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INSIDE OUT: THE SOCIAL LIFE OF A PAIR OF INSCRIBED BOOK COVERS FROM ANCIENT KHOTAN

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INSIDE OUT: THE SOCIAL LIFE OF A PAIR OF INSCRIBED BOOK COVERS FROM ANCIENT KHOTAN*

RUIXUAN CHEN

Abstract

This paper presents the preliminary findings of an in-depth investigation of a pair of wooden book covers, each inscribed on the inside, which a Russian diplomat brought from the Tarim Basin to St. Petersburg. Pinpointing the find-spot of the covers as a significant archaeological site to the east of Khotan, the present research analyses the inscriptions, sheds new light on the materiality of the covers, and suggests that they were probably used as votive objects. A salient aspect of the covers is that they bear testimony to a close connection between the monastery, to which they once belonged, and some prestigious monasteries known from Chinese and Tibetan sources. Based on a careful reconstruction of the ties between these monasteries and their socio-religious implications, a tentative hypothesis is ventured on the nature of the binary system of Buddhist monasteries in the Kingdom of Khotan (ca. 1st c.?–1006).

1. *The Covers*

The present paper attempts a reconstruction, albeit incomplete, of the socio-historical background against which a pair of wooden tablets was perceived and used, and ventures a hypothesis of its implications. The wooden tablets, with which the paper is concerned, came into the hands of the Swiss Indologist Ernst Leumann (1859–1931) in 1909. At that time, Leumann saw them used as the covering boards of an 8th-century manuscript of the so-called *Book of Zambasta*, a Khotanese Buddhist poem probably composed no later than the 5th century.¹ As a sharp-

* The present paper has grown out of the revision and rewriting of a small section of my PhD dissertation, i.e., Ruixuan Chen, “The *Nandimitrāvādāna*: A Living Text from the Buddhist Tradition,” (PhD diss., Universiteit Leiden, 2018), 35–52. For a careful reading and insightful comments on earlier drafts, I am much obliged to Jonathan A. Silk (Leiden), Paul M. Harrison (Stanford), Mauro Maggi (Rome), and Fan Lin (Leiden). I am thankful to Michaël Peyrot (Leiden), the peer-reviewer of the manuscript who revealed his identity, for his constructive comments, which improved the paper stylistically and saved



sighted philologist, Leumann immediately noticed that each of the two covers was inscribed in Brāhmī script on its inside. Having made a draft transcription of the inscriptions, he had to return the materials to St. Petersburg for a time. When the manuscript came back to him about one year later, it came without any covers. Therefore, he was no longer able to check his transcription against the original.² This is the earliest record we have about the existence of the covers under discussion. Leumann explicitly mentioned the source of the materials as St. Petersburg, where the pair of book covers, having been returned by Leumann, was probably held back for some reason.

It was not until the 1990s that scholars outside Russia were informed again about the back cover. While preparing a comprehensive edition of all the Khotanese texts preserved in St. Petersburg, Ronald E. Emmerick (1937–2001), one of the doyens of Khotanese studies in the 20th century, studied and published facsimile of the back cover, which was back then referred to as SI P 6.1.³ The whereabouts of the front cover, as a matter of fact, remained a mystery for a bit longer. No facsimile of the front cover

me from a number of oversights. A preliminary version of the paper was presented on October 23, 2019 at the BuddhistRoad project, CERES, Ruhr-Universität Bochum. I thank Carmen Meinert (Bochum) and Haoran Hou (Bochum, Beijing) for their kind invitation, and all the participants on that occasion, including Jens-Uwe Hartmann (Munich), Iain Sinclair (Wollongong), Yukiyo Kasai (Bochum), and Henrik H. Sørensen (Bochum), for inspirational dialogues and constructive critiques. Special thanks go to Erika Forte (Kyoto) for sharing a map published below, and to my students and friends, particularly Tianren Jiang, Xueni Lin, and Miao Yang, for their generous assistance with various technical aspects of this paper. The usual disclaimer applies.

¹ Too much has been published on this book to give an exhaustive bibliography here. For a Romanized edition of this book with English translation, see Ronald E. Emmerick, *The Book of Zambasta: A Khotanese Poem on Buddhism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968). For a brief but informed introduction to this book, see most recently Mauro Maggi, “Local Literatures: Khotanese,” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Buddhism I: Literature and Languages*, ed. Jonathan A. Silk et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 861–862. For the *terminus ante quem* of its composition, see 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 et al. (Berlin: Reimer, 2004), 184–190.

² See Ernst Leumann, *Buddhistische Literatur: Nordarisch und Deutsch* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1920), 164–165.

³ Ronald E. Emmerick and Margarita I. Vorob’ëva-Desjatovskaja, *Saka Documents Text Volume III: The St. Petersburg Collection* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1995), 34–36.

had been given to Emmerick by 1995,⁴ but its original was rediscovered afterwards, assigned the shelf mark SI P 6.0, and put at the disposal of Emmerick,⁵ whose untimely death prevented him from publishing it in a projected supplement to the 1995 volume.

In all likelihood, both of the book covers belonged to the Petrovsky Collection consisting of Central Asian artifacts which were donated by Nikolai F. Petrovsky (1837–1908) in 1905 or purchased by the Russian Academy of Sciences after his death.⁶ Petrovsky was the Russian consul general in Kašgar during the years 1882–1903. As an assertive contender for Russia's supremacy in the so-called Great Game (most of the 19th c. to 20th c.),⁷ Petrovsky was so enthusiastic about collecting antiquities from the Tarim Basin that he not only acquired numerous manuscripts and artworks but also made them available to eminent Russian scholars of his time.⁸ However, he was not an archaeologist digging sites himself, and his acquisition of antiquities was in fact carried out through the agency of some purveyors in Khotan, e.g. Badruddhin, formerly an elder (*aqsaqal*, lit. 'white beard') of the Afghan and Indian merchants, and

⁴ Emmerick and Vorob'ëva-Desjatovskaja, *Saka Documents*, 34: "Unfortunately it has not proved possible to find the front cover."

⁵ In his unpublished draft of a glossary of the St. Petersburg Collection, Emmerick made the following comments (p. 12): "The front cover has meantime been found and is accordingly referred to as SI P 6.0." In addition, a coloured photograph of the front cover is found in his *Nachlass*.

⁶ See Emmerick and Vorob'ëva-Desjatovskaja, *Saka Documents*, 19. In the case of the manuscript and book covers, it is more likely that they were purchased after Petrovsky's death in 1908; see Margarita I. Vorob'ëva-Desjatovskaja, *The Caves of the One Thousand Buddhas: Russian Expeditions on the Silk Route, on the Occasion of 190 Years of the Asiatic Museum* (St. Petersburg: The State Hermitage, 2008), 103.

⁷ On the Great Game against its historical and political background see Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia* (New York: Kodansha International, 1992).

⁸ For an introduction to N.F. Petrovsky and his collection, see Julia Elikhina, "Some Buddhist Finds from Khotan: Materials in the Collections of the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg," *The Silk Road* 6.1 (2008): 29–37. For his contacts with the renowned Russian Orientalist S.F. Oldenburg, who was offered the opportunity to study some of the manuscripts acquired by Petrovsky as early as in the 1890s; see Irina F. Popova, "S.F. Oldenburg's First Russian Turkestan Expedition (1909–1910)," in *Russian Expeditions to Central Asia at the Turn of the 20th Century*, ed. Irina F. Popova (St. Petersburg: Slavia, 2008), 148–149.



Keraken Moldovack, an Armenian carpet dealer.⁹ Therefore, it is not unlikely that Petrovsky also purchased the pair of book covers from those purveyors who, in their turn, employed treasure hunters to procure them those items. Given that Leumann first received the pair of covers together with the manuscript sandwiched between them, it is not far-fetched to assume that they were originally used as the covers of the book, with which they were discovered and sold.

As is the case with most items collected from treasure hunters, it is impossible to pinpoint the find-spot of the manuscript in question, which was dismantled early on with its bits and bobs sold to different buyers.¹⁰ Through a stroke of good fortune, Ellsworth Huntington (1876–1947), an American geographer who visited the Tarim Basin in 1905, came across a folio of the very same manuscript (i.e., fol. 214) at Khādalik, a site ca. 110 kilometres due east of present-day Khotan.¹¹ It thus transpired that this manuscript hailed from Khādalik, and that those treasure hunters plundered this site in such a frantic manner that parts of the manuscript were probably neglected and left *in situ*. This also points to a strong likelihood of identifying Khādalik as the find-spot of the pair of book covers, which constitute a unique piece of evidence for the religious life of the monastic community that had once occupied the site of Khādalik. Before unpacking this piece of evidence, a concise introduction to the archaeological context of the site is in order.

⁹For various sources and accounts on the lives of the two purveyors whose activities as antiquity dealers continued down into the 1930s, see Daniel C. Waugh and Ursula Sims-Williams, “The Old Curiosity Shop in Khotan,” *The Silk Road* 8 (2010): 72–75.

¹⁰For information on the fate of this manuscript in general, see Ronald E. Emmerick, *The Book of Zambasta: A Khotanese Poem on Buddhism* (London & New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), xi–xix; Waugh and Sims-Williams, “The Old Curiosity Shop,” 85–86.

¹¹See Ellsworth Huntington, *The Pulse of Asia: A Journey in Central Asia Illustrating the Geographic Basis of History* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1907), opposite 206. This folio is now housed at Yale University Library as part of the Huntington Collection and catalogued under the shelf mark “Series XV, Box 1, Folder 8: Khotanese fragment I.” A photograph of this folio is on display on the homepage of this collection, accessed January 2021. <https://guides.library.yale.edu/SouthAsiaMSSA/Huntington>.

2. The Find-spot

Khādalik (lit. ‘the place with the sign stake’) is one of the best documented archaeological sites in the Khotan region thanks to the meticulous description¹² by Marc Aurel Stein (1862–1943), a Hungarian-born British archaeologist who excavated this site from September to October 1907.¹³ According to Stein, the site of Khādalik consists of two ruined ‘shrines’—one in the north (i.e., Kha.i), the other about 35 metres to the south of it (i.e., Kha.ii)—and a number of small structures mostly situated in the vicinity of the ‘shrines’ (fig. 1). The term ‘shrine’ was not clearly defined by Stein, but one may infer from his detailed description that it refers to a rectangular space enclosed by a concentric passage probably for circumambulation. The centre of the space could have been occupied by an over life-size monumental image as a prominent object of worship, as evinced in the vestiges of a central platform in the northern ‘shrine’. But the details remain obscure, for the ‘shrines’ were in complete disarray as Stein saw it, while their beautifully frescoed walls had been shattered in quarrying many centuries ago.¹⁴ Among the small structures, a middle-sized hall (i.e., Kha.iii), immediately adjoining the southern ‘shrine’, appears to have had a sizeable platform occupying about one third of its space, and thus may well have served some ritual function (e.g. as an assembly hall). There are three small structures located next to the northern ‘shrine’ (i.e., Kha.iv, viii, and x),¹⁵ each endowed with a fireplace made of clay alongside a plastered sitting platform. The layout of the small structures seems to suggest that they were cells in which monks took up quarters.¹⁶

¹² See Marc A. Stein, *Serindia: Detailed Report of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost China*, vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1921), 154–163.

