2014), 67, § 3.2.2.3; Ingo Strauch, “The Evolution of the Buddhist rakṣa Genre in the Light of New Evidence from Gandhāra: The *Manasvi-nāgārajasūtra from the Bajaur Collection of Kharoṣṭhī Manuscripts,” Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies 77.1 (2014): 63–84. It should, however, be noted that in some particular periods in Kāśmīr (and possibly also in its vicinage), the nāga worship has been considered as having been seriously endangered by the Bauddhas, and subsequently reintroduced by Hindu kings; see Witzel, “The Brahmins of Kashmir,” 271–272 and passim. On the complexity of this issue, we will come again on another occasion.


23 In re-analysing the record of this sūtra, written by Śākya Sengyou—and previously translated and studied by Paul Pelliot and Sylvain Lévi—see Victor H. Mair, “The Khotanese Antecedents of the Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish (Xiangyu Jing),” in Buddhism across Boundaries—Chinese Buddhism and the Western Regions (Collection of Essays 1993), ed. John R. McRae and Jan Nattier (Sanchung, Taipei: Fuguangshang Foundation for Buddhist and Culture Education, 1999), 364, n. 1, Mair suggests that the “Great Monastery”, where the teaching of the sūtra was first heard, “was probably the Gomāṭi-mahāvihāra”, see Mair, “The Khotanese Antecedents,” 366, n. 14; the text was subsequently ‘compiled’ in 445 in Qočo (ibid., 368 and 374–375). And, once again, among the possible Indic antecedents, Mair mentions Haribhaṭṭa’s Jātakamālā, fragments of which have been found in Gilgit (see von Hinüber, “The Gilgit Manuscripts,” 100) and in the Schøyen collection (see Jens Braarvig, “The Schøyen Collection,” in From Birch Bark to Digital Data: Recent Advances in Buddhist Manuscript Research. Papers Presented at the Conference Indic Buddhist Manuscripts: The State of the Field. Stanford, June 15–19, 2009, ed. Paul Harrison and Jens-Uwe Hartmann (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften Verlag, 2014), 163).
**Pañcatantra** that alternates narrative prose, gnomic, and nīti-verses may be seen as a putative model of political behaviour of the type ‘miroir du prince’\(^{24}\), a ‘basic’ model to imitate that may potentially be addressed to the petty lords which, incidentally, were legion on both sides of the Pamir. Oskar von Hinüber notes à propos the Gilgit fragment that “[T]his seems to be the oldest trace of the **Pañcatantra** in an Indian manuscript”.\(^{25}\) And we may even go a step further and wonder if the Gilgit manuscript may be close to the northwestern recension that was translated into Pehlevi (ca. 570) and came down to us in the Syriac translation (dating to the same period) that, in its turn, was later translated into Arabic (ca. 750), the famous story of Kalīla and Dimna.\(^{26}\)

### 3. Divinities and Tutelaries: Exported, Imported and Transported

Mundane divinities or *numina* are by definition ‘local or presiding gods’. As seen, whether included in narrative intrigues or listed in various textual traditions, the major and minor gods have been present in Buddhism since the beginning of its documented history.

Quite famous are the lists of tutelary gods that appear in early Buddhist literature. Sylvain Lévi, inspired by the fragments discovered in


\(^{26}\) On the fascinating fortune of this text, see Lancereau and Renou, **Pañcatantra**, 20–21, 25–41 and notes. Ravigupta’s Siddhāsāra, fragments of which were found in the same region (see n. 13) enjoyed a similar destiny. Dated “with considerable confidence to approximately AD 650” it “may have been translated into Arabic as early as the eight century” and “[e]nterprisingly it was frequently quoted in translation by Rhazes, who was born in AD 865. His translation appears to go back to one made by a certain Ibn Dahn, who is dated approximately to AD 800.” See Emmerick, “Some Remarks on Translation Techniques,” 19.
Central Asia, attracted the attention of scholars to this literature, particularly to the Mahāmāyūrīvidyārajñī (Māy) (3rd c. to 4th c.), as well as to other texts which include various itineraries from India to the northwestern regions and beyond, to China.  

The Māy is partially kept in the famous Bower manuscript, dated to the first part of the sixth 6th century and most likely written in Kāśmīr. Published by Frederic Rudolf Hoernle in 1893 in Calcutta, the Māy is a widely diffused text of protection that records a long series of mundane deities and major gods, as for instance the bodhi trees of the seven Buddhas of the past, the four mahārājas and their sons; the yakṣas tutelaries of the cities, the 28 mahāyakṣasenāpati, the dharmabhṛṭṛ of Vaīṣravaṇa, or the goddesses having protected the gestation and birth of the Bodhisattva, among them the twelve great mothers (Skt. mahāmātṛ), the twelve mahāpiśācī and still others as the mahārākṣasī.

In his long article of 1915, “Le catalogue géographique des Yakṣa”, Sylvain Lévi compared the Chinese version of the Māy with the extant mss. kept in the Bendall Collection in Cambridge and the British Museum collection, dated to the epoch of Nayapāla (ca. 1054/1025–1041).  

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BuddhistRoadPaper 6.1 Special Issue. Scherrrer-Schaub, “Conveying India to the Pamir and further Away”
and Vigrahapāla III (1041–1067). This comprehensive catalogue of local and city’s gods, which possibly originated in stages, both geographically and historically, starts with the city of Pāṭaliputra and lists a series of cities and regions together with their appointed protectors, spanning from India proper to the north-western regions, as far as the present region of North Pakistan and beyond.31

Other lists of sacred sites mentioned and published by Lévi are kept in the Ajānātiya,32 the Candragarbhāsūtra, and the Śūryagarbha of the Mahāsaṃnipāta, all texts that were largely diffused in the oases of the Taklamakan desert, where fragmented mss. have been found in Sanskrit or in vernacular languages. These texts are closely related to the Li yul luṅ bstan33 [Prophecy of Khotan], that links the narrative of the institution of Buddhism in Khotan to the Candragarbhāsūtra,34 the Āryāhatsaṅghavardhanavākyākaraṇa, and the Vimalaprabhāparipṛcchā.

