



CAVES OF THE THOUSAND BUDDHAS

CAVES OF THE THOUSAND BUDDHAS, Ch'ien Fo Tung (Qianfodong), a large group of grottoes and cave temples carved out of Ming-sha hill in the southeastern Tun-huang (Dunhuang) district of Kansu (Gansu) province, China. Between the 4th and 10th centuries Tun-huang was a gateway between China and the Silk Road across Central Asia (see, e.g., Haussig, pp. 74-75) and was visited by many Iranian travelers, especially Sogdian merchants. There was already a Sogdian presence there in about 312, the generally accepted date of the [Sogdian Ancient Letters](#) discovered by Mark Aurel Stein in the Tun-huang frontier wall.

The library. According to an inscription dated 648, the Buddhist sanctuary at Tun-huang was founded in 366 by the monk Yüch-ts'un (Yuecun; Chen, pp. 256-60). Subsequently more than a thousand large and small caves were hollowed out; despite repeated destruction over the centuries, 492 of them still survive. They contain many wall paintings and about 2,300 sculptures, all in a fairly good state of preservation. In cave no. 17, opening from the entrance to cave no. 16, a rich hoard of several tens of thousands of manuscript rolls and drawings dating from the 5th to the 11th centuries was discovered sometime around 1900; the hoard had been sealed up before 1036, when Tun-huang was occupied by the Tanguts (Xixia).

Stein was the first Westerner to inspect the cave and its contents; he visited



the site four times between 1907 and 1930 (1912, pp. 28-31, 164-233, 339; idem, 1928, I, pp. 354-62; 1921, II, pp. 812ff). The French sinologist Paul Pelliot spent some time there in 1908, and subsequently the Japanese Zuichō Tachibana and Yoshikawa Koichirō (in 1911), the Russian Sergeï Oldenburg (in 1914-15; cf., e.g., Klimkeit), and the Dane Arthur Bollerup Sørensen (in 1915; Petersen, p. 112) also paid visits. All of them carried away manuscripts and works of art, which they had to purchase from the monk Wang Daishi, guardian of the caves; these are now preserved mainly in London (British Library and India Office Library, catalogued with the prefix “Ch.”), Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale, Pelliot collection), Leningrad (Oriental Institute of the Academy of Sciences), Japan (Ryūkoku University Library), Peking (National Library of China, Beijing), and Copenhagen (Royal Library).

Today the caves have become a tourist attraction, which poses a problem for the preservation of the delicate wall paintings. As a result, the most important caves are now closed to the public, which will only have access to eight cave replicas that are being built (*New York Times*, 21 November 1989, pp. C 19, 21).

The manuscripts. The majority of the manuscripts from Tun-huang contain Buddhist texts written in Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan, Khotanese, and Sogdian, but there are also many Confucian, Taoist, and Manichean texts (including three Manichean texts in Chinese: The “Hymnscroll” and the “Compendium of the Doctrines of Mani” in the British Library and the “Traité Pelliot” in the Bibliothèque Nationale, see Lin and Schmidt-Glinzer, pp. 5-8) and a large number of secular documents (economic and juridical texts and official and private correspondence), which have considerable significance for the study of the Iranian presence in the area of Tun-huang. The Iranian texts have been published almost in their entirety (see below), and most of the Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese manuscripts, both in Western and Eastern collections, have been catalogued, and many have been published or collated for text editions. In view of the importance of the Tun-huang documents for the history of the eastern Iranian peoples the following manuscript catalogues may be mentioned here: L. de la Vallée Poussin, *Catalogue of the Tibetan Manuscripts from Tun-huang in the India Office Library, with an Appendix on the Chinese Manuscripts by Kazuo Enoki*, Oxford, 1962. L. Giles, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Chinese Manuscripts from Tunhuang in the British Museum*, London, 1957. M. Lalou, *Inventaire des manuscrits tibétains de Touenhouang conservés à la Bibliothèque Nationale (Fonds Pelliot Tibétain) Nos 1283-2216*, 3 vols., Paris, 1939-61. P. Pelliot and T. Haneda, *Manuscrits de Touen-Houang*, 2



vols., Kyoto, 1926. J. Gernet and Wu Chi-yu, *Catalogue des manuscrits chinois de Touen-Houang, Fonds Pelliot Chinois* I, 1970 (nos. 2001-2500); III, 1983 (nos. 3001-3500). Wang Zhong-min, *Dun-huang yishu zongmu suoyin* (General index of the manuscripts from Tunhuang), Peking, 1962. Tōyō Bunkō, *Sei-iki Shutsudo Kan-bun Bun-ken Bun-rui Moku-roku. Sho-kō. Hi-Bukkyō-Bunken no bu* (First draft of a classified catalogue of the non-Buddhist Chinese documents from Central Asia), 2 vols., Tokyo, 1964-66. J. O. Petersen, "The Dunhuang Manuscripts in the Royal Library of Copenhagen," in L. Littrup, ed., *Analecta Hafniensia. 25 Years of East Arian Studies in Copenhagen*, Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies Occasional Papers 3, Copenhagen, 1988. On the Old Turkish manuscripts see in particular J. Hamilton, *Manuscrits Ouïgours du IX^e-X^e siècle*, 2 vols., Paris, 1986.