¹³ For a personal narrative of this excavation in his second expedition (1906–1908), see Marc A. Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay: Personal Narrative of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost China* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1912), 236–246.

¹⁴ Stein, *Serindia*, 156–157.

¹⁵ The small structures seem to have served as workshops for the carpenters engaged in the quarrying of the timber from the northern ‘shrine’ after the latter’s desertion, as is evinced in the heaps of chippings etc. found inside the rooms. See Stein, *Serindia*, 157.

¹⁶ Stein, *Serindia*, 159 and 161.

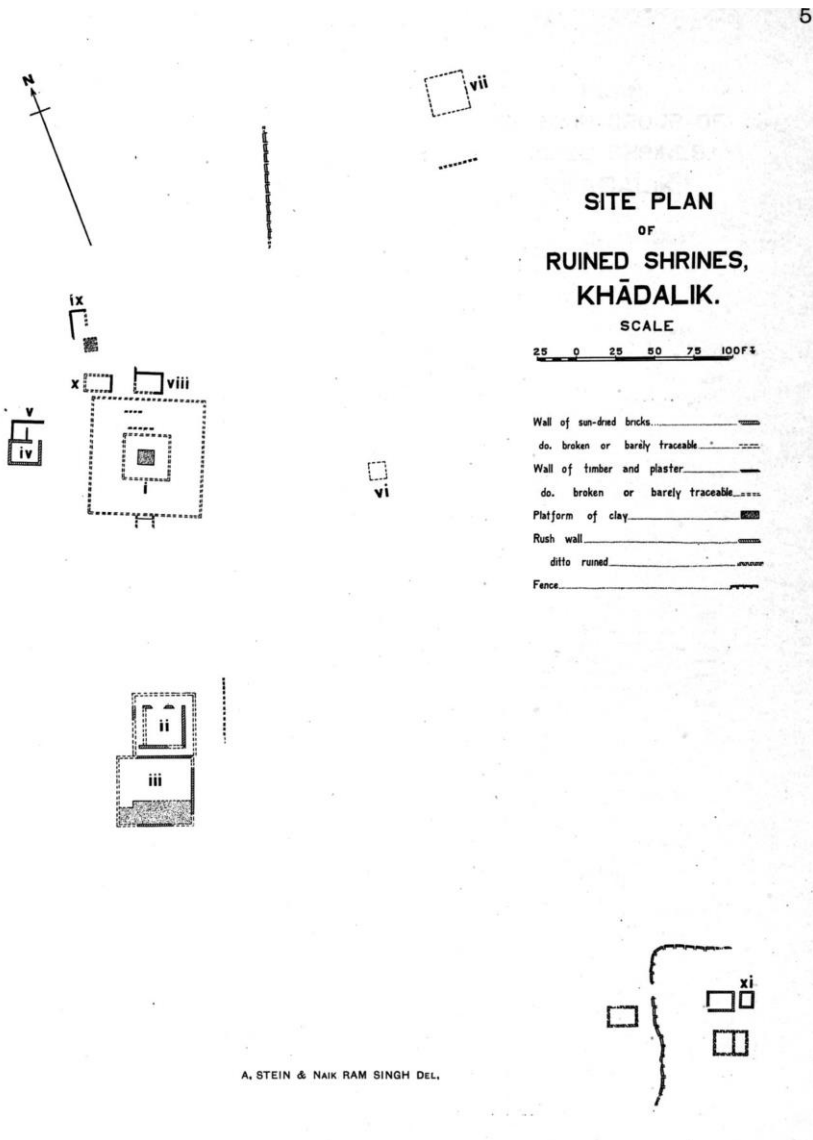


Figure 1. Site plan of Khādalik. Adapted from Stein, *Serindia*, vol. 3, 5.

Copious Buddhist manuscripts, in both Sanskrit and Khotanese, are discovered at the site of Khādalik. The vast majority of the texts copied in those manuscripts are Mahāyāna in character: Apart from the aforementioned manuscript of the *Book of Zambasta*, Khādalik yielded fragments of almost all the major Mahāyāna *sūtras* that are known to have circulated in Khotan.¹⁷ Nevertheless, a variety of non-Mahāyāna Buddhist works were also transmitted among local Buddhists, including belles-lettres,¹⁸ collection of narratives,¹⁹ and Mainstream canonical texts.²⁰ They are proof that the monastic community residing at this site had catholic tastes in Buddhist literature. Among all the manuscripts unearthed from Khādalik, only those belonging to the Stein Collection

¹⁷For a list of Mahāyāna texts testified to by manuscript remains from the Khotan region, see Klaus Wille, “Survey of the Identified Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Hoernle, Stein, and Skrine Collections of the British Library (London),” in *From Birch Bark to Digital Data: Recent Advances in Buddhist Manuscript Research*, ed. Paul M. Harrison and Jens-Uwe Hartmann (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2014), 226–227. The lion’s share of the manuscripts stems from the site of Khādalik.

¹⁸There are fragments of an adaptation of Aśvaghōṣa’s *Buddhacarita* (IOL San 1123–1124, 1233–1234) and of Triratnadāsa’s *Guṇāparyantastotra* (IOL San 1387); see Louis de la Vallée Poussin, “Documents sanscrits de la seconde collection M.A. Stein,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1911): 770–772 and 1064–1067. In addition, there is a folio from a manuscript of Mārceta’s *Anaparāddhasotra* (IOL San 1388); see Wille, “Some Recently Identified Sanskrit Fragments from the Stein and Hoernle Collections in the British Library, London,” *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University* 8 (2005): 68.

¹⁹Klaus Wille and Seishi Karashima identified a set of fragments (i.e., IOL San 761, 1242, 1256, Or.15010/130) as parts of Kumāralāta’s *Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā Dṛṣṭāntapaṅkti*; see Wille, “Some Recently Identified Sanskrit Fragments,” 62–64; Karashima, “The Sanskrit Fragments Or.15010 in the Hoernle Collection,” in *The British Library Sanskrit Fragments Volume II.1: Buddhist Manuscripts from Central Asia*, ed. Seishi Karashima et al. (Tōkyō: International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University, 2009), 494–495; and Wille, “Survey of the Identified Sanskrit Manuscripts,” 226. With regard to these fragments, see also Diego Loukota Sanclemente, “The Goods that Cannot Be Stolen: Mercantile Faith in Kumāralāta’s *Garland of Examples Adorned by Poetic Fancy*” (PhD diss., University of California – Los Angeles, 2019), 72–73, where the bibliographical information is to be slightly corrected.

²⁰Some fragments written in the paleographic variety “Gilgit/Bāmīyān Type I” (i.e., Or.8212/39 and 103a+b) appear to belong to the *Samyuktāgama* of an unknown Mainstream school; see de la Vallée Poussin, “Documents sanscrits de la seconde collection M.A. Stein,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1913): 569–580; and Klaus Wille, “Some Recently Identified Sanskrit Fragments from the Stein and Hoernle Collections in the British Library, London (2),” in *The British Library Sanskrit Fragments Volume I: Buddhist Manuscripts from Central Asia*, ed. Seishi Karashima et al. (Tokyo: International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology, 2006), 49.



were archaeologically excavated and thus assigned site marks. In other words, with regard to a substantial portion of the Khādalik manuscripts, it is not possible to ascertain which structure of the site had originally housed them.

As far as the Stein Collection is concerned, the lion's share of the Khādalik manuscripts stemmed from the two major 'shrines', in which, according to Stein, they "had originally been deposited as votive offerings".²¹ In addition, a considerable number of manuscripts seem to have been deposited near the entrance to two square cellae—one situated north of the two cells adjacent to the northern 'shrine' (i.e., Kha.ix), the other at some distance to the east of this monastic complex (i.e., Kha.vi)—the walls of which were largely ruined. Due to the scanty structural remains, it is difficult to reconstruct the original functionality of the two structures; but vestiges of their decoration are indicative of a close resemblance to the two 'shrines',²² even though they seem to be of a smaller size and without any circumambulation passage. Therefore, the manuscripts deposited in those structures could also have been votive objects. Some dozen fragments were found atop wood chippings within one of the aforementioned cells (i.e., Kha.viii), where turned pieces of wood apparently transferred from the northern 'shrine' during the quarrying were also discovered.²³ It is thus not impossible that those fragments had originally also belonged to the northern 'shrine' rather than to monks dwelling in this cell. All in all, the manuscript finds from Khādalik are to be interpreted against the backdrop of the overall cultic orientation of the site.

The cultic orientation of the site also finds expression in numerous fragments of frescoed walls as well as painted panels, which provide invaluable evidence of Buddhist iconography in Khotan.²⁴ The Indo-

²¹ See Stein, *Serindia*, 158. Stein went so far as to surmise that the dispersion of leaves and fragments in the 'shrines' resulted from purposeful endeavors of the worshippers, a phenomenon which he observed elsewhere in the southern Tarim Basin (p. 159, fn. 9).

²² For the fragmentary reliefs in wood and stucco found on the two spots, see Stein, *Serindia*, 160, 162. Stein explicitly designated Kha.vi as "a small shrine" (p. 160). If that is anything to go by, what he meant by 'shrine' in this case is not completely the same as in the case of the two major 'shrines'.

²³ Stein, *Serindia*, 161.

²⁴ For an old survey of Buddhist iconography in Khotanese paintings, which remains the most thorough treatment of this subject matter despite the passage of time, see Joanna Williams, "Iconography of Khotanese Painting," *East and West* 23 (1973): 109–154.

