

*The  
Silk Road*



Volume 7 Autumn 2009

*The*  
**Silk Road**

**CONTENTS**

<i>From the editor's desktop: Paths Less Trodden</i> , by Daniel C. Waugh .....	2
<b>Xiongnu Constituents of the High Mountains: Results of the Mongol-American Khovd Archaeology Project, 2008</b> , by Bryan K. Miller et al. ....	8
<b>On the Chronology of the Noyon uul Barrows</b> , by Sergei S. Miniaev and Julia Elikhina .....	21
<b>Chinese Lacquerware from Noyon uul: Some Problems of Manufacturing and Distribution</b> , by Michèle Pirazzoli t'Serstevens .....	31
<b>The Tomb of the Sogdian Master Shi: Insights into the Life of a Sabao</b> , by Albert E. Dien .....	42
<b>Buddhism in Mongolia Today: Introduction</b> , by Zsuzsa Majer and Krisztina Teleki .....	51
<b>Continuation or Disjuncture with the Past and the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition</b> , by Zsuzsa Majer .....	52
<b>Building on Ruins, Memories and Persistence: Revival and Survival of Buddhism in the Mongolian Countryside</b> by Krisztina Teleki .....	64
<i>On the Road: Over the High Passes</i> , by Frank Harold, with photographs by Ruth Harold .....	74

Cover photo: *The Tsam Ceremony. Mongolia. Photo © 2009 Zsuzsa Majer and Krisztina Teleki*

*The Silk Road* is a publication of the Silkroad Foundation supplied in a limited print run to libraries. Beginning with Vol. 8 (2010), it will be published as an annual. We cannot accept individual subscriptions. Each issue can be viewed and downloaded at: <<http://www.silkroadfoundation.org/toc/newsletter.html>>. The print version contains black and white illustrations; the on-line version uses color. Otherwise the content is identical. Please feel free to contact us with any questions or contributions. General guidelines for contributors may be found in Vol. 2, No. 1 (June 2004) on the website; more detailed instructions may be obtained by contacting the editor.

The Silkroad Foundation  
14510 Big Basin Way # 269  
Saratoga, CA 95070

Editor: Daniel C. Waugh  
dwaugh@u.washington.edu

© 2009 Silkroad Foundation

© 2009 by authors of individual articles and holders of copyright, as specified, to individual images.

**"The Bridge between Eastern and Western Cultures"**

## PATHS LESS TRODDEN

Lurking in the back of my mind are oft-quoted lines from one of the domestically (if not internationally) revered of America's poets, Robert Frost, about how taking the less traveled road made all the difference (for him, in life...?).<sup>1</sup> I think what conjured up Frost was the lively interchange I had with Frank Harold about his article at the end of this issue, which focuses on what most would agree were historically the most important routes through the Central Asian mountains. Confronting the challenge of routes through difficult terrain is a kind of metaphor for much of contemporary scholarship on the Silk Roads, however broadly or narrowly we may define our subject. This issue of our journal offers examples in all of the articles. The opening report by Bryan Miller and his colleagues informs us of exciting new discoveries on the periphery of the Xiongnu polity and in the excavation of 'ordinary' people's graves. While the following discussion focusing on Noyon uul concerns one of the most famous of Xiongnu elite burial sites, the conclusions substantially revise its commonly accepted dating. The many new discoveries of Sogdian material in China in recent years still leave questions of interpretation open, as Al Dien demonstrates in his analysis of the tomb of the Sogdian Master Shi. And finally, the two articles by recent Ph.D.s Zsuzsa Majer and Krisztina Teleki detail the challenges of learning about Mongolian Buddhism after its destruction of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and the even greater challenges faced by those who would wish to restore it.

Every time I read of a new discovery or re-interpretation, I wonder where the 'field' of studies about the Silk Roads may be in a decade or two, and whether, if I would be able to return in, say, 2090, I would understand any of what then will be written on the subject (assuming that Silk Road studies survive that long). Increasingly I am drawn away from the familiar roads to the paths that historically may have been the ones less traveled, and to the interpretive routes that are not yet permanently etched on the landscape. Perhaps, like Frost's road, their appeal is precisely because they are 'grassy and wanted wear.' What I shall attempt here is

to reflect on some ways that current scholarship is asking us to re-conceptualize traditional approaches which have been used in the study of the Silk Roads and analogous topics and then to speculate on how one might wish to be able to write or re-write their history at some future time. The focus here will be on movement, landscapes, and routes, reflecting that emphasis in two recent, stimulating collections of essays produced by seminars that brought together some of the best experts working on these subjects.

The papers in *The Archaeology of Mobility: Old World and New World Nomadism* (2008), published by the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at the University of California, Los Angeles, use a wide range of specific examples from various continents to illustrate current thinking about how to go about studying what at one time would have been characterized simply as 'nomads,' people who in the traditional view occupied a pole opposite from that of 'sedentary' agriculturalists. As these essays point out, there is already a substantial literature revising this static interpretive framework. By and large, the participants in the Cotsen Seminar all recognize the fluid nature of mobile societies and economies. 'Pure nomadism' was rare, if it existed at all. Quite simply, we should abandon any idea of a dichotomy between the 'steppe and the sown' and think rather of a continuum.<sup>2</sup> Yet how we can best document the regional variations and change over time is a continuing challenge.

The first in what is to be an ongoing series of research conferences at the University of Pennsylvania Museum produced *Landscapes of Movement: Trails, Paths, and Roads in Anthropological Perspective* (2009). At first blush this volume might seem to offer less than does *Mobility* to the Silk Road specialist, since most of the examples are New World ones, based on source evidence that in some ways would seem to be unique to the particular cases. However, I would argue that in fact many of the analytical approaches are ones which can be found in recent work on Central Eurasia, and that it is possible here to find inspiration for new ways of looking at such subjects as the routes through those mountain barriers ostensibly standing in the way of long-distance exchange.<sup>3</sup> At very least here we are asked to question what the function was of different routes or paths, whose importance might not always be measured by how direct or easy they were or whether they were suited, in the first instance, to the

---

large-scale movement of goods. Moreover, the paths may be symbolic, not physical ones.

Underlying this discussion are basic questions about evidence and how it might reasonably be used. While we can expect that the range and quantity of source material for our study will continue to increase, we never are going to be in a position where the sources are so abundant as to leave few gaps in the historical record. There will always be differing interpretations of what are often quite cryptic and fragmented bits of evidence. This then raises questions of how to supplement 'hard evidence' with other kinds of sources. If we do not have material contemporary with or of the same provenance as that of our subject, to what extent can comparative observations from a later period or different region be invoked as analogies to 'fill in the gaps?' Of particular relevance is the question of how and whether we might extrapolate from modern ethnographic observation of 'tradition' to learn about a culture centuries earlier, concerning which otherwise we might have at best a few very biased written sources and scattered archaeological evidence. We need to be acutely conscious of the ways in which 'traditions' may be modern inventions and more generally recognize that 'tradition' is very much a moving target.<sup>4</sup>

There is a fundamental problem here in that the written sources, essential for writing real history, for the most part are the work of formally educated urban authors even if they may contain first-hand observation and occasionally transmit what are ostensibly the words of those who did not live in urban environments and had not been trained to write.<sup>5</sup> To allow archaeological evidence to speak with a full voice, we need written material to contextualize it; so, however much we may criticize the written sources for their biases, we cannot simply discard them. A similar kind of reasoning can be applied to the way in which we might use modern ethnographic material. Often it can provide systematic observation of lifeways, and the informants for the ethnographer can explain that which is being recorded. A ritual object by itself really has no voice or at best may speak in a language we do not yet understand. A ritual object in the hands of a living person may have an interpreter, even if we then must analyze carefully what he or she says in order to establish its value in answering our questions. How we pose those questions is in itself problem-

atic. To what degree we then can extrapolate from the answers to an earlier and silent period may vary considerably from case to case.

Apart from invoking anthropological models and interrogations, among the current approaches which are undertaken to enhance our understanding of material objects is 'experimental archaeology.' That is, there are efforts to replicate the techniques used by earlier craftsmen to reproduce the same objects which archaeology uncovers. Such efforts may include the chipping of stone tools, the effort to replicate wear patterns on the finished tools, the making of pots, or the construction of boats.<sup>6</sup> The example of ceramics is of particular significance for Inner Asian history and pre-history. New classificational approaches and new analytical techniques involving chemical analysis may help provide much more concrete markers than we have had for determining provenance and patterns of movement and exchange and placing them in a solid chronological framework. An important question under discussion currently is whether one can even expect 'nomads' in the traditional sense to have used heavy and fragile ceramic vessels (as opposed to containers fashioned from reeds, leather, etc.), and if they did, what might have been the circumstances in which they could have produced or obtained such vessels (Eerkens 2008; Barnard 2008). Experiments to replicate ceramic manufacture do in fact show that in certain circumstances it could have been undertaken among mobile pastoralists. Certainly if we look at burials of the Xiongnu, we find extensive remains of pottery, a fact which of itself should reinforce our growing perception that we may here be dealing with multi-resource economies and complex societies involving some kind of fixed settlements.

Given the fractured landscape of our different kinds of sources, it should come as no surprise that the picture we can develop of a society from one category of evidence may be impossible to corroborate by looking at a different category. *The Archaeology of Mobility* provides some striking examples from the Middle East. Of particular interest is the case of the Amorites in the late third and early second millennium BCE. The written sources, none of them produced by the Amorites themselves, suggest they were 'nomadic,' albeit originally probably a settled population; yet to date there are essentially no securely identifiable 'Amorite' archaeological remains (Buccellati 2008). Analo-

---

gous challenges confront us if we turn to the pastoralists of Inner Asia. For the Bronze and early Iron Age (roughly, 2<sup>nd</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE), there are no indigenous written sources. Until recently, much of the archaeological evidence has been that excavated in elite tombs. There one finds evidence about long-distance exchange, the evolution of the use of domesticated animals, and much more, even if its interpretation is still very much subject to dispute. What has been needed is more evidence to document settlement patterns and develop an understanding of socio-economic change.

Several of the essays in this volume provide good summaries of recent research which may eventually expand considerably our understanding of the world of Inner Asian pastoralists. Claudia Chang summarizes results of the very interesting work she and her Russian and Kazakh colleagues have undertaken in southeastern Kazakhstan in recent years, documenting within a relatively small region a considerable diversity in settlement and economic activity (Chang 2008; 2003; *Gold* n.d.). Michael Frachetti's project in the Dzhungar Mountains southeast of Lake Balkhash in Kazakhstan explores what he calls 'pastoralist landscapes' (Frachetti 2008a).<sup>7</sup> Apart from locating many new settlement sites, the effort has been made here to document most probable routes from the valleys into the neighboring mountains and to correlate this material with ethnographic observation and calculations of such factors as the 'carrying capacity' of pastures. While the modern data are removed from the period of the archaeological record by some three millennia or more, the fact that there seem to have been at most relatively small changes in the local climate and ecology in that long period encourages us to believe that the modern data can shed significant light on the lives and movement of the Bronze-Age pastoralists. An important aspect of this work is to emphasize the dependence of movement and settlement patterns on localized factors and on the annual cycle of seasons, considerations that certainly also need to be kept in mind in any discussion of the 'Silk Road' routes across Inner Asia. Other essays in *The Archaeology of Mobility* employ analogous considerations from 'landscape archaeology' in order to try to understand the sedentary-nomadic continuum, be it in the Great Lakes region of North America or in the Middle East.

Esther Jacobson-Tepfer's essay in the volume

summarizes very well the work of the American-Russian-Mongolian project that extended over a decade between 1994 and 2004 and focused on documenting 'the ecology of ancient cultures in the Mongolian Altai' (Jacobson-Tepfer 2008, p. 208, n. 18).<sup>8</sup> As is the case with other essays here, the carefully nuanced conclusions leave us with more questions than answers, since so much additional research is needed to document the contexts in which the major rock art sites in the Altai and other parts of Inner Asia are situated. To date, relatively little has been done to excavate burials; the location of settlement sites is still pretty much a blank page. We can certainly agree that the rock art documents locations of often a very long-term presence of pastoralists, even if the chronology can only be approximated. Moreover, as some of the studies in *Landscapes of Movement* reinforce, the location of petroglyphs may be one of the ways to trace routes and paths of historic importance, even if the identity of those who used them may as yet be difficult to establish. The symbolic importance of the imagery is one aspect which this project has been considering.

An important example of how such evidence is changing our knowledge of routes through the 'impenetrable fastness' of the mountainous knot in the center of Asia is in the ongoing research concerning what Jason Neelis terms the 'capillary' routes in what is now Northern Pakistan (Neelis 2006; 2002 [2006]). The construction of the Karakorum Highway in the 1970s, connecting Kashgar with Gilgit via the Khunjerab Pass, facilitated access to many of the important sites of rock art (granted, many of them associated with people who display formal literacy) and brought to light widely dispersed material, which, in the absence of other kinds of documentation, at least confirms the use of a multiplicity of routes connecting South and Central Asia. While it may well be the case that movement of large quantities of goods over many of these routes was unlikely, nonetheless, we know for certain that they were involved in the transmission of Buddhism and that Sogdian traders seem to have frequented certain of them. All this, well prior to developments of early modern and modern times in which expansion and control of many of these routes occurred in conjunction with political developments in places such as the Hunza Valley (Stellrecht 2006). Clearly there are major gaps in this history, but I think one important

---

cautionary lesson which emerges from what we now know is that our modern perceptions of the routes may very well reflect primarily their 'recent' history; and that history may not necessarily be a reliable gauge of any particular route's importance in earlier historical times.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the new research on routes connects both with the study of 'landscapes' and the study of mobility of nomadic pastoralists. For even if we lament the apparent absence of hard evidence concerning locations inhabited by the pastoralists, the paths themselves must be considered artifacts of human 'construction.' In some places they may be worn into the landscape (and in certain conditions analysis of soil samples may document their antiquity). Once paths by dint of frequent use have become 'inscribed' in the minds of the users, they may be further marked by 'materialization': petroglyphs, cut steps, supports of wood and stone on steep cliff faces, *obos* (cairns) at the tops of passes, even paving or control gates, especially as they approach political centers (Snead 2009, esp. pp. 46-48).

Yet beyond this physical documentation there is another type of evidence which might be helpful in allowing us to reconstruct what these 'built features' signified in the lives of those who traveled the paths. For the examples in the American West, one important source of documentation that has been mined is oral history and literature (Darling 2009; Zedeño et al. 2009). Song cycles may be keyed to particular seasonal or ritual travel along certain routes; in the texts there are often concrete references to prominent features of the landscapes through which the paths led. The purpose of the travel and identity of the travelers might mean, of course, that there would be substantial differences in how the paths and landmarks registered in the perceptions of the travelers themselves.

Whether and how we might use such evidence for the Silk Roads is certainly an open question. But recent studies by ethnomusicologists remind us of how much landscapes (physical and spiritual) and the natural environment find a place in oral literature of the Mongols, Tuvsans and other Central Asian peoples (Pegg 2001; Levin 2007). Theodore Levin (2007, pp. 149-158), citing the work of Emma Bunker on the ancient animal-centered art of 'steppe peoples,' cautiously suggests that the modern ethnomusicological material may

help us to reconstruct the cultural context in which such work was produced and circulated.

Should such ideas eventually lead us to write a semi-fictionalized version of the history of the ancient peoples of the Silk Roads as a new kind of "history"?<sup>9</sup> Many would object, even if to undertake that might in fact not be a vastly different enterprise from the invocation of ethnographic observation which already animates some of the studies which are appearing. We cannot, of course, expect to be able to ride along with the Xiongnu or Wusun listening to their songs (if they had them) evoking particular sounds or images of nature along the paths through steppes and mountain. Yet it might not be unreasonable to 'reconstruct' that such groups which lacked an indigenous written culture had in their oral traditions responses to their surroundings analogous to those which can be documented in modern times as deeply-rooted cultural traditions of peoples who now inhabit the same territories.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps then there is a way see through the eyes of the early travelers and bring to life travel along the Silk Roads in a way that to date has not been done. In the process we might then incorporate more fully the paths less traveled which constituted an integral part of the networks connecting the disparate parts of Eurasia.

Daniel C. Waugh  
Professor Emeritus  
The University of Washington  
Seattle, USA  
dwaugh@u.washington.edu

## References

*Archaeology* 2008

*The Archaeology of Mobility: Old World and New World Nomadism*. Ed. Hans Barnard and Willeke Wendrich. Cotsen Advanced Seminars 4. Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles, 2008.

Barnard 2008

Hans Barnard. 'Suggestions for a *Chaîne Opératoire* of Nomadic Pottery Sherds.' In: *Archaeology* 2008, pp. 413-440.