31 See Lévi, “Le catalogue géographique des Yakṣa,” 30–122. It would, of course, be perilous to consider this text, relatively dated to the 3rd or 4th century, as witness the local deities of that period. Not only because of the imprecise date of its composition, but also because the lists of divinities, cities, etc., it may reflect an earlier stage.


33 See Emmerick “Tibetan Texts Concerning Khotan,” 74 and 91: “‘phags pa zla ba’i sūn pos žus pa dañ / lha mo dri ma med pa’i ’od kyis żus pa dañ / ‘phags pa dgra bcom pa dge ’dun ‘phel gyi luṅ bstan pa rnams dañ mthun par Li’i yul dañ / der li rje’i rgyal po rnams kyis ’phags pa rnams spanyan drañs nas / saṅs rgyas kyi bstan pa dañ / de’i gzi gtsug lag khan dañ / lha khan dañ / mchod rten rnams ji ltar bžins pa dañ / dge ’dun sde gni s ji ltar spel ba’i tshul rgyas pa bstan pa / li yul luṅ bstan pa žes ba ba rdzogs so /." And this is repeated in the Li yul chos kyi lo rgyus [Annals of Buddhist Khotan]: “dar ma mdo sde Su rya ga rba dañ / Can dra ga rba dañ /Bye ma la pa ri pri ca’i gziñ las mdo tsam žig / mkhan po Mo rgu bde šil gniṣ / gsar du bsgyuro //.” And this fragments of which were found in Khotan; see Klaus Wille, “Survey of Identified Manuscripts in the Hoernle, Stein, and Skrine Collection of the British Library (London),” in From Birch Bark to Digital Data: Recent Advances in Buddhist Manuscript Research. Papers Presented at the Conference Indic Buddhist Manuscripts: The State of the Field. Stanford, June 15–19, 2009, ed. Paul Harrison and Jens-Uwe Hartmann (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften Verlag, 2014), 226 and 229. It is equally worth noting that the Mahāsaṃnipāta, which is mentioned in the “légende de fondation” of Buddhist Khotan (see Emmerick, The Book of Zambasta, 4–5), is among the texts that the king of Khotan kept in his palace (at Birgamdrara?), according to the relation of

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These texts were thus considered as the founding narrative of ‘Buddhist’ Khotan. The country is effectively counted among the twenty-one places bestowed or conferred by the Buddha himself to the protectors and guardians of the various lands\textsuperscript{35} (\textit{yul khams so so’i mgon po dañ / lha klu la sogs pa sruiñ ma rnams la gtad pa}), from now on ‘buddhisied’, countries that spread from Madhyadeśa to China via the Indus valley (and further northwest), the Pamirs, and far beyond to Kaśgar and Khotan.\textsuperscript{36} This appears to show that at this point, a considerable shift in the

\textsuperscript{35} The \textit{Vimalaprabhāparipṛcchā} contains a series of narratives and rites and opens in quoting the \textit{Candragarbhasūtra}, with Bhagavat staying at the Čṛḍhrakūṭa and investing the gods with the charge of protecting all the regions (\textit{yul thams cad sruiñ ma rnams las tu so sor gtad pa}, folio 201a2) of the Jambudvīpa. The interesting point is that the transaction is performed as a contract or agreement in reciprocity: the tutelaries will protect the Buddhist country, grant prosperity, etc., and the inhabitants will worship them in return. The detailed commentary of this long and fascinating work far exceeds the present scope, but we will nonetheless emphasize here the fact that it promotes the circulation of some particular \textit{sūtras}, among them the \textit{Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra} [and the \textit{Suvarṇa}] that should be deposited in the royal palace of Khotan, as well as in other strategic places in the kingdom, namely in \textit{vihāras}, thereby functioning as protector of the king and the kingdom. Cf. Cristina Scherrer-Schaub, “Histoire du bouddhisme indien tardif (Ile-XIIe siècle). Matériaux pour l’étude du bouddhisme indien et du Mahāyāna (VI),” \textit{Annuaire de l’École Pratique des Hautes Études, Sciences religieuses} 114.2005–2006 (2007): 55–57; Cristina Scherrer-Schaub, “Histoire du bouddhisme indien tardif (Ile-XIIe siècle). Matériaux pour l’étude du bouddhisme indien et du Mahāyāna (VII et VIII),” \textit{Annuaire de l’École Pratique des Hautes Études, Sciences religieuses} 116.2007–2008 (2009): 91–92. This fact is well attested among the petty kings of Gilgit, whose name appears in protective texts and colophons (von Hinüber, “The Gilgit Manuscripts,” 84)—kings that the \textit{Vimalaprabhā} includes in the family lineage and relations with neighbour petty kings, including Khotan. See Cristina Scherrer-Schaub, “Dhāraṇī, Vidya-rajñī (Devī?): Buddha! Dire les rites et écrire l’histoire. Les excès d’une forme,” (paper presented at the XII Conference of the International Association for Buddhist Studies (IABS), University of Lausanne, Switzerland, August 23–28, 1999); Cristina Scherrer-Schaub, \textit{Questions bouddhiques/Buddhist Questions} VII (forthcoming).