Buddhist pantheon, as represented in those artworks from Khādalik, includes buddhas (e.g. the cosmological Vairocana),²⁵ bodhisattvas (e.g. Avalokiteśvara and Kṣitigarbha),²⁶ guardian numina (e.g. Vaiśravaṇa),²⁷ non-Buddhist deities of Indian origin (e.g. Maheśvara and Gaṇeśa),²⁸ and an indigenous culture hero, i.e., the Silk Princess credited with the introduction of sericulture into Khotan.²⁹ An aura of reciprocity between the heterogeneous pantheon and local Buddhist donors, lay and monastic alike, seems to have suffused this site, and as such could be evoked, enacted, and renewed by ritual means. The site of Khādalik thus flourished as a regional centre of worship throughout the 7th and 8th centuries and was probably deserted at the close of the 8th century or the beginning of the 9th century,³⁰ as the Kingdom of Khotan came under the sway of the Tibetan Empire (Tib. Bod chen po, ca. 7th c. to 842).

²⁵ See Williams, “Iconography,” 118, figs. 4–10. For the issue of the supposed transmission of the imagery of the Cosmological Buddha from Khotan to Kuča and beyond, see the critical reappraisal by Angela F. Howard, *The Imagery of the Cosmological Buddha* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 95–102.

²⁶ See Williams, “Iconography,” 130–132, figs. 30–31, 35.

²⁷ See Williams, “Iconography,” 132–133, fig. 38; and Tanabe Katsumi 田辺勝美, *Bishamonten zō no kigen 毘沙門天像の起源* [The Genesis of the Image of Vaiśravaṇa] (Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin, 2005), 177–179.

²⁸ See Williams, “Iconography,” 143–146, figs. 53 and 54. For a more up-to-date, iconographic study of the non-Buddhist deities depicted in the murals from Dandān-ōiliq, a site showing a certain affinity with Khādalik, see Ciro Lo Muzio, “Brahmanical Deities in Foreign Lands: The Fate of Skanda in Buddhist Central Asia,” *BuddhistRoad Paper 6.1 Special Issue: Central Asian Networks: Rethinking the Interplay of Religions, Art and Politics across the Tarim Basin (5th–10th c.)*, ed. Erika Forte (2019): 8–43.

²⁹ See Williams, “Iconography,” 148, fig. 61. For the legend of the Silk Princess and its chronological issues, see also Étienne de la Vaissière, “Silk, Buddhism and Early Khotanese Chronology,” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* (New Series) 24 (2014): 85–87.

³⁰ The dating of the site’s abandonment to the end of the 8th century was proposed by Stein, *Serindia*, vol. 1, 157 and 159, on the basis of numismatic evidence (esp. dated Tang 唐 coins found *in situ*). A small number of Old Tibetan documents seem to point to the dwelling of Tibetan officials at the site of Khādalik in the early 9th century, since the name of one of the officials mentioned in one of the documents (i.e., Or.15000/257, site mark: Kha.vi.14.a.) is otherwise attested in a datable Old Tibetan contract in the Hedin Collection; see Tsuguhito Takeuchi, “Three Old Tibetan Contracts in the Sven Hedin Collection,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 57.3 (1994): 577, fn. 10. For a transliteration of these documents, see Tsuguhito Takeuchi, *Old Tibetan Manuscripts from East Turkestan in the Stein Collection of the British Library. Volume II: Descriptive Catalogue* (London: The British Library and the Toyo Bunko, 1998), 111–113, §§348–351. It must be emphasised that the Tibetans must not be held culpable for the desertion of those monastic sites in Khotan. Neither is there circumstantial evidence for



This sets the *terminus ante quem* for a cache of inscribed wooden tablets from Khādalik, which have a typological affinity with the present covers. The inscriptions are in Khotanese and Tibetan, dating back to the 8th century and the early 9th century, respectively. Stein mentioned one of the aforesaid cellae (i.e., Kha.ix) as the find-spot of “a dozen wooden tablets inscribed with Brāhmī characters,” which are mostly elongated in shape.³¹ Two other wooden tablets, larger in width, are discovered at the same site—one from the southern ‘shrine’,³² the other without site mark.³³ Judging from their shapes and inscriptions, those tablets were probably used as tallies of tax collection, receipts for grain, records of water rights, etc. in a monastic context.³⁴ Four wooden tablets inscribed in Tibetan script, bearing witness to the last days of this monastic site, were excavated or purchased by Stein.³⁵ In terms of functionality the tablets

any pogroms against Khotanese Buddhists initiated by the Tibetan authorities, under whose rule at least some monasteries continued to exist; see Erika Forte, “Khotan in the Last Quarter of the First Millennium: Is There Artistic Evidence of the Interrelations between Khotan and Tibet? A Preliminary Survey,” in *Coins, Art and Chronology II: The First Millennium C.E. in the Indo-Iranian Borderlands*, ed. Michael Alram et al. (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010), 461–462. Therefore, the reasons that monasteries such as that at Khādalik became desolate should be sought elsewhere.

³¹ Stein, *Serindia*, 162. Those wooden tablets are still preserved in the British Library under the shelf numbers IOL Khot W 10–18 and 52–54. According to Stein, there were inscribed wooden tablets also unearthed from the other cella (i.e., Kha.vi.14). Those tablets seem to be no longer extant. See Stein, *Serindia*, 162.

³² This tablet is catalogued as IOL Khot W 58 (site mark: Kha.ii.3).

³³ This tablet (Or.9612) formed part of the Skrine collection. According to a note on its wrapper, it was originally discovered at Khādalik, but no information about the exact find-spot is forthcoming; see Daniel C. Waugh and Ursula Sims-Williams, “The Old Curiosity Shop in Khotan,” *The Silk Road* 8 (2010): 81, 83.

³⁴ For English translations of the inscriptions, see Prods O. Skjærvø, *Khotanese Manuscripts from Chinese Turkestan in the British Library: A Complete Catalogue with Texts and Translations* (London: The British Library, 2002), 78, 562–564, and 570–572.

³⁵ For the record of the discovery of IOL Tib N 2209 (site mark: Kha.ix.7), see Stein, *Serindia*, 162. Stein loc.cit. mentioned two other fragmentary wooden tablets inscribed in Tibetan script from Kha.vi. and viii. The latter may be identified with the tiny fragments subsumed under IOL Tib N 2298, on which the Tibetan letters are hardly legible. Stein acquired through Badruddīn Khān three other Tibetan wooden tablets (i.e., IOL Tib N 2229, 2231, and 2234), allegedly unearthed from Khādalik, during his third expedition (1913–1916); see Marc A. Stein, *Innermost Asia: Detailed Report of Exploration in Central Asia* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1928), 130.

were probably letters and tally sticks,³⁶ which shed light on some aspects of the Tibetan military administration of Khotan without any discernible connection with monastic everyday life. To sum up, among the extant wooden tablets from Khādalik, whose inscriptions are mostly ephemera having no religious content, the present covers stand out as a remarkable exception.

3. *The Inscriptions*

Both of the covers are polished and inscribed on the inside, while on the rough outside there is nothing but a handful of scribbled words.³⁷ The inside inscriptions are neither epistolary nor secular in character, but exhibit some intriguing connections with religious sphere, which might be indicative of their ritual use.

The inscription written on the front cover (SI 1930; erstwhile SI P 6.0) consists of nine lines of Brāhmī letters, which seem to have been written in the same hand. The first two lines had been so mutilated that only a couple of letters were visible to Leumann who deciphered the remaining lines of the inscription with success.³⁸ According to Leumann, the legible part of the inscription comprises four verses in Khotanese and a prose passage in Sanskrit. The Khotanese verses foreground the significance of

³⁶ IOL Tib N 2209 is furnished with a seal case at its left end and thus likely to consist of the cover and beginning of a letter; see August H. Francke, “Notes on Sir Aurel Stein’s Collection of Tibetan Documents from Chinese Turkestan,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1914): 52–53; and Stein, *Serindia*, 162. IOL Tib N 2231 and 2234 apparently contain parts of two letters on military and/or administrative matters (see Frederick W. Thomas, “Appendix R: Notes on the Tibetan Manuscripts Illustrated in Plates CXXX–CXXXIII,” in Stein, *Innermost Asia*, 1086–1087), while IOL Tib N 2229 seems to have been used as tally stick by a mountain convoy. See Frederick W. Thomas, “Tibetan Documents Concerning Chinese Turkestan VII: Government and Social Conditions,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1934): 461.

³⁷ For transcriptions of the outside scribbles, see Ernst Leumann, *Das nordarische (sakische) Lehrgedicht des Buddhismus: Text und Übersetzung* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1933–1936), 359; and Emmerick and Vorob’ëva-Desjatovskaja, *Saka Documents*, 35. Leumann’s hypothesis that these were title of the work, i.e., the *Book of Zambasta*, is not borne out by any evidence, while the scribbles are by and large not translatable.

³⁸ For his transliteration and German translation of the entire inscription, see Leumann, *Lehrgedicht*, 358–359. There is an unpublished transliteration and English translation left by Emmerick in his *Nachlass*, which I have utilised for my English translation of the inscription; see Ruixuan Chen, “The *Nandimitrāvādāna*,” 42–43.



compassion (Khot. *mulysdi*, Skt. *karuṇā*) and forbearance (Khot. *kṣāndi*, Skt. *kṣānti*), and the Sanskrit passage consists of the invocation of the three jewels (Skt. *ratnatraya*) and five bodhisattvas, whose names all have ‘womb, embryo’ (Skt. *garbha*) as the second component,³⁹ as well as an essence incantation (Skt. *hrdaya*), which is instrumental in healing eye-diseases.⁴⁰ It is noteworthy that the Sanskrit inscription seems to place Ākāśagarbha, a celestial bodhisattva associated with the great element of space (Skt. *ākāśa*),⁴¹ in the foreground, for, among the five bodhisattvas mentioned in this inscription, only he is honorifically addressed as ‘the Noble One’ (Skt. *ārya*) and invoked in the aforesaid incantation for eye-diseases. The predilection for Ākāśagarbha is thus characteristic of the religious background against which the covers were used, as will be discussed below.