Beckwith 2009

Christopher I. Beckwith. *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present*. Princeton and Ox-

- 
- ford: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Buccellati 2008  
Giorgio Buccellati. 'The Origin of the Tribe and of 'Industrial' Agropastoralism in Syro-Mesopotamia.' In: *Archaeology* 2008, pp. 141-159.
- Chang 2003  
Claudia Chang et al. 'Iron Age society and chronology in South-east Kazakhstan,' *Antiquity* 77, No. 296 (June 2003): 298-312.
- Chang 2008  
Claudia Chang. 'Mobility and Sedentism of the Iron Age Agropastoralists of Southeast Kazakhstan.' In: *Archaeology* 2008, pp. 329-342.
- Darling 2009  
J. Andrew Darling. 'O'odham Trails and the Archaeology of Space.' In: *Landscapes* 2009, pp. 61-83.
- Earle 2009  
Timothy Earle. 'Routes through the Landscape: A Comparative Approach.' In: *Landscapes* 2009, pp. 253-269.
- Eerkens 2008  
Jelmer W. Eerkens. 'Nomadic Potters: Relationships Between Ceramic Technologies and Mobility.' In: *Archaeology* 2008, pp. 307-326.
- Frachetti 2004  
Michael D. Frachetti. 'Archaeological Explorations of Bronze Age Pastoral Societies in the Mountains of Eastern Eurasia.' *The Silk Road* 2/1 (2004): 3-8.
- Frachetti 2008a  
Michael D. Frachetti. 'Variability and Dynamic Landscapes of Mobile Pastoralism in Ethnography and Prehistory.' In: *Archaeology* 2008, pp. 366-396.
- Frachetti 2008b  
Michael D. Frachetti. *Pastoralist Landscapes and Social Interaction in Bronze Age Eurasia*. Berkeley etc.: Univ. of California Pr., 2008.
- Gold n.d.  
*Of Gold and Grass: Nomads of Kazakhstan*. Ed. Claudia Chang and Katharine S. Guroff. Foundation for International Arts Education/Access Industries, n.d.
- Holzwarth 2006  
Wolfgang Holzwarth. 'Sources of Gilgit, Hunza and Nagar History (1500-1800) and Comments on the Oral Roots of Local Historiography.' In: *Karakoram* 2006, pp. 171-190.
- Invention* 1983/1984  
*The Invention of Tradition*. Ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. Cambridge, etc.: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1983 (pb. ed. 1984).
- Jacobson-Tepfer 2006  
Esther Jacobson-Tepfer. 'The Rock Art of Mongolia.' *The Silk Road* 4/1 (2006): 5-13.
- Jacobson-Tepfer 2008  
Esther Jacobson-Tepfer. 'The Emergence of Cultures of Mobility in the Altai Mountains of Mongolia: Evidence from the Intersection of Rock Art and Paleoenvironment.' In: *Archaeology* 2008, pp. 200-229.
- Karakoram 2006  
*Karakoram in Transition: Culture, Development, and Ecology in the Hunza Valley*. Ed. Hermann Kreutzmann. Oxford etc.: Oxford Univ. Pr., 2006.
- Landscapes 2009  
*Landscapes of Movement: Trails, Paths, and Roads in Anthropological Perspective*. Ed. James E. Snead et al. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology, 2009.
- Larsson 2007  
Gunilla Larsson. *Ship and Society: Maritime Ideology in Late Iron Age Sweden*. Aun 37. Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, 2007.
- Levin 2006  
Theodore Levin (with Valentina Süzükei). *Where Rivers and Mountains Sing: Sound, Music and Nomadism in Tuva and Beyond*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Pr., 2006.
- Neelis 2002 [2006]  
Jason Neelis. 'La Vieille Route Reconsidered: Alternative Paths for Early Transmission of Buddhism Beyond the Borderlands of South Asia.' *Bulletin of the Asia Institute, N.S.*, 16 (2002 [2006]): 143-164.
- Neelis 2006  
Jason Neelis. 'Hunza-Haldeikish Revisited: Epigraphical Evidence for Trans-regional History.' In: *Karakoram* 2006, pp. 159-170.
- Pegg 2001  
Carole Pegg. *Mongolian Music, Dance & Oral Narrative.: Performing Diverse Identities*. Seattle and London: Univ. of Washington Pr., 2001.
- Snead 2009  
James E. Snead. 'Trails of Tradition: Movement, Meaning, and Place.' In: *Landscapes* 2009, pp.
-

---

42-60.

Stellrecht 2006

Irmtraud Stellrecht. 'Passage to Hunza: Route Nets and Political Process in a Mountain State.' In: *Karakoram* 2006, pp. 191-216.

Stronach 2004

David Stronach. "On the Antiquity of the Yurt: Evidence from Arjan and Elsewhere." *The Silk Road* 2/1 (2004): 9-18.

Whitfield 1999

Susan Whitfield. *Life along the Silk Road*. London: John Murray, 1999.

Zedeño et al. 2009

María Nieves Zedeño, Kacy Hollenback, and Calvin Grinnell. 'From Path to Myth: Journeys and the Naturalization of Territorial Identity along the Missouri River.' In: *Landscapes* 2009, pp. 106-132.

## Notes

1. Frost's 'The Road Not Taken,' first published in 1920, is readily available on the Internet, e.g., at <<http://www.bartleby.com/119/1.html>>, accessed December 26, 2009.

2. However, this does not mean, as Christopher Beckwith would have it in his new book (Beckwith 2009), that that societies in Inner Asia were no different from those on its periphery. I discuss this and the many other problematic aspects of Beckwith's bold book in an extended review, 'Central Eurasians Everywhere,' forthcoming in *Mongolian Studies*.

3. Probably Timothy Earle (2009) would disapprove of my somewhat loose usage of terminology (roads, routes, trails, paths, etc.), just as I find his analytical categories a bit rigid. Nonetheless his concluding chapter to the volume lays out very clearly ways that we might conceptualize the material for meaningful comparisons across cultures. One should note that by his definitions, the 'Silk Roads' were largely not roads at all.

4. The starting point for many discussions of the 'invention of tradition' is the stimulating collection of essays edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (*Invention* 1983/1984). Of particular interest in *Archaeology* 2008 is Benjamin A. Sidel's essay demonstrating that the 'traditional' Bedouin tent may be a modern construct. Fortunately for the trellis tent (yurt or ger), we have reliable evidence for its considerable antiquity (see Stronach 2004).

5. This is one of Beckwith's very legitimate concerns about the way in which the history of Central Eurasians has commonly been treated. The biases of, say, the Chinese annals regarding the Xiongnu or the Arab and Persian historians regarding the

Mongols, are, of course, well known. Careful analysis of modern historical narratives about early history that have been taken as 'authoritative' may well reveal the shallowness and weakness of their source base, especially if those sources themselves are of relatively recent date and may at best represent a kind of vague oral tradition. See, for example, the illuminating discussion in Holzwarth 2006.

6. For the last of these, an example which is of some relevance for our thinking about medieval trade routes, see Larsson 2007. Experiments using the construction techniques suggested by a careful analysis of all the archaeological evidence have enabled the reconstruction of Viking boats that more realistically might have been of the type used in river portages than would be the case if we take as our models the large and heavy ships found in some of the famous Viking burials. These reconstructed boats have then been used in travel along some of the historic routes in western Eurasia, including the tracing of routes across the Caucasus which arguably were of importance in the Eurasian trade.

7. For an earlier overview of his project, see Frchetti 2004; for his important monographic treatment, Frchetti 2008b, which we hope to treat more extensively in a future issue of our journal.

8. For an earlier overview see Jacobson-Tepfer 2006. Major publications of this project's results are now available. For more information see the extensive and technically sophisticated website, 'Archaeology and Landscape in the Altai Mountains of Mongolia' <<http://img.uoregon.edu/mongolian/index.php>>, accessed December 26, 2009.

9. An example of such an approach, where the fictional elements are somewhat awkwardly grafted onto composite biographies based solidly on historical materials, is Whitfield 1999, to date one of the best introductions to the Silk Road for the general reader.

10. Perhaps the best known example of historical 'reconstruction' in recent decades using, among other things, the insights drawn from anthropology, is Natalie Zemon Davis's *The Return of Martin Guerre*. The book has been criticized for its 'excess of invention,' a criticism which Davis feels was not merited. See the review article by Robert Finlay and her rebuttal in *American Historical Review* 93/4 (1988): 553-603. To be somewhat cynical here, I think professional academics are particularly alarmed (yea, even envious) when one of their colleagues has the rather rare talent to produce a serious book which reaches a popular audience and becomes a best-seller. It did not hurt in this case that the film version, on which Davis consulted and which starred Gérard Depardieu, preceded the book. Of course we should not pretend there are no boundaries between fact and fiction or fictionalize simply for the sake of a higher ranking in Amazon.com's tracking of sales.

---

# Xiongnu Constituents of the High Mountains: Results of the Mongol-American Khovd Archaeology Project, 2008

**Bryan K. Miller** *Rowan University, USA*

**Jamsranjav Bayarsaikhan** *National Museum of Mongolian History, Mongolia*

**Prokopy B. Konovalov** *Russian Academy of Sciences, Ulan-Ude*

**Tseveendorj Egiimaa** *National Museum of Mongolian History, Mongolia*

**Judy Logan** *Independent Conservator*

**Michelle Machicek** *University of Sheffield, UK*

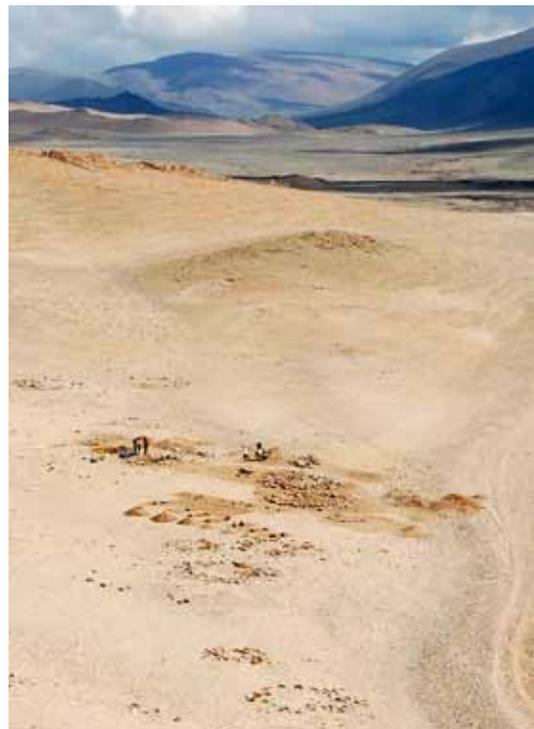
The greater Gobi-Altai region of western Mongolia lies adjacent to the illustrious northwest Chinese region of the Silk Roads. This area became a critical frontier for the steppe empire of the Xiongnu (3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE – 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE), whose presence is attested to by the Takhiltin-khotgor cemetery of mounded ramped tombs attributable to the imperial supra-elite (Miller et al. 2008; Navaan 1999). In the summer of 2008, the Mongol-American Khovd Archaeology Project further pursued a regional understanding of the Xiongnu phenomenon in frontier zones by focusing on excavations at the small burial ground

of Shombuuziin-belchir within the mountain passes of the Altai. This site lies along a route leading up from the monumental cemetery at Takhiltin-khotgor to the other side of Altai into the Dzhungar Basin at the northern edge of the Silk Roads [Fig. 1]. The cemetery, and the full excavation of all its features, will constitute the heart of excavations and survey for further seasons of fieldwork. The Khovd project aims to address a set of research questions that will explore patterns of subsistence and mobility in both local communities and the larger region in order to understand integration and interaction on several scales.

*Fig. 1. Khovd map with excavation sites.*



*Fig. 2. View of Shombuuziin-belchir cemetery.*



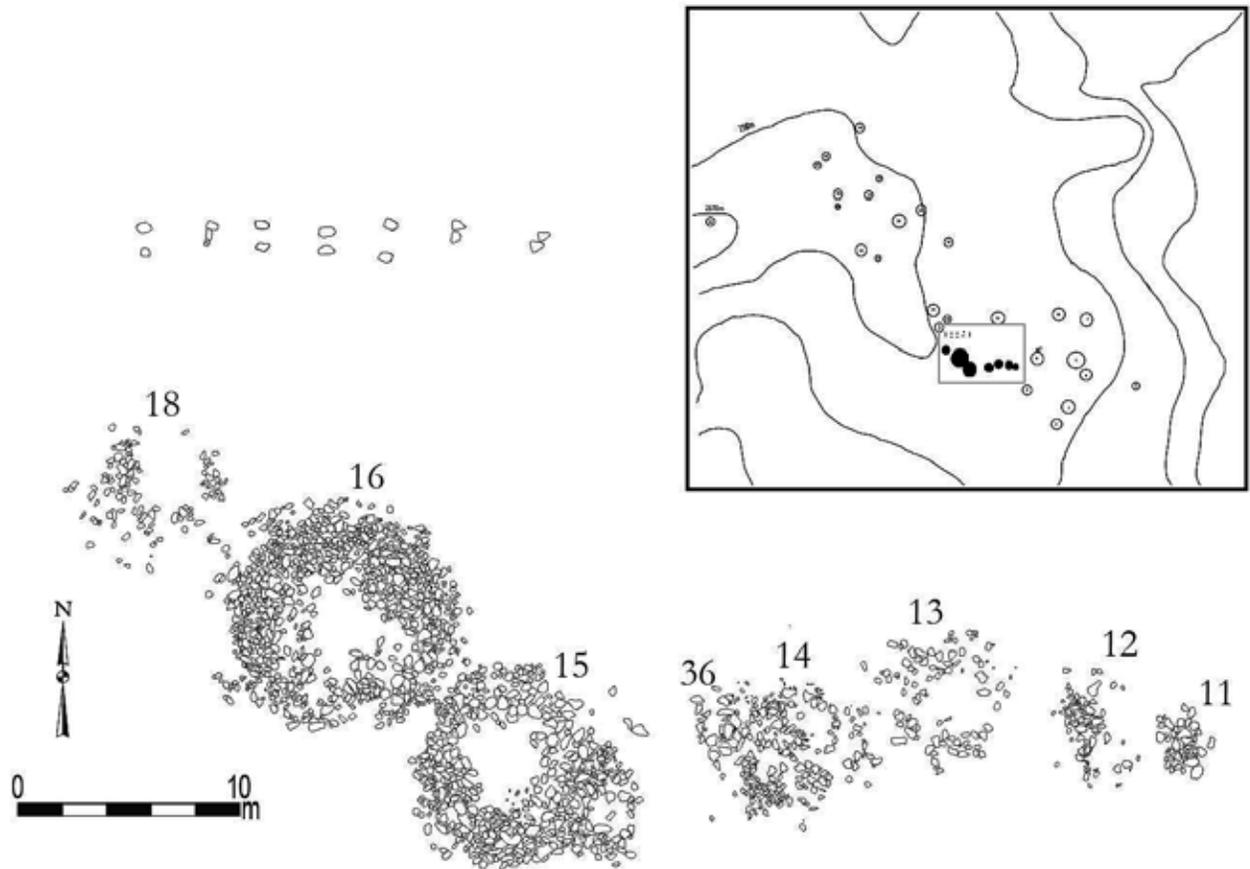


Fig. 3. Map of Shombuuziin-belchir cemetery (2008 excavations).

### Shombuuziin-belchir cemetery

The Xiongnu period cemetery at Shombuuziin-belchir lies within a niche of hills overlooking the mountain valley of the Tsenkher River [Fig. 2, facing page]. This upper extent of the Tsenkher River runs through the Mongolian Altai Mountains at 2380 m elevation and is lined with numerous stone mounds and other features from the preceding Bronze Age, as well as dotted with several ritual features of the medieval Türk period. Surveys of the burial grounds found surface markings for thirty-four graves, the majority of which appear as circular arrangements of stones about five meters in diameter [Fig. 3]. A few clusters of graves appear within the cemetery, and in 2008 the Khovd Project chose one such group to investigate as the start of the full excavations of the site.

We cleared the surface around the entire line of burial markings, though some collections of surface stones were difficult to discern, even after cleaning 20 cm down to the ancient sur-

face level. Cleaning the first 20 cm unveiled a collection of larger ring markings and smaller clusters of stones. This was the first indication that we were again dealing with a new category of burials that had been addressed in the discoveries in excavations of small satellite burials in the monumental cemetery at Takhiltin-khotgor in 2007 (Miller et al. 2008). The surface demarcations of some larger graves were clearly circular in their original state. However, for the smaller graves it often remain difficult to determine the shape and dimensions of their original surface markings. Some of the burial pits did not lie at the exact center of the small scatters of stones. One would therefore not want necessarily to categorize them as circular graves with a burial pit in the middle.

One must also consider the possibility that the scattered stones from looting have not only distorted the original shape of the surface demarcation, but obscured adjacent features. In one case, not until we began to excavate deeper below the ground surface did we discover an additional burial (N<sup>o</sup> 36) abutting the plot of another grave (N<sup>o</sup> 14). The preliminary excavations in 2008 have highlighted the potential for

discerning unnoticed or indistinct features beyond the results of surface surveys. For this reason it will become necessary to clean down to the original surface level throughout the burial grounds (cf. Konovalov 2008; Miniaev 1998). In total, eight stone-marked burials and two features related to burning were excavated. Two of the graves (N<sup>o</sup> 15 and N<sup>o</sup> 16) resemble the standard type — circular stone marking above with northern oriented wooden coffin beneath — seen elsewhere in the regions of Mongolia and South Siberia attributed to the Xiongnu empire (Konovalov 1976; Torbat 2004). Several others, however, correspond to the stone cists beneath small clusters of stones seen at Takhiltin-khotgor. The variety of burial types as well as deceased age range present an ideal preliminary sample. The high quality of preservation for much of the wood, human bones, and other organic material adds to the potential for research on the remains found at this site.

### Wooden coffin burials

The circular demarcations of stones for burials N<sup>o</sup> 15 and N<sup>o</sup> 16 measured 660 cm and 730 cm, respectively, when first surveyed. After cleaning 20 cm down to the original surface and exposing more stones of the broad burial marker, the surface circles of these two burials measured approximately eight and ten meters in diameter. Both of these graves were heavily looted in antiquity, as almost all Xiongnu-period interments have been, but the remaining scant artifacts are enough to impart an idea of the previous burial assemblage. The burial pits and furnishings, however, are preserved to such an astounding degree that we may now begin to explore the intricacies of burial and coffin construction. Whereas many burials in other regions leave behind frayed remnants or organic stains of the wood furnishings, the interments at Shombuuziin-belchir have yielded whole portions of coffins and accompanying structures that could be lifted out for closer examination.

The wood-plank coffin in burial N<sup>o</sup> 16 was placed 270 cm below the surface and surrounded by a stone arrangement 220 x 57 cm [Fig. 4]. The plank lid of the coffin was then covered with a series of transverse wooden beams supported

by a set of wooden supports along either side of the coffin that stood against the outer arrangement of stones. After careful cleaning, these cross beams were removed and examined further. Several of them had rectangular holes cut through the middle, but these holes did not correspond to any wooden inserts or other structural pieces of the grave furnishing. The coffin in burial N<sup>o</sup> 15 was placed 230 cm below the surface with an equivalent packing of stones with wood supports, 280 x 110 cm, and array of cross beams laid overtop the plank lid and held up by the set of wooden supports alongside the coffin [Fig. 5, facing page]. The ends of the beams overtop both coffins resembled splintering breaks more than cleanly hewn pieces of equal length, and the additional presence of some beams with rectangular slots through the middle suggests that these were pieces from another construction that were re-used to cover the furnishing of the deceased.