\textsuperscript{36} See Emmerick, Tibetan Texts Concerning Khotan, 2–3 and 8–9: “\textit{sais rgyas bcom ldan ’das Šā kya thub pa rgyal po ’i khab hya rgod phun po ’i ri la bzhugs te zla ba’i sitiñ po gsuñs pa’i lha klu la sogs pa sruiñ ma rnams la gtad pa’i dus na dus na li yul yañ luñ bstan te’},” followed by the name of the various divinities appointed to Khotan. The \textit{Candragarbhasūtra} lists the 250,000 sacred sites where buddhas miraculously appeared. The number of apparitions progressively increase with the increasing in distance from India, and Khotan holds the ‘privilege of sanctity’, second only to China: “La dernière des listes (D) est à ce point de vue particulièremen significa-

\textsuperscript{*Jñānagupta who visited the region in the 6th century; see Lévi, “Notes chinoises sur l’Inde V,” 253–255. See the following note.

\textsuperscript{35} See Emmerick, Tibetan Texts Concerning Khotan, 2–3 and 8–9: “\textit{sais rgyas bcom ldan ’das Šā kya thub pa rgyal po ’i khab hya rgod phun po ’i ri la bzhugs te zla ba’i sitiñ po gsuñs pa’i lha klu la sogs pa sruiñ ma rnams la gtad pa’i dus na dus na li yul yañ luñ bstan te’},” followed by the name of the various divinities appointed to Khotan. The \textit{Candragarbhasūtra} lists the 250,000 sacred sites where buddhas miraculously appeared. The number of apparitions progressively increase with the increasing in distance from India, and Khotan holds the ‘privilege of sanctity’, second only to China: “La dernière des listes (D) est à ce point de vue particulièremen significa-

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\textsuperscript{36} See Emmerick, Tibetan Texts Concerning Khotan, 2–3 and 8–9: “\textit{sais rgyas bcom ldan ’das Šā kya thub pa rgyal po ’i khab hya rgod phun po ’i ri la bzhugs te zla ba’i sitiñ po gsuñs pa’i lha klu la sogs pa sruiñ ma rnams la gtad pa’i dus na dus na li yul yañ luñ bstan te’},” followed by the name of the various divinities appointed to Khotan. The \textit{Candragarbhasūtra} lists the 250,000 sacred sites where buddhas miraculously appeared. The number of apparitions progressively increase with the increasing in distance from India, and Khotan holds the ‘privilege of sanctity’, second only to China: “La dernière des listes (D) est à ce point de vue particulièremen significa-
control over the socio-political sphere had occurred. One may wonder if the vesting of local gods to the charge of protecting a particular place was not proceeding parallel to the phenomenon of exportation of images narratively transposed in the motif of the ‘flying’ images, stūpa and relics, but the interweaving of narrative motifs occurring in the texts connected with Khotan is so dense that it demands a separate treatment.\footnote{It may nonetheless be noted that the \textit{GośrangaVAkaraṇa} goes a step further and images of the \textit{Tathāgata} are there mentioned as guarding the cities, the same phenomenon occurs in the \textit{Li yul luBstan pa}, see Scherrer-Schaub, \textit{Questions bouddhiques/Buddhist Questions} IV and VII. On the “travelling objects” to and via Khotan, see now Erika Forte, “A Journey ‘to the Land on the Other Side’: Buddhist Pilgrimage and Travelling Objects from the Oasis of Khotan,” in \textit{Cultural Flows across the Western Himalaya}, ed. Patrick McAllister, Cristina Scherrer-Schaub, and Helmut Krasser (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften Verlag, 2015), 151–187.}

Texts like the \textit{Mahāmāyūrī} and the \textit{Āṭānāṭīya} recommend various rites under the modality of specific recitations and practices with the scope of ‘regulating the evil’ in the private and public sphere. Other narratives illustrate the case where Buddhist agents directly grant protection from evil in society and, above all, state protection, a function that was assigned to \textit{atharvanic} priests, or traditional specialists. Obviously, when the Buddhist institution was directly involved in these practices, it acquired a peculiarly central role in the political sphere, even if in the context of a variety of mediated or unmediated transactions with the political authority and with the territorial, if not cadastral, owner of the region. When, at some point, the \textit{numina} allotted to the various spheres of the Buddhist traditional cosmology were, under different personal names (at times non-Indic), vested in their/with the charge of protecting the Buddhist regions (or ‘Buddhist to be’), and appointed to sacred sites or cities by the Buddha himself, a variously shaped new configuration of
the social order and the cosmic space was introduced. This phenomenon possibly existed since the very beginning of Buddhism in India. The standardization of plastic and narrative representation of the various categories of divinities, observable from relatively early on, seems to confirm the idea. But this ‘monochromy’ might have coexisted with a ‘polychromy’ of local gods/protectors that were not necessarily represented in painting, plastic, or narrative, but rather in various ritual and social contexts that are by definition ephemeral.

4. Linking the King to the Buddhist Institution

The hierarchy of divinities and the role played by some of them as intermediary in the process of controlling and neutralising noxious forces is attested in various texts, namely the already alluded to Ājānāṭīya-sūtra-nāma mahāsūtra.

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39 Exception do exist, however, e.g. the representation of Wi-nya-myin, the Protectress of Tabo, and her retinue, “placed conspicuously above the entrance to the Assembly Hall opposite the original entrance of the temple”, see Deborah Klimburg-Salter in Tabo: A Lamp for the Kingdom. Early Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Art in the Western Himalaya, ed. (Milan: Skira, 1997), 11 and fig. 39 and 55.

