



The Tribute Trade with Khotan in Light of Materials Found at the Dunhuang Library Cave

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Historians have long been interested in the Chinese tributary system because of its importance to understanding China's relations with other countries—both in the past and today. Many of today's intractable foreign policy issues had their roots in the tribute system. One has only to think of Tibet—was it a part of China during the Qing dynasty? independent? something in between?—to grasp the importance of the topic.

Most studies of the tribute system have focused on periods like the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) when China was united and its weaker neighbors presented gifts to the emperor in the capital. Northwest China in the ninth and tenth centuries offers a promising comparison because the Tang central government, ravaged by the costs of suppressing the An Lushan rebellion (755–763), was weak, so weak in fact that Khotan and the Uighur khanates referred to the local rulers in Dunhuang as “China” and often sent envoys bearing tribute only as far as Dunhuang.¹ Even in these times of intermittent warfare, the regional powers of the northwest continued to exchange emissaries. Anyone assessing the considerable risks has to wonder why.

Those hoping to understand the tribute system in any period face a major obstacle in the Chinese-language sources: most of the surviving record consists of terse entries originally composed by bureaucrats for other bureaucrats.² These are preserved in the official histories and other document collections. To cite a typical example: “On the fourth day of the twelfth month [of the second year of the Jianlong reign, or 961] the king of Khotan Li Shengtian sent an emissary to present

one jade tablet and one box.”³ This is but one of a dozen instances on which Khotanese envoys brought tribute to the Chinese between 938 and 1009.⁴ In each case, the Chinese sources record the date, the name of the country presenting tribute, the item presented, and occasionally the name of the emissary heading the delegation. None of these sources, though, records how the participants viewed these exchanges. Nor do we learn what they received in return for their gifts.

For this information, we must look to the Chinese- and Khotanese-language documents preserved in the library cave of Dunhuang (cave 17 according to the numbering in use today) and taken to the United Kingdom, France, and Russia in the early years of the twentieth century. One set of documents—about the travails of a tribute-bearing mission that included seven princes—is particularly informative about relations between Khotan and its neighbors in the ninth and tenth centuries. More specifically: we will ask what was the purpose and nature of the tribute trade? Who was traveling on the overland trade routes at this time? Why?

These Khotanese documents have been translated, often several times, and thoroughly annotated by Khotanologists, facilitating their use for those, like myself, who do not read Khotanese.⁵ This essay does not presume to date these documents, a problem that has defied solution by the greatest Khotanologists of the twentieth century. The closing section, though, offers a translation of a revealing letter from members of the royal household living in Dunhuang to the Khotanese princess and prime minister. Building on it, this

section will speculate why so many Khotanese documents were placed in cave 17.⁶

When the trade between Khotan and the Uighur khanate of Ganzhou (modern Zhangye, Gansu) had been suspended for ten years (either in the late ninth or mid-tenth century), the kaghan wrote to the king of Khotan. From a historical point of view, the exact date of the letters does not matter too much because the earlier date (in the 890s)⁷ and the later date of 966⁸ fall into the same period in Dunhuang history: that of Chinese rule between 848 and 1036, when the Xixia army defeated the Cao-family forces. After more than seventy years as part of the Tibetan empire, Dunhuang came under the rule of a Chinese general named Zhang Yichao in 848, and his nephew and grandson continued to rule to sometime around 914. The Returning-to-Righteousness (Guiyijun) government ruled Dunhuang during the waning years of the Tang dynasty, which formally collapsed in 907. Even before then, though, the center was very weak, and Dunhuang was all but independent. Sometime around 920, a second family, the Caos, took over from the Zhangs. The Cao family governed for more than a century, and their rule overlapped with that of the Song dynasty, founded in 960 in China. Sometime around 1036, the Xixia Tanguts conquered Dunhuang, and the region remained under non-Chinese rule through the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries.

We do not know the original language of the Uighur kaghan's letter. He may have written in his native Uighur, or in Chinese or Tibetan, both serving as diplomatic languages at the time. The Khotanese translators, who viewed the document as the equivalent of a *haṣḍi* communication (usually from an inferior to a superior),⁹ rendered the letter: "(I) the Khan (of Kamcū) have so made a *haṣḍi*,¹⁰ stating, the country has for some reason been destroyed." The word "country," Bailey explains, refers to the intercourse and diplomatic contact between the two countries of Khotan and Dunhuang. In the past, the letter continues, when relations were "good on both sides," the king of Khotan "used to send to the Kamcū [Ganzhou] land for the Khan the favour of many various wonderful things."¹¹

In focusing on trade, the kaghan does not bring up another benefit of sending delegations to visit other rulers: the information that they brought back. Zhang Guangda and Rong Xinjiang note

that the envoys played a key role because they reported on the military strength of different rulers.¹² In another report, the Khotanese envoys themselves allude to this role: "And we began to collect [information], but again we thought, It is impolitic and we did not any more collect it here."¹³ Although they stopped actively gathering information, their report to the Khotanese king still included much detail about Dunhuang and Ganzhou.

Not surprisingly, the documents have much more to say about trade than gathering intelligence. Writing after a ten-year gap in which the Uighurs and Khotan did not exchange envoys, the Uighur kaghan hopes to persuade the Khotanese to resume trade and so describes it in glowing terms. The different documents about the seven princes, though, convey a very different picture of Silk Road exchanges at the time. All the goods mentioned are locally made, and none of the documents refers to coins.¹⁴

We must remember that the peak years of the Silk Road trade, between 500 and 800, have passed. At that time, contracts from Turfan and Kucha regularly give prices in Sasanian silver coins (possibly Sogdian replicas),¹⁵ Kucha coins, and Chinese bronze coins.¹⁶ The An Lushan rebellion of 755 forced the Chinese central government to withdraw its annual subsidies of coins and bolts of silk for the armies stationed in the northwest. The consequences were immediate.