The looting of both these coffins was extensive and left behind no bones for N<sup>o</sup> 16 and only a handful of teeth and rib fragments in N<sup>o</sup> 15. Nevertheless, the size of each coffin suggests

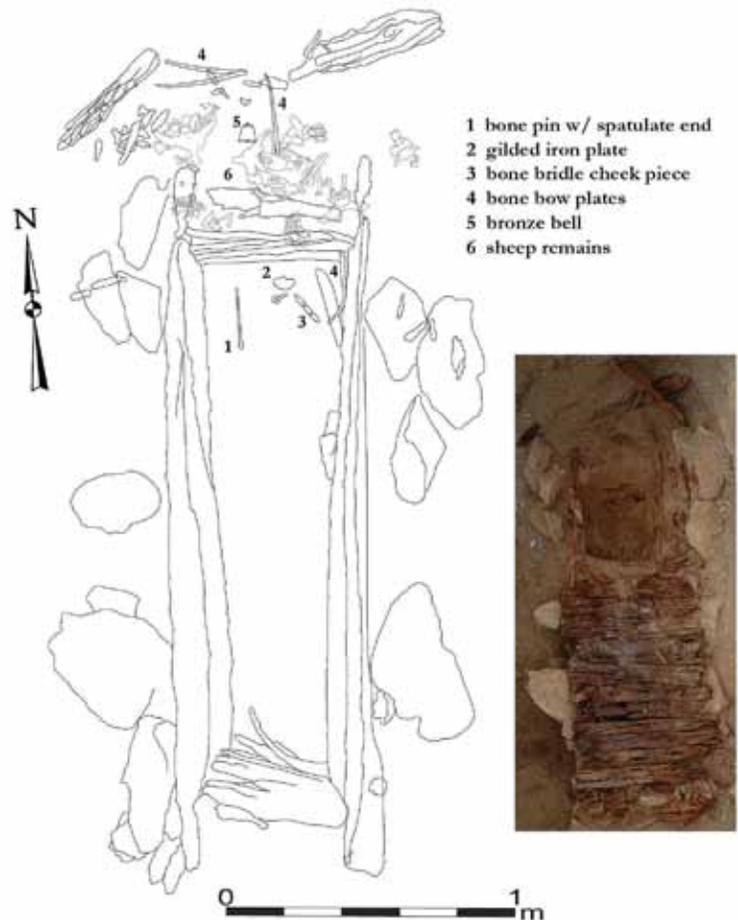


Fig. 4. SBR-16.

that the individuals were adults — coffin № 15 measured 187 x 60 cm, and coffin № 16 measured 180 x 52 — and the few remnants from grave № 15 confirm the maturity of that individual. The looters robbed the coffins of almost all the interred goods, but did not significantly damage the coffins in the process. Upon the completion of excavating grave № 15, we were able to remove carefully the southern two-thirds of the articulated coffin [Fig. 6]. A layer of faded red paint remained on the outside of the coffin walls, and white and black X-marks had been painted ovetop this layer. Both coffins were constructed from large singular planks whose cross-sections reveal that they were cut from broad-trunked trees that are uncharacteristic of the Gobi-Altai area. In burial № 16 we found a handful of iron pieces that had been mounted

Fig. 5. SBR-15.

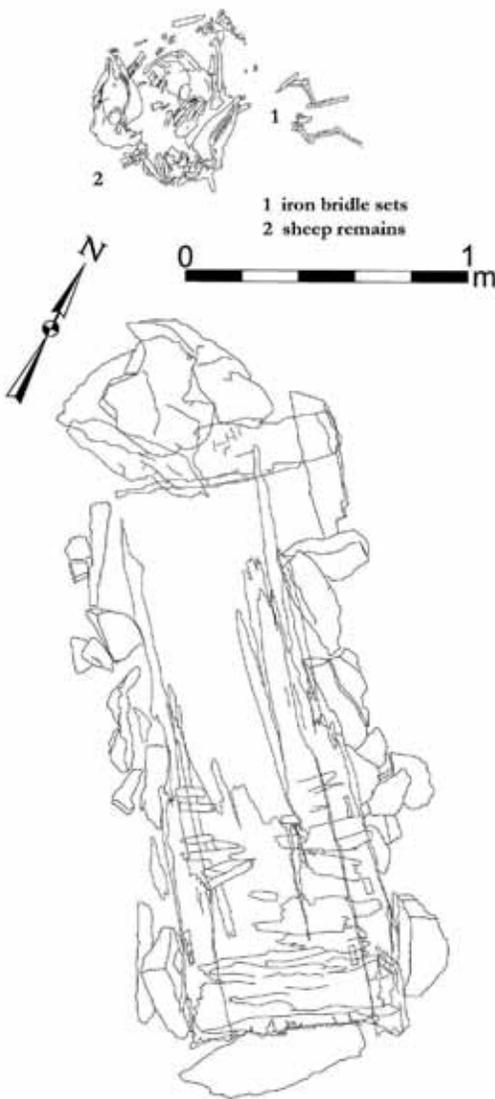


Fig. 6. SBR-15 painted wooden coffin.

onto the wooden coffin [Fig. 7] — square pieces in the shape of four-leafed (quatrefoil) designs like those seen on other more elaborate Xiongnu-period coffins. An integrated combination of the cross-lattice pattern and quatrefoil design was more standard for the occasionally decorated Xiongnu coffins (see tomb № 64 at Takhiltin-khotgor in Miller et al. 2008), but the presence of these singular elements in both cases remains noteworthy. The decorative elements, the form and construction of the coffins, and the overall structure and orientation of the graves undoubtedly ties



Fig. 7. SBR-16 iron quatrefoil decoration.

them to traditions seen in the territories further east of the Altai — the core of the Xiongnu polity.

The few artifacts remaining in these two graves also resemble burial assemblages of elite graves throughout Central Mongolia and Transbaikalia. Fragments of iron belt pieces were found in most of the graves, but only the portions in graves № 15 and № 16 had thin gold foil attached to the outer surface. A standard waist clasp from grave № 15 was found intact with three abut-

Fig. 8. SBR-15 gilded iron belt clasp.



ting strips of gold foil covering the convex surface [Fig. 8]. A scatter of tiny fragments from the surface of a painted red and black lac-



Fig. 9 (above). SBR-15 lacquer fragments.  
Fig. 10 (below). SBR-16 bone chopsticks.

quer vessel were also found in grave N° 15 [Fig. 9], and a pair of bone chopsticks was tossed to the north of the coffin in grave N° 16 [Fig. 10]. Many of the elite circular graves elsewhere have yielded the remains of small Chinese red-and-black lacquer vessels as well as pairs of bone chopsticks.<sup>1</sup> These bone implements differ from the bone pin found in the collection of scattered goods [Fig. 11], though the differences between long bone pieces are often difficult to determine based on the shape or placement of the burial of the bone items.<sup>2</sup> In most of the burials excavated thus far, including the smaller stone cist interments, were fragments of thin, tightly woven fabric, composed of lustrous, fine fibres, most likely silk. The remnants of such cloth could indicate at least the import of Chinese manufactured material, if not Chinese manufactured garments. Since only small fragments were found, it is impossible to determine the form or style of textile artifacts. Only one small piece of fabric, found overtop the infant in burial N° 36, was intact.

Aside from the remnants of prestige goods

Fig. 11. SBR-16 bone pin with spatulate end.



and decorative additions to the burial furnishings, these two graves contained numerous iron portions of bridle equipment, especially snaffle bits. Grave N° 15 contained at least two bridle sets [Fig. 5 artifact 1], and N° 16 yielded a carved bone cheek piece from a horse bridle [Fig. 12]. Finds similar to the small bronze bell in grave N° 16 [Fig. 13] have been seen in other Xiongnu graves, though such ornamental bells are usually made of iron (cf. Miller et al. 2006). This manner of gear clearly indicates horse-riding, and, in Xiongnu graves, is often accompanied by weapons of archery. Burial N° 16 yielded long thin plates of carved and polished bone that served to strengthen the middle and endpoints of bows [Fig. 14, facing page]. As the overwhelming majority of Xiongnu graves found thus far are spoiled from looting, so are the bow pieces disarticulated and our understanding of bows at that time equally fragmentary.



Fig. 12 (above). SBR-16 bone cheek piece.

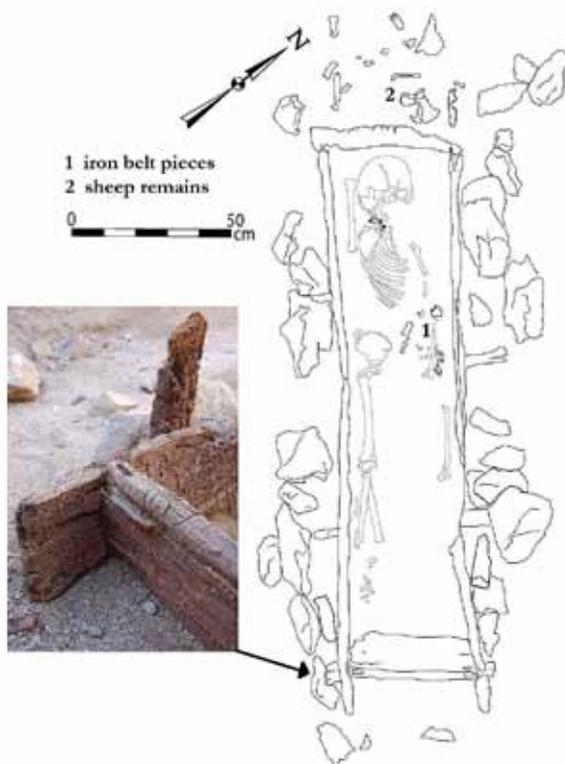
Fig. 13 (below). SBR-16 bronze bell (with stone clapper).



Fig. 14. Bone bow plates: (a) SBR-16 pair of end plates (b) SBR-13 mid plate (c) SBR-13 end plate with middle reinforcement.

The least disturbed section of burials № 15 and № 16 were the niches to the north of the coffins, wherein were placed an assortment of remains from small herd animals, either sheep or goats. In both cases the portions of livestock offered to the deceased included the skull, cervical vertebrae, ribs, phalanges, sacrum, and tail of at least four sheep/goat in № 15 and six in № 16. The portions selected, consisting mostly of extremities, are typical of animal offerings in Xiongnu graves.

Fig. 15. SBR-14.



In several ways, burial № 14 [Fig. 15] resembled № 15 and № 16 and other standard circular Xiongnu graves. A wooden coffin with remnants of faded red paint on the outside was placed at the bottom of a pit beneath the center of a round arrangement of stones. The coffin was set 170 cm deep and surrounded by stones that lined the burial pit. Just to the head of the coffin was placed a collection of sheep/goat remains. This burial was shallower and the coffin much smaller — 146 x 35 cm — than the previous two, the likely explanation for the size differential in burial furnishing being that it contained the remains of a four- to six-year-old child. The

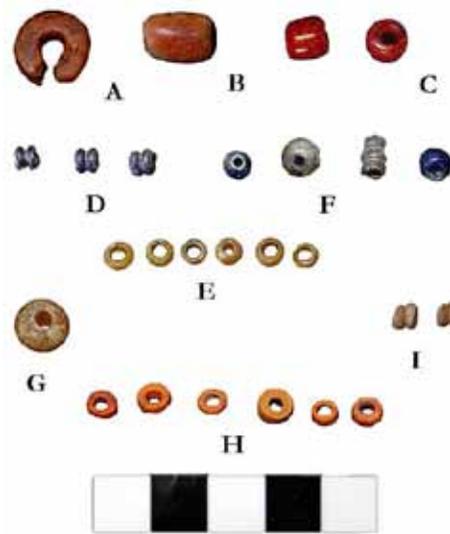


Fig.16. Beads: (a) SBR-12 amber (b) SBR-14 amber (c) SBR-36 amber (d) SBR-14 glass (e) SBR-14 glass (f) SBR-18 glass (g) SBR-14 alabaster (h) SBR-18 ceramic (i) SBR-14 glass.

few bones that remained indicate a stretched position of the body within the coffin, a custom typical of Xiongnu interments. The wood construction of this coffin appeared to imitate the style and form of the others, though it employed smaller pieces of wood interlocked to form the walls rather than broad singular planks for each side. It also differed greatly from № 15, № 16 and all the other burials excavated in 2008, in that the burial furnishing, and thus the deceased, was oriented more toward an east-west axis than a north-south axis. The burial did contain several dozen beads scattered across the floor of the looted coffin, including stone, amber, alabaster, and glass [Fig. 16B,D,E,G,I]. Beads, as ornaments of the head, neck, and waist, are prevalent in Xiongnu burials of all manner.

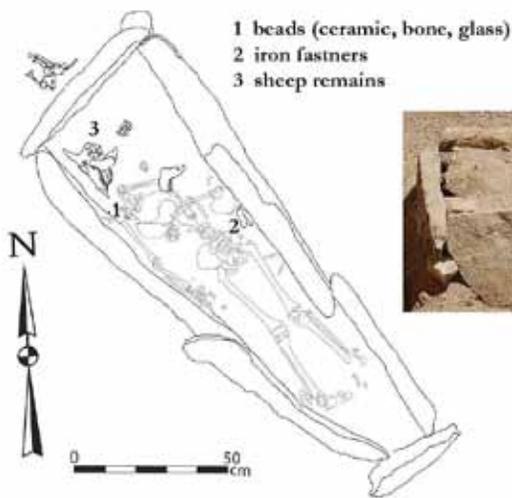


Fig. 17. SBR-18.

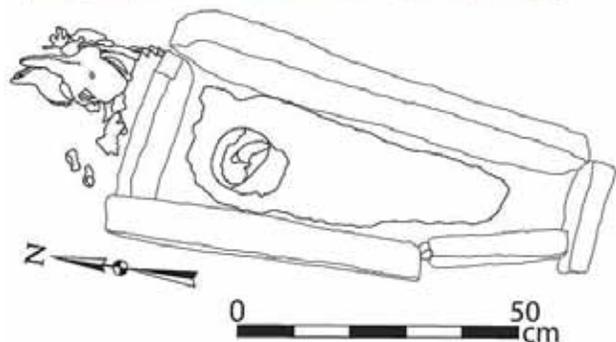
### Stone cist burials

Both children and adults were also buried within stone furnishings. A child between the ages of seven and ten was interred in a stone cist 140 cm below the surface of the stones of burial N° 18 [Fig. 17]. This burial had been looted as well, the stones on the surface in disarray and the stone lid of the cist thrown open. Ninety percent complete, the body of this child exhibited a stretched supine position, oriented east of north within a tight stone containment. The head and some ribs and vertebrae of a single sheep/goat were found within the head area, along with the disturbed upper portion of the body, a large bone bead and a collection of small ceramic and glass beads [Fig. 16F,H]. A clump of organic material with significant iron portions found underneath the pelvis was block lifted and analyzed in the lab. Further cleaning showed it to be the remains of a large iron belt piece with a carved bone fastener [Fig. 18].



Fig. 18 (above). SBR-18 iron belt piece with carved bone fastener.

Fig. 19 (right). SBR-36.



Though three of the other four burials were disturbed (perhaps by rodents), all of them remained unlooted. This is a rare occurrence for Xiongnu-period interments and as fortunate for our investigations as the high quality of preservation of most of the materials at this site. The smaller, less endowed interments were conceivably less of a target for grave robbers, and this perhaps explains the difference in degrees of looting. The stones overtop burial N° 36 were intermixed and easily confused with the surface stones

related to burial N° 14. About one meter below these stones, we found a tight oval-shaped cluster of small stones a meter-and-a-half long. Directly beneath these assorted rocks we found a stone cist, measuring 100 x 45 cm, with the stone slabs of the lid still in place [Fig. 19]. Just to the north of the cist were the skull, cervical vertebrae, ribs, hooves, sacrum, and tail bones of a single sheep/goat. The collection of animal bones remained in a bundle up against the north wall of the cist, and the neck vertebrae, which also had some skin on the bones, were still articulated with the head. Although the surface stones of this burial were disturbed, it was clear that the grave pit itself had not been penetrated. The small stone container had not been filled with dirt, and the infant inside remained intact — still swaddled in a set of fur and stitched



Fig. 20. SBR-36 infant in leather swaddling.

leather garments and a small square of fabric, probably silk, placed over the face. Because of the fragile nature of the desiccated corpse and the organic coverings — and since the inside of the cist had not been filled in with dirt — we block lifted the entire interior of the grave and brought it back to the laboratory for further cleaning and careful analysis [Fig. 20]. All the materials — including the silk face mask, an amber bead [Fig. 16C], the bones of the infant (between ½ to a full year old), and the leather stitched pieces [Fig. 21] were catalogued and packed for storage in the National Museum of Mongolia, where they await further study.

The surface stones overtop burial N° 11 were not scattered and were clustered

Fig. 21. SBR-36 fragment of leather swaddling.

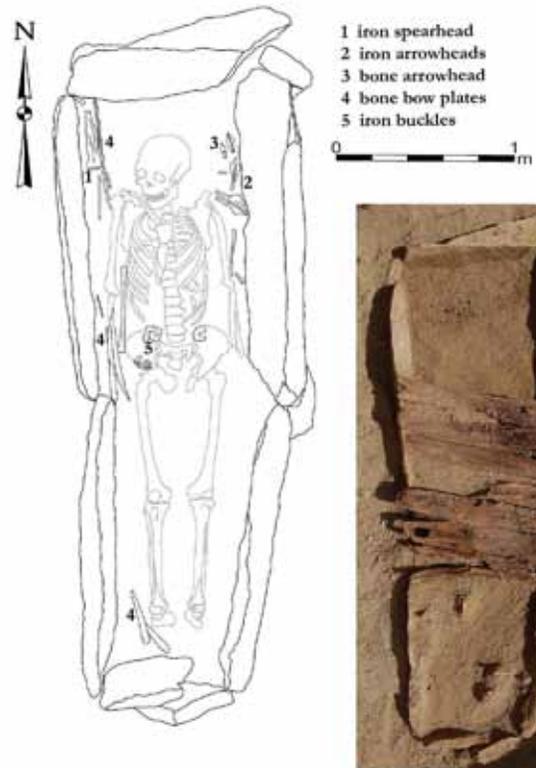


Fig. 22. SBR-13.

in a relatively small pile. Beneath these stones we found a similarly small stone cist of slightly smaller dimensions (85 x 40 cm) and shallower (75 cm below surface) than burial N° 36. The stones that covered the small cist were still in place, but when opened the containment yielded only three human bone fragments. From these scant remains and the size of the burial furnishing we were able to establish that the deceased had been a baby, though a refined age range is difficult to determine.