40 See Skilling, Mahāśūtras: Vol. 1, 566–567 and 570–571. With regard to this protective text, Skilling notes that “[I]t has been recognized as one of the most potent parittas, up to the present day. Its influence seems to have been enormous. Its recitation sets up a mandala, a protective circle formed by the four Kings, and subdues the various spirits under their sovereignty. The idea of protection of the four quarters or cardinal points (and sometimes zenith, nadir, and intermediate points) permeates rākṣā literature: through the invocation of the four Great Kings, as in the Mahāmāyūrī, or of sundry yakṣas, as in the Mahāmāyūrī and in the non-canonical Theravādin Chadisāpāla-sutta. Like the Mahāsamāja, the Ājānāṭīya belongs to the ambience of the early caityas and cave temples in India”, see ibid., 575–576, and more explicitly, “At the heart of these two surviving recensions [that is the (Mūla)-sāvastivāda and Theravāda] lies a liturgy that wove together mythological, cosmological, and apotropaic elements, and was most probably recited at sacred sites such as the ancient caityas”, ibid., 577. Incidentally, the Ājānāṭīya is attested (with different orthographies and titles) among mss. of the “Northern Route of the Silk Road”. Cf. e.g. Wille, “Survey of the Sanskrit Manuscripts,” 196. While fragments of the

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At the occasion of the repairs of the stūpa 41 that had been recently destroyed by lightning the king of Oḍi re-enacts the foundation (i.e. the deposit of relics) performed by Vasusena, son of Uttarasena. Senavarma, the present king of Oḍi, shares the merits of his act with relative and officials and deliberately associates to the religious act his lineage, the administrative body of the state and allied (ll. 8d-10b), and possibly, in order to win their favor, includes in the act the worship of a group of major and minor deities (l. 10c), 42 foreshadowing the contract in reciprocity between the institution and the outer society that later on, as seen, will be so to speak overtly affirmed in the Candragarbhasūtra. And the king as said wishes to win the favor of the deities, since as will be seen in the following lines the document considers them as putative noxious forces.

In effect, the inscription of Senavarma shows that the king does not directly invite the various agencies to protect the state and his person but these are indirectly called upon to act as guardians and protectors of the stūpa enshrining the relics. This is indeed implicitly suggested in the imprecatory clause (ll.12e–13e), calling down the unfelicitous consequence of being precipitated 43 to the Avīci-hell (Skr. sa

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42 See von Hinüber, Beiträge zur Erklärung der Senavarma-Inschrift, 34, here quoted after the very convenient author’s Sanskrit rendering: Brahmā sahampatiḥ śakro devānām indraś caivāro mahārājā aṣṭavimśatīr yakṣasenāpatayo hārtī saparivārā pūjitāḥ. To the references given by Gérard Fussman (ibid., 35) and equally inspired by Edgerton, one may add, among other texts, the Mahāmāyūrī and the Suvarṇabhāsottama.

43 The expression padyet saśarīraḥ (gāndhāri on l. 13c: padeati saśarire), is here translated as “may [they] be precipitated”, the verb “precipitate” meaning in its turn “throw down headlong,” French “tomber la tête la première” which is the usual case with the Avīci hell, nicely represented for instance on a bas-relief of Borobudur. Cf. the expression adhāśira (Mahāvastu III 455.3) and the explicit gloss of Dharmasamuccaya XVI.7ab: etān patanti narakān ārdhāvapādā vaṅmukhāḥ ll. (Li-kouang Lin, Dharma-samuccaya: BuddhistRoad Paper 6.1 Special Issue. Scherrer-Schaub, “Conveying India to the Pamir and further Away”
avīcimahānirayaṃ padyet saṣarīraḥ) for all those beings, minor and major gods included (ll. 13b–13c), who would dare damaging the shrine.44

Despite the distance in time that separate the inscription of Senavarma and the narrative of the founding of ‘Buddhist Khotan’, the central role played by the region of Swāt in connecting India to the Pamir and beyond to the Tarim basin45 and the location of particular texts along these itineraries invite to question the presence of the sequence of deities, undoubtedly formulaic and yet particular, that are here associated with the religious act of repairing the damaged stūpa. In the Candragarbhasūtra, whose Chinese translation dates to the 6th century,46 Brahmā Sahaṃpati, Śakra Devendra, and the four mahārājas intervene, as in thousands of other texts, as the interlocutors of Bhagavat. The list of yakṣa and other numina, guardians of cities and regions, assigns Hārītī to the protection of Uḍḍiyāna/Uḍḍiyāna, and Vaiśravaṇa to Khotan.47 While it is well known that Hārītī is connected with the region of northwestern India and particularly with Gandhāra, it is nonetheless interesting to notice the persistence of Hārītī in the region of Swāt from the time of the Oḍi’s inscription to the Candragarbhasūtra. In the Senavarma’s sequence Hārītī appears with an unprecised attendance (saparivāra), while in the Su-

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44 The Senavarma inscription seems to follow the model of the liturgy addressed to the stūpa in the Vinaya tradition, and mention of the first sequence of deities associated with the religious act may have functioned as an ‘enlarged version’ of the common recitation of gāthā. As will be seen in a later Khotanese document (IOL Khot S 21, Prods Oktor Skjærvø with contribution by Ursula Sims-Williams, Khotanese Manuscripts from Chinese Turkestan in the British Library: A Complete Catalogue with Texts and Translations by Prods Oktor Skjærvø with Contributions by Ursula Sims-Williams (London: The British Library, 2002), 522, ll. 14–16), this short sequence of worshipped deities is there included among all those who were called to protect the realm and the king, see p. 129 and n. 60.

45 It is significant, we think, that other epigraphs of the region that precede the Senavarma inscription seem to display another pattern, see Scherrer-Schaub, Questions bouddhiques/Buddhist Questions VII-VIII.