The differences between Turfan and Dunhuang contracts are striking: at Dunhuang in the ninth and tenth centuries purchasers exchange silk or grain, weighed in fixed amounts, to purchase or rent land or to buy animals.¹⁷ In their magisterial survey of contracts from Dunhuang, Yamamoto Tatsuro and Ikeda On explain: "That the Dunhuang contracts provide evidence of the discontinuation of the use of money is a fact that cannot be overlooked. From the period of Tibetan control onward, money was not used in this region, the media for disbursement being grain or cloth."¹⁸ In 788–790 the financial records of a storehouse at Dunhuang referred to coins; this was the latest Chinese-language mention of coins known to date.¹⁹ Tibetan-language contracts, most likely from the period of Tibetan occupation 786–848, confirm the decline in the circulation of coins: with only a few mentions of *dmar*, the Tibetan word for "copper," which may refer to bronze coins, the contracts record ex-

changes in grain and cloth. It is possible that some Chinese coins, perhaps those minted before 755, continued to circulate in the ninth and tenth centuries, but the region's economy had become essentially demonetized.²⁰

When Yamamoto and Ikeda say "money," they mean coins. Yet if we adopt a broader, and more commonly accepted, definition of money as a store of wealth, fixed measures of grain and fixed lengths of cloth sometimes served as "money" at Dunhuang.²¹ Contracts from Dunhuang often give the dimensions of each piece of cloth, and in the tenth century parties to a transaction occasionally sketched the piece of cloth in question on the back of the contract. They would not have done this at the height of the Tang when the size of cloth had been standardized. At least some of the time, cloth served as a bartered item that had to be measured each time it changed hands.

In such an economy, what products did the Khotanese present as tribute? Jade was the one unique local product whose chunks and pebbles residents could gather from the riverbeds of Khotan. Since 1200 B.C., if not before, the Chinese had imported Khotanese jade. The lavish tomb of the Shang king's consort Fu Hao (ca. 1200 B.C.) contained over one thousand jade implements, some carved from the distinctive jade of Khotan.²² Demand never flagged in subsequent centuries.

The princes and their entourage carried 600 *jin* of Khotanese jade with them. A single *jin* weighed about 600 grams,²³ so their load totaled some 360 kilos of jade. We do not know the meaning of the terms *nūca* and *paśamjsana* for the other commodities carried by the Khotanese. Hiroshi Kumamoto rightly suggests that we consider the goods mentioned in the Chinese-language sources as we ponder the definitions of these words. Both seem to be made from leather, he notes, making it likely that they were saddles, harnesses, or some other equipment for animals.²⁴ Horses and jade were the most common tribute items from Khotan, and other recorded gifts included camels, falcons, yak tails, textiles, furs, medicines, minerals, herbs, some types of fragrances, amber, and coral.²⁵

This list overlaps extensively with the goods mentioned in monastic inventories studied by Rong Xinjiang²⁶ as well as in other Dunhuang documents studied by Zheng Binglin.²⁷ These goods fall into broad categories: textiles (silk, of course, but increasingly cotton and linen as well),

metal, incense and other aromatics, furs, animals, ceramics, and precious stones. Some, like the furs, are obviously of local manufacture, but the origin of others is more difficult to determine because no physical specimens survive.

We might call this the French fry problem.²⁸ Was the Iranian powder (*hufen* 胡粉, a pigment used for make-up and painting) that appears in so many Dunhuang documents actually from Iran? Or did the people living in Dunhuang call it "Iranian" because the item had once originated from Iran? Travelers could conceivably have carried powder overland from Iran, because it was light, but "Iranian locks" (*husuo* 胡鎖) were heavy and, accordingly, almost certainly made locally.

One commodity at Dunhuang definitely traveled overland: precious jewels including lapis lazuli (from Badakshan, Afghanistan), agate (from India) coral (from the ocean shore in India and overland from Tibet), and pearls (from Sri Lanka, again most likely via Tibet). Tang-dynasty short stories often speak of wealthy Iranian jewel merchants living in Chang'an.²⁹ Still, these gems, we must note, do not appear in the documents about the seven princes.

As was fitting in a subsistence economy, people also appear as tribute items. The forty Sogdian slaves presented by the kaghan of Ganzhou to the ruler of Dunhuang had, we can assume, no freedom of movement.³⁰ The second group of envoys to report to the court, Tathāgatha Śrībhadrā and Ana Saṃgai, explain how someone who was traveling with them was enslaved: "As for Dārakau Paḍa-tcaina, Hvām' Tsaihsiang captured him. He is thus our slave." After the Khotanese delegation supported him for three months, they explained, he returned to China in the hope of regaining his freedom.³¹ It is possible that the 40 Sogdians were enslaved under similar circumstances.