The surface stones over burial N° 13 appeared disturbed, but the stone lid of the cist was intact, as was the body of the deceased within [Fig. 22]. A small number of foot bones were strewn through the interior of the stone cist, and the arrows exhibited some movement as well. However, this was not the result of looting; so we may consider the burial assemblage to be more or less complete. The stones overtop

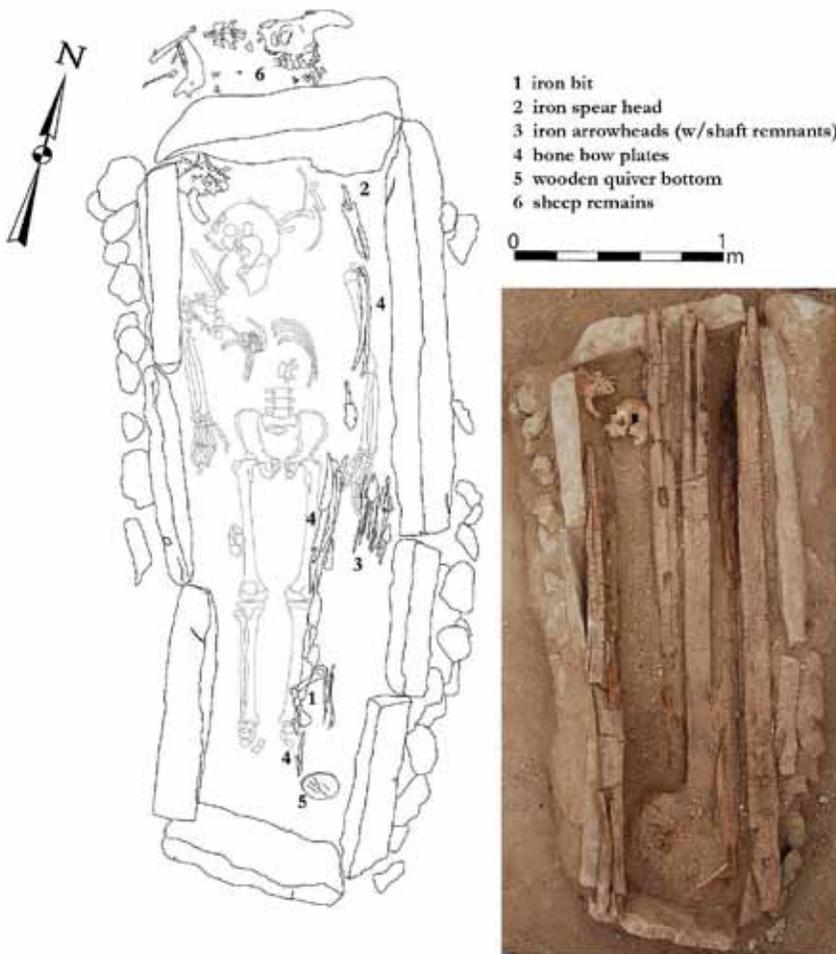


Fig. 23. SBR-12.

burial № 12 were placed in an oval-shaped cluster similar to burial № 11, and the stone lid overtop the cist beneath was in place, like the cist in burial № 13. The bones of the deceased in burial № 12 were shifted more, but again we believe that this was not the result of looting [Fig. 23]. These two graves thus present us with unlooted interments, skeletons over 90% complete, and, more importantly the proper provenances and full contexts of many artifacts, assemblages, and burial features that have previously been more difficult fully to understand.

Both burials were similar in size. The stone cist in № 12 was 270 x 76 cm, placed 134 cm deep, and the cist in № 13 was 290 x 83 cm, placed 140 cm deep. The orientations of the cists was east of north, and the bodies were both placed in a stretched supine position. While this position is by far the most common among all Xiongnu burials, it is also not the only manner of interment yet discovered. Several of the deceased within stone cists, or without any furnishing, excavated at Takhilt-

in-khotgor in 2007 were placed in a supine position with their legs bent (Miller et al. 2008). Both individuals were adults, though of greatly different age. The deceased in burial № 12 was a young adult between the ages of 15 and 18, most likely a male.<sup>3</sup> Burial № 13 held an older male adult between the ages of 35 to 45. Despite the difference in age, there appears very little difference in burial style, form, and artifact assemblages. Both contain iron horse bits and buckles as well as weaponry related to archery — seemingly standard equipment in many of the Xiongnu graves. The sheep/goat remains to the north of the cist in burial № 12, the bone pin in burial № 13 [Fig. 24], and the amber bead in burial № 12 [Fig. 16A] are also typical artifacts, whether in small stone cists or large complex wooden interments.

Taking advantage of the unspoiled conditions of the burial structures in № 12 and № 13, we may return to the issue of

the wooden cross-beams first addressed for burials № 15 and № 16. The grave furnishings for those larger burials consisted of double containments: a wooden coffin with single plank walls, surrounded by a wall of piled stones and intermittent wood supports that held up two long wooden beams and a series of short, broken cross-beams. These wood cross-beams may have acted as the lid complement to the surrounding wall of stones to form an outer containment. As mentioned above, the rectangular holes cut through the middle of some of the beams, holes which did not correlate with any other wooden fitting in the burial, and the splintered broken ends of the beams imply that these were pieces from a previous structure that had been broken apart and reused in the building of the burial furnishing. The situation and form of similar



Fig. 24. SBR-13 bone pin.

12 and № 13 further illuminate the possible functions and original contexts of such beams.

The lids of stone cists № 12 and № 13 were both in place over the stone side walls of the deceased's containment, and these capping stones were broad enough to be placed squarely over the cist and supported on either side by the stone walls. Wooden beams had been placed overtop the stone cists, but not in a number or manner that would suggest their function as supporting the lid stones above them or serving as an additional lid. Only seven beams were placed across the middle of the cist in № 13, and five beams were set lengthwise overtop the deceased in № 12, most of which did not span the full length of the cist. It would seem then, that these beams represent a practice that relates to something other than mere structural reinforcement of the grave furnishings. The piece most indicative of the previous contexts of these wooden additions is the two-meter-long beam along the eastern side of the cist in burial № 12. The southern end of this beam bears a striking resemblance to the end of a yoke-beam situated at the front of a wooden cart or other vehicle [Fig. 25]. Similar finds of cross-beams with cut holes have been discovered at the site of Tevsh uul in the northern Gobi (Tseveendorj 1989). These beams also greatly resemble pieces of wooden vehicles found overtop the burial chambers in large elite tombs at Takhiltin-khotgor (Navaan 1999) and may relate to the equivalent practice of vehicle interment in other square mounded tombs

found within central Mongolia and South Siberia (Miniaev and Sakharovskaia 2006, 2007; Mission 2003; Rudenko 1969).

The archery equipment in burials № 12 and № 13 constitutes two of the most complete assemblages to date. Each of these sets includes an entire bow, a handful of arrows, and is accompanied by an iron spearhead. The arrows in burial № 13 represent an array of tip styles. There is one socketed bone arrow head. The iron arrowheads are significantly larger and heavier, are mounted to arrow shafts via a metal tang,



*Fig. 25. SBR-12 wooden beams with slotted holes and 'yoke' end.*

and include two styles of three-winged heads. The thin bone plates associated with the bow remained in situ, with several canoe-shaped and hour-glass-shaped plates [Fig. 14B] at the middle and a pair of notched plates at either end of where the wooden structure of the bow had been. These plates are more complex, fitting two pieces overtop each other to form the equivalent of what could be a single bow plate, as in the pieces from burial № 16 [Fig. 14C]. Burial № 12 also contains bone bow plates, and about two-thirds of the bow's thin wood between and beneath the plates remained intact. Additionally, the arrows — at least a dozen in total — were not shifted from their original position. They lay at the left hand of the deceased, and, while the wooden shafts were mostly gone, sizes of the arrows were approximated by measuring from the iron heads with their tangs to the wooden bottom of the quiver that remained by the deceased's left foot. These artifacts present the opportunity critically to reassess our understandings of bow construction and assemblages of arrowheads included in the graves. In depth analyses of the archery equipment found in this handful of burials in 2008 will be published in a subsequent article.

An interesting note pertaining to habitual anatomical movements may also be mentioned. The bow of burial № 12 was placed over the left arm and the bow of № 13 was placed over the right arm. Musculo-skeletal marker scores of robusticity and cortical defects of the upper limbs and clavicles were higher on the sides where the bows were placed. A more comprehensive osteological study of individuals from other assemblages interred with bows may allow for more conclusive observations to be made regarding bilateral asymmetry and handedness in combination with habitual archery activities.<sup>4</sup>

### Further research

The first season of excavations at Shombuuziin-blechir revealed high degrees of preservation, both in the quality of organic materials and in the relatively low frequency of looting. The relative completeness of skeletal material and the high quality of bone preservation allows for sufficient demographic considerations as well as the taking of valuable bone samples. The analysis of such samples will help to address questions of subsistence and mobility. Preliminary observations have already altered our understanding of artifacts, the assemblag-

---

es in which they are found, and the subtleties of burial structure related to function and cultural practice. The similarities of the larger burials to Xiongnu graves in central Mongolia and southern Siberia links this site closely with the mortuary traditions of those areas and the steppe polity whose core region lay within those territories. The relatively close monumental cemetery at Takhiltin-khotgor further ties it with the steppe regions to the east. Evidence of Chinese-style artifacts also suggests connections to greater regions and larger networks, and it is the nature of all these relationships, inter-regional and intra-regional, that we will investigate through continued excavations.

### Acknowledgements

Many thanks are to be given for work by the stupendous Mongolian students (and crew) from Khovd and by the volunteers who came as participants in the Silkroad Foundation 2008 expedition. Prof. L. Nyam-Suren of Khovd University was of great assistance, as always, both outside of and in the field. Claire Neily was an invaluable member of the excavation and conservation crews, assisting Judy Logan in the laboratory and even developing a process to rehydrate the tiny fragments of the lacquer vessel in burial № 15 so that they could be more easily analyzed. Veronica Joseph was a key member of the crew before and during the excavation expedition, and Barbara Betz greatly assisted logistics in the field and contributed significantly to the preparation of this report. Investigatory surveys of the areas in the vicinity of the Shombuuziin-belchir cemetery, while not included in this report, were begun by Joshua Wright and James Williams, and their initial insights are greatly appreciated. Support was provided by the Silkroad Foundation as well as a dissertation research grant from the Henry Luce Foundation and American Council of Learned Societies and graduate funding from the Kolb Society of Fellows at the University of Pennsylvania Museum.

### About the authors

Further information about the Khovd Archaeology Project may be found at <<http://silkroadfoundation.org/archaeology/khovd/>>

**Bryan K. Miller** received his Ph.D. in East Asian Languages and Civilizations from the University of Pennsylvania in 2009 and his M.A. in Archae-

ology from the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at UCLA in 2000. He has been researching the Xiongnu entity in Mongolia and North China since 2001 and wrote his dissertation on Power Politics in the Xiongnu Empire. His present research concerns historical and archaeological investigations of early empires in East Asia, namely the Qin and Han of China and Xiongnu of Mongolia. He is presently a visiting professor in the History Department of Rowan University and is a consulting scholar for the University of Pennsylvania Museum Asian section. E-mails: <[millerbk@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:millerbk@sas.upenn.edu)>, <[millerb@rowan.edu](mailto:millerb@rowan.edu)>.

**Jamsranjav Bayarsaikhan** is curator of Bronze and Iron Age collections at the National Museum of Mongolian History. He received his M.A. in archaeology from Mongolian Educational University in 2005, and is presently pursuing a Ph.D. at the National University of Mongolia. He is also the chief Mongolian archaeologist for the Smithsonian 'Deer Stone' Project in northern Mongolia. His present research concerns Bronze Age ritual monuments and burials of Mongolia. E-mail: <[bayarsaikhan@nationalmuseum.mn](mailto:bayarsaikhan@nationalmuseum.mn)>.

**Prokopy B. Konovalov** has been an archaeologist in the Russian Academy of Sciences in Ulan-Ude since 1960 and has conducted excavations at numerous sites in Buriatia and Mongolia of the Bronze and early Iron Ages. The majority of his work has focused on sites attributed to the Xiongnu, and he published a seminal piece on his cumulative early work in 1976, which still stands as a landmark book: *The Xiongnu of Transbaikalia*. His pioneer work on full excavations of Xiongnu aristocratic tomb complexes in the 1970s was finally published in 2008, and he has brought his expertise in this specific area of archaeological cultures to numerous projects within Mongolia, including the more recent Khovd Project.

**Tseveendorj Egiimaa** is a member of the staff of the archaeology division of the National Museum of Mongolian History and a curator of Xiongnu materials, presently working with the National Museum of Korea on materials conservation. She received her M.A. in archaeology from Mongolian Educational University in 1999.

**Judy Logan** began her career in conservation in 1972, and her experience includes field work in Quebec, Labrador, and Newfoundland as well as projects in Italy during the 1980s and in Jordan from 1993-2005. Judy has de-

---

veloped the conservation component for field schools, served for a term as Adjunct Assistant Professor, Queen's University MAC Program, developed workshops and seminars on various aspects of archaeological conservation for Canadian Conservation Institute's outreach programs, and presented workshops at meetings of the Canadian Archaeological Association and the Society for Historical Archaeology. Judy retired from CCI in 2006 and has stayed active in conservation by serving on committees for various archaeological associations, doing field work, presenting lectures and workshops. She presently serves in the capacities of chief materials conservator and mentor for an archaeological materials conservation internship run within the Khovd project.

**Michelle Machicek** is a Ph.D. candidate in Biological Anthropology in the Archaeology Department of the University of Sheffield. Her current research is comprised of isotopic and osteological analyses of later prehistoric populations from Central Asia. She is carrying out dietary reconstruction on human skeletal remains using stable isotopic analyses in order better to understand past subsistence strategies of pastoralist populations. She is also currently in the process of researching human physiological adaptation to long-term climate change as well as attributes of health, nutrition and lifestyle in these populations. Additional research interests include various aspects of mortuary analysis, particularly focusing on age and gender representation in the burial record and elements of funerary ritual in the past.

## References

Bass 1995

William M. Bass. *Human Osteology: A Laboratory and Field Manual*. 4th ed. (Special Publication No. 2, Missouri Archaeological Society), 1995.

Frachetti 2008

Michael D. Frachetti. *Pastoralist Landscapes and Social Interaction in Bronze Age Eurasia*. Berkeley, etc.: Univ. of California Pr., 2008.

Hawkey and Merbs 1995

Diane E. Hawkey and Charles F. Merbs. 'Activity-induced musculoskeletal stress markers (MSM) and subsistence strategy changes among ancient Hudson Bay Eskimos.' *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* 5/4 (1995): 324-338.

Konovalov 1976

Prokopii B. Konovalov. *Khunnu v Zabaikal'e* [The Xiongnu of Transbaikalia]. Ulan-Ude: Burjatskoe knizhnoe izd-vo., 1976.

Konovalov 2008

Prokopii B. Konovalov. *The Burial Vault of a Xiongnu Prince at Sudzha (Il'movaia pad', Transbaikalia)*. Bonn Contributions to Asian Archaeology Vol. 3. Vor- und Frühgeschichtliche Archäologie, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn, 2008.

Miller et al. 2006

Bryan K. Miller, Francis Allard, Diimaajav Erdenebaatar, and Christine Lee. 'A Xiongnu Tomb Complex: Excavations at Gol Mod 2 cemetery, Mongolia (2002-05).' *Mongolian Journal of Anthropology, Archaeology and Ethnology* (Ulaanbaatar) 2/2 (2006): 1-21.

Miller et al. 2008

Bryan K. Miller, Jamsranjav Bayarsaikhan, Tseveendorj Egiimaa, Christine Lee. 'Xiongnu Elite Tomb Complexes in the Mongolian Altai: Results of the Mongol-American Hovd Archaeology Project, 2007.' *The Silk Road* 5/2 (2008): 27-36.

Miniaev 1998

Sergei S. Miniaev. *Dyrestuiskii mogil'nik* [The Dyrestui Cemetery]. *Arkheologicheskie pamiatniki Siunnu*, Vol.3. St. Petersburg: Evropeiskii dom, 1998.

Miniaev and Sakharovskaia 2006

Sergei S. Miniaev and Lidiia M. Sakharovskaia. 'Investigation of a Xiongnu Royal Complex in the Tsaraam Valley.' *The Silk Road* 4/1 (2006): 47-51.

Miniaev and Sakharovskaia 2007

Sergei S. Miniaev and Lidiia M. Sakharovskaia. 'Investigation of a Xiongnu Royal Complex in the Tsaraam Valley. Part 2. The Inventory of Barrow No. 7 and the Chronology of the Site.' *The Silk Road* 5/1 (2007): 44-56.

Mission 2003

Mission archéologique française en Mongolie. *Mongolie: le premier empire des steppes*. Arles: Actes sud, 2003.

Navaan 1999

D. Navaan. *Hunnugiin uv soyol: arheologiin sudalgaany material*. Ulaanbaatar, 1999.

Rudenko 1969

Sergei I. Rudenko. *Die Kultur der Hsiung-nu und die Hugelgräber von Noin Ula*. Bonn: Habelt, 1969.

---

Torbat 2004

Ts. Torbat. *Hunnugiin jiriin irgediin bulsh*. Ulaanbaatar, 2004.

Torbat et al. 2003

Ts. Torbat, Ch. Amartuvshin and U. Erdenbat. *Egiin Golyn sav nutag dah' archeologiin dursgaluud*. Ulaanbaatar: Mongolian State Pedagogical University, 2003.

Tseveendorj 1989

D. Tseveendorj. 'New Data on the Archaeology of the Hsiung-nu.' In: *The Ancient Cultures of Mongolia*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Pr., 1989, pp. 51-87.

## Notes

1. Extensive excavations at Burkhan-tolgoi in northern Mongolia (Torbat et al. 2003) and a handful of sites south of Lake Baikal (Konovalov 1976) exemplify the significant presence of such Chinese-style

goods in circular graves of the Xiongnu.

2. Reports of the fully excavated site of Burkhan-tolgoi (Torbat et al. 2003) present a problem in differentiating between such bone items, collectively called *savkh*, especially when their form is not so different as with the bone items found at Shombuuziin-belchir. In such cases as Burkhan-tolgoi, the placement of the bone artifacts in the burials may greatly assist the determination of their function in the interments and in the lives of the deceased.

3. The sex of juveniles is virtually impossible to determine, and that of young adults, while often a confident assessment, is not without question. In this case we must state that the sex of the young adult in burial № 12 is most probably male. All ageing and sexing criteria utilized are available in Bass (1995).

4. Analysis of musculoskeletal stress markers for adult individuals is based on criteria set out in Hawkey and Merbs (1995).