The Khotanese inscription on the back cover (SI 1929, erstwhile SI P 6.1) was correctly identified by Ernst Leumann as the beginning of the *Nandimītrāvadāna*, an authoritative text for the cult of the sixteen arhats, which is otherwise known from the Chinese and Tibetan traditions.⁴² In comparison with its Chinese and Tibetan counterparts, the Khotanese

³⁹ These bodhisattvas are Jñānagarbha, Candragarbha, Maṇigarbha, Kṣitigarbha, and Ākāśagarbha. Their names occur in the dative singular and are consistently preceded by *namau* (i.e., *namo*, the sandhi form of the nom. sg. of Skt. *namas* ‘homage’, in Khotanese orthography). In Khotanese, the sandhi form became fixed and was used as a kind of honorific marker rather than a noun followed by a dative, i.e., in a way similar to Bactrian *vamō* /*namō*/, for which see Nicholas Sims-Williams, *Bactrian Documents from Northern Afghanistan. Volume II: Letters and Buddhist Texts* (London: The Nour Foundation, 2007), 174–177. Mauro Maggi, *Pelliot chinois 2928: A Khotanese Love Story* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente, 1997), 40, reads it in parenthesis (namely ‘Homage!’), which is syntactically not unlikely. Compare also Sino-Japanese *namo/namu* 南無 ‘Homage!’, based on more or less the same usage.

⁴⁰ See Chen, “The *Nandimītrāvadāna*,” 43: *hrdayam āvartayisyāmi tadyathā hi hi hi hi hī āviśa āviśa aihī Ākāśagarbhā rūpacakṣur .. cakṣu .. cakṣu nirmalaṃ karaumi* (← *karomi*) *hana hana viṣumbha cakṣurauga* (← *cakṣuroga*) *svāhā*; and my translation: “I will recite the essence incantation, as follows: hi hi hi hi – Enter! Enter! Come [here], Ākāśagarbha! The form eye [i.e., the eye as material organ] ... eye ... I make the eye unsullied. Kill! Kill! Smother! Disease of the eye, hail!”

⁴¹ On this bodhisattva and his cult in Sino-Japanese Buddhism, see Marinus Willem de Visser, *The Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha (Kokūzō) in China and Japan* (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1931).

⁴² For the Chinese translation by Xuanzang (玄奘), completed in 654 or 662, see Sylvain Lévi and Édouard Chavannes, “Les seize Arhats protecteurs de la Loi,” *Journal Asiatique* 11.8 (1916): 5–50 and 189–304. For the 11th-century Tibetan translation by Ajitaśrībhadrā and Shā kya ’od, see Chen, “The *Nandimītrāvadāna*,” 94–198.

version is drastically abridged and merely contains the frame narrative, in which a spiritually accomplished elder by the name of Nandimitra, before passing into the complete *nirvāṇa*, informs his disciples and acolytes about the names and dwelling places of the sixteen arhats, who were entrusted with the protection of the true *dharma* for many years to come. While the parallel texts go on to narrate the future vicissitudes of the *dharma* as well as the threefold wholesome acts conducive to rebirths in the three assemblies of Maitreya the future buddha, the Khotanese version abruptly comes to a halt after the list of the sixteen arhats, which might give the impression of an incomplete or defective copy. This impression, as I have argued elsewhere, is unwarranted.⁴³ On the contrary, it is conceivable that the Khotanese text originated in a time period when oral transmission rendered the writing of the entire text unnecessary, and/or that the ostensibly incomplete text served some special purposes in a ritual context.⁴⁴ The latter probability is further corroborated by another idiosyncrasy of the Khotanese version, namely the interpolation of some declarations of reverence for the arhats.⁴⁵ It is not unlikely that the ritual use of the cover was associated with the performance of some utterances rendering homage to the guardians of the true *dharma*.

While the other inscribed wooden tablets from Khādalik mostly deal with profane matters, the book covers in question testify to some sort of communication with supramundane agents belonging to the sphere of the sacred (e.g. arhats, bodhisattvas). This distinction is significant from a

⁴³ See Chen, “The *Nandimitrāvadāna*,” 44–45.

⁴⁴ For detailed arguments, see *ibid.*, 45–46. A similar hypothesis has been postulated for some Kharoṣṭhī scrolls (esp. those of prestige literature), in which only the beginning of the text is written on the *recto* and not continued on the *verso*; see Stefan Baums, “Gandhāran Scrolls: Rediscovering an Ancient Manuscript Type,” in *Manuscript Cultures: Mapping the Field*, ed. Jörg B. Quenzer et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 206.

⁴⁵ At the end of Nandimitra’s instructions about who were the first and the last arhats and where they lived with how many saints in their entourages, there are two almost identical statements in the first-person voice: line 5 *ays-ūṃ namasūṃ vanūṃ* (“I worship and pay homage to them [i.e., the elder and the saints in the entourage]!”) line 10 *biśūṃ hā aysā namasūṃ vanūṃ* (“I worship and pay homage to all of them!”). See Chen, “The *Nandimitrāvadāna*,” 76, 79, 83, and 86. These statements are missing from the Chinese and Tibetan versions, and cannot be attributed to the narrator Nandimitra. It is not unlikely that they were to be recited as a refrain in addition to the information on the name, dwelling place etc. of each and every arhat, as suggested by a brief note added to the paragraph on the second arhat: *ta ta hveṇai khu paḍājsye* (“So is to be spoken as [is spoken] to the previous one”). See Chen, “The *Nandimitrāvadāna*,” 76 and 84.

religious perspective. An additional idiosyncrasy of the book covers is their imperfect alignment: The back cover (ca. 39×12 cm)⁴⁶ is shorter than the front cover (ca. 52×12 cm), while a complete folio of the *Book of Zambasta* is about the size of the latter. In other words, if the string-holes of the covers and the folios are aligned with one another, the back cover would be placed left-of-center, exposing a good twenty per-cent of the last folio (fig. 2). The lack of symmetry between the pair of covers is indicative of the possibility that the back cover had originally belonged to another manuscript, one of a smaller size than the *Book of Zambasta*.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, this does not speak against the fact that the two wooden tablets had already been used as a pair of covers when the inscriptions were written, as is evident from their identical handwriting.⁴⁸

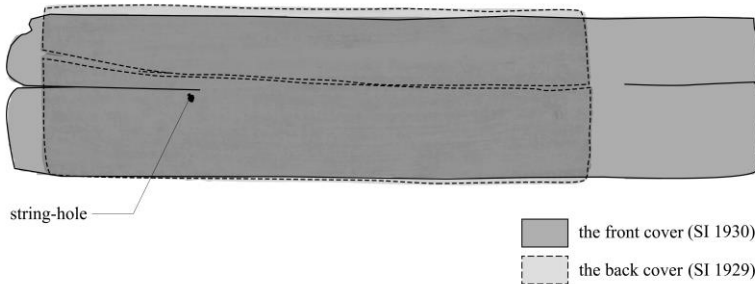


Figure 2. The back and front covers (SI 1929 & 1930) aligned according to the string-hole.

⁴⁶ See Emmerick and Vorob’ëva-Desjatovskaja, *Saka Documents*, 34.

⁴⁷ Iain Sinclair (p.c.) draws my attention to the fact that asymmetric pairs of book covers are not rare among the Sanskrit manuscripts preserved in Nepal. To be sure, there is no evidence, as Peyrot (p.c.) points out, to exclude the possibility that the book covers and/or manuscripts were produced at another monastery from where they were brought to Khādalik. Since this paper is primarily concerned with the use of the book covers, whether or not they were produced at the same site does not affect the validity of my argument.

⁴⁸ That is to say, the smaller back cover had not been inscribed on the inside until it was (re)used and paired with the larger front cover. In light of the almost perfect match between the front cover and the *Book of Zambasta*, there should be little doubt that it was initially tailored for that manuscript. But the writing of the inscriptions on the inside took place only after the two asymmetric wooden covers became a pair—this also marks the beginning of their social life, so far as it can be reconstructed historically.

4. *The Functionality*

What special function did the inscribed covers fulfil? Why were they both inscribed on the inside? To attempt educated guesses about these issues, we must zoom out from the Khotan region and the Tarim Basin to the broader Buddhist world, since comparable phenomena have been observed elsewhere.

In the Buddhist book cult in modern and contemporary Nepal, the use of wooden covers is well documented. On the outside of the covers, which are, in most cases, posterior to the 10th century, there are heavy accumulations of sandalwood paste, vermilion powder, as well as saffron, bearing witness to their enduring presence in some ritual environment. The inside of the covers are, more often than not, painted and decorated with an iconographic programme.⁴⁹ With regard to the ritual use of a 12th-century Sanskrit manuscript in 2004, Kim Jinah took note of the following remarkable maneuver:

Once the book was ritually imbued with [the goddess Prajñāpāramitā's] presence, the book was divided into ten equal stacks and distributed to each Vajrācārya. The book covers were returned to the book's seat in front of which the main Vajrācārya continued to perform more *dhāraṇī* rituals before he could join the recitation.⁵⁰

On that occasion, the covers were treated as a special constituent part of the manuscript, which functioned as indispensable paraphernalia for auxiliary *dhāraṇī* rituals. To be sure, the ritual recitation, in its present form and with its present organisation, cannot predate the 19th century, and very meager, if any, evidence for the Buddhist book cult in India during the first millennium CE has come to light.⁵¹ It would thus be foolhardy to assume that fully fledged rituals of worshipping Buddhist books similar to those in Nepal were practiced in 7th/8th-century Khotan.

⁴⁹ For art-historical surveys of such painted covers, see Martin Lerner, *The Flame and the Lotus: Indian and Southeast Asian Art from the Kronos Collections* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1984), 87; Jeremiah Losty, *The Art of the Book in India* (London: The British Library, 1982), 23; and Kim Jinah, *Receptacle of the Sacred: Illustrated Manuscripts and the Buddhist Book Cult in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 63–64.

⁵⁰ Kim, *Receptacle of the Sacred*, 273.

⁵¹ See Jens-Uwe Hartmann, "From Words to Books: Indian Buddhist Manuscripts in the First Millennium CE," in *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures: Knowledge, Ritual, and Art*, ed. Stephen C. Berkwitz (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 104.

Be that as it may, I argue that at least some elements eyewitnessed by anthropologists and art historians in Nepal are not later innovations, e.g. the particular significance attached to the inside of book covers.



Figure 3. Two pairs of vertically painted covers. Gilgit. Institute for Central Asian Studies, Srinagar. Adapted from Klimburg-Salter, “Along the Pilgrimage Routes,” 266–267.