The seven princes and their companions set off for Chang'an carrying 360 kilograms of jade and some leather goods, most likely harnesses. Stranded in Dunhuang, they did not reach their destination. But what if they had? What were they hoping to get in exchange for their gifts to the Tang emperor? An undated Chinese-language document (also from cave 17 and dating to the late ninth or tenth century) is particularly revealing because it records what a delegation from Dunhuang presented and, most unusually, exactly what the court gave them in return.³²

The delegation of 29 people presented 1 ball of jade (weight not specified), 1 yak tail, 1 antelope horn (presumably for medicinal use) and one 1 letter. Hosting the delegation for nearly four months (they arrived on the 27th day of the 12th month and left on the 11th day of the 4th month), the Chinese divided the group into 3 levels (the top 3 officials, 13 lower-level officials, and 13 carriers). They allowed 13 to proceed to Chang'an and detained the remaining 16 at Lingzhou (modern Zhongwei and Zhongning counties, Ningxia). The authorities bestowed a different set of gifts on each of the three levels. For example, the three men in the highest rank received 15 bolts of cloth (the documents do not specify what kind), 1 silver bowl, and 1 suit of brocade. Those in the second and third ranks were given correspondingly less: the second tier of envoys (13 men) obtained 10 bolts of cloth (not 15), a silver cup (not a bowl), and a suit, while the 13 men on the bottom tier got 8 bolts of cloth, a suit, and no silver. Combining these with the gifts from other branches of the government, the group collected a total of 561 bolts of cloth, 5 silver bowls, 14 silver cups, and 50 suits. In addition, each member of the group received 43 bolts of cloth to cover travel expenses, literally, "the cost of camels and horses," a total of 1,247 bolts, more than twice the amount of cloth that the delegation received. Again without actually seeing the goods on this list, it is impossible to assess their value, but it certainly seems that the envoys from Dunhuang received much more than they gave. We can understand why they made such a long trip: the payoff was genuine. These goods were all packed together, sealed, and listed on an accompanying bill of goods addressed to Dunhuang officials from their representatives' office in Chang'an. We know that this group arrived safely home to Dunhuang because cave 17 contained this inventory.

In contrast, the seven princes' trip was, by all accounts, an utter failure. Detained in Dunhuang by the local ruler, the Linggong as he is called in these documents,³³ and prevented from going farther east, they languished. They were forced to spend the different gifts they carried, and in the end, they ended up utterly destitute, as we learn from the short document that they themselves wrote:

All the animals our men had are lost. Our clothes are lost . . . there is no one with whom we can get out

(and go to?) Ganzhou. And the animals Ttaya-sām had, they were since lost. There is nothing any more for the horses, nor any clothes. Neither Chikā the *pramām* nor Ḍū the *puye* has any animals. How (can) we then come to Shuofang,³⁴ since we have neither gift nor letter for the Chinese king? . . . Till now there in Ganzhou many men have died. We have no food. How were then an order to come? How can we have to enter a fire (from which) we can not bring ourselves back?"³⁵

A letter from their escorts Chikā Gūlai and Dūm Saṃgalakā explains how each of the animals was lost.³⁶ The princes, some of whom had to travel on foot, were able to make it to Dunhuang only by joining up with some of the *Cimūdas*, the fearsome bandits living outside of Dunhuang who preyed on so many Silk Road travelers.³⁷

Travel was, of course, slow. As the envoy Ana Ḍai-sai explained, "I shall go as far as Ṣacū making a difficult journey in forty-five days on foot, which with power to fly in the air I had done in one day."³⁸ There is something wonderful about someone in the distant past imagining that he could fly from Dunhuang to Khotan. For those who could not fly but went on horseback, the journey from Khotan to Dunhuang took eighteen days.³⁹

Who was traveling with the princes? The Khotanese materials report that, at different times, the princes' delegation included envoys (of higher and lower ranks), monks, lay people, and Chinese.⁴⁰ The Linggong of Dunhuang understood the role of the monks and the lay people very differently. He refused to allow the party to go towards Ganzhou because of the unrest; he explained that he feared that the Chinese court would hold him responsible if gifts intended for them did not arrive in the capital.⁴¹ Yet he reluctantly agreed to allow three monks to proceed—once they had left their finger marks on a formal document absolving him of responsibility—because he thought that clerics did not carry gifts and therefore were at less risk.

The Linggong was not always so generous with the monks. In one of his reports to the Khotanese court, the emissary Tathāgatha Śrībhadrā claims that he directly reproached the Linggong for mistreating the Khotanese delegation: "You did us much unpleasantness and dishonor. How now and at present do you see the grace of the Buddhist teaching and (how) do you remember the

services of the humble *pravrajitas*?⁴² “What great faith he has,” remarked the observers, and the Linggong himself apologized: “How did I harm upon the monks and brought about a bad name for myself.”⁴³ Perhaps these conversations did not occur exactly as reported, but other sources confirm the frequent participation of monks in tribute missions. Rulers hosted them because they hoped to learn about religion from them or, more compellingly, believed that hosting a powerful monk could bring immediate benefit, whether in the form of miracles or enhanced prestige accruing to Buddhist patrons.

The documents use different words for the monks, often Khotanese variations of the Sanskrit word for teacher, *ācārya*. Buddhists at Dunhuang, Hao Chunwen’s research has shown, did not always observe the terms of their ordination vows.⁴⁴ Many monks continued to live at home with their families, sometimes with their children. The report that one “teacher” took a wife and gave her a roll of cloth, a pair of trousers, an overcoat, and another type of cloth⁴⁵ is entirely consonant with what we know of Buddhist practice at Dunhuang.