# On the Chronology of the Noyon uul Barrows

**Sergei S. Miniaev**

*Institute for the History of Material Culture, St. Petersburg*

**Julia Elikhina**

*State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg*

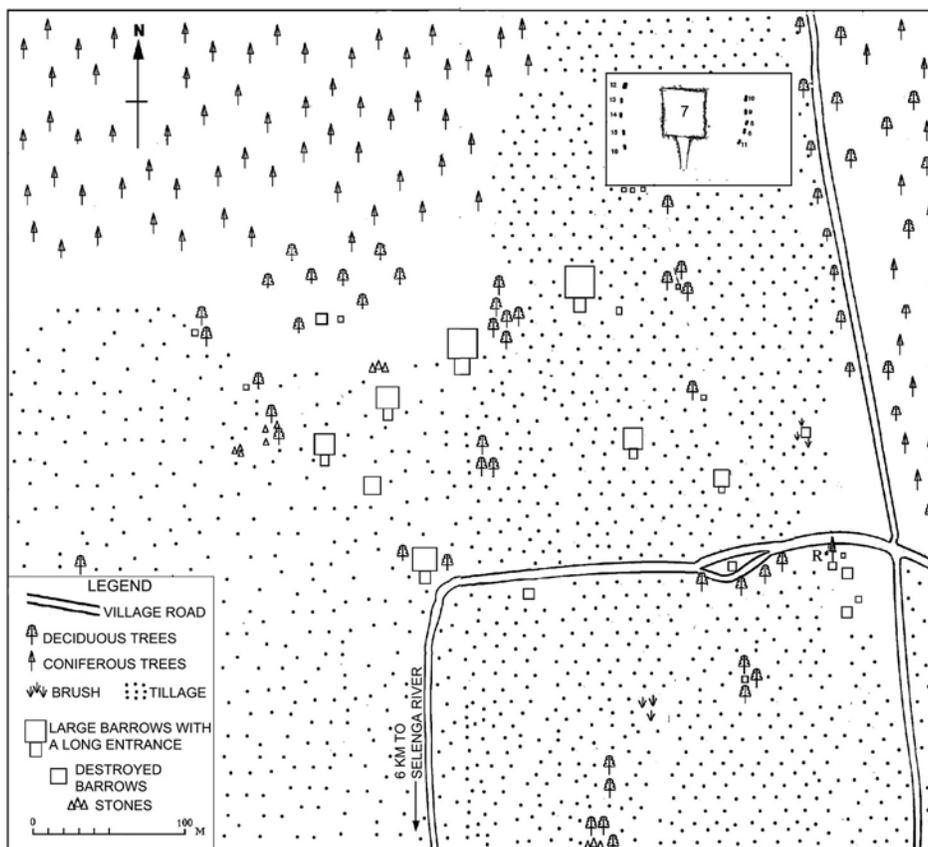
The Xiongnu were a herding people who in the last centuries BCE occupied huge expanses of Central Asia and created there a powerful 'proto-state' formation of a type that was further developed by later nomadic 'empires.' The archaeological monuments of the Xiongnu extend across a broad area of the steppe belt from the Enisei River to Manchuria and from Lake Baikal to the Ordos region of the Yellow River bend. One often finds in them reliably datable material (mirrors, coins, objects with inscriptions) which mean that such objects are among the basic sources for resolving the problems of the chronology of archaeological complexes of the whole of Central Asia and its neighboring regions.

Studies in recent years have provided not only new material but have enabled us to determine the system of the spatial organization of Xiongnu burials. Analysis of the distribution of burials across the area of their cemeteries has shown that in most cases the burials form complexes consisting of a central barrow and satellite burials distributed around it. Such complexes in turn form several groups, located some dozens of meters from one another. Furthermore, the larger barrows are located higher than the others; the largest barrow in each complex in most cases is in the northern section of the cemetery. One can suggest that such large barrows were created first and thus

are the earliest in each group. They served as distinctive dominating features, around which the remaining part of the cemetery formed later. Alongside the large barrows are located small burials which, as studies of recent years have shown, are burials with human sacrifices (Miniaev 1985, 1989, 1998; Miniaev and Sakharovskaia 2002). Thus, each large barrow and the satellite burials located next to it can be viewed as a contemporaneous complex, whose burials took place over one or several days, that is, during a single funeral ceremony. An example is the distribution of burials at Tsaram, a modest-sized cemetery of the Xiongnu elite in Transbaikalia [Fig. 1].

One can observe analogous arrangements of burials in various Xiongnu cemeteries, such as at the largest currently known royal complex of the Xiongnu in the Gol-Mod mountains in western Mongolia in Arkhangai aimag (Miller et al. 2008). Here surrounding the central barrow

*Fig. 1. Plan of the cemetery in the Tsaram Valley.*



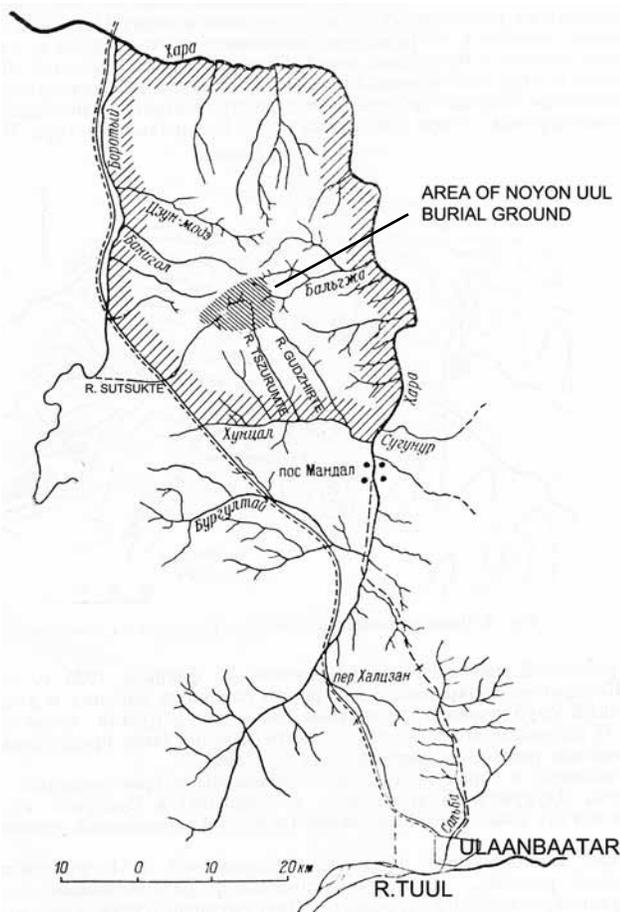


Fig. 2. Map showing the location of Noyon uul mountain. After: Rudenko 1962, Fig. 1.

are some dozens of satellite burials which vary in size and importance.

The persistent repetition of the system of spatial organization of burials in various cemeteries shows that their layout is not accidental. It was, it seems, the norm of burial practice of the Xiongnu as a whole, indirectly reflecting real connections and relations both within separate collective groups and of the society as a whole. These specific features of the planning of the burials substantially broaden the possibility of analyzing the materials of the cemeteries, above all for the determination of their chronology.

The present article will show how this is possible for one of the best known Xiongnu monuments — the burials of the elite at Noyon uul mountain in northern Mongolia [Fig. 2]. The cemeteries at Noyon uul are located in three forested valleys: Gudzhirte ("Salt Marsh"), Tsurumte ("Pious Offering") and Sutszakte ("Prayerful") [Fig. 3, facing page]. The Mongolo-Tibetan Expedition

headed by the famous explorer Petr Kuz'mich Kozlov counted some 212 barrows in these cemeteries during its work there in 1923-1926. Seven of them were 'excavated' unscientifically under the supervision of Kozlov's assistant Sergei A. Kondrat'ev; another one (№ 24/12) was opened by the well-known archaeologist Sergei A. Teploukhov. Most of those barrows (№№ 1, 6, 23, 24/12, and 25) were in the Sutszakte valley. Three additional ones (the Andreevskii, Kondrat'evskii and Ballodovskii barrows), the first two named for members of the expedition, were located in the Tszurumte valley. In 1926-1927 digging continued, by Grigorii I. Borovka (Barrow № 49) and Andrei Simukov (Barrow № 5 and an unnumbered barrow). Simukov also had participated in the work of 1924-1925 (Simukov 2008). A number of later expeditions have carried out excavations at Noyon uul (Dorzhsuren 1962; Erdélyi et al. 1967), including, most recently, the expedition of the Institute of Archaeology of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Polos'mak et al. 2008).

The main part of the nearly 2000 objects retrieved by the Kozlov expedition is today housed in the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, to which the material was transferred in 1934 from the Ethnographic Section of the Russian Museum. Finds from Barrow № 1 and a number of gold decorations were transferred to the National Museum of Mongolian History in 1928; related Xiongnu materials — mainly random finds from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century — are today in the museums in Irkutsk and Kiakhta. The authors of the current article are in the process of completing a descriptive catalogue of the Hermitage collection, which is noteworthy for its more than 1100 examples of fabrics and various other organic materials, in addition to a wide range of metalwork, some pottery, and objects made of semi-precious stones. The collection includes as well human skeletal material and various plant and animal remains. (Earlier reports on the material are in: *Kratkie otchety* 1925; Trever 1932; Umehara 1960; Rudenko 1962; Elikhina 2007a, 2007b.)

The datable materials from the Noyon uul collection include:

- lacquered Chinese cups (three of which specify the year of their production) and fragments of a lacquered box;
- a fragment of a Chinese mirror;
- inscriptions in Chinese characters on fabrics;

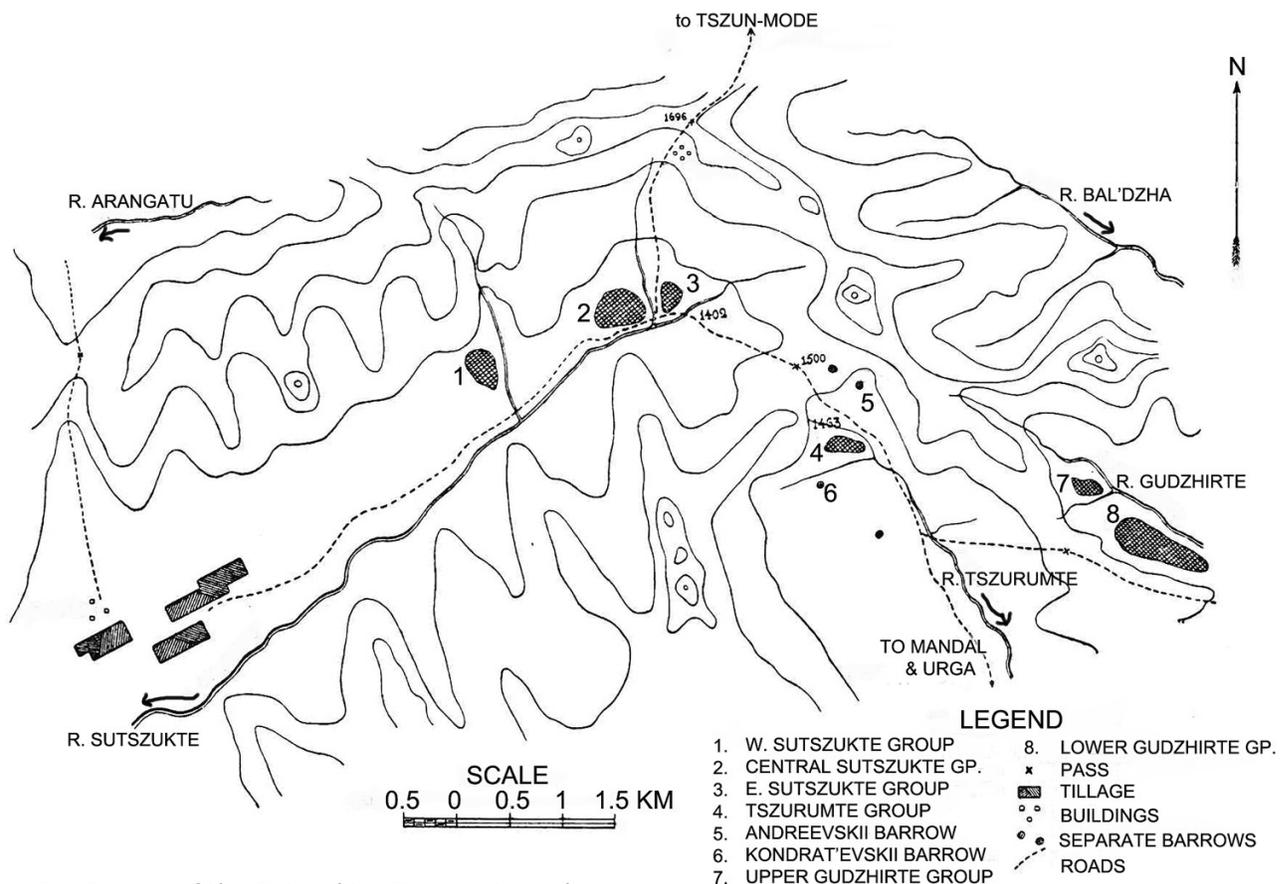


Fig. 3. Map of the Sutszukte, Tsurumte and Gudzhirte cemeteries.

- samples of wood and charcoal, which have been dated by C-14 analysis, allowing the results to be juxtaposed with the archaeological materials.

Let us examine each of these materials in turn.

1. The lacquered cup with an inscribed legend in Chinese characters (State Hermitage Museum, Inv. № MR-2301), found in Barrow № 6 on the dirt floor of the northeastern corridor [Figs. A-1 – A-4, p. 31 below]. The cup is decorated with depictions of phoenixes; on the bronze mount of the handle is an engraved depiction of a bird [Fig. A-5]. On the outer rim of the foot of the cup is an inscription of 17 characters [Figs. A-7 – A-8]. (For details regarding the inscriptions on the Noyon uul cups, see the accompanying article by Michèle Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens 2009.) The beginning of the inscription [upper section Fig. A-7], indicating the reign date, is engraved with a fine line and has been preserved in its original form, a fact which is the crucial one for dating the cup. The rest of the inscription has been more crudely engraved in a style differing

markedly from that of the beginning [detail, Fig. A-8]. Microphotography of this part of the inscription shows that it was substantially altered and that in all probability the names of the craftsmen and supervisors of the work were corrected. This could explain the somewhat minor differences in the reading of the inscription by various scholars. First deciphered by Otto Kümmel and Umehara Sueji, the inscription indicates the year of manufacture – the fifth year of of the Jianping Era, which normally is the equivalent of the first year of the next reign era, Yuanshu, corresponding to 2 BCE. Written in red lacquer in the center of the underside on the brown lacquered surface of the cup are the characters 'Shanglin' (上林) [Fig. A-6] designating the Imperial Palace park. According to Aleksandr N. Bernshtam, these characters and the year of manufacture of the cup allow one to suppose that it was given along with other objects to Shanyu Wuzhuliuruoti during his visit to the court of Han Emperor Aidi. Since Shanyu Wuzhuliuruoti died in 13 CE, Bernshtam assumed that is the year to which Noyon uul Barrow № 6 dates (Bernshtam 1951, p. 38).

---

Such an interpretation of the burial in Barrow № 6 is in principle possible. However a number of considerations argue against accepting this hypothesis. Above all one should note that Wuzhuliruoti, as had other Xiongnu leaders before him, arrived at the Han court with a suite of 500 retainers. One cannot exclude the possibility that prestigious gifts from the Han court such as those which the shanyu received were also distributed among members of his entourage. Evidence of this is to be found in the presence of an analogous cup (see below) dated in the same fifth year of the Jianping Era, in another barrow located in the neighboring Tsurumte valley. This discovery, like the discoveries of lacquered cups in ordinary Xiongnu burials, shows that luxury objects received by the Xiongnu elite as gifts eventually came into the possession of other strata of the population. Thus there can be no certainty that the cup was buried with Shanyu Wuzhuliruoti. In any event, this matter has little bearing on the determination of the chronology of the graves. The indication of 2 BCE suffices to determine the terminus post quem both of Barrow № 6 at Noyon uul (regardless of who was buried there) and of the unnumbered barrow in the Tsurumte valley.

2. The handle and sizeable fragments of a lacquered cup with an incised inscription in Chinese characters (Ulaanbaatar, National Museum of Mongolian History, Inv. № A-242) [Figs. A-9 – A-12, pp. 33-34 below]. Published references to this cup erroneously have attributed it to the finds from Barrow № 5 (Umehara 1960; Louis 2006-07) or Barrow № 6 (*L'Asie* 2000, p. 147, fig. 128; *Mongolie* 2003, p. 223). In fact, it was excavated by Simukov in 1927 from an unnumbered barrow at Tsurumte, but without any indication of where it was located in the barrow (Simukov 2008).

On the extant part of the bottom of the cup is an incised *tamgha* [Fig. A-10] and a fragment of what appears to be a character; just above the slightly raised foot is an inscription consisting of 66 characters. The first four of them indicate the year of manufacture — the fifth year of the Jianping Era — which thus specifies a terminus post quem of 2 BCE for the unnumbered barrow at Tsurumte as it does also for Barrow № 6 at Sutszunkte. So we would emphasize once again that the discovery of two cups with identical dates of the fifth year of the Jianping Era in different cemetery groups of Noyon uul renders

improbable the attribution of Barrow № 6 as the tomb of Shanyu Wuzhuliruoti and, hence, the dating of that barrow to 13 CE.

3. Four lacquered cups, 13 cm each in length, from Barrow № 23 (three of them now in the State Hermitage, Inv. №№ MR-2302, 2303 and 2304, and one in the National Museum of Mongolian History in Ulaanbaatar) [Fig. 4, facing page]. The exact location of these cups in the barrow was not specified (Sergei Rudenko [1962, p. 121] erroneously indicates they are finds made to the north of the coffin). They have no inscriptions and in contrast to the ones described above are distinguished as a whole by their lesser quality and simplified ornament, which is characteristic for the period of the Eastern Han (Louis 2006-07, p. 51). François Louis noted cups analogous to these from the tomb of Wang Shu in Korea, dated after 69 CE (*ibid.*). Therefore, it is quite probable that the terminus post quem for Barrow No. 23 is the last third of the first century CE.

4. Fragments from a lacquered toilet box with bronze mounts, found in Barrow № 24/12 [Figs. A-13, A-14; State Hermitage, Inv. № KP-14150]. As Michèle Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens has noted (2009), the technique of ornamentation and this type of box are typical for the end of the Western Han. One of the closest analogies may be dated between 16 BCE and 2 BCE. Thus the terminus post quem for Barrow № 24/12 is the end of the first century BCE.