As is the case with the later Nepalese manuscripts, three manuscripts from the site of Gilgit in present-day Pakistan were also discovered between wooden covers, on the inside of which there are depictions of buddhas and/or bodhisattvas in company with kneeling donor figures.⁵² None of the painted covers have been unequivocally dated. According to Deborah Klimburg-Salter, two out of the three pairs of wooden covers

⁵²For the most thorough discussion of the three pairs of covers discovered in Gilgit, see Deborah Klimburg-Salter, “Along the Pilgrimage Routes Between Uḍḍiyāna and Tibet: The Gilgit MSS Covers and the Tibetan Decorated Book Covers,” in *Tibet in Dialogue with Its Neighbours: History, Culture and Art of Central and Western Tibet*, ed. Erika Forte et al. (Beijing: China Tibetology Publishing House, 2016), 396–400. For the first published report on the discovery, see Madhu Sudan Kaul Shastri, “Report on the Gilgit Excavation in 1938,” *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society* 30.1 (1939): 2–12, esp. 3 and 6; see plates 1424A, 1433, 1436 for old photographs of the covers and some folios. For coloured photographs of the three pairs of covers, see Klimburg-Salter, “Along the Pilgrimage Routes,” 266–270, figs. 3–10.

were vertically painted on the inside (fig. 3) and can be tentatively dated to the 7th and 8th centuries, during which time Gilgit and its neighbours were under the hegemony of the Palola Śāhis (late 6th to mid-8th c.);⁵³ and the third pair of covers, characterized by a horizontal compositional pattern, represents an innovation and is chronologically later.⁵⁴ In any case, these earliest surviving examples of painted book covers suffice to demonstrate that the custom of painting covers can be traced back to the first millennium CE. Two commonalities between these covers have special relevance to the Khotanese covers in question: First, the paintings show no obvious connection with the texts copied in the manuscripts. The same holds *mutatis mutandis* true for the Khotanese inscriptions, none of which have any direct bearing on the content of the *Book of Zambasta*. Second, and more importantly, the iconographic design is shown only on the inside of the covers from Gilgit, while their outside, embellished with the running vine motif, performs a decorative function. This feature hints at a strong likelihood that the inside paintings, which are invisible to those who would see but not open the books, served some other purposes than decoration.

⁵³ For the inscriptions, manuscripts, and sculptures commissioned by the Palola Śāhis, see Oskar von Hinüber, *Die Palola Śāhis, ihre Steinenschriften, Inschriften auf Bronzen, Handschriftenkolophone und Schutzzauber: Materialien zu Geschichte von Gilgit und Chilas* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2004). For a number of supplements by the same author, see Oskar von Hinüber, “Three New Bronzes from Gilgit,” *Annual Report of the International Research Institute of Advanced Buddhology at Soka University* 10 (2007): 39–43; “More on Gilgit Bronzes and Some Additions to ‘Die Palola Śāhis’,” *Annual Report of the International Research Institute of Advanced Buddhology at Soka University* 12 (2009): 3–6; “An Inscribed Incense Burner from the MacLean Collection in Chicago,” *Annual Report of the International Research Institute of Advanced Buddhology at Soka University* 13 (2010): 3–8; and “Four Donations Made by Maṅgalaḥamsikā, Queen of Palola (Gilgit),” *Annual Report of the International Research Institute of Advanced Buddhology at Soka University* 14 (2011): 3–6.

⁵⁴ See Klimburg-Salter, “Along the Pilgrimage Routes,” 399–402 with additional references. In his review of Kim, *Receptacle of the Sacred*, Oskar von Hinüber claims that “these book covers can be dated safely to the early 7th century”; see von Hinüber, “Review of Kim Jinah, *Receptacle of the Sacred*,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 59.4 (2016): 371–382. This claim presumably hearkens back to Oskar von Hinüber, “Die Bedeutung des Handschriftenfundes bei Gilgit,” in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft Supplement 5: XXI Deutscher Orientalistentag, 24. bis 29. März 1980 in Berlin*, ed. Fritz Steppat (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1983), 49–50, where he has pointed out some stylistic similarities between the painting on one of the pairs of covers and some rock paintings from the upper Indus valley, dated by Karl Jettmar to the early 7th century.



In her comparative study of the inside paintings, Klimburg-Salter has drawn our attention to a number of wooden tablets from Kuča and Khotan, which were, like the two older pairs of covers from Gilgit, vertically painted and thus probably used as votive offerings. On the basis of some similarities in size, style, and composition, Klimburg-Salter has proposed that the two pairs of covers showing vertical compositions might have been the result of a functional convergence of painted wooden tablets on the one hand and wooden book covers on the other.⁵⁵ If that was the case, a not insignificant phenomenon transpires: When the covers were used as votive objects, cult images were painted on the inside rather than the outside. Some of the factors contributing to this intriguing phenomenon are probably to be seen in the materiality of the covers: The inside, compared with the outside, is harder to become the worse for wear, and, perhaps more importantly, is more closely tied up with or even incorporated into the manuscript embodying the sacred word of the Buddha.⁵⁶ Hence it is not unlikely that the manuscript, as the carrier of divine messages, invests the inside of the covers with efficacy. Although we know little about the Buddhist rituals in Gilgit,⁵⁷ the cultic use of wooden covers with emphasis on the inside can be assumed for this milieu with certitude. For this scenario, the presence of the book cult is not a necessary presumption.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ See Deborah Klimburg-Salter, “The Gilgit Manuscript Covers and the ‘Cult of the Book’,” in *South Asian Archaeology 1987*, ed. Maurizio Taddei (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1990), 815–830.

⁵⁶ For some issues of canonicity and canonisation in the specific case of the *Book of Zambasta* being the Buddha’s word, see Ruixuan Chen, “Lurching Towards a Canon: Mahāyāna Sūtras in Khotanese Garb,” *Entangled Religions: Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Religious Contact and Transfer* 11.6 (2021).

⁵⁷ On the nature of the site at Gilgit and hypothetical ritual uses of some of the Gilgit manuscripts, see Gérard Fussman, “Dans quel type de bâtiment furent trouvés les manuscrits de Gilgit?” *Journal Asiatique* 292.1–2 (2004): 101–150; Gregory Schopen, “On the Absence of Urtexts and Otiose Ācāryas: Buildings, Books, and Lay Buddhist Ritual at Gilgit,” in *Écrire et transmettre en Inde classique*, ed. Gérard Colas et al. (Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 2009), 189–219; among others.

⁵⁸ Jinah Kim also takes note of the dynamics between inside and outside as a book’s cultic potential, which she interprets through a paradoxical interplay between the visibility and the invisibility, see Kim, *Receptacle of the Sacred*, 40–41. This is an intriguing theory *per se*, but her proposal of “a ritual turning of folios of a manuscript that accompanied a continuous recitation of the text” (pp. 64–65) is based on some misinterpretation of epigraphic evidence; see the critique by von Hinüber, “Review,” 372–373.

The Palola Śāhis ruling over the Gilgit region and the Khotanese kings were both devout and wealthy patrons of Buddhism. During the 7th and 8th centuries, they allied with each other as Chinese vassal states to counter the expanding military power of the Tibetan Empire, which eventually annexed both these regions at the end of the 8th century.⁵⁹ The political alliance paved the way for cultural exchanges between Gilgit and Khotan, interconnected through the Karakoram corridor.⁶⁰ In this regard, it comes as no surprise that the Buddhist manuscript cultures of the two regions had much in common. In Khotan, painted wooden tablets with vertical iconographic design are discovered at several sites,⁶¹ not least at Khādalik (fig. 4),⁶² and are dated by various scholars to the 6th or

⁵⁹ For the Tibetan Empire's Central Asian campaigns in the two centuries, see Moriyasu Takao 森安孝夫, "Toban no chūō ajia shinshutsu 吐蕃の中央アジア進出 [The Military Expansion of the Tibetan Empire in Central Asia]," *Kanazawa daigaku bungakubu ronshū* 金沢大学文学部論集 [Bulletin of the Faculty of Letters at Kanazawa University] 4 (1984): 1–85. Khotan fell under Tibetan hegemony in the 670s and ca. 790–840 (pp. 10, 52–57). The Tibetans, after their conquest of Baltistan, had acquiesced in the semi-independence of the Palola Śāhis until 722, and finally occupied the Gilgit region during the years 737–747 on the eve of the demise of the Palola Śāhis' rule (pp. 36–42).

⁶⁰ For the Saka orthographic features attested in some Gilgit manuscripts and Khotanese elements in names and titles of some donors, see Oskar von Hinüber, "Die Paiśācī und die Entstehung der sakischen Orthographie," in *Studien zum Jainismus und Buddhismus: Gedenkschrift für Ludwig Alsdorf*, ed. Klaus Bruhn (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1981), 121–127; and von Hinüber, "Die Bedeutung," 58–59. For artistic evidence of various communications between Gilgit and Khotan, see Deborah Klimburg-Salter, *The Silk Route and the Diamond Path: Esoteric Buddhist Art on the Trans-Himalayan Trade Routes* (Los Angeles: UCLA Art Council, 1982), 89. Buddhists in Gilgit and Khotan seem to have had an more or less identical predilection for certain Mahāyāna texts, see von Hinüber, "Die Bedeutung," 52; and Lore Sander, "Early Prakrit and Sanskrit Manuscripts from Xinjiang (Second to Fifth/Sixth Centuries CE): Paleography, Literary Evidence, and Their Relation to Buddhist Schools," *Buddhism Across Boundaries: The Interplay of Indian, Chinese, and Central Asian Source Materials*, ed. John R. McRae and Jan Nattier, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2012), 45.

⁶¹ See e.g. OA 1907,1111.67 (D.IV.4) from Dandān-ōiliq. A coloured photograph at actual size is found in Roderick Whitfield, *The Art of Central Asia: The Stein Collection in the British Museum. Volume III: Textiles, Sculpture and Other Arts* (Tōkyō: Kōdansha International, 1985), fig. 71. For more wooden tablets with similar iconographic patterns from Khotan, see Williams, "Iconography," 119 and 125, figs. 14–22 and 23–26.

⁶² This painted tablet, whose call number is MAS.419 (Kha.ii.E.0013), was excavated from the southern 'shrine' of Khādalik. It shows a simple standing Buddha on one side, dressed in a dark green robe; his short black hair is surrounded by a halo, and the right arm raised at chest in the gesture of fearlessness (*abhaya mudrā*). See Stein, *Serindia*, 189 and; Whitfield, *Textiles, Sculpture and Other Arts*, fig. 49.

the 8th century.⁶³ In other words, they are either contemporaneous with or slightly prior to the painted covers from Gilgit.



Figure 4. A vertically painted wooden plaque. Khādalik. MAS.419 (Kha.ii.E.0013). The British Museum. Adapted from Wihfield, *Textiles, Sculpture and Other Arts*, fig. 49.

⁶³For the different scholarly opinions on the date of the painted wooden tablets, see Klimburg-Salter, “The Gilgit Manuscript Covers,” 825–826.