Monks, princes, lay people—the lines dividing them were porous and became even more so when the delegation faced difficult circumstances. Ana Dai-sai summarized the situation: “So in this case where a man, each for himself, takes things (goods, or money), the whole land has been destroyed. The men each for himself have not given that (thing, money) with a good face, but with a bad (face).”⁴⁶ Tathāgatha Śrībhadrā and Ana Saṃgai explained how eight members of their delegation reacted to the collapse of the delegation. In each case, they repeat the phrase “he took the Royal favor [=tribute, gift] and went away,” meaning that the individual in question absconded with the tribute sent by the Khotanese king and intended for the Chinese.⁴⁷ Of the eight men, only two went to China: the slave (mentioned above), to obtain his freedom, and a trader who planned to give “one hundred blankets to the Royal Court.” The two envoys detail the various offenses of the others—selling jade, prompting a village to write a petition against him, becoming involved in a dispute about cloth—who all managed to return to Khotan with the goods they were supposed to present to the Chinese ruler.⁴⁸

At various points, the princes and their companions encountered other traders. After bring-

ing a letter to the three monks that the Linggong had allowed to go on ahead, two men “left (Ganzhou for Shazhou to do) trade.”⁴⁹ They were subsequently robbed in Guazhou. During the difficult trip during which so many of the princes’ animals died, Chikā Gūlai and Dūm Saṃgalakām reported that two of their companions “lost their merchandise,” and a Sogdian trader could not locate either his pack animals or the “merchandise he had hidden in the mountains.”⁵⁰

Difficult circumstances prompted the princes to engage in trade as well. One prince, Capastaka, gave 30 *jin* (roughly 18 kilos) of jade to the Dunhuang authorities in exchange for 150 bolts of silk, ostensibly for the court, and 50, for his Chinese mother, Lady (Furen) Khī-vyaina. When his brother Wang Pa-kyau wrote to his mother to complain that Capastaka had cheated him (he does not explain exactly how), he asks her to send him more jade: “When the envoys go there do you deign to send a little *īra* [jade] stone?”⁵¹ It certainly sounds as if he, just like his brother Capastaka before him, plans to exchange the jade his mother sends for more silk.

Bolts of silk were the main currency used by travelers, we learn from a list of expenses incurred by a group of Khotanese (the document does not specify the size of the group).⁵² They use bolts of silk to buy horses, to make payments to a guide and others, and to assess the value of an “Arab sword” (worth three [*jin*?] of silk). The silk did not always function as money; the travelers also cut up one bolt to sew a *drraijsai*, presumably some type of garment. At one point, the group shifts from making payments in silk to sheep and then even pays using antelope skins, an indication that one could always barter for unusual goods when the occasion arose. The list reports: “And he gave present to 40 compatriot merchants.”⁵³ “This is one of the few Khotanese commercial documents found in Dunhuang,” Hiroshi Kumamoto notes. “They are noteworthy in that the local Chinese documents in the ninth and tenth centuries only mention Khotanese envoys and priests, but hardly ever Khotanese merchants.”⁵⁴

In fact, this generalization holds true for all Silk Road sites, not just Dunhuang. In almost every instance, envoys and monks have left far more traces in the documentary record than have merchants.⁵⁵ Understanding the circumstances leading to the preservation of materials can help

us to explain why. Cave 17 constitutes a unique find of enormous size, a repository of tens of thousands of documents, larger than any other cache of documents from the Silk Road. Although some earlier scholars argued that Dunhuang was a repository for waste, Rong Xinjiang has argued—to my mind, utterly convincingly—that cave 17 was not a garbage pit but a storeroom in which monks deliberately placed many intact texts, both in Chinese as well as other languages including Khotanese, and paintings, many dating to the period 950–1000.⁵⁶ Similarly, the recent analysis by Jacob Dalton, Tom Davis, and Sam van Schaik suggests a date of the tenth century for the Tibetan manuscripts found in the cave.⁵⁷

Stein did find a layer of waste materials, Rong explains, but they lay on top of intact scrolls, many rolled up in covers bearing a label showing their order in the Buddhist canon (those notations served as a kind of call number). The people who placed the materials in the library cave saved every single scrap of paper in the hope they might prove useful in future repairs. One monastic inventory from Dunhuang dated 873 lists goods that can be “discarded at the next time of registering,” which include pots and pans, but not banners, sutra covers, or sutra wrappers.⁵⁸ This list is important because it overlaps with the actual contents of cave 17: sutras, sutra wrappers, banners, and embroidered images. These were, Rong notes, the most valuable items in the cave.⁵⁹

Some of the Buddhist sutras in cave 17, Rong points out, had patches on the reverse made from individual Buddhist broadsheets publicizing the miracles of a bodhisattva such as Guanyin or Manjuśrī. Because so many modern curators remove these patches and file them separately, it is easy for us to forget that they were placed in cave 17 only because of this use.⁶⁰

Many of the Chinese colophons indicate that the texts in cave 17 belonged to the Three Realms Monastery, more in fact than belonged to any other monastery at Dunhuang. A monk named Daozhen (active 934–987, when his name last appears on a document) from this monastery wrote a colophon explaining why he collected the materials he placed in cave 17.⁶¹ Daozhen “having seen that among the contents of the storehouse of his temple the sets of scriptures and commentaries were incomplete, thereupon bowed his forehead to the ground and, with devout sincerity, took an oath and made prayers: I will go carefully through the cartons and storehouses of all

the families, seeking after old and decayed scriptural texts. I will gather them in the monastery, repair and patch them from beginning to end, and pass them down to other ages.”⁶² Daozhen died sometime after 987, and we can assume that his successors continued his collecting practices until 1002, the date of the latest document found in the cave.