5. A lacquered cup with an inscription from Barrow № 20, excavated by Natalia Polos'mak in 2006, but whose location in the barrow has not been specified in the information published to date (Polos'mak et al. 2008; 'Za "kadrom"' 2008, p. 83). In its measurements and ornament the cup is entirely analogous to those found by the expedition of Kozlov in Barrow № 6 and Simukov in the unnumbered barrow at Tsurumte. One might suppose that the cup, found apparently together with the Chinese mirror, was part of the inventory of one of the burial dolls, a supposition that is supported as well by the discovery of women's teeth on the floor of the chamber of Barrow № 20 (Chikisheva et al. 2009). Similar burial dolls were found in Barrow № 7 at Tsaram (Miniaev and Sakharovskaia 2007a, 2007b). They consisted of a female skull, with extremities formed from lacquered wooden sticks; in their burial inventory were Chinese mirrors and



Fig. 4. Lacquered cups from Barrow № 23: 1,2,4 - Hermitage Inv. №№ MR-2303, 2302 and 2304. 3 - National Museum of Mongolian History, unnumbered; 5. Interior of № 3; 6. Tamgha on underside of № 2302.

lacquered dishes. The date of the manufacture of the cup from Barrow № 20, as indicated in the inscription, was the fourth year of the Yuanyan Era, which corresponds to 9 BCE (Chistiakova 2009). This date thus establishes a terminus post quem for Barrow № 20.

6. A fragment of a Han mirror (State Hermitage, Inv. № MR-0810) [Fig. 5, next page] was found in Barrow № 25 in the eastern corner of the 'coffin'; it measures 13 x 6.5 cm.<sup>1</sup> Around the edge of the mirror is an ornamental band depicting birds (phoenixes?) and with stylized images of animals. Closer to the center of the mirror can be seen another ornamental band with a small nipple in the middle of an eight-petaled rosette, flanking which are stylized

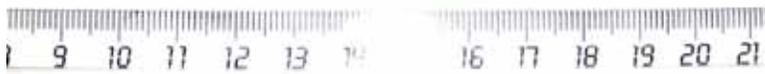


Fig. 5. Fragment of a Han mirror, found in Barrow № 25 (Hermitage Inv. № MR-0810).

zoomorphs (a bird and a feline or dragon). These two ornamental fields are separated by two narrow bands, the outer one with a saw-tooth pattern and the inner with a comb-tooth pattern. Inside the inner field (with the rosette and nipple) is another comb-tooth band. Finds of mirrors of a similar type in archaeological contexts enable one to date them to the period of the Eastern Han, i.e., no earlier than the first quarter of the first century CE (*Zhongguo*, p. 333).

7. Characters on a pair of silk pants (State



Hermitage №№ MR-1979, 1980) [Figs. 6, 7]. The pants were found in Barrow № 6 and consist of two separate halves. The inscription [Fig. 8] consisting of rows of repeating eight characters (新神靈廣成壽萬年) has been variously translated by specialists. It is complete on the pants, but separate characters are also found on some analogous pieces of silk from that same barrow. One reading suggests that the cloth was manufactured in the reign of Wang Mang (9–24 CE), that is, the beginning of the first century CE (Umehara 1960, p. xvi; Lubo-Lesnichenko 1995), which is in agreement with the terminus post quem for this barrow established on the basis of the inscription on the lacquered cup.

The same kind of inscription with wishes for good fortune is on silk from the Kondrat'ev barrow. It is not excluded that the manufacture date of that silk also is the reign of Wang Mang, although the fragmentary nature of the cloth does not permit one to reconstruct the entire inscription.

Fig. 6 (left). Silk pants from Barrow No. 6 (Hermitage Inv. №№ MR-1979, 1980).

Fig. 7 (top). Detail of fabric of the pants.

Fig. 8 (bottom). The Chinese characters on the pants.

8. Radiocarbon dates. In the laboratory of radiocarbon analysis of the Institute for the History of Material Culture of the Russian Academy of Sciences (headed by Ganna Zaitseva), five C-14 dates have been obtained for the barrows of Noyon uul. The results of this analysis are given in the following table.

Nº of sample	barrow	material	date (BP*)
Le-7795	Nº 6	section of a column, wood	1840 ± 30
Le-7934	Nº 6	charcoal	1910 ± 50
Le-8132	Nº 49	wood	1855 ± 30
Le-7935	Nº 49	charcoal	1380 ± 30
Le-8191	Nº 24/12	charcoal	1740 ± 40

\* Before Present

As the table shows, the C-14 dates as a whole do not contradict the archaeological dating, with the exception of sample Le-7935 from Barrow Nº 49, which apparently derives from charcoal in a looter's tunnel.

Let us look now at the spatial organization of the monument, where, as noted above, the burials are concentrated in several stream valleys.

*The Sutszukte valley.* The burials are concentrated here in three large groups—western, central and eastern [Fig. 9]. Of the burials examined above which contain dating material, Barrows Nº 20, 23, 24/12, 25 and 49 are located in the central group. The first four of those enumerated are found in the northern part of this group, that is, located higher than the remaining barrows and are among the largest in the group. The features of the spatial organization of Xiongnu cemeteries noted above allow one to suggest that these barrows were among the first to be constructed here, and their date thus establishes a terminus post quem for the remaining burials.

Hence, the dating of Barrows Nº 20 and Nº 24/12 (both no earlier than the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE), Nº 23 (second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE), and Nº 25 (no earlier than the Eastern Han, i.e., no earlier than the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE) enables one to suggest that the central Sutszukte group began to be formed no earlier than the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, and the remaining barrows of this group should be dated to the same or an only somewhat later time. The C-14 date for Barrow Nº 49 (1855 ± 30), located in the southern part of the central group agrees with this hypothesis.

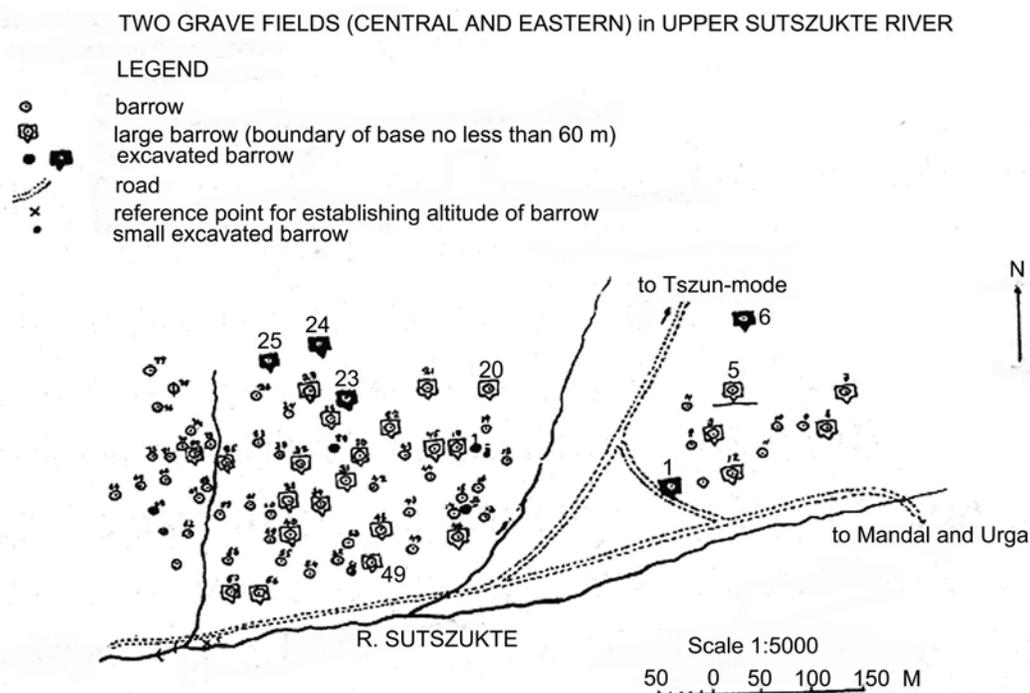


Fig. 9. The original site plan of the central and eastern groups of tombs at Sutszukte (with translated captioning and numbers for the tombs discussed here inserted in place of the handwritten ones).

---

In the site plan of the central and eastern groups at Sutszunkte which was first published by Teploukhov (Teploukhov 1925, Fig. 3) and then reproduced in various publications (Umehara 1960, Fig. 4; Rudenko 1962, Fig. 3), Barrow № 6 is located in the central group. However, in the original site plan this barrow is located in the eastern group, as Kondrat'ev, the director of the work at Noyon uul also noted in his report. According to Kondrat'ev, Barrow № 6 is the largest in the Sutszunkte valley. Like the other large barrows in the central group it is located in the northern part of its cemetery field and was constructed, apparently, as the first in this group. Thus, the inscription on the lacquered cup indicating the manufacture date of 2 BCE and the inscription on the silk (no earlier than the Wang Mang period, i.e., no earlier than the first quarter of the first century CE) determine the terminus post quem not only for that barrow but for the entire eastern group at Sutszunkte. On the basis of this one can propose that Barrow № 1 (Mokryi), located in the southern part of the given group likewise cannot be dated earlier than the beginning of the Common Era and more probably dates to the first half of the first century CE.

*The Tsurumte valley.* The participants in Kozlov's expedition located on the map of the site the central part of the cemetery and several of the nearby large barrows. Reliable dating material (the inscription on the lacquered cup) was obtained only for a separate unnumbered barrow, from which Simukov recovered part of the finds in 1927 (Simukov 2008, pp. 42-45). According to his description, this was an isolated barrow located in the vicinity of other isolated barrows somewhat lower than the Tsurumte group (judging from the plan of the cemeteries, approximately 700 m. southeast of the Kondrat'ev barrow; see Fig. 3). It is not excluded that the barrow in question was part of yet another cemetery at Tsurumte. However, the absence of a map for that sector of the monument leaves the question open. One can only conclude that, as with Barrow № 6, for the given barrow the terminus post quem is 2 BCE.

Hence with considerable confidence one can suggest that, as at Sutszunkte, the barrow groups at Tsurumte came into being no earlier than the end of the first century BCE. There are no reliable dating materials as yet from *Gudzhirte* valley, another of the cemeteries at Noyon uul. One can but suppose the establishment of

this cemetery occurred at approximately the same time as was the case for the neighboring cemeteries.

On the basis of the archaeological material and radiocarbon dates the establishment of the cemeteries at Noyon uul mountain dates no earlier than the end of the first century BCE and more likely was in the first century CE. The archaeological material from other Xiongnu monuments in Transbaikalia and Mongolia likewise does not allow one to date these monuments any earlier than the first century BCE (for details, see Miniaev 2001; Miniaev and Sakharovskaia 2007b, pp. 54-55). Such a conclusion contradicts the traditional view based on the written sources that the beginning date for Xiongnu complexes is the end of the third century BCE. Obviously it is necessary to correct the generally accepted ideas about the chronology of the Xiongnu cultural complex, whose date has a significant bearing on the chronology of other early Iron Age monuments in Siberia and Central Asia.

[translated from Russian by Daniel C. Waugh]

## About the authors

**Julia (Iuliia Igorevna) Elikhina** graduated from the Department of Mongolian and Tibetan Philology in the Oriental Faculty of St. Petersburg State University; she defended her *kandidat* dissertation in history (Ph.D. equivalent) on 'The Cult of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara and His Reincarnations (Kings and Lamas) in the History of Tibetan Statehood from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the Beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries.' Since 1988 she has been on the staff of the State Hermitage Museum where she is Curator of Tibetan, Mongolian and Khotanese collections (including archeological materials from Noyon uul, Karakorum, etc.). She is the author of more than 50 articles, a forthcoming one dealing with Mongolian sculpture. In addition, she has two monographs in press: one on the Tibetan paintings from the Collection of Iu. N. Roerich in the Hermitage collection; the other on the cults of the main bodhisattvas and their terrestrial reincarnations in the history and art of Tibetan Buddhism. She may be contacted at <julia-elikhina@yandex.ru>.

**Sergei S. Miniaev** is the author of numerous articles and monographs on Xiongnu archaeology and founding editor of a Russian monograph

---

series, *Arkheologicheskie pamiatniki Siunnu*. In 2007 he received an award from the Euroasian Archaeological Institute in Izmir recognizing his contributions to Xiongnu archaeology; in 2008 he was a fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. Additional material on his excavations may be found at <<http://xiongnu.atspace.com/>>. E-mail: <[ssmin@yandex.ru](mailto:ssmin@yandex.ru)>.

## References

*L'Asie 2000*

*L'Asie des Steppes: d'Alexandre le Grand à Gengis Khan*. Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux; Barcelone: Fundació la Caixa, 2000.

Bernshtam 1951

Aleksandr N. Bernshtam. *Ocherk istorii khunnov* [A Brief Study of the History of the Huns]. Leningrad, 1951.

Chikisheva et al. 2009

T. A. Chikisheva, N. V. Polos'mak, and P. V. Volkov. 'Odontologicheskii material iz kurgana No. 20 v Noin-Ule (Mongoliia)' [Odontological material from Barrow No. 20 at Noyon uul (Mongolia)]. *Arkheologiya, etnografiia i antropologiya Evrazii* 2009/3[39]: 145-151.

Chistiakova 2009

A. N. Chistiakova. 'Perevod ieroglificheskoi nadpisi na lakovoi chashechke iz kurgana No. 20 v Noin-Ule (Mongoliia)' [A translation of the hieroglyphic inscription on the lacquered cup from Barrow No. 20 at Noyon uul (Mongolia)]. *Arkheologiya, etnografiia i antropologiya Evrazii* 2009/3[39]: 59-68

Danilov et al. 1998

S. V. Danilov, I. V. Filippova, A. A. Amogolonov. 'Kitaiskie zerkala iz pamiatnikov khunnu' [Chinese mirrors from Xiongnu monuments]. In: *Arkheologiya i etnologiya Dal'nego Vostoka i Tsentral'noi Azii*. Ed. N. N. Kradin. Vladivostok, 1998, pp. 115-118.

Dorzhsuren 1962

Ts. Dorzhsuren (Dorjsüren). 'Raskopki mogil Khunnu v gorakh Noin ula [i] na reke Khuni gol (1954-1957 gg.)' [Excavations of Xiongnu tombs in the Noyon uul mountains and on the River Khuni-Gol (1954-1957)]. In: *Mongol'skii arkheologicheskii sbornik*. Moscow: Izd-vo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1962, pp. 36-44.

*Dschingis Khan 2005*

*Dschingis Khan und seine Erben. Das Weltreich der Mongolen*. München: Hirmer Verlag, 2005.

Elikhina 2007a

Iuliia I. Elikhina. 'Kolleksiia nakhodok iz Noin-Uly, khраниashchaia v Ermitazhe (kharakteristika kolleksiia)' [Features of the collection of finds from Noyon uul in the Hermitage Museum]. In: *Rerikhovskoe nasledie. Trudy konferentsii*, vyp. 3. St. Petersburg, 2007, pp. 304-310.

Elikhina 2007b

Iuliia I. Elikhina. 'Zoloto i srebro iz Noin-ulinskoii kolleksiia, khраниashcheisia v Ermitazhe' [Gold and silver from the Noyon uul collection in the Hermitage Museum]. In: *Rerikhovskoe nasledie. Trudy konferentsii*, vyp. 3. St. Petersburg, 2007, pp. 537-541.

Erdélyi et al. 1967

Istvan Erdélyi, C. Dorjsüren, D. Navan. 'Results of the Mongol-Hungarian Archaeological expeditions 1961-1964 (a comprehensive report).' *Acta archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 19/3-4 (1967): 334-370.

*Kratkie otchety 1925*

*Kratkie otchety ekspeditsii po issledovaniiu Severnoi Mongolii v sviazi s Mongolo-Tibetskoii ekspeditsiei P. K. Kozlova*. Leningrad, 1925

Louis 2006-07

François Louis. 'Han Lacquerware and the Wine Cups of Noin Ula.' *The Silk Road* 4/2 (2006-07): 48-53.

Lubo-Lesnichenko 1995

Evgenii Lubo-Lesnichenko. 'Kitaiskaia nadpis' na gunnskikh "shtanakh bez motni" iz Noin-Uli' [The Chinese inscription on the Xiongnu 'pants without a crotch panel' from Noyon uul]. In: *Materialy nauchnoi sessii '75 let ot delu Vostoka'*. St. Petersburg, 1995, pp. 40-41.

Miller et al. 2008

B. Miller, F. Ollard, D. Erdenebator, K. Li. 'Pogrebal'nyi kompleks siunnu: raskopki mogil'nika Gol-Mod-2.' *Arkheologicheskie vesti* 15 (2008): 55-71. [Translation of: Bryan K. Miller, Francis Allard, Diimaajav Erdenebaatar, and Christine Lee. 'A Xiongnu Tomb Complex: Excavations at Gol Mod 2 cemetery, Mongolia (2002-05).' *Mongolian Journal of Anthropology, Archaeology and Ethnology* (Ulaanbaatar) 2/2 (2006): 1-21.]

Miniaev 1985

Sergei S. Miniaev. 'K topografii kurgannykh pamiatnikov siunnu' [On the topography of Xiongnu barrows]. *Kratkie soobshcheniia Instituta arkheologii* 184 (1985): 21-27.