Should Klimburg-Salter's hypothesis of the functional convergence, outlined above, be not exclusively applicable to Gilgit, but an innovative development shared between Gilgit and Khotan, one may argue that at least some wooden covers from Khotan, such as the present ones, were also used as votive objects. If this theory is not quite wide of the mark, it may also lend support to my speculation that the aforesaid inscriptions may have had a functionality similar to that of the inside paintings from Gilgit, despite the superficial differences between written artifacts and artworks. In that case, these book covers might have been offered or consecrated in a certain ritual context, while the texts inscribed on the inside were performed in some way (e.g. through ritualised recitation).

5. *The Monastery*

Admittedly, the details of the supposed ritual context remain unclear for the most part. Be that as it may, we gain precious clues about some potentially significant characteristics of the Buddhist monastery at the site of Khādalik, which cast light on its position in broader networks of monasteries in the Kingdom of Khotan.

Before delving into the specific characteristics, it may be helpful to first present an overview of the typology of Khotanese monasteries. By and large, the monasteries known to have existed in the Khotan region can be divided into two categories: prestigious monasteries and those of minor repute. Prestigious monasteries were, as a rule, supported by high-level patronage,⁶⁴ and their foundation was, in most cases, legendary and associated with the cult of Buddhist saints (i.e., bodhisattvas, arhats, etc.), the relocation of Buddhist reliquaries, or epoch-making events in the

⁶⁴ A substantial number of prestigious monasteries were royal monasteries, which were reputedly founded by the Khotanese king or, less frequently, by members of the royal family. The most renowned royal monastery in Khotan was Gomaṭī[ra] (Khot. Gūmatīra, Tib. 'Gum tir), which, according to the eyewitness account of the Chinese pilgrim monk Faxian (ca. 340–ca. 420, 法顯), housed tens of thousands of Mahāyāna-minded monks supported by a public fund. See T. 2085.51, 857b3–17 and Max Deeg, *Das Gaoseng-Faxian-Zhuan als religionsgeschichtliche Quelle: Der älteste Bericht eines chinesischen buddhistischen Pilgermönchs über seine Reise nach Indien mit Übersetzung des Textes* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005), 511–512. Founding royal monasteries was *de jure* the prerogative of the Khotanese king, but became a *de facto* joint enterprise to be carried out in tandem with Chinese or Tibetan dignitaries when the kingdom was in the clutches of the Tang or the Tibetan Empire, see Emmerick, *Tibetan Texts Concerning Khotan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 58–59. and 60–61.



socio-economic history of Khotan (e.g. the introduction of sericulture).⁶⁵ Some of these monasteries were endowed with miraculous images and *stūpas*, and thus became sacred sites attracting pilgrimage and offerings from far and wide.⁶⁶ Geographically speaking, almost all the prestigious monasteries were allegedly situated in the vicinity of the capital of the kingdom, and have not been identified with any of the monastic sites known to date,⁶⁷ which are relatively small in area and far removed from the capital.⁶⁸ That is to say, the vast majority of the monastic sites that

⁶⁵ The Chinese pilgrim monk Xuanzang (600/602–664, 玄奘), who sojourned in Khotan (644/645) on his way back from India, took note on a series of foundation legends of prestigious monasteries which had come into being prior to the mid-7th century; see T. 2087.51, 943b25–945b27. Quite a number of these legends find parallels in the *Prophecy of the Li Country*, a Khotanese text which had been composed no later than the late 8th century and was later translated into Tibetan (*Li yul lung bstan pa*); see Emmerick, *Tibetan Texts Concerning Khotan*, 22–73.

⁶⁶ A case in point is an anonymous, yet influential monastery in Phema to the east of Khotan, which was famous for an over-lifesize gilded image flying from the south (i.e., from India). Around the miraculous image several *stūpas* were built and banners offered by believers. As was witnessed by the Chinese pilgrim Song Yun (fl. 6th c., 宋雲) in 519, about half of the banners were donated by pilgrims from northern China, whose presence in Phema can be traced as far back as the period of 384–417. See T. 2092.51, 1018c15–1019a3; and Édouard Chavannes, “Voyage de Song Yun dans l’Udyāna et le Gandhāra: 518–522 p. C.,” *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient* 3 (1903) : 393.

⁶⁷ The only possible exception might be the aforementioned monastery Gomatī[ra], which some Chinese archaeologists proposed to identify with a monastic site near to Melikawat, a sizeable ruin of an ancient city (ca. 1 km²) at the Yurung Kāsh River; see Huang Wenbi 黄文弼, *Talimu pendi kaogu ji* 塔里木盆地考古记 [*Archaeological Report on the Tarim Basin*] (Beijing: Science Press, 1958), 54. This proposal, to my knowledge, has not found universal acceptance; and Huang conflated Chinese records on two different royal monasteries (i.e., Gomatī[ra] and Tcarma), which he mistook for one monastery. For more archaeological finds excavated from this site in September and October 1979, which point to the existence of a large monastery, see Li Yuchun 李遇春, “Xinjiang Hetian xian Mailikeawati yizhi de diaocha he shijue 新疆和田县买力克阿瓦提遗址的调查和试掘 [A Survey and Excavation of the Site of Melikawat in Hetian County, Xinjiang],” *Wenwu* 文物 [Cultural Relics] (1981): 33–37.

⁶⁸ The whereabouts of the ancient capital of the kingdom of Khotan is a subject of dispute. Marc Aurel Stein was tempted to identify it with the site of Yotkan on the basis of his understanding of the Chinese sources; see Marc A. Stein, *Ancient Khotan: Detailed Report of Archaeological Explorations in Chinese Turkestan* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907), vol. 1, 199–206. This hypothesis was well received in the West, but was critiqued by Huang, *Talimu pendi*, 53, who regarded the site of Melikawat as a more likely candidate for the ancient capital. A third hypothesis alternatively suggested Nagara-khana, a site to the east of Yotkan, to have been the seat of the Khotanese royal court; see Yin Qing 殷晴, “Yutian gudu ji lüzhou bianqian zhi tantao 于阗古都及绿洲变迁之探讨 [On the Ancient Capital and the Oasis Changes of Khotan],” *Hetian shizhuan jiaoxue yu yanjiu* 和田师专

have been excavated so far belong to the second category—they were, in all likelihood, provincial monasteries without foundation legends of their own, availing themselves only of limited material and human resources in comparison with monasteries of the first type.⁶⁹

The Buddhist monastery at Khādalik, presumably named Kāśavitra,⁷⁰ exemplifies the second type mentioned above. In spite of its provincial

教学与研究 [Teaching and Research at Hetian Teachers' College] (1983): 23. See also Li Yiping 李吟屏, “Gudai Yutian guodu zai yanjiu 古代于阗国都再研究 [Revisiting the Capital of Ancient Khotan],” *Xinjiang daxue xuebao* 新疆大学学报 [Bulletin of Xinjiang University] (1989): 40–47, for a critical survey of the received hypotheses as well as a new theory locating the ancient capital in the proximity of Halal-bagh, a site situated southeast of Yotkan. Despite these diverse scholarly opinions, there can be no questioning the fact that the ancient capital lay somewhere between the Kara Kāsh and Yurung Kāsh Rivers.

⁶⁹ This might explain the fact that not a few provincial monasteries, such as the present one at Khādalik, became desolate around or shortly after the Tibetan take-over of the kingdom of Khotan at the end of the 8th century, in stark contrast to some royal monasteries which survived the Tibetan occupation and continued to prosper up to the end of the 10th century, as is evinced in records of monks affiliated with Gomafī[ra] etc. in Khotanese manuscripts from Dunhuang. The Tibetans are not to be held culpable for the desertion of monastic sites such as Khādalik and Dandān-öliq, insofar as there is no evidence for any form of persecution of Buddhism in Tibetan-ruled Khotan, while the coeval Tibetan emperor Tri Songdētsen (742–ca. 800, Tib. Khri Srong lde'u btsan) was acclaimed as a devout Buddhist patron. To my mind, one of the factors to account for this phenomenon is the redistribution of taxes and corvée triggered by the introduction of the Tibetan system of military administration headquartered at Mazār-tāgh, which may have taken a heavy toll on the wealth and manpower of Khotanese monasteries on all levels. See Tsuguhito Takeuchi, “The Tibetan Military System and Its Activities from Khotan to Lop-Nor,” in *The Silk Road: Trade, Travel, War and Faith*, ed. Susan Whitfield (Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2004), 50–56. Under such circumstances, it is conceivable that provincial monasteries were faced with more difficulties to scrape by on reduced material means than royal monasteries.

⁷⁰ The name of the monastery is otherwise unknown, apart from two tantalising statements in a Khotanese devotional text written on the back of a Tang Chinese scroll of Dharmakṣema's translation of the *Mahāparinirvāṇamahāsūtra* (T. 374.12, 420a10–b10) discovered in the northern ‘shrine’; IOL Khot 212/1 (Kha.i.221), lines 37(15)–38(16): *simagri Kāśivitrī bisamga paha ūsihyādi pūjākarmyau jsi* [May the complete (*samagra*) monastic community (*bhikṣusaṅgha*) of Kāśavitra deign to ripen [the wholesome roots] through those actions of honoring (*pūjākarma*)]; and lines 58(36)–59(37): *audi bvaṣṭe ba'ysūṣṭi būre jsā ṣṭā pūña kūṣilamūla ttāhire simagri Kāśivitrī bisamgna hambrīhāre* [Until the enlightenment has been realised, the real merits (*puṇya*) and wholesome roots (*kuśalamūla*) they will share with the complete (*samagra*) monastic community of Kāśavitra]. The transliteration and translation are adapted from Prods Oktor Skjærvø, *Khotanese Manuscripts from Chinese Turkestan in the British Library: A Complete Catalogue with Texts and Translations* (London: The British Library, 2002), 458 and



character, this monastery demonstrates a close association with some of the prestigious monasteries that left traces in extant literary sources. In this respect, the covers in question present another piece of evidence for its connection with such a prestigious monastery named Satkāyaprahāṇa, reputedly situated in the valley of Mt. Sa(t)kāya at the Kara Kāsh River. On the one hand, the cult of Ākāśagarbha, the celestial bodhisattva foregrounded in the inscription on the front cover, is known to have been associated with Satkāyaprahāṇa, which was a breeding ground for the cult of this bodhisattva. The belief that Ākāśagarbha is a permanent resident in that monastery was entrenched among Khotanese Buddhists