Four Chinese-language documents held in St. Petersburg are particularly important because they establish a connection between the Three Realms Monastery and the members of the Khotanese royal family living at Dunhuang. All four are petitions to the royal family, and all are complete. If they are the original documents, they were never sent; alternatively, they are copies of documents that were sent.⁶³ One is from a high official, most likely an envoy, while the others are from the ladies-in-waiting of the Khotanese princess. Here is a full translation of the most informative document:⁶⁴

Your humble servant Youding writes to Princess Tiannü:⁶⁵ Youding has long prostrated herself in serving the princess, whose generosity she has received many times. When will she ever be able to repay it? Now we need one skirt waistband made from Iranian brocade (*hujin*). On the next trip we sincerely hope and request that the emperor⁶⁶ send an emissary with such a skirt waistband. In addition there is an additional small matter, which we explain to you and the prime minister in the hope that he will hear and grant our request.

Because the cave construction at Dang stream⁶⁷ has not yet been completed, we sincerely hope that the princess and prime minister will send 14 or 15 bolts of plain silk to give to the miller to make a sieve⁶⁸ and to buy and bring to the workmen living near the caves. In addition, send colored pigments, iron powder,⁶⁹ and dye for thread to sew an embroidered image for the Three Realms Monastery for project-related expenses.⁷⁰

Our lady is growing old, and often suffers from cold vapors; perhaps when an emissary comes he can bring two or three *sheng* [three–six liters] of refined warming medicine.

Also, send 30 or 50 bolts of fine Phema cotton, which will also be used for cave-related expenses.

Also, 20 or 30 *jin* [12–15 kilograms] of red copper.⁷¹

We also ask Master⁷² Prime Minister: Chouzi and Chouer⁷³ want jade-rope belts, so send two. Also thirty or forty good arrows, send them east as well.

This is a difficult document, quite possibly written by non-native speakers and filled with many local phrasings, with the result that this translation is tentative in many places. This docu-

ment is critical, though, for understanding the relationship among the Khotanese residents of Dunhuang and the royal family in Khotan. One king of Khotan (Viśa' Saṃbhava or Li Shengtian) married the daughter of Cao Yijin, the ruler of Dunhuang.⁷⁴ The Khotanese royal family maintained a residence in Dunhuang that was referred to as either Taizi zhuang (estate of the crown prince) or Taizi zhai (house of the crown prince).⁷⁵

The lady-in-waiting who wrote this letter to the princess and the prime minister in Khotan lived in this Dunhuang residence. Her tone and her willingness to make so many different requests indicate that she was on a comfortable footing with the princess and the prime minister of Khotan, whom she addresses as "master." It is likely that she was from an elite Khotanese or Chinese family as was the prime minister.⁷⁶ Most important for our understanding of how Khotanese documents came to end up in cave 17, this letter documents that the Khotanese royal family made donations to the Three Realms Monastery, here, specifically giving dye for thread to make an embroidered image.

These documents suggest the following scenario: a monk from the Three Realms Monastery—perhaps Daozhen, perhaps one of his followers if he has already died—approaches the Dunhuang branch of the Khotan royal family and requests their Buddhist texts for the monastery library. The Khotanese possess different types of documents, some written on the backs of Chinese sutras, some entirely in Khotanese.⁷⁷ As Kumamoto notes, almost all the Khotanese documents from cave 17 were written in Dunhuang. Two important exceptions are the *Jātakastava*, a Buddhist text with a colophon written in Khotan, and a letter from King Viśa' Śūra describing the attack on Khotan by the Karakhanids (P 5538a).⁷⁸

The fighting between Khotan and the Karakhanids was protracted. In 970 the Khotanese won a major victory, extended their territory to Kashgar, and sent a dancing elephant to the emperor of the Song dynasty to mark their success. But the Karakhanids overpowered the Khotanese in 1006. If, when the monk from Three Realms Monastery solicited donations from the Khotanese royal family living in Dunhuang, the Khotanese realized that their homeland was about to fall to the army of the Karakhanid ruler, Yūsuf Qādir Khan, then it is even more likely that they would have donated their entire archive to the Three Realms Monastery.

The above scenario is frankly a reconstruction—no sources survive that tell us exactly how the library in cave 17 was formed—but it suggests that the documents concerning the seven princes were written in the late tenth century as Hiroshi Kumamoto proposed in his dissertation. Almost all the materials in the cave, including paintings, date to between 950 and 1000. Still, one cannot rule out James Hamilton's suggestion that the princes traveled in the late ninth century. Perhaps greater certainty will come in the not-too-distant future when all the Dunhuang documents are digitized and computer-searchable.

Notes

1. H. W. Bailey, "Altun Khan," *BSOAS* 30 (1967), p. 98.

2. E. Balazs, "History as a Guide to Bureaucratic Practice," in *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy: Variations on a Theme*, trans. H. M. Wright (New Haven, 1964), pp. 129–49.

3. *Song huiyao jigao* (A draft version of the important documents of the Song) *fanyi* (The Fan and Yi non-Chinese peoples) (Beijing, 1957), 7:1b. The original text has Li Shengwen 李聖文, presumably an error for Li Shengtian 李聖天.

4. There is a very helpful list of these missions in H. Kumamoto, "Khotanese Official Documents in the Tenth Century A.D.," Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1982, pp. 63–65.