46 Translated by Narendrayaśas from Uḍḍiyāna (born in 517), see Hōbōgirin, Fascicule annexe 1931, 145b. The text could thus have been composed around this epoch or shortly before.

varṇabhāsottama, where she harbours the epithet bhūtamātar, and like in the Mahāmāyūrīvidyārajaṇī, she is accompanied by her five hundred sons.48

48 See Suvarṇabhāsa I. 13 and 14.51: Hārītī bhūta-mātā ca pāmc-a-putra-śatai api / (Prods O. Skjaervo, This Most Excellent Shine of Gold, King of Kings of Sutras. The Khotanese Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra (Cambridge: Harvard University, The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization, 2014), vol. 1, 13 and 273); cf. Māy: Pāñcikena ca yakṣa-senāpatinā, Hārītāya ca pañca-putra-śata-parivārayā bhāṣītā cābhyanumoditā ca (Takubo, The Ārya-Māyūrī-Vidyā-rajaṇī, 56–57). Both the Māy and the Senavarma inscription share a common hierarchy, where Hārītī is listed after a particular sequence which indicates that, by then, Hārītī was submitted. In two other occurrences of the same text, Hārītī appears among the twelve mahāpiśācī (Takubo, The Ārya-Māyūrī-Vidyā-rajaṇī, 29) and among the ten mahārākasī (ibid., 32), the goddesses having protected the gestation and birth of the bodhisattva (supra p. 118). See Scherrer-Schaub, Questions bouddhiques/Buddhist Questions VII–VIII. In her usual ‘comprehensive’ approach of art history, Hélène Diserens critically examines a small image belonging to the school of Vijābrōr, near Brār on the shore of the Jhelum—possibly dating to the 6th century (see Hélène Diserens, “La statue de Brār (Kaśmīr) retrouvée,‖ Arts Asiatiques 48 (1993): 80a)—a region that may be considered as being part of that large area where the ‘stellate itineraries’ (supra p. 114) were crossing (Diserens, “La statue de Brār,” 72–85). The value of this article lies in the fact that the author, after having dedicated an important passage to the iconography, enters the topic of Hārītī in its complexity. Worth mentioning is the evidence of the Ajaṇṭa’s representation of the ferocious ogress and the tamed ‘buddhised’ Hārītī on the same relief, parallel to the case that we find in some texts: “La représentation post kouchane du couple [i.e. Pāñcika and Hārītī], sans doute la plus célèbre, est sculptée sur le grand relief central de la chapelle latérale de la caverne 2 à Ajanta [= Ghulam Yazdani, Ajanta. The Colour and Monochrome Reproductions of the Ajanta Frescoes Based on Photography, Volume 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), II, 34–35, pl. xxxiv]: assise à la droite de Pāñcika selon la coutume indienne de placer les deux conjoints, Hārītī tient un enfant sur son genou gauche et une bourse dans sa main droite. Deux petits reliefs narratifs, placés de chaque côté des divinités, illustrent deux scènes de la légende bouddhique et certifient l’identification de la déesse originaire du Gandhāra: l’ogresse agressant le Buddha et Hārītī convertie agenouillée devant le Buddha‖. Gregory Schopen gives a detailed analysis of various vinaya’s passages concerned with the role of Hārītī as protectress of childrens, see Gregory Schopen, “A New Hat for Hārītī. On ‘Giving’ Children for their Protection to Buddhist Nuns and Monks in Early India,” in Buddhist Nuns, Monks, and other Worldly Matters. Recent Papers on Monastic Buddhism in India, ed. Gregory Schopen (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i, 2014), 130–156. Cf. also Noël Péri, “Hārītī, la mère-de-démons,” Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient 17.3 (1917): 2–43, slightly outdated, no doubt, and yet with useful references to vinaya material, namely on the presence of Hārītī depicted in convent’s refectory where the tamed goddess received regular meals (ibid. 44–48).

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The earliest evidence of Khotan as a Buddhist centre of learning dates to 260. Skjærvø notes that the Tang annals mention “the cult of the celestial god”, which, according to him, “no doubt refers to a remaining Old Iranian Mazdayasnic cult in Khotan.” Concerning the territorial lords of Khotan, however, we know nearly nothing apart from the wooden panel representing the legend of the Rat King, dating to the 6th century. Instead, the Buddhist Protectors of Khotan are well known and well attested not only in the Li yul luṅ bstan and the Li yul chos kyi lo rgyus, but also in other documents, and are illustrated on murals commented in writing on cartouches, as in Mogao Cave 231 in Dunhuang dating to 839.

The Vimalaprabhāparipṛcchā, part of the texts related to the founding of Buddhist Khotan, promotes the circulation of particular works, among them the Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra and the Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra

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50 See Ursula Sims-Williams, “Khotan: A Kingdom of Remarkable Diversity,” in The Silk Road. Trade, Travel, War and Faith, ed. Susan Whitfield and Ursula Sims-Williams (London: The British Library, 2004), 133–138, fig. 26, 137 and n. 1: “Stein notes that the story is similar to that told by Herodotus of the destruction of Sennacherrics’s Assyrian host on the borders of Egypt (Ancient Khotan, 120) and also a later Chinese legend of Buddhist protection against Arab besiegers”. Duan Qing, among other items found in Khotan mentions an “amulet which has a format of approximately 2 m long by 7 cm wide” and that according to the author “represents a certain local cult”, see Duan, “Indic and Khotanese Manuscripts,” 269, 278, and 271. Here however it should be stressed that the term ‘local cult’ does not refer to a specific indigenous cult, but to the fact that the Buddhist text of protection, written in Khotan, in its apotropaic function is ‘designed for a single woman named Savakā’, a Khotanese lady (ibid., 278) who commanded (and possibly paid) the talisman.

that are recommended to be deposited in the royal palace of Khotan, as well as in other strategic places of the kingdom, namely in vihāras, thereby functioning as protectors of the king and the kingdom. These texts, that were also famous among the petty kings of Gilgit, whose name appears in protective texts and colophons, link the family lineage of the lords of the region with other neighbour roitelets, including the royal family of Khotan.