Iranian presence at Tun-huang. From some of the Chinese documents in the Pelliot collection (e.g., Pelliot chinois, 3559, publ. Yamamoto and Tohi, II, pp. 115-29) it is clear that by the 8th century the Sogdians had established a prosperous settlement or colony, An Ch'eng (An-cheng; Bukhara town), about 500 m east of the city of Tun-huang; within the administrative system of the T'ang dynasty (618-907) it was designated the canton of Ts'ung-hua (Cong-hua). In 750 the population was apparently about 1,400, in 300 households; according to the calculations of O. Ikeda (pp. 57-59), more than 40 percent of the adult males in Ts'ung-hua had personal names indicating Sogdian origins (e.g., K'ang = Samarkatad, An = Bukhara, Shih = Tashkent). At An Ch'eng a temple to Hien (*xian* "heavenly," referring to a Zoroastrian god; see [chinese-iranian relations i](#)) was erected; it became a prayer center not only for the Sogdians but also for Chinese in the region. In some of the Chinese documents from the caves there are accounts and hymns for the worship of Hien (Waley, 1956, p. 123).

Sogdian culture was also the medium by which certain Indian influences reached Tun-huang; they can be discerned, for example, in the images of a four-armed goddess seated on a dog and of a deity holding a dog in his hand on a painting on paper (Bibliothèque Nationale, P4518.24; Jao, pl. 40), which are reminiscent of Sogdian mural paintings at Pyandzhikent and [Afrasiāb](#) (Azarpay, pp. 155-57, 24 fig. 3, 43 fig. 13, 127 fig. 56).

In the 10th century intermarriage between the ruling families of Khotan and Tun-huang strengthened ties between the two countries. The daughter of Ts'ao I-chin (Cao Yijin), ruler of Tun-huang (920-46), married the Khotanese king, Li Sheng-t'ien (Li Shengtian; Viśa' Saṃbhava, r. 912-66), who is depicted at Mogao



in wall paintings in cave no. 98; their sons are mentioned as donors in an inscription in cave no. 444 (Zhang and Rong, 1984, pp. 29-30); and their daughter is depicted in cave no. 61 (Pelliot, 1920-24, pl. 117). The Khotanese documents discovered at the site include accounts of officials and even of seven princes sent by the Khotanese government to visit Tun-Huang; some of them remained for some time and visited all the shrines, making offerings of oil for the lamps of the temples and caves (Bailey, 1951b, p. 44; Zhang and Rong, 1989, pp. 287-98). Artists from Khotan are mentioned in Chinese sources, and the style of the surviving painted decorations of some famous images at Ch'ien Fo T'ung reveal close connections with those at Rawak and other sites in Khotan (Zhang and Rong, 1986, pp. 97-102).

The Khotanese and Sogdian texts. The Khotanese texts have been transliterated by H. W. Bailey (1951a, 1945-63), and many translated by him and others (for details of publications up to about 1975 see Dresden, esp. manuscript sigla Ch, Or, and P). The principal facsimile editions are: Konow, 1916 (Ch 00275: *Vajracchedikā*, Ch xlvi.0013b: *Aparimitāyuh-sūtra*); Bailey 1938 (Ch ii.002; *Siddhasāra*, ii.003: *Jīvakapustaka*, and 00274: *Jātakastava*; Takubo (Ch c.001; miscellaneous texts); *Corpus Inscr. Iran.* (manuscripts from both the Stein and the Pelliot collections; see Dresden, manuscript sigla Ch, Or, and P, for details; see also [buddhism iii](#), e.g., on *Bhadrakalpikā-sūtra* and *Bhadracaryā-deśanā*). Only a small portion of the Khotanese material in the Soviet Union has so far been made available.

Almost all the Sogdian texts in western Europe have been edited and translated (see Utz). The principal facsimile editions are: Gauthiot and Pelliot and Benveniste, 1940a (Pelliot collection); MacKenzie, 1976 (Stein collection). The most recent comprehensive text editions and translations are: Benveniste, 1940b, and MacKenzie, 1970 and 1976 (for earlier publications see Utz). The Sogdian manuscript fragments in the Soviet Union were published and translated by Rosenberg.



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