5. My debt to Prods Oktor Skjærvø is enormous. In addition to his catalog, *Khotanese Manuscripts from Chinese Turkestan in the British Library: A Complete Catalogue with Texts and Translations*, with contributions by U. Sims-Williams (London, 2002), I have drawn extensively on handouts distributed at several talks given at Yale as well as his unpublished 2004 paper, "Perils of Princes and Ambassadors in Tenth-Century Khotan." The translations of the individual documents cited in this paper are:

IOL Khot S 6/Ch.0048: *Catalogue*, p. 485.

IOL Khot S 13/Ch.00269. 23–108: *Catalogue*, pp. 509–13.

IOL Khot S 13/Ch.00269.108–20: *Catalogue*, pp. 513–14.

P(elliot chinois, henceforth P) 2031 and 2788: H. Kumamoto, "Two Khotanese Fragments Concerning Thyai Paḍātsā," *Tokyo University Linguistic Papers* 11 (1991), pp. 101–20.

P 2786, British Library Or.8212.162.125–b5, Or.8212.186: H. Kumamoto, "Khotanese Official Documents," pp. 116–36, Texts I–III.

P 2790: H. W. Bailey, "Śrī Viśa Śūra and the Ta-uang," *Asia Major* n.s. 11 (1964), pp. 1–26.

P 2958.149–227: Bailey, “Altun Khan,” pp. 95–104.

Images of all the Pelliot manuscripts can now be viewed online at <http://www.idp.bl.uk>.

6. Kumamoto Hiroshi notes that Dunhuang was “the single largest source of the manuscripts of Khotanese,” in his “The Khotanese in Dunhuang,” in *Cine e Iran da Alessandro Magno alla dinastia Tang*, ed. A. Cadonna and L. Lanciotti (Florence, 1996), pp. 79–101, citation on p. 79.

7. J. Hamilton, “Le pays des Tchong-yun, Čungul, ou Cumuḍa au Xe siècle,” JA 265.3–4, pp. 351–79; “Sur la chronologie khotanaise au IXe-Xe siècle,” in *Contributions aux études de Touen-houang*, vol. 3, ed. M. Soymié (Paris, 1964), pp. 47–53.

8. This is the date that Kumamoto proposes in his Ph.D. dissertation (pp. 47–51). The occurrence of a *nakṣatra* day, the use of the title of *linggong*, and the mention of a tiger year suggest a date of either 966 or 990, but he prefers 966 because the ruler of Dunhuang in 990 did not use the title *linggong*. Elsewhere, he has proposed a date in the 880s for the princes’ documents (“The Khotanese in Dunhuang,” p. 86).

9. H. Kumamoto, “The Khotanese Documents from the Khotan Area: With an Appendix by Saitō, Tatuya,” *The Memoirs of the Toyo Bunko* 54 (1996), p. 33.

10. Bailey actually cites the word as “*haṣḍa*,” but it is now known to be a feminine *-i* stem *haṣḍi-*, cf. Skjærvø in R. E. Emmerick and P. O. Skjærvø, *Studies in the Vocabulary of Khotanese*, vol. 1 (Wien, 1982), p. 128.

11. P 2958, translated in Bailey, “Altun Khan,” p. 96. Oktor Skjærvø comments: “The letter is as easy or as difficult to read as the others of the group, and I never noticed anything weird about the language,” email dated July 29, 2008.

12. Zhang Guangda and Rong Xinjiang, *Yutian shi congkao* (Collected studies of Khotanese history) (Shanghai, 1993), p. 18.

13. P 2790, as translated in Bailey, “Śrī Viśā Śūra and the Ta-uang,” p. 3.

14. For an introduction to the economy of the region, see Moriyasu Takao, “From Silk, Cotton, and Copper Coin to Silver: Transition of the Currency Used by the Uighurs During the Period from the 8th to the 14th Centuries,” in *Turfan Revisited: The First Century of Research into the Arts and Cultures of the Silk Road*, ed. D. Durkin-Meisterernst et al. (Berlin, 2004), pp. 228–39.

15. In 2006 Stephen Album examined about one hundred of the Wuqia coins held in the Xinjiang Museum; he estimated that over one quarter were “contemporary imitations” of Sasanian silver coins. Cf. S. Album, conference presentation, International Symposium on Ancient Coins and the Culture of the Silk Road, Shanghai Museum, December 5–7, 2006 (forthcoming conference proceedings from the Shanghai Museum).

16. See Helen Wang’s wonderfully thorough discussion of the evidence in her *Money on the Silk Road: The Evidence from Eastern Central Asia to c. AD 800, Including a Catalogue of the Coins Collected by Sir Aurel Stein* (London, 2004).

17. Yamamoto Tatsuro and Ikeda On, eds., *Tunhuang and Turfan Documents Concerning Social and Economic History, III, Contracts (A) Introduction and Texts* (Tokyo, 1987), pp. 13–18.

18. Yamamoto and Ikeda, *Contracts*, p. 16.

19. Ikeda On, “Tonkō no ryūtsū keizai” (The circulating economy of Dunhuang), in *Tonkō no Shakai*, Tonkō kōza, 3 (Lectures on Dunhuang, vol. 3) (Tokyo, 1980), pp. 297–343; pp. 316–17, citing P 2763, P 2654.

20. The Tibetan-language divination texts from Dunhuang that mention coins (Pelliot tibétain 1055 and 1056) use the Tibetan word *dong-tse*, a translation of the Chinese word *tongzi*. See T. Takeuchi, *Old Tibetan Contracts from Central Asia* (Tokyo, 1995), pp. 25–26.