- Miniaev 1989  
Sergei S. Miniaev. 'Sotsial'naia planigrafia pogrebal'nykh pamiatnikov siunnu' [The social structuring of the spatial organization of Xiongnu burial monuments]. In: *Materialy 4 konferentsii 'Skifo-sibirskii mir'*. Kemerovo, 1989, pp. 76-78.
- Miniaev 1998  
Sergei S. Miniaev. *Dyrestuiskii mogil'nik* [The Dyrestui Cemetery]. Arkheologicheskie pamiatniki Siunnu, Vol.3. St. Petersburg: Evropeiskii dom, 1998.
- Miniaev 2001  
Sergei S. Miniaev. 'Siunnuskii kul'turnyi kompleks: vremia i prostranstvo' [The Xiongnu cultural complex: its time and extent]. In: *Drevniaia i srednevekovaia istoriia Vostochnoi Azii*. Vladivostok, 2001, pp. 295-305.
- Miniaev and Sakharovskaia 2002  
Sergei S. Miniaev and Lidiia M. Sakharovskaia. 'Soprovoditel'nye zakhoroneniia "tsarskogo" kompleksa № 7 v mogol'nike Tsaram' [Satellite burials of the 'royal' complex № 7 in the Tsaram cemetery]. *Arkheologicheskie vesti* (St. Petersburg) 9 (2002): 86-118.
- Miniaev and Sakharovskaia 2007a  
Sergei S. Miniaev and Lidiia M. Sakharovskaia. 'Elitnyi kompleks siunnu v padi Tsaram' [The Xiongnu elite complex in the Tsaram valley]. *Rossiiskaia arkheologiiia* 2007/1: 194-201.
- Miniaev and Sakharovskaia 2007b  
Sergei S. Miniaev and Lidiia M. Sakharovskaia. 'Investigation of a Xiongnu Royal Complex in the Tsaram Valley. Part 2: The Inventory of Barrow № 7 and the Chronology of the Site.' *The Silk Road* 5/1 (2007): 44-56.
- Mongolie 2003  
*Mongolie. Le premier empire des steppes*. Actes Sud; Mission archéologique française en Mongolie, 2003.
- Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens 2009  
Michèle Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens. 'Chinese Lacquerware from Noyon uul: Some Problems of Manufacturing and Distribution.' *The Silk Road* 7 (2009): 31 – 41.
- Polos'mak et al. 2008  
N. V. Polos'mak, E. S. Bogdanov, D. Tseveendorzh, N. Erdene-Ochir. 'Izuchenie pogrebal'nogo sooruzheniia kurgana 20 v Noin-Ule (Mongoliia)' [Study of the burial construction of Barrow № 20 at Noyon uul (Mongolia)]. *Arkheologiiia, etnografiia i antropologiia Evrazii* 2008/2[34]: 77-87.
- Rudenko 1962  
Sergei I. Rudenko. *Kul'tura khunnov i noin-ulinskii kurgany* [The Culture of the Xiongnu and the Noyon uul barrows]. Moscow-Leningrad: Izd-vo. Akademii nauk SSSR, 1962.
- Simukov 2008  
Andrei D. Simukov. 'Otchet o raskopkakh dvukh kurganov v padiakh Sudzuke i Tsurumte' [Report on the excavations of two barrows in Sudzuke and Tsurumte valleys]. *Trudy o Mongolii i dlia Mongolii* [Works about Mongolia and for Mongolia]. Vol. 3, pt. 1. Ed. Konagaya Yuki. Senri ethnological reports, 75. Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2008, pp. 40-45.
- Teploukhov 1925  
Sergei A. Teploukhov. 'Raskopka kurgana v gorakh Noin-Ula' [Excavation of a barrow in the Noyon uul mountains]. In: *Kratkie otchety* 1925, pp. 41-52.
- Treuer 1932  
Camilla Treuer. *Excavations in Northern Mongolia (1924-1925)*. Leningrad: J. Fedorov Printing House, 1932.
- Umehara 1960  
Umehara Sueji 梅原末治. *Mōko Noin-Ura hakken no ibutsu* 蒙古ノインウラ発見の遺物 [Artifacts found at the Noyon uul site in Mongolia]. Tokyo: Tōyō Bunko, 1960.
- Za 'kadrom' 2008  
'Za "kadrom" arkheologicheskikh sensatsii' [Behind the cinematic image of archaeological sensations]. *Nauka iz pervykh ruk* 2008/3[21].
- Zhongguo 1997.  
*Zhongguo tongjing tu dian* 中国铜镜图典 [Encyclopaedia of Chinese Mirrors]. Comp. by Kong Xiangxing 孔祥星 and Liu Yiman 刘一曼. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1992 (reprinted 1997).

## Note

1. Sometimes another fragment of a mirror has been described as a find from Noyon uul (Danilov et al. 1998, p. 118), although in fact it was found in Barrow № 25 at the Gol Mod cemetery (in the basin of the river Khuni-Gol; Dorzhsuren 1962, Fig. 7-7).



A-1



A-2

**Figs. A-1 – A-4.** Lacquered cup from Barrow № 6 (State Hermitage Museum, Inv. № MR-2301).



A-7



A-3



A-8

A-5

A-4



A-6



**Fig. A-5.** Engraved image of bird on bronze handle mount of lacquered cup № MR-2301. **Fig. A-6.** Painted inscription 'Shanglin' on underside of lacquered cup № MR-2301. **Figs. A-7, A-8.** Inscription on foot of lacquered cup № MR-2301.



**Fig. A-9.** Lacquered cup from unnumbered barrow at Tzurumte  
(National Museum of Mongolian History, Inv. № A-242)



A-10

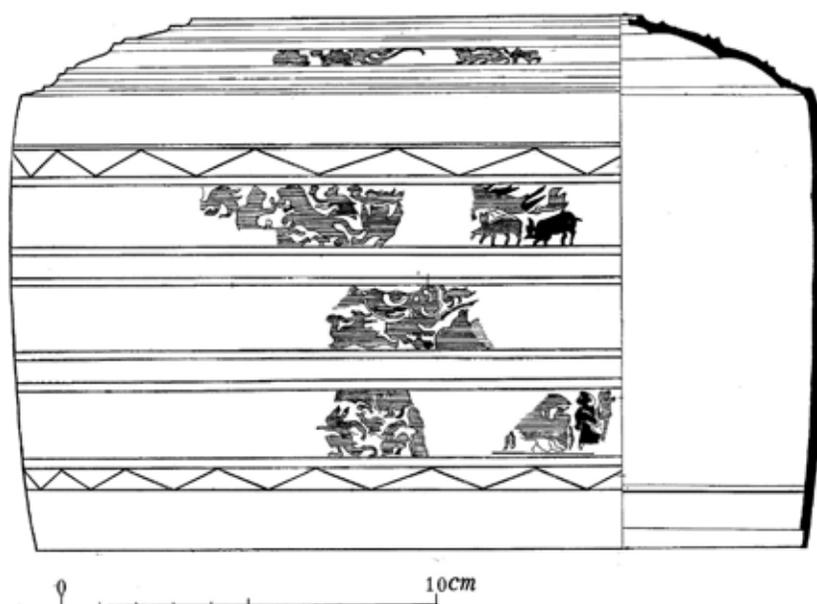
**Figs. A-10 – A-12.** Details showing tamgha and inscription on lacquered cup № A-242.



A-11



A-12



**Fig. A-13.** Reconstruction of the toilet box which was in Barrow № 24/12. After: Umehara 1960, p. 33, Fig. 18.



**Fig. A-14.** A fragment from the toilet box in Barrow No. 24/12 (Hermitage Inv. № KP-14150).

---

# Chinese Lacquerware from Noyon uul: Some Problems of Manufacturing and Distribution

**Michèle Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens**

*Directeur d'études, École pratique des Hautes Études, Paris*

Given the extent of the territories occupied by the Xiongnu beginning in the last centuries BCE, reliably dated material found in their archaeological sites can be of great value for working out problems of chronology for archaeological complexes more broadly in Central Asia and adjacent regions. Reliably dated material in Xiongnu sites includes first of all imports from China. This article will analyze the Chinese lacquered objects from the famous Xiongnu cemetery at Noyon uul (Noin Ula) in Northern Mongolia.

## 1. The Chinese lacquer eared cup from an unnamed barrow<sup>1</sup>

*Reading and translation of the inscription*

The inscription is incised in clerical script around the slightly-raised foot of the cup [Figs. A-9 – A-12, pp. 33-34]. I follow the reading given by Hong Shi (2005, p. 404) and the translation given by Anthony Barbieri-Low (2001, N° 2.49, p. 422), modifying it according to the corrections brought by Hong Shi.

建平五年，蜀郡西工造，乘輿髹 丹<sup>2</sup>畫木黃耳椀，容一升十六龠，素工尊，髹工褒，上工壽，銅耳黃塗工宗，畫工 [ ]，丹工豐，清工白，造工告造，護工卒史巡，守長克，丞駿，掾豐，守令史嚴主。

Made in the fifth year of the Jianping era [2 BCE] by the Western Workshop of Shu Commandery. An eared cup with a wood core and gilt bronze mounts, painted with designs and lacquered in black and red, fit for use by the emperor. Capacity one *sheng* and sixteen *yue*. Made by: core carver Zun, lacquerer Bao, topcoat-lacquerer Shou, gilder Zong, design-painter [ ], red-lacquerer Feng,<sup>3</sup> the artisan doing the gilding finishing Bai,<sup>4</sup> and the finisher artisan Gao.<sup>5</sup> Managed by: Commandery Clerk for Workshop Inspection Xun, Probationary Factory Chief Ke, Assistant Factory Chief Jun, Lacquer Bureau Head Feng, and Probationary Foreman Clerk Yan.<sup>6</sup>

Outside, on the bottom of the cup, lines are incised apparently forming a motif which is no longer legible owing to the fragmentary state of the object. These lines were certainly incised on the cup later on. The only surviving mark which could be a Chinese character and which is partly legible could be 朱 *zhu* written for 銖. I suggest this reading by analogy with the same character incised on the underside of a silver eared cup from Tomb N° 1 at Beishantou 北山头, Chaohu 巢湖 city (Anhui). The tomb probably dates from the mid-second century BCE, and the character 朱 on the underside of the silver cup is the last character, giving the weight of the object (Anhui 2007, pp. 107-08 and color Pl. 49).

*Decoration of the cup*

I shall not comment on the painted décor of the cup which is typical of what Barbieri-Low (2001, pp. 212-34) has defined as the Ornate Shu style created at the Western Workshop in Sichuan sometime between 44 and 20 BCE. It consists, on the eared cups, of eight birds arranged in opposed pairs, each bird facing the other with raised claw. 'The birds are separated by sweeping diagonals and by spiraling curls which spring from the lines and curves of their bodies' (ibid., p. 228). The painted line is thick but the motifs are spaced out.

## 2. The Chinese lacquer eared cup from Barrow N° 6 [Figs. A-1 – A-8, pp. 31-32]

*Incised inscription around the foot of the cup<sup>7</sup>*

The transcription and translation are by Barbieri-Low following the transcription by Kayamoto and Machida:

建平五年九月，工王潭經，畫工獲，嗇夫武省

Made in the fifth year of the Jianping era [2 BCE] in the ninth month [Sept./Oct.] by master artisan Wang Tanjing and design-painter Huo.<sup>8</sup> Inspected by: Workshop Overseer Wu.

*Painted inscription on the underside*

On the underside of the cup are painted in red lacquer the two characters 上林 ('Shanglin') [Fig. A-6]. Shanglin designates the Shanglin

---

Park, west of the capital Chang'an. The park included Imperial pleasure palaces and government workshops, among them one which made lacquerware.

On this lacquer cup does the inscription mean that the cup was made for use in the palaces of the Shanglin Park? Or does it mean that it was made at the Shanglin workshops? In his dissertation Barbieri-Low seems to hesitate between the two hypotheses.<sup>9</sup> I do not think that this painted inscription gives the place where the cup was made. If Shanglin indicated the place of manufacture, the two characters would be incised with the date and before the names of the artisans, as it is the case for the bronzes made at the Shanglin workshops, on which 'Shanglin' is engraved at the head of the inscription.

Generally the inscription painted on lacquerware of the Western Han period gives the name (or the title) of the owner of the object, or it gives the palace department where the piece was used, for example the 大官 (Daguan, for 太官 Taiguan), 'the Food Department.' When the name of the artisan who has made the object is given, the name is printed in the shape of a seal. On a lacquer platter (*pan*) from Tomb N°1 at Sanyangdun 三羊墩, Yancheng, Jiangsu province, the two characters 大官 are painted in the center of the bottom, inside and outside. On the underside, near the rim, are painted, also in clerical script, the two characters 上林, Shanglin (Jiangsu 1964, pp. 393-402 and Fig. 7). The style used for writing the graphs 上林 is quite equivalent to the one of the Noyon uul cup. As Hong Shi notes (2006a, p. 335), it is probable that the Sanyangdun platter belonged to the Food Department of one of the Shanglin Palaces. I think the same is true of the cup from Barrow N° 6 at Noyon uul and that 'Shanglin' indicates the palace to which the cup belonged.

#### *Place of manufacture*

If so, in what workshop this cup was made? The incised inscription does not mention a place of manufacture. The text organization of the inscription is different from the one incised on the lacquers made at the Imperial Tribute Workshop (Gonggong 供工) and at the Imperial Workshop (Kaogong 考工) both in Chang'an. The inscription shows also a division of work much less important than in the government workshops of Shu and Guanghan in Sichuan. On the Noyon uul cup are mentioned only two

artisans, one, a certain Wang Tanjing, in charge of all the work except for the painted décor, the other one, Huo, the painter of the décor. The only official mentioned is the overseer in charge of the inspection.

The painted decoration of the cup shows the classical theme of opposed birds, diagonals and spirals, but using thin lines instead of the rather thick lines in relief used by the Sichuan workshops. A bird has been sketchily incised on the bronze mount as an echo of the birds painted on the cup. The style of the décor painted on the cup from Barrow N° 6 seems to follow that used at the two Chang'an workshops, the Kaogong and the Gonggong. It is similar, for instance, to the design of one of the eared cups from Tomb N° 62 at Mozuizi 磨嘴子, Wuwei county, Gansu province.<sup>10</sup> The incised inscription on the Mozuizi cup gives the date of manufacture, 8 BCE, and the place, the Kaogong Workshop. The inscription specifies also that the cup was 'fit for use by the emperor.'

In the present state of our knowledge I think we can imagine that private workshops imitated the lacquerware produced in the government factories and that some of their products were bought to be used in the imperial palaces side by side with objects from the official workshops. The cup from Noyon uul Barrow N° 6 could be such a private production.

### **3. Fragment of a Chinese lacquer toilet box from Barrow N° 24/12**

The fragment (ca. 4 x 4 cm) is one of several from a toilet box with a bronze mount around the rim [Figs. A-13, A-14].<sup>11</sup> The decoration of the fragment is composed of two quadrupeds proceeding to the left and above them of birds flying in the same direction. Gold foil inlays still adhere to some parts of the motifs. The technique, called *pingtuo* 平脱, consists in inlaying the motif with foils of gold or silver cut out following the design. The foils are pasted with lacquer on the object and then covered by several layers of lacquer; after drying, the object is polished until the gold or silver motif reappears. This refined and expensive kind of lacquerware associated gold and/or silver inlays with volutes delicately painted or incised on the background. It was a special product of private workshops of the Jiangsu-Anhui region<sup>12</sup> during the first century BCE, especially during the last part of that century. Lacquers decorated in that style, mainly toilet boxes, have been found in

---

many princely and upper-class tombs of the region and less frequently of other southern regions.<sup>13</sup> These *pingtuo* lacquer boxes are never inscribed with a date, the name of the workshop, the names of the artisans or of the managing staff. When they bear an inscription, it consists in a short mention, painted in red lacquer, giving the name of the owner of the object.

In a few tombs, such as the tomb of the wife of Liu Qing 劉慶, Noble of Quanling 泉陵侯 at Yaoziling 鸚子嶺, Yongzhou 永州 in Hunan province, one finds side-by-side lacquers of different provenances (Hunan 2001, pp. 45-62). The tomb dates from the last years of the Western Han and contains, among other grave goods, twelve lacquers. Six of them, all for the table, were made in government workshops, four in the Guanghan, one in the Gonggong and one in the Kaogong; among them, five were 'fit for use by the emperor'; these six pieces are dated between 16 BCE and 2 BCE.<sup>14</sup> Five pieces were either in very bad condition or without décor, or simply painted with clouds. The last lacquerware, a goblet, was decorated with *pingtuo* motifs in the same style as the box from Barrow N° 24/12. This cohabitation in the same tomb and in equal quantity of lacquerwares made for the palace in government workshops and some made in private workshops, probably in the region between Jiangsu and Hunan, is very interesting. It shows how the lacquer tableware of a noble family at the end of the Western Han was composed: some pieces had been received as gifts (either directly or through intermediaries) from the imperial palace, some pieces were of local provenance. The matching of a container and a cover of different dates for the goblet from the Gonggong workshop reveals how highly these lacquerwares were prized.

### **Conclusion: the problem of distribution**

The case of Yaoziling Tomb N° 2 leads us to ask two questions. First, why have so few imperial lacquers of this period been found in China? Second, how were the imperial lacquer pieces found on sites outside China brought there?

The quantity of lacquerware used at the imperial palace was enormous. The inscription incised on the underside of a lacquer platter found at Lelang mentions that this platter was received by the 'Food Department' (Daguan) of the Changle 常樂 Palace on the first year of the

Shianguo Era (9 CE) and that it was N° 1,454 in a set of 3000 lacquer platters.<sup>15</sup>

We know that the lacquer tableware used at the palace could also be used as gifts in certain circumstances. As Barbieri-Low reminds us (2001, p. 261), 'gift-giving was a firmly established function of the imperial establishment.' This being so, one might assume that a good many of these imperial lacquers would be found on the territory of Han China. However, such is not the case. I have made a quick count from the tables given by Hong Shi.<sup>16</sup> Fifty-three inscribed lacquers made for the palace in the Shu, Guanghan, Kaogong and Gonggong Workshops are so far extant for the period between 85 BCE and 71 CE. Of this total of 53 lacquers, 36 have been excavated from tombs in the Lelang commandery (Kor. Nangnang, in present day North Korea), one comes from Noyon uul, and only 16 were found in eight tombs in China proper. These figures are not exhaustive except for China proper (as of 2005). The number must be augmented for Noyon uul, Tsaram (Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens 2007) and other Xiongnu graves and is certainly too low for Lelang. As a matter of fact the number of pieces coming from Lelang would be still more numerous if Hong Shi had taken into account the pieces from all Japanese museums and private collections and from the recent excavations in North Korea.<sup>17</sup> Even with these limitations, the result is striking. The richest finds of Chinese imperial-use lacquers from government workshops does not come from China but from tombs in the Lelang commandery.

The fact that so few tombs in China proper contain lacquerware from the government workshops for the period 85 BCE - CE 71 is revealing. The occupants of some of these eight tombs are nobles — for example, the lady in Tomb N° 104 of Baonüdü (Wenwu 1991/10: 39-61) and the one in Tomb N° 2 of Yaoziling (Hunan 2001, pp. 45-62), both in the south — and they could have received these lacquers as relatives (or through relatives) of the imperial family. The other tombs' occupants have until now been considered to be minor provincial officials from outlying regions (for example, those in Tomb N°s 13, 15 and 17 at Qingzhen, in Guizhou province).<sup>18</sup> I have already suggested (Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens 2001, pp. 473-484) that the lacquerware from Qingzhen as well as the pieces from Lelang<sup>19</sup> were mainly given by the

---

Chinese court to local 'barbarian' chieftains and not to Han officials. If the Han court had given inscribed lacquerware 'fit for imperial use' to local Han officials, how then explain that fewer than five pieces have been found to date, when we know that hundreds or even thousands of tombs of officials have been excavated in China for the same period? Of course it is not impossible to find in the tomb of a Han official stationed in a faraway and not completely pacified region an imperial-use lacquer, but it does not mean that the piece was intended for him.

In the same way it is difficult to conceive that this category of lacquerware made in government workshops between 85 BCE and 71 CE was available on the market. If it were so, many more items would be found in Chinese tombs of the period.