459–460 with minor modifications. For the definition of a ‘complete’ (Skt. *samagra*, Pāli *samagga*) community, i.e., with all its members and those within its monastic boundary (Skt. *sīmā*) gathered together, in a Vinaya exegetic context, see Petra Kieffer-Pütz, *Die Sīmā: Vorschriften zur Regelung der buddhistischen Gemeindegrenze in älteren buddhistischen Texten* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1992), 129–130, §10.2. The term was used in Buddhist epigraphic sources as early as the ‘schism edict’ of Aśoka, see Heinz Bechert, “The Importance of Aśoka’s So-called Schism Edict,” in *Indological and Buddhist Studies: Volume in Honour of Professor J.W. de Jong on His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Luise A. Hercus et al. (Canberra: Faculty of Asian Studies ANS, 1982), 64–65. Apparently, the prayer text in question demonstrates that the manuscript on which it was written formed part of a donation made probably in the 8th century to a certain monastery called Kāśavitra. Given that the manuscript ended up being buried among numerous votive objects at the site of Khādalik, it is not unlikely that Kāśavitra was none other than the monastery at Khādalik. An alternative scenario would be that the manuscript had originally belonged to another monastery and was somehow transferred to monks at Khādalik, but there is not even any circumstantial evidence suggesting that such transfer or appropriation of votive objects ever took place. Kāśavitra is otherwise attested in a Khotanese manuscript from Dunhuang, namely P. 2893 (lines 11–12), as the place where the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī and the *yakṣa* king Māñibhadra were believed to take up their abode; see Harold W. Bailey, *Indo-Scythian Studies, Being Khotanese Texts Volume III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 82. For an earlier transliteration of this proper name with translation, see Harold W. Bailey, “Hvatanica IV,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 10.4 (1942): 892–893. The same author explained this proper name etymologically as **Kāśyapa-vitara-* ‘Kāśyapa’s renunciation’ (> **Kāśavavitra-* > **Kāśavētra-*); see Harold W. Bailey, “Kāśavitra,” in *Jñānamuktāvalī: Commemoration Volume in Honour of Johannes Nobel on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday*, ed. Claus Vogel (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1963), 38–41. If the supposed association with Kāśyapa, the past Buddha, is not unwarranted, it might be also possible to reconstruct **Kāśyapa-avitr-a-* ‘having Kāśyapa as its protector (*avitr*)’ (> **Kāśavāvitra-* > **Kāśavētra-*). Given that the dwelling place of Mañjuśrī and Māñibhadra is otherwise known in the Tibetan parallels as (part of) Mt. Oxhead (Tib. ’Ge’u te shan < Chin. Niutou shan 牛頭山, MChin. *Diw thā[w] ṣan; see Harold W. Bailey, “Hvatanica IV,” 911), this Kāśavitra situated on the mountains at the Kara Kāsh River must be distinguished from the eponymous monastery at Khādalik.

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from the 8th through 10th centuries, and the presence of the bodhisattva made Satkāyaprahāṇa a sacred site whose reputation extended beyond the limits of the Kingdom of Khotan and reached to Tibet and China.⁷¹ Therefore, the inscription invoking Ākāśagarbha may well have rung a bell with many Buddhists who readily associated the incantation and its efficacy with the prestigious monastery presided over by this celestial bodhisattva.

On the other hand, the *Nandimitravadāna* inscribed on the back cover centres on the apprehensions about the decline of the *dharma* and the cult of the sixteen arhats. These two themes constitute part and parcel of the *Prophecy (of the Arhat) of the Li Country*, an indigenous Khotanese composition in the late 8th or early 9th century, which was translated into both Tibetan and Chinese.⁷² This prophecy of the evanescence of

⁷¹ The belief that Ākāśagarbha took up his abode in Satkāyaprahāṇa found expression in multilingual sources: (1) Khotanese: P. 2893, line 13: *Ākāśagarbha ra jsām ši' baudhasatvā Sakāyagīra satvapariṣāka* [And also Ākāśagarbha, the bodhisattva [took up his abode] in Mt. Sakāya for the ripening of sentient beings.] For a different transliteration with translation, see Bailey, “Hvatanica IV,” 893–894. (2) Tibetan: *Gośrṅgavyākaraṇa* (Peking Kanjur, mDo sna tshogs, ke 231a6–7): *de bzhin du nam mkha' ltar dpag tu med par byang chub sems dpa' Nam mkha'i snying pos kyang gtsug lag khang 'Jigs tshogs spong byed ces bya ba 'byung bar 'gyur ba'i sa gzhi de mchod gnas su 'gyur bar byin gyis brlabs so* // [Likewise also the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha, having power as boundless as the space (*ākāśa*), blessed the spot [where] there was to be a monastery called Satkāyaprahāṇa [so that] it would become a place of worship.] Frederick W. Thomas, *Tibetan Literary Texts and Documents Concerning Chinese Turkestan. Part I: Literary Texts* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1935), 15, reconstructed the name of the same monastery as *Śaṅkāprahāṇa, which is not quite correct. (3) Chinese: Or.8210/S.2113 *verso*: 虛空藏菩薩如來於薩迦耶山寺住[...]虛空藏菩薩於西玉河薩伽耶僊寺住 [The bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha, the Tathāgata (sic), dwelt in a monastery [in the valley of] Mt. Satkāya [...]] The bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha dwelt in the monastery Satkāyaprahāṇa at the West Jade River (i.e., the Kara Kāsh River.) More or less the same sentences occur in the captions to several Dunhuang murals (e.g. in Caves 231 and 237), see Paul Pelliot, *Grottes de Touen-houang: Carnet de notes de Paul Pelliot. Inscriptions et peintures murales* (Paris: Collège de France, 1983), vol. 3, 25 and 29. See also Zhang Guangda 張廣達 and Rong Xinjiang 榮新江, “Dunhuang ‘ruixiang ji’, ruixiang tu ji qi fanying de Yutian 敦煌‘瑞像記’、瑞像圖及其反映的于闐 [The Records of Marvelous Images, Paintings of Marvelous Images from Dunhuang, and Khotan as Represented Therein],” in *Yutian shi congkao* 于闐史叢考 [Collected Inquiries into the History of Khotan] (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1993), 252 and 254.

⁷² The text is extant in three Old Tibetan manuscripts from Dunhuang, namely, IOL Tib J 597, 598, 601.2. For an edition of the Tibetan text, see Patrizia Cannata, “La Profezia dell’Arhat della terra di Li: Riguardante il declino della fede nella vera legge,” in *Indo-Sino-Tibetica: Studi in onore di Luciano Petech*, ed. Paolo Daffinà (Rome: Bardi,



Buddhism in the Tarim Basin was put in the mouth of Saṅghavardhana, an arhat who is said to have resided in the valley of Mt. Sa(t)kāya close to the monastery Satkāyaprahāṇa, according to the frame narrative.⁷³ While the prophecy *per se* was modeled on a Mahāyāna sūtra entitled *Candragarbhasūtra*,⁷⁴ its frame narrative, as I have shown elsewhere,⁷⁵ may well have drawn inspiration from that of the *Nandimitrāvadāna*, which, although with a differently named protagonist (i.e., Nandimitra instead of Saṅghavardhana), has more or less the same basic structure. It is thus not far-fetched to argue that whoever composed the *Prophecy (of the Arhat) of the Li Country* knew and emulated the *Nandimitrāvadāna*, which was gaining ground in a Khotanese milieu during the period of the Tibetan rule (ca. 790–840). In this milieu, the monastery Satkāyaprahāṇa, where the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha dwelt, must have acquired such a special significance that it was blended into the backcloth against which the divine message was delivered.

1990), 43–79. For an English translation of the Tibetan text, see Thomas, *Tibetan Literary Texts and Documents*, 77–87. The Tibetan text was translated in its entirety into Chinese by Gö Chödrup (fl. first half of 9th c.; Tib. 'Gos Chos grub, Chin. Wu Facheng 吳法成); see P. 2139 (= T. 2090.51, 996a4–997b25). For the translator, see Wu Qiyu 吳其昱, “Dai ban koku dai toku sanzō hōshi Hōjō den kō 大蕃國大德三藏法師法成傳考 [On the Life and Work of Facheng, the Trepitaka Master of the Tibetan Empire],” in *Tonkō to Chūgoku bukkyō: Kōza Tonkō 7 敦煌と中国仏教：講座敦煌 7 [Dunhuang and Chinese Buddhism: Lectures Concerning Dunhuang VII]*, ed. Makita Tairyō 牧田諦亮 and Fukui Fumimasa 福井文雅 (Tōkyō: Daitō shuppansha, 1984), 383–414. For a recent study of Chödrup’s cursive handwriting with copious notes on his life and work, see Channa Li, “Toward a Typology of Chödrup’s (Tib. Chos Grub, Chin. Facheng 法成) Cursive Handwriting: A Palaeographical Perspective,” *BuddhistRoad Paper* 1.2 (2021): 3–62. With regard to the *terminus post quem* of the composition of this text, see Jan Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1991), 191, fn. 113 and 192, fn. 117.

⁷³ See Cannata, “La Profezia dell’Arhat,” 48: *Li yul dang po byung nas Li’i rgyal po rabs drug ni ’das / rgyal po rabs bdun pa Bi dza ya kir rta zhes bya ba’i tshē / gtsug lag khang Sar ka pra ha na ya* (← *Sar ka ya pra ha na*) *zhes bya ba dang nye ba’i lung pa Sa ka ya ki ra* (← *gi ra*) *zhes bya ba na ’phags pa dgra bcom ba Sang ga ba rta na zhes bya ba zhig bzugs te* [...] [From the origin of the Li country there passed six generations of kings of Li. During the time of the king of the seventh generation, by name Vijaya Kīrti, there resided in a valley, named (Mt. Sakāya), near to the monastery (Satkāyaprahāṇa), an Arhat named Saṅghavardhana (...)]; translation adapted from Thomas, *Tibetan Literary Texts and Documents*, 77. For its Chinese parallel in Chödrup’s translation, see T.2090.51, 996a6–9.

⁷⁴ See Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time*, 189–194.

⁷⁵ See Chen, *The Nandimitrāvadāna*, 52.

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In short, the inscriptions on the covers testify to curious ways in which Kāśavitra at Khādalik and Satkāyaprahāṇa at the Kara Kāsh River, two monasteries about 140 kilometres apart (fig. 5), interrelated with each other. The question then arises as to how the interrelationship between such a set of monasteries—one prestigious, the other of minor repute—is to be historically interpreted.