That the Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra was widely circulated, particularly in Khotan, is evidenced by the Khotanese summary mentioning the Ācārya of the Gūmatṭaṇā (Gum tīr) vihāra, the famous monastery having hosted renowned Buddhist scholars of the past. Centred upon the figure of Avalokiteśvara, the Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra is famous for Avalokiteśvara’s polymorphism and shows how, by virtue of his skillfulness in means (upāya-kausālya), Avalokiteśvara may assume various forms. Among these, quite a number of divinities are conceived as his metamorphoses. While the Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra functions as a

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54 Emmerick, A Guide to the Literature of Khotan, 29.
55 In the 7th and 9th centuries, the polymorphous Avalokiteśvara, among whose various forms Īśvara and Maheśvara are included, will find a counterpart in Amṛteśvara that, according to the Netratantra, may assume the form of the Buddha: “It may be urged against this interpretation that the Netratantra includes the Buddha among the forms that may be assumed by Amṛteśvara. For the Buddha is evidently not a brahmanical deity. That objection might hold for other areas of the Indian world but not for Kashmir. For in its account of the local religious calendar the Kashmirian Nīlamatapurāṇa requires the worship of the Buddha in celebration of the day of his birth and Nirvāṇā during the 3 days of the moon’s passing from Puṣya to Maghā in the bright half of Vaiśākha. Moreover, the Netratantra refers to the Buddha at the end of its description of his iconic form “as bestowing the reward of liberation upon women”. This suggests that the worship of [Amṛteśvara as] the Buddha was a duty that the Śaiva officiant was required to perform for the special benefit of the women of the palace. Patronage of Buddhism in Kashmir was not provided by the royal women alone, but in the political history of the kingdom completed by the poet-historian Kalhaṇa in 1148/9 they do figure conspicuously in this role in his account of events immediately before and during the Kārkoṭa dynasty (c. 626–855/6), the period towards whose end I hold the Netratantra to have been composed”, see Alexis Sanderson, “Religion and State: Śaiva Officiants in the Territory of the King’s Brahmanical Chaplain,” Indo-Iranian Journal 47 (2004): 254–255.

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powerful talisman protecting the king and his kingdom, the \textit{Suvarnabhāsottama} acts in a more complex and structured context.\footnote{Among other themes, the \textit{Suvarna} conveys a model of kingship that is also attested in early Tibetan inscriptions, see Scherrer-Schaub, “A Perusal of Early Tibetan Inscriptions,” 135–145 and notes. For an extensive treatment of the \textit{Suvarna} model of royal theory, see Scherrer-Schaub, \textit{Questions bouddhiques/Buddhist Questions} IV.}

The \textit{Book of Zambasta} contains a narrative that may be considered as the foundling motif of the elaborate theme that we find in the \textit{Suvarnabhāsottama} of the king that leaves the palace accompanied by the city’s tutelaries and other gods, and goes to meet the \textit{dharmabhānaka}.\footnote{A detailed treatment of this motif, which may be considered as a variant of the better-known motif of the ‗father and son‘ kept in the *\textit{Pitūputrasamāgamasūtra} (see C\textit{risti}na Scherrer-Schaub, \textit{Yuktisa\'ṭikāvṛtti. Commentaire à la soixantaine sur le raisonnement ou \textit{Du vrai enseignement de la causalité par les Maître indien Candrakīrti}. (Brussels: Institut belge des études chinoises, 1991), ns. 121, 373, 492, and 511), far exceeds the present scope. We may notice in passing that the narrative’s main characters are king Śuddhodana and the Buddha, who returns to his father’s palace and instructs him. In the end, the two main characters will reverse their respective roles: Śuddhodana will call his son ‘father’ while referring to himself as ‘son’ of the Buddha, see Emmerick, \textit{The Book of Zambasta}, chapter 5, 96–117; cf. Dhammadinnā, “Mahāratnakūṭa Scripture in Khotan: A Quotation from the \textit{Samantamukhaparivarta} in the Book of Zambasta,” \textit{Annual Report of The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University} 12 (2014): 339, n. 8. The story ends on 117.1–2 (folio 212), with the transfer of merits gained by the translator: “Through these merits may the śāsana surely last long in the land of Khotan. May the king of Khotan for many years keep the land unharmed”. Further evidence of the act of humility on part of the king is given in the record of Faxian (法顯). When visiting Khotan at the beginning of the 5th century, the Chinese pilgrim describes the procession of images that starts on the first day of the fourth month. When the procession and the cart with the image of the Buddha approach the city, the king, who is standing at the gate of the city with his queen and her parivāra, removes his crown, and dressed with new robes goes barefoot to meet the image. See Jean-Pierre Drège, tr., \textit{Faxian. Mémoire sur les pays bouddhique} (Paris: Les belles lettres, 2013), 6–7.}

An interesting document from the region of Mazar-thag [IOL Khot 50/4 (M.Tagh.b.ii 0065)], a “metrical text composed in the 16th regnal year of Viśa’ Kīrtta (791?–806) who is described as the ‘great gracious lord’”, links the king with the Tibetans and is worth mentioning here in extenso:

When the good time came — at the time when the great Gracious Lord of the blessed aeon (= the Buddha) took birth here, Viśa’ Kīrtta, by the power of (his merits).
[There is] abundance here in everything because of the merits of the king, as well as because of the Tibetan Masters, who are guarding this land of Khotan.