21. See my paper, “The Place of Coins—and their Alternatives—in the Silk Road Trade,” presented at the International Symposium on Ancient Coins and the Culture of the Silk Road, Shanghai Museum, December 5–7, 2006 (forthcoming conference proceedings from the Shanghai Museum).

22. Wang Binghua, “‘Sichou zhi lu’ de kaituo ji fazhan” (The opening and development of the “Silk Road”), in *Sichou zhi lu kaogu yanjiu* (Studies on the archeology of the Silk Road) (Urumqi, 1993), pp. 2–5.

23. See Table of Equivalent Measures in the author’s *Negotiating Daily Life in Traditional China: How Ordinary People Used Contracts 600–1400* (New Haven, 1995), p. xiii.

24. P 2741.93–95 mentions the gifts for China = “600 jin of jade as well as *nūca* of leather (?) and two *paśaṃjsana*,” translated in Kumamoto, “Two Khotanese Fragments Concerning Thyai Paḍā-tsā,” p. 114. Kumamoto notes that the word *paśaṃjsana* occurs as well in P 5538a.78, the official letter dated 970 from King of Khotan to Cao Yuanzhong, “Then for you we deigned to send one *paśaṃjsana* made of *īmja* (leather?) with well-adorned cover(?)”

25. Kumamoto, “Khotanese Documents,” pp. 211–13.

26. Rong Xinjiang, “Khotanese Felt and Sogdian Silver: Foreign Gifts to Buddhist Monasteries in Ninth- and Tenth-Century Dunhuang,” *Asia Major* 3rd series, 17.1 (2004), pp. 15–34. Note in particular the chart of goods on pp. 31–34.

27. Zheng Binglin, “Wan Tang Wudai Dunhuang shangye maoyi shichang yanjiu” (A study of the mercantile trade and markets of Dunhuang in the late Tang dynasty and Five Dynasties periods), *Dunhuang xue jikan* 45 (2004), pp. 103–18.

28. I thank my colleague Peter C. Perdue for this formulation.

29. E. H. Schafer, “Iranian Merchants in T’ang Dynasty Tales,” in *Semitic and Oriental Studies: A Vol-*

ume Presented to William Popper, ed. W. J. Fischel (Berkeley, 1951), pp. 403–22.

30. P 2786 as translated in Kumamoto, Ph.D., p. 122, and discussed on p. 197.

31. P 2786 as translated in Kumamoto, Ph.D., p. 129.

32. The document P 3547 has not been studied extensively; Zheng Binglin mentions it in his very useful article about trade at Dunhuang: “Wan Tang Wudai Dunhuang shangye maoyi,” p. 108.

33. *Linggong* was short for *zhong shu ling* (“secretariat director”), Kumamoto, Ph.D., p. 41.

34. They say *śahvā* for the Chinese place-name, Shuofang 朔方, the military district “which roughly covers the loop of the Yellow River” (Kumamoto, Ph.D., p. 198). The capital city of Shuofang was Lingzhou, where envoys on their way to the Tang capital were first received.

35. IOL Khot S 13/Ch.00269.109–20, translated in Skjaervø, *Catalogue*, p. 514.

36. IOL Khot S 13/Ch.00269, as translated in Skjaervø, *Catalogue*, p. 512.

37. Hamilton, “Le pays des Tchong-yun.”

38. Bailey, “Altun Khan,” p. 97.

39. Skjaervø, “Perils of Princes and Ambassadors in Tenth-Century Khotan.”

40. Kumamoto, Ph.D., pp. 119, 150, 182.

41. The phrasing is not crystal clear, prompting Kumamoto to paraphrase the *Linggong*’s views: “If there were not such gifts [= tribute], and if you just go to China, there should be no problem for the Ling-kung. However those gifts are actually here. And if they should fail to reach China, the king of Khotan may think that the Ling-kung has unlawfully taken them. Therefore, the Ling-kung cannot allow the envoys to go, as long as those gifts cannot safely be delivered to China.” Ph.D., p. 218.

42. Bailey translates *pravrajita* as “ascetic,” “Altun Khan,” p. 97.

43. Or.8212.162, as translated in Kumamoto, Ph.D., p. 136.

44. Hao Chunwen, *Tang houqi wudai Songchu Dunhuang sengni de shehui shenghuo* (The society and life of monks and nuns at Dunhuang in the late Tang, Five Dynasties, and early Song periods) (Beijing, 1998).

45. Or.8212.162 as translated in Kumamoto, Ph.D., p. 135. Compare Skjaervø, *Catalogue*, p. 290.

46. The word “land” here has the broader meaning of relations among countries. P 2958, as translated by Bailey, “Altun Khan,” p. 97.

47. Kumamoto, Ph.D., p. 225.

48. P 2786 and Or.8212.186, sections 43–45 as translated in Kumamoto, Ph.D., pp. 128–30, with extensive annotation on pp. 226–44.

49. P 2786 as translated in Kumamoto, Ph.D., p. 120.

50. IOL Khot S 13/Ch.00269, as translated in Skjaervø, *Catalogue*, pp. 511–50.

51. P 2958, as translated in Bailey, “Altun Khan,” p. 98.

52. P 2024, as translated in H. Kumamoto, “Miscellaneous Khotanese Documents from the Pelliot Collection,” *Tokyo University Linguistics Papers* 14 (1995), pp. 229–57. P 2024 is translated on pp. 231–35 and discussed on pp. 235–38.