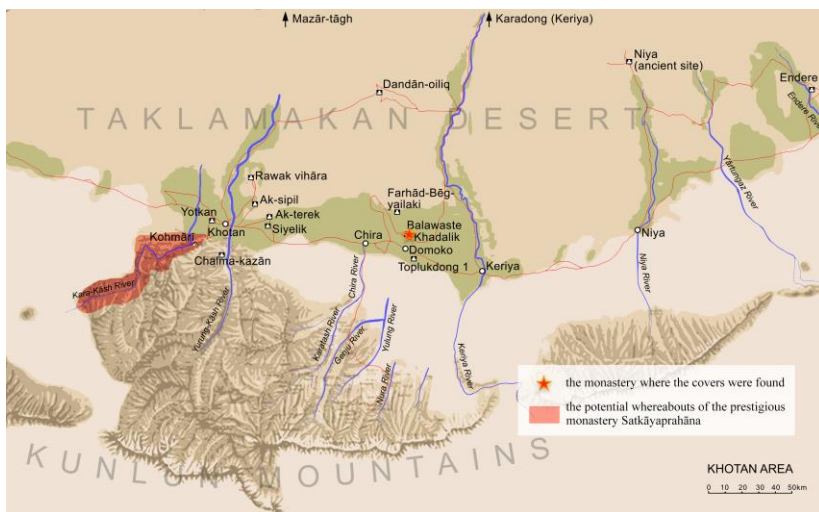


Figure 5. Main Buddhist sites in the Khotan region. Modified after Stein, *Ancient Khotan*, “Map of the Khotan Area” by Jürgen Schörflinger and Miao Yang.

6. *In Lieu of a Conclusion*

There seems to have existed a similar affinity between Toplukdong, a small-scale monastic site near Domoko, and Gomatī[ra], one of the foremost royal monasteries which was somewhere in the alluvial plains of the two Kāsh Rivers.⁷⁶ Erika Forte has identified a painting, newly excavated from Toplukdong (Temple 1), as the depiction of the *yakṣa* general Saṃjñāya attended by a deer, whose motif is no doubt anchored

⁷⁶ See fn. 64 and 67 above.



to the foundation legend of Gomatī[ra]:⁷⁷ Saṃjñāya appeared in the guise of a luminescent deer chased by the king of Khotan. When the king came near to the light source, the *yakṣa* general revealed his true identity and told the king to build on that spot a monastery, which was to become Gomatī[ra].⁷⁸ As regards the religio-historical implications of this affinity, Erika Forte has put forth the hypothesis that archaeological sites such as Toplukdong were home to provincial monasteries founded with royal patronage, which were “affiliates” with prestigious monasteries such as Gomatī[ra].⁷⁹ In other words, artistic representations of a tutelary deity, who was believed to have played a decisive role in founding a given prestigious monastery, may well have functioned, in some ways, as the monastic ‘logo’, displayed not only at the head temple of the monastery but also at its branch temples.⁸⁰ Forte’s hypothesis is thoughtprovoking and should be tested against more evidence.

If one may draw an analogy between the case of Toplukdong and the case of Khādalik, a natural corollary of the aforesaid hypothesis would be that the latter was an affiliate or branch temple of Satkāyaprahāṇa. Whether or not this was the case, Forte is certainly right in highlighting the use of written artifacts and artworks as conveyors of significant information about the identity of the monastic community in which they were (re)produced and used. To what extent patronage could affect the formation of the identity is difficult to fathom, but the fact remains that the identity was, at least in some cases, eclectic, involving more than one

⁷⁷ See Erika Forte, “Kōtan chiku Domoko hakken Topurukuton 1-gō butsuji to Kumatei-dera densetsu コータン地区ドモコ発見トブルクトン1 號仏寺と瞿摩帝寺伝説 [Toplukdong Temple no. 1 in Domoko (Khotan) and the Legend of Gomatī(ra) Monastery],” in *Tōhōgaku kenkyū ronshū: Takata Tokio kyōju taishoku kinen* 東方学研究論集：高田時雄教授退職記念 [Studia Orientalia: Festschrift in Honor of Professor Tokio Takata on the Occasion of His Retirement] (Kyōto: Rinsen Book Co., 2014), 210–227; and Erika Forte, “Images of Patronage in Khotan,” in *Buddhism in Central Asia I: Patronage, Legitimation, Sacred Space, and Pilgrimage*, ed. Carmen Meinert et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 48–55.

⁷⁸ For the story in the *Prophecy of the Li Country*, for instance, see Emmerick, *Tibetan Texts Concerning Khotan*, 28–33.

⁷⁹ See Forte, “Images of Patronage,” 55–56.

⁸⁰ The hypothetical dichotomy between the head and branch temples is reminiscent of the case of Japanese Buddhism, in which a certain Buddhist sect is endowed with one head temple (Jap. *honzan* 本山) and numerous branch temples (Jap. *betsuin* 別院) across the country. I do not know whether or not Forte’s theory is inspired by the Japanese case with which she is familiar.

prestigious monastery. Khādalik is a good case in point: Apart from the connection with Satkāyaprahāṇa discussed above, there is a fragmentary wooden panel (Kha.ix.10) showing on either side three female figures, whose root must be sought in the legend of the Silk Princess.⁸¹ Pictorial representations of this legend, discovered in a greater quantity at Dandān-ōiliq,⁸² are indicative of a close association with the monastery Māsa (Chin. Mashe 麻射, Tib. Ma zha),⁸³ founded in commemoration of the introduction of sericulture into Khotan. In that case, the identity of Khādalik was not fixed in one place, but shifted between the legendary monastery at the Kara Kāsh River and the celebrated ‘Silk-Princess’ monastery to the south of the ancient capital, which may well have had some significance in the Khotanese society by virtue of its Chinese ties on the one hand and its association with the lucrative silk manufacture on the other.

If this assumption of an eclectic identity is approximately correct, we may go one step further by arguing that the case of Khādalik was not the exception but the norm among similar monasteries in the Kingdom of Khotan. Rather than exclusively affiliated with a single prestigious monastery, monasteries such as Khādalik were (at least ideologically) entangled in a nexus of prestigious monasteries, which constituted the backbone of a sacred topography of Khotanese Buddhism. The reason for their dependence on more than one prestigious monastery as source of authority and efficacy is probably related to their provincial character: Unlike prestigious monasteries near the Khotanese capital, monasteries of minor repute were mostly located in regions removed from the seat of the royal court, and as such were localised and deeply entrenched in faith communities. In addition, unlike prestigious monasteries consecrated by miraculous foundation, monasteries of minor repute were mostly without direct divine associations, and as such were second-hand ‘suppliers’ of religious services for local Buddhists who could not afford pilgrimage to the distant sacred places. In this regard, a monastery of minor repute, in its ideal form, should have represented a sacred topography in miniature,

⁸¹ See fn. 29 above.

⁸² See Forte, “Images of Patronage,” 45–48.

⁸³ The name of the monastery is etymologically obscure. A tantalising proposal is to derive it from Khot. *māysa* ‘house, workshop’, or its locative singular *māsa*; see Duan Qing and Helen Wang, “Were Textiles Used as Money in Khotan in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries?,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (2013): 308, fn. 2.



deriving ideas, legends, and cultic practices from as many prestigious monasteries as Buddhists within its precincts wished for—it had no specialty, but a bit of everything.

This hypothetical state of affairs, if not wide of the mark, echoes the memorable epigram attributed to Archilochus: “The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.”⁸⁴ In the Khotanese case, if it is not too far-fetched to liken prestigious monasteries to hedgehogs and monasteries of minor repute to foxes, the epigram can be slightly modified: “The fox knows many things, *for* the hedgehog knows one big thing;” inasmuch as a fox is an array of hedgehogs writ small. Without prestigious monasteries, each having its own divine association, it would have been pointless to establish monasteries on the provincial level as sustainable reserves of cultic energy, the effusion and renewal of which were made possible by a diversity of devotional acts performed in honor of various tutelary deities and culture heroes. Those deities and heroes that were believed to be sedentary at specific prestigious monasteries thus became itinerant by the agency of provincial cultic centers such as Khādalik, where they were integrated into an Indo-Buddhist pantheon attracting local devotees from many walks of life. To be sure, these observations are mere conjecture until further evidence comes to light, and it remains nebulous what was the driving force behind the dynamic networks between these two types of monasteries.⁸⁵ That being said, the evidence adduced above has hopefully demonstrated that the existence of a hierarchically organized and functionally structured system of Buddhist monasteries in ancient Khotan is a plausible conjecture.

⁸⁴ Πόλλ’ οἶδ’ ἀλώπηξ, ἀλλ’ ἐχῖνος ἓν μέγα. Archilochus Fragment 201 in Douglas E. Gerber, *Greek Iambic Poetry: From the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries BC* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 216.

⁸⁵ It is possible, and indeed conceivable, to attach some importance to royal patronage in the formation of the binary system, as does Forte (Forte, “Images of Patronage”, 55–56); but it is equally possible, if not probable, to link provincial monasteries with monks and/or members of the local elite, who visited some prestigious monasteries, took part in rituals there, and were thereby informed about their foundation legends and divine associations.

Abbreviations

IOL Khot	Khotanese Manuscripts preserved at the British Library in London
IOL Khot W	Khotanese Wooden Tablets preserved at the British Library in London
IOL San	Sanskrit Manuscripts preserved at the British Library in London
IOL Tib N	Tibetan Manuscripts and Wooden Tablets preserved at the British Library in London
Kha.	Khādalik
MAS.	Marc Aurel Stein. Objects from his second expedition at the British Museum in London
OA	Oriental Arts Section of the British Museum in London
Or.	Oriental. Manuscripts of the Department of Oriental Manuscripts and Printed Books of the British Library and of the joint British Library Oriental Collection/India Office Library in London
P.	Pelliot Collection of Chinese Dunhuang Manuscripts preserved at the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris
T.	<i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i> 大正新脩大藏經 [Taishō <i>Tripitaka</i>], edited by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaikyoku 渡辺海旭. Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–1935.

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IOL Khot W 10–18, 52–54 = Kha.ix.8, 19, 40, 50, 51, 53, 61, 62, 63, 65, 67, 74, 76, and 77. Edited and translated in Prods Oktor Skjærvø, *Khotanese Manuscripts from Chinese Turkestan in the British Library: A Complete Catalogue with Texts and Translations*. London: The British Library, 2002, 562–564, and 570–571.

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- IOL San 1256 = Kha.i.93. Kumāralāta's *Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā*, unknown chapter. Unedited.
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