His sixteenth regnal year has passed. Great respect has arisen for him. Because of the guardians for the sake of promoting the Law,

he with faith (and) in love has invited thither to Gara (the Hill of Mazar-tagh), two reverend ones. He at that time, at the beginning of the month of Rāhaja

for the sake of protection of the land (...). (So) strive there in the temple for one year well (and) *uninterrupted, so that all suffering disappear!58

This public record that may be relatively dated to 806/807(?), is interesting in many respects. The Tibetans took Khotan in 791/792 and occupied the region until 851. If the date of the reign of Viśa’ Kīrta is 791–806+,

this means that the king’s floruit was spent entirely under Tibetan domination. In this epoch, the governor of the citadel of Mazar-tagh, the naṅ rje po, was higher up in hierarchy than the king of Khotan.59 The document may also be seen as a case of the king acting as the donor of the Buddhist institution, and the invitation extended to the religious to come


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to Mazar-tagh is but a variant of the model illustrated in the narrative of the Book of Zambasta and the Suvarṇa, alluded to previously. Incidentally, and given the subordinated position imposed to the king by the Tibetans, the exhortation that “all suffering will disappear” sounds somewhat ironic.

A later document [IOL Khot S 21], a detailed praśasti of king Śrī Viša DharmaⅡ dating to 982, bears evidence of another model of royal politics illustrated by the famous motif of the ‘king-and-bodhisattva’. In 978, Viśa’ Dharma succeeds his father Viśa Śūra (r. 967–978?), who:

led a victorious army against the Muslim Ilek-khan of Kashgar and reported on the campaign in a letter to the ruler of Dunhuang, dated 17 February 970, in which he mentioned the capture of a dancing elephant. As it happens, both the original letter from the king (P. 5538a in the Pelliot collection, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris) and a record of the event in the Chinese annals have been preserved, in which we are told of a dancing elephant captured during a victorious struggle with Kashgar and presented to the Chinese court in 971.

Most interesting, “Viśa’ Śūra mentions his ‘Tajik’ son at Kashgar”. Prods Oktor Skjærvø advances the hypothesis that this fact might have proved the undoing of Khotan and Buddhism in Xinjiang, for shortly after King Viśa Śūra was succeeded by Viśa’ Dharma in 978, relations with the Dunhuang government seem to have been broken off, presumably because of Uighur pressure from Ganzhou, graphically reflected in a series of Khotanese letters probably dating to 990–993.

He concludes:

We may perhaps conjecture that the king’s Muslim relative at Kashgar not long after this replaced Viśa’ Dharma as king of Khotan.  

If this is the case, then one could surmise that the praśasti of king Viśa Dharma is intended as an exalted exhortation addressed to the king to preserve the Buddhist religion in Khotan, and his political, familial, and

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60 The document IOL Khot S 21 is edited and translated by Prods O. Skjærvø, Khotanese Manuscripts, 522–524.


religious link with Dunhuang. We find in it a list of bodhisattvas, divinities (Śakra, Brahmā, Nārāyaṇa, Maheśvara, Skandha, Varuṇa, and others) and numina, said to have granted kingship to the king. Various significant epithets are here piled any old how, painting the present king of Khotan/Gostanadeśa, among others, as rājesvarī and bala-cakravartin rāja, epithets that link the epigraph to various Buddhist texts and that, all things considered, could be applied to the contextual political situation (“subduer of all kings”). Further on, the text recalls that the protectors gave him the name of

Viśa’ Dharma bodhisattva and king, adding that, like Lord Śakra, who is a lamp shining among the Trāyastriṃśa gods, Viśa’ Dharma [shines] among the kings of the Jambudvīpa.

Interesting clues are found in the eulogy’s narratio cum dipositio, where we learn that the king wished to take a Chinese princess from the royal family of Dunhuang as future queen in order to ensure the continuation of “the golden kingly family.” Viśa’ Dharma thus sends an envoy to Dunhuang in search of that ‘pearl,’ and this gives occasion to the panegyrist to praise the region:

63 Cf. the document IOL Khot S 21 (Ch.i.0021a), l. 20: “Sous le roi-boddhisattva (sic) Viśa Darma (sic), 5e année du règne cū-hiña, année du Cheval, 7e mois=23 juillet-21 août 982,” see Hamilton, “Les règnes khotanais entre 851 et 1001,” 51.

Like the land of gods (is) the city of Shazhou, like a lamp, pure (like) gold melted a hundred times, – or like a peak studded with jewels, brilliant, beautiful, like that that land shines together with (its) king.\textsuperscript{66}

Further he praises the Buddha and Bodhisattva images, beautifully displayed in the twin monastery of Gūmattīra, the Dunhuang replica of the famous homonymous Khotanese mahāvihāra. This extraordinary document finds impressive resonance in events having occurred in the neighbour kingdom of Puraṅ-Guge a few decades later. Indeed, the monastic site of Tabo (Spiti, Himachal Pradesh, India) was founded in 996 by king Ye śes ‘od, whose reign might have partially overlapped with the reign of king Viśa’ Dharma. Epigraphical records and the evidence of a colophon give various titles to king Ye śes ‘od that, among other interesting aspects of the question, link the king of Puraṅ-Guge with his ancestors of Central Tibet. In both Tabo and Tholing, he is recorded as bodhisattva, though in a slightly different way. In Tabo, he is said to be