53. P 2024, as translated in Kumamoto, “Miscellaneous Khotanese Documents from the Pelliot Collection,” translation on p. 232.

54. Kumamoto, “Miscellaneous Khotanese Documents,” pp. 230–31.

55. See my forthcoming book, *A New History of the Silk Road*, Oxford University Press, for more detail.

56. Rong Xinjiang, “The Nature of the Dunhuang Library Cave and the Reasons for Its Sealing,” *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie* 11 (1999–2000), pp. 247–75; Rong Xinjiang “Zailun Dunhuang cangjing dong de baocang – Sanjie si yu cangjing dong” (Further discussion of the treasure in the library cave of Dunhuang – Three Stages Monastery and the library cave), in Rong Xinjiang, *Dunhuang xue xinlun* (Lanzhou, 2002), pp. 8–28, especially pp. 18–19.

57. After careful analysis of the Tibetan-language manuscripts of the Stein collection, the authors suggest that different scribes specialized in copying different types of Buddhist texts: one scribe who used Khotanese page numbers was, they propose, most likely a native speaker of Khotanese. J. Dalton, T. Davis, and S. van Schaik, “Beyond Anonymity: Paleographic Analyses of the Dunhuang Manuscripts,” *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies* 3 (2007), 23 pages (available on-line at www.jiats.org).

58. Rong, “The Nature of the Dunhuang Library Cave,” p. 259.

59. Rong, “Zailun,” p. 23.

60. See plate CI, in vol. 4 of M. A. Stein’s *Serindia: Detailed Report of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost China* (Oxford, 1921), discussed by Rong, “Zailun,” pp. 22–26.

61. A partial translation of Doc 0345 appears in Rong Xinjiang, “The Nature of the Dunhuang Library Cave”; the full passage is translated by S. Teiser, *The Scripture of the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1994), pp. 142–43.

62. Teiser, *The Scripture of the Ten Kings*, p. 142.

63. Zhang and Rong, “Shi shiji yutian guo,” p. 184.

64. Translation of Dx-2148 (2) and Dx-6069 (1), transcribed on pp. 183–84, Zhang Guangda and Rong Xinjiang, “Shi shiji Yutian guo de tianshou nianhao ji qi xiangguan wenti” (The Tianshou reign period in tenth-century Khotan and other related problems), *Ouya xuekan* 1 (1999), pp. 181–92. Allow me to thank Rong Xinjiang, Chen Guocan, Wu Min, and Jinping Wang for their help in translating this document.

65. Princess Tiannü was either the wife of Li Shengtian or his daughter.

66. As is typical of Khotanese documents intended for internal use, they refer to the Khotanese king

using the Chinese term for emperor, *huangdi*. Documents addressed to the Chinese usually use the word *wang* ("king"). Rong Xinjiang, personal communication, September 30, 2008.

67. A stream that flows near the caves of Dunhuang.

68. The word for sieve, 羅底 *luodi*, literally means "with a bottom made of luo gauze cloth."

69. *Gangtie* is usually translated as "steel," but here it means a black-colored pigment made from iron and carbon.

70. For an illustration of such an embroidery, see R. Whitfield et al., *Caves of the Thousand Buddhas* (London, 1990), p. 113, fig. 88A. For a study of embroidery and its significance as a Buddhist offering, see the essay by A. Sheng, "Fangzhi yishu, jishu yu fojiao jifu" (Textile art, techniques, and the Buddhist accumulation of merit), in *Fojiao wuzhi wenhua: siyuan caifu yu shisu gongyang guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwen ji / Merit, opulence and the Buddhist network of wealth: Essays on Buddhist material culture*, ed. S. E. Fraser (Hu Suxin) (Shanghai, 2003), pp. 64–80.

71. Edward Schafer identifies "red copper" as an alloy of antimony, gold, and copper, *Golden Peaches of Samarkand; a Study of Tang Exotics* (Berkeley, 1963), p. 257.

72. Chinese-language documents from Dunhuang often use *Alang* 阿郎 ("father") to mean master. The phrasing reinforces the impression of closeness be-

tween the author of the letter and the Khotanese royal family.

73. These are nicknames for two children, the first may be a girl, while the second is definitely a boy. The character *chou* 丑 is a homophone for *chou* 醜 ("ugly") a name often given to children in the hope that evil spirits would leave them alone.

74. Viśa' Saṃbhava's third daughter also married a Cao, Cao Yanlu.

75. Rong Xinjiang and Zhuang Guangda, *Yutian shi congkao*, p. 110.

76. Yoshida Yutaka has written (in Japanese) about a textile with a bilingual inscription on it in Chinese and Khotanese script. The Chinese reads "Lady (furen) sincerely presents this to her son the prime minister Li Kuang'er," while the Khotanese reads: "ḍī tsai syām hīye" (property of the prime minister). See his *Kōtan shutsudo 8–9 seiki no Kōtango sezoku monjo ni kansuru oboegaki* (Notes on the Khotanese documents of the 8th–9th centuries unearthed from Khotan) (Kobe, 2006), p. 35; also his article in the present volume. I thank Rong Xinjiang for first bringing this to my attention.

77. Kumamoto, "The Khotanese in Dunhuang," pp. 79–101, especially pp. 90–91.

78. M. J. Dresden, *Jātakastava or "Praise of the Buddha's Former Births"* (Philadelphia, 1955).