The finds of lavish imperial objects in the Xiongnu barrows can be easily explained as part of the redistribution practice by the Han court of luxury production made for its use. These prestigious gifts were made as part of an alliance, in response to an act of allegiance or in exchange for token tribute. At the same time it does not mean that a lacquerware inscribed 2 BCE was brought back to Xiongnu territory during the *shanyu's* visit of 1 BCE, and it does not mean either that a lacquer vessel marked 'Shanglin' and dated 2 BCE was made especially for that visit, as François Louis suggests (2006-07, p. 51). Things, alas, are often more complex, and, incidentally, we have no proof that Barrow N° 6 at Noyon uul is the grave of Shanyu Wuzhuliuruoti.

What is certain, on the other hand, is that, in order to increase his grip on the steppe, the Xiongnu *shanyu* was politically obliged to distribute among his nobility the wealth he had obtained from the Chang'an court (Louis 2006-07, p. 51). Last but not least, it is also interesting to find in the Xiongnu graves inlaid lacquerware from private workshops situated in the Jiangsu-Anhui region and supplying the Chinese aristocracy.

As new archaeological work is done in China proper and outside China in the sphere of Han influence we will be better able to understand the way lacquerware from government and private workshops circulated, including imitations of high quality products, a field we have no means to explore at the moment.

---

## About the author

A scholar of early Chinese culture, **Prof. Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens** is Directeur d'études, École pratique des Hautes Études at the Sorbonne. Her books include *The Han Dynasty* (New York: Rizzoli, 1982); the chapter on Qin and Han in vol. 1 *La Cina*, 2 vols. (Turin: 1996), which she edited; *Giuseppe Castiglione 1688-1766: peintre et architecte à la cour de Chine* (Paris:Thalia, 2007). She has written on the Chinese lacquerware found at Begram in Afghanistan and on Han food vessels; she has contributed a chapter on 'Death and the Dead: Practices and Images in the Qin and Han' in John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski, eds, *Early Chinese Religion: Part One: Shang through Han (1250 BC–220 AD)* (Leiden: Brill, 2009) and in Michael Loewe and Michael Nylan, eds, *The Chinese First Empires: A Re-appraisal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). E-mail: <micheleps@noos.fr>.

## References

Anhui 2007

Anhui sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 安徽省文物考古研究所, Chaohu shi wenwu guanlisuo 巢湖市文物管理所. *Chaohu Han mu* 巢湖漢墓 [Han tombs in Chaohu]. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2007.

Barbieri-Low 2001

Anthony J. Barbieri-Low. 'The Organization of Imperial Workshops during the Han Dynasty.' Unpublished PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2001.

Barbieri-Low 2007

Anthony J. Barbieri-Low. *Artisans in Early Imperial China*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2007.

Hong 2005

Hong Shi 洪石. 'Zhanguo Qin Han shiqi qiqi de shengchan yu guanli 戰國秦漢時期漆器的生產与管理' [Production of lacquerware and its management in the Warring States, Qin and Han periods]. *Kaogu xuebao* 考古學報 2005/4: 381-410.

Hong 2006a

Hong Shi 洪石. 'Zhanguo Qin Han shiqi qiqi shang de wenzi neirong tanxi 戰國秦漢時期漆器上的文字內容探析' [Investigation in the meaning of the inscriptions on lacquers of the Warring States, Qin and Han periods]. pp. 329-339 in *Handai*

---

*kaogu yu Han wenhua guoji xueshu yantao hui lunwenji* 漢代考古与漢文化国际学术研讨会论文集 [Proceedings of the International Symposium on Han archaeology and Han culture]. Jinan: Qi Lu shushe, 2006.

Hong 2006b

Hong Shi 洪石, *Zhanguo Qin Han qiqi yanjiu* 战国秦汉漆器研究 [Research on the lacquerware of the Warring States, the Qin and Han periods]. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2006.

Hunan 2001

'Hunan Yongzhou shi Yaoziling erhao Xi Han mu 湖南永州市鹤子岭二号西漢墓' [Western Han Tomb N° 2 at Yaoziling in Yongzhou city, Hunan]. *Kaogu* 考古2001/4: 45-62.

Jiangsu 1964

'Jiangsu Yancheng Sanyangdun Han mu qingli baogao 江苏盐城三羊墩漢墓清理报告' [Excavations of Han tombs at Sanyangdun, Yancheng, Jiangsu province]. *Kaogu* 考古1964/8: 393-402.

Kayamoto and Machida 1974

Kayamoto Tojin 榎本杜人 and Machida Akira 町田章. 'Kandai kinenmei shikki shūsei 漢代紀年銘漆器聚成' [Collection of Han period lacquers with dated inscriptions]. In: *Rakurō Kanbo* 樂浪漢墓 [Han tombs in Lelang]. Nara: Rakurō Kanbo Kankōkai, 1974, pp. 96-122.

Louis 2006-07

François Louis. 'Han Lacquerware and the Wine Cups of Noin Ula.' *The Silk Road* 4/2 (2006-07): 48-53.

Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens 2001

Michèle Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens. 'Les laques chinois de Begram, un réexamen de leur identification et de leur datation.' *Topoi* 11 (2001) [2003]: 473-484.

Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens 2007

Michèle Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens. 'A Chinese Inscription from a Xiongnu Elite Barrow in the Tsaraam Cemetery.' *The Silk Road* 5/1 (2007) : 56-58.

Son 1980

Byonghon Son [Son Pyông-hôn]. *Ancient Tombs of Korea*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Harvard University, 1980.

Sun 2004

Sun Ji 孙机. 'Guanyu Handai qiqi de ji ge wenti 关于漢代漆器的几个问题' [Some problems concerning the lacquerware of Han period]. *Wenwu* 文物 2004/12: 48-56.

Takaku 1993

Takaku Kenji 高久健二. 'Rakurō funbo no hennen 樂浪墳墓の編年' [The chronology of the Lelang tombs]. *Kōkogaku zasshi* 考古學雜誌 78/4 (1993): 33-77.

Umehara 1943

Umehara Sueji 梅原末治. *Shina Kandai kinenmei shikki zusetu* 支那漢代記年銘漆器圖說 [Illustrated catalogue of Han period lacquers with dated inscriptions]. Kyōtō: Kuwana Bunseidō, 1943.

Umehara 1960

Umehara Sueji 梅原末治. *Mōko Noin-Ura hakken no ibutsu* 蒙古ノインウラ發見の遺物 [Artifacts found at the Noyon uul site in Mongolia]. Tokyo: Tōyō Bunko, 1960.

Wang 2007

Wang Peixin 王培新. *Lelang wenhua* 乐浪文化 [Lelang culture]. Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2007.

Wuwei 1972

'Wuwei Mozuizi san zuo Han mu fajue jianbao 武威磨咀子三座漢墓發掘簡報' [Preliminary report on the excavation of three Han tombs at Mozuizi, Wuwei]. *Wenwu* 文物 1972/12: 9-23.

Zhongguo 1996

*Zhongguo meishu fenlei quanji, Zhongguo qiqi quanji, 3: Han* 中国美术分类全集, 中国漆器全集, 3 漢 [Complete collection of Chinese art, complete collection of Chinese lacquerware, 3: Han period]. Fuzhou: Fujian meishu chubanshe, 1996.

Zhu and Qiu 1980

Zhu Dexi 朱德熙 and Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭. 'Mawangdui yihao Han mu yice kaoshi 馬王堆一號漢墓遺策考釋' [Investigations on the grave goods inventory in Han Tomb Number 1 at Mawangdui]. *Wenshi* 文史 (di shi ji 第十輯) 1980: 61-74.

## Notes

1. The cup, in the collection of the National Museum of Mongolian History, Ulaanbaatar, Inv. N° A-242, has been published several times. See Umehara 1943, N° 16, Pl. 13.2; Umehara 1960, pp. 28-34, Pl. 61; Kayamoto and Machida 1974, N° 21; Barbieri-Low 2001, N° 2.49, p. 422.

2. The graph on the inscription is 丹 with, on the left, the water radical, which is, according

---

to Hong Shi, equivalent to 丹.

3. Hong Shi thinks that the *dangong* is the artisan who coats the inside of the cup with red cinnabar lacquer. The red cinnabar was the most expensive color and, by the way, the most precious one. About the reading of the *dan* graph, see Hong 2005, pp. 386-87. Barbieri-Low (2001, pp. 306-312) reads 澗 *zhou*. Zhu Dexi and Qiu Xigui (1980, pp. 68-70) already read 丹 with the water radical on the left; for them this graph was equivalent to 彤 *tong* (red lacquer) and read *tong* during the Han. In any case, *dan* as well as *tong* refers to 'red lacquer.' In a recent article, Sun Ji (2004, pp. 52-53) reads also 丹 with the water radical on the left and reaches the same conclusion.

4. According to Hong Shi (2005, p. 387), *qinggong* is linked with the gilding of the bronze elements of the lacquerware, because when the inscriptions do not mention 黄耳, 黄钗 or 黄塗工, there is no mention of 清工. Therefore he thinks that *qinggong* is a finishing work which consists in eliminating and cleaning the surplus of gilding on the bronze mounts.

5. According to Hong Shi (2005, p. 388), 造工 *zaogong* means here the last operations on the object, that is polishing, engraving of the inscription and cleaning. Barbieri-Low (2001, p. 315), as well as other specialists, translates 造工 by 'master artisan.' What is clear is that the *zaogong* is done by the artisan at the head of the team and that, in other cases, *zaogong* refers simply to the master artisan.

6. For a study of this 'premodern assembly line' as he rightly calls it, see Barbieri-Low 2007, pp. 76-83.

7. The cup, in the collection of the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Inv. N° MR-2301, has been published in Umehara 1943, N° 15, Pl. 13.1; Umehara 1960, pp. 28-34, Fig. 15, Pls. 59-60; Kayamoto and Machida 1974, N° 20; Barbieri-Low 2001, N° 2.48, p. 421.

8. Barbieri-Low 2001, p. 421, writes 'Hu.'

9. On p. 125, n. 64, he adopts the first solution; on p. 145, n. 104, and p. 352 he

seems to privilege the second one.

10. Wuwei 1972, Figs. 9 and 29. Tomb N° 62 dates from the Wang Mang period.

11. The fragments from the box are in the State Hermitage Museum, Inv. N° KP-14150.

12. Maybe especially in the Sishui 泗水 and Guangling 廣陵 kingdoms.

13. See for Jiangsu province: *Kaogu* 1963/6: 287-90; *Wenwu* 1988/2: 19-43; *Wenwu* 2007/7: 39-60; for Anhui: *Kaogu* 1979/4: 320-29; *Wenwu* 1993/9: 1-31; for Hunan: *Kaogu* 2001/4: 45-62; *Wenwu* 2007/12: 21-41; for Guangxi: *Kaogu* 1972/5: 20-30. See also *Zhongguo* 1996.

14. The dated pieces include: a goblet, 16 BCE; its cover, 8 BCE; two eared cups, 10 BCE; another one, 9 BCE; one *zun*, 8 BCE; one platter, 2 BCE.

15. 常樂, 大官, 始建国元年正月受, 第千四百五十四, 至三千. See Umehara 1943, Pl. 35.

16. Hong 2005, pp. 404-08. For useful tables and a bibliography of Warring States and Han period lacquerware discovered in China, see Hong 2006b, pp. 226-71.

17. For the Korean excavations, see Takaku 1993, pp. 33-77; Wang, 2007.

18. See *Kaogu xuebao* 1959/1: 85-103. The three cups with legible inscriptions in these three tombs are dated 3 CE and 'fit for use by the emperor.'

19. After having excavated a large number of tombs, rich and poor, the Korean archaeologists have concluded that the majority of the deceased in the Lelang tombs were local people and not, as it had been thought since the earlier Japanese studies, Han colonists or officials. If they are right, it means that the Chinese luxury objects found in these tombs, such as the lacquerware from the government workshops, were not all of them in the possession of Han high officials, but that some of them at least could have been diplomatic presents given to local chieftains. On this point, see Son 1980.

---

# The Tomb of the Sogdian Master Shi: Insights into the Life of a *Sabao*

**Albert E. Dien**  
Stanford University

The most interesting evidence of the presence of Sogdians in China thus far is the tomb of Master Shi (Sogdian name Wirkak) which was found in 2003 in Xi'an, in an area where other such tombs have been excavated, in what may have been a cemetery for high-ranking Sogdians who lived in Chang'an during the Northern Zhou dynasty (557–581 CE) (Xi'an Shi 2005; see also Wang 2008). Besides being so important as a source of information concerning the Sogdians in China, the tomb also provides new information concerning the office of *sabao* 薩保 or merchant chief, the head of the Sogdian communities in China. I recently published (Dien 2003) an article which included an interpretation of scenes of the life of the deceased, Master Shi (494–579). In the same issue of that journal the French scholars Frantz Grenet and Pénélope Riboud also published their analysis of these scenes (Grenet and Riboud 2003). I wish in the following to point out why I disagree with their interpretation and to add some comments on the question of the *sabao*.

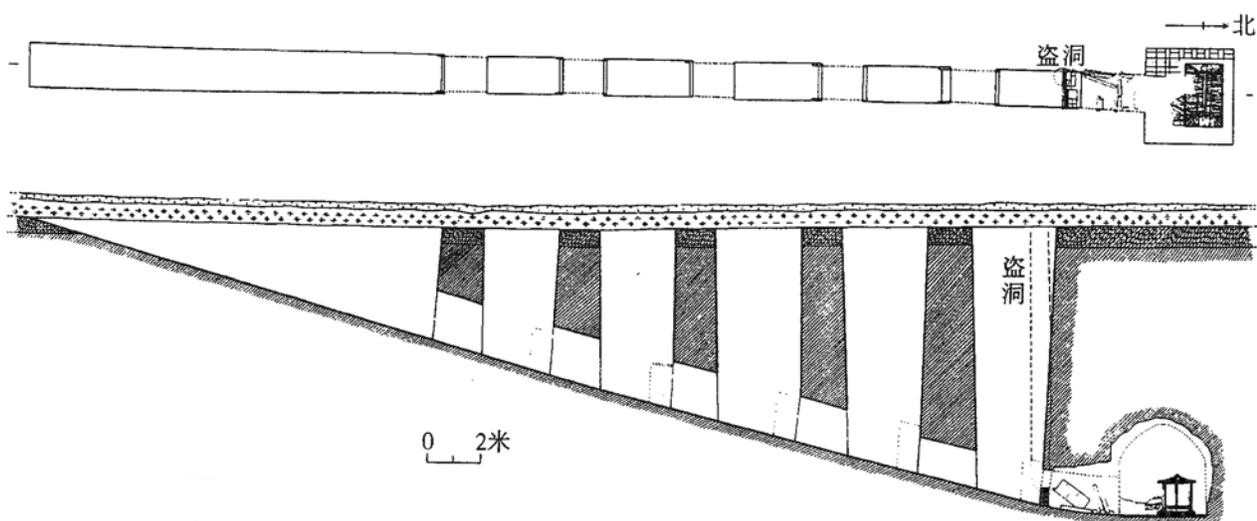
The tomb had been robbed in the past, and only a few items remained of whatever grave goods had been deposited in it. The robbers had disturbed the contents such that some bones were found scattered about, those of a

male and a female. There is also mention in the report of animal bones but nothing more was said on that topic.

The total length of the tomb was 47.26 m, and it was made up of a long ramped passageway, with five air shafts along its length, an entry way that had been blocked up with bricks and a stone door, that then led into the tomb chamber itself, 3.7 x 3.5 m [Fig. 1]. The walls of the passageway, entry and chamber had been covered with a thin layer of white plaster on which murals of some sort had been painted but nothing of this survived. The chamber contained a stone vault, the *shitang* 石堂 or 'stone hall' as it was called, 2.5 x 1.55 m, that was covered with reliefs to which paint and gold foil had been added [Fig. 2, facing page] (Rong 2005a; Yang 2005; Yang 2003).

Usually in China the epitaph, if there is one, is on a stone slab that stands alone, but in this case it was incised on the lintel above the door of this stone vault. Additionally, it was a bilingual one, in Chinese and in Sogdian, the only one in Sogdian thus far known [Fig. 3, facing page] (Sun 2005; Yoshida 2005). The Chinese text, less well-preserved than the Sogdian, says that the deceased was surnamed Shi 史, that he held the title of *sabao* of Liangzhou 涼州 of the Zhou dynasty, that is, of the Northern Zhou,

Fig. 1. Tomb of Master Shi.  
After: Wenwu 2005/3, p. 5, Fig. 3.



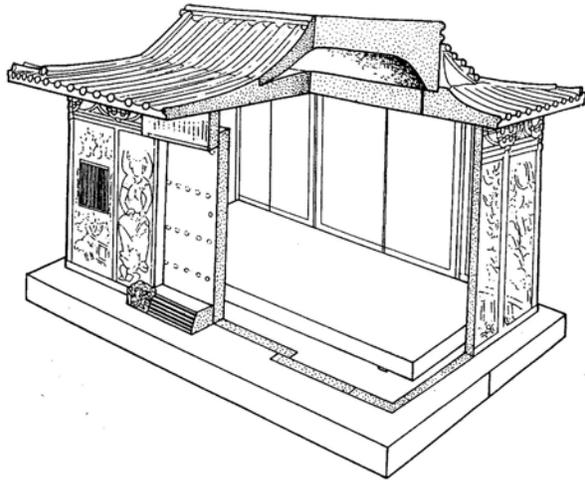


Fig. 2. Stone sarcophagus in Master Shi's tomb.  
After: Wenwu 2005/3, p. 20, Fig. 11.

that he was a man of the state of Shi (that is, Kesh, the modern Shahr-i Sabz in Uzbekistan), and that he had lived in the Western Regions but had moved to Chang'an. His grandfather, Ashipantuo 阿史盤陀, had been a sabao in his native land, his father's name was Anujia 阿奴伽, but no office is listed for him. Master Jun (whose Chinese name is not legible and so in

Chinese publications he goes by his surname with the honorific *jun* or 'master' by which he is termed in the epitaph) early in the Datong reign (535–551) was appointed as chief of the judicial department of the sabao bureau (*panshicao zhu* 判事曹主), then in the 5<sup>th</sup> year of the same reign (539) he was made sabao of Liangzhou. He died in 579 at the age of 85. His wife, née Kang (= Samarkand origin) died a month later. The tomb was built by their three sons, and the interment took place the next year. The Sogdian contains basically the same information.

There is much to be said about the religious aspects of the scenes on the vault, but I want to turn to life on earth: at least as depicted here, the topics include receptions and banquets at home often with music, scenes of hunting, processions, and caravans.

There is much variety in the reliefs found in the various Sogdian tombs of this period thus far found in China, such that one may

Fig. 3. Sogdian-Chinese bilingual epitaph. After: Nachrichten der Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens (Hamburg), 183-184 (2008), p. 127, Fig. 4.