\textit{\textbf{born in the divine lineage of the Ancestors and bodhisattvas (\textit{sñon mes Byaṅ chub sms dpa'}\textsuperscript{41}) [he] the bodhisattva, the guide of all black-headed men (byaṅ chub sms dpa’ gi myi rje lhas mdzad mgo’ nag yoṅs kyī mgon… Ye śes ‘od), a lord of men made/magically created by [a portion of] all gods, [king] Ye śes ‘od,\textsuperscript{67}}

However, in Tholing he is simply “Great bodhisattva, dharma-protector, divine teacher Ye śes ‘od (byaṅ chub sms dpa’ chen po cho[s] sk[yoṅ] lha bla ma Ye śes ‘od)”.\textsuperscript{68}

In previous research, we drew attention to the possible various links existing between these regions, Kāśmīr, Central Asia, and, more specifically, the region of Khotan.\textsuperscript{69} It is equally Ye śes ‘od, the king of Puraṅ-

\textsuperscript{66} Skjærvø, Khotanese Manuscripts, 524; ll. 17–19.
\textsuperscript{67} Scherrer-Schaub, “A Perusal of Early Tibetan Inscriptions,” 141 and notes.

\textsuperscript{41} BuddhistRoad Paper 6.1 Special Issue. Scherrer-Schaub, “Conveying India to the Pamir and further Away”
Guge, who is recorded as “Princely Donor and Bodhisattva” in the colophon appended to a manuscript of the Tibetan translation of the Šatasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā, bearing the same titulature as the king of Khotan. In that colophon, Ye śes ‘od appears as if “in assuming the religious life [of a bodhisattva he] abandoned the ‘state affairs’ but retained, in one way or another, the ‘religious-cum-political-power’”, 70 a status that he seemingly did not share with his homologous neighbour, the last Buddhist (and Muslim?) king of Khotan.

Further links between Khotan and the western regions are evidenced in the famous description of the route given in the travel report, dating to the reign of Abhimanyagupta (958–972) of the Utpāla Dynasty (855–1003) in Kāśmīr, better known as “Saka itinerary” (IOL Khot S 21 Ch. i0021a.b.), the title that Morgenstierne gave to his article published in 1942. 71 The fact that Viśa Śūra (r. 967–978?) was filled with wonder at seeing the dancing elephants, is nicely echoing the amazement of the Khotanese travellers who styled this precious document, which records a series of monasteries and temples and indicates the mountains and rivers of a large area extending from the Pamir to Gilgit and Kāśmīr and observing, among other, the use of entering the river on ‘inflated skin’”, a practice that was also known along the gTsaṅ po. When speaking of king Abhimanyagupta, the travellers are struck by the great number of elephants that they saw in Kāśmīr: were they part of the elephantry announcing the sound of the war-drums beating in the vicinity?

And there is more. Rinchen Zanpo (Tib. Rin chen bzaṅ po, ca. 958–1055), the emblematic figure of the renewal of Buddhism in Tibet, a son of mNa’ ris, left his country in 975 at the age of seventeen, and went first to Kāśmīr where he studied with the famous paṇḍita Śraddhākaravarman

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moving then, as it seems, to northern India and returned home in 988.\(^{72}\)

In this epoch or on the occasion of his second visit to Kāśmīr, Rinchen Zanpo might have met the famous Kāśmīri pandita and physician Janārdana, who was then collaborating with Dharmaśrīvarma and Śākya Blo gros (two of his own collaborators), and who translated the \(\text{Aṣṭāṅga-hṛdaya-nāma-vaiḍūryaka-bhāṣya}\) of Vāgbhaṭa. The colophon says that the translation had been performed “by order of the Divine btsan po of Tibet, the \(ācārya\) Byaṅ chub sems dpa’ the Divine Guru Jñānaprabha”\(^{73}\) otherwise said king Ye śes ‘od. And this colophon, once again, appears as one of the numerous flashes studding the ‘stellate itineraries’ that we have been dealing with here and that will lead us even further away.


**Abbreviations**


Ch. Ch’ien fō tung (Qian fō dong) the “Thousand Buddhas Caves” (commonly referred to as Dunhuang) Stein site about 10 miles southeast of modern Dunhuang (cf. n. 75).


IOL Khot S Shelf no. of manuscripts scrolls from Qian fo dong, see Ch., Cf. n. 75.


M. Tagh. Mazār Tāgh “Hill of the sacred shrine”, Stein site north of Khotan on the Khotan river.75

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74 The present author after having noted current confusion in the use of Abbreviations has deemed useful to precise the siglas, as they are adopted by the scholars in their respective fields, and as they could be equally advantageously adopted by the general public. Needless to say indeed, that each of them are important ‘markers’ for the historians.

Or Oriental. “Or” refers to the main manuscripts accession sequence, first of the OMPB [Department of Oriental Manuscripts and Printed Books of the British Library, formerly part of the British Museum] and subsequently of the joint British Library Oriental Collection/India Office Library. See n. 75.

P. Chinese Manuscripts from Dunhuang in the Paul Pelliot Chinese collection, Bibliothèque nationale de France (BN), Paris

P. T. P. tib.76 Tibetan Manuscripts from Dunhuang in the Paul Pelliot Tibetan collection, Bibliothèque nationale de France (BN), Paris.


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76 This is the adopted sigla in French publications, see e.g. Françoise Wang-Toutain, Catalogue des manuscrits chinois de T’ouen-Houang. Fragments chinois du Fonds Pelliot tibétain de la Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris, École française d’Extrême-Orient, 2001). It has the advantage of avoiding the ambiguity created by the use, among some Tibetologists, of the sigla “P.T.” to abbreviate the name of the famous Tibetan historian dPa’o gTsug lag phreñ ba (1504-1566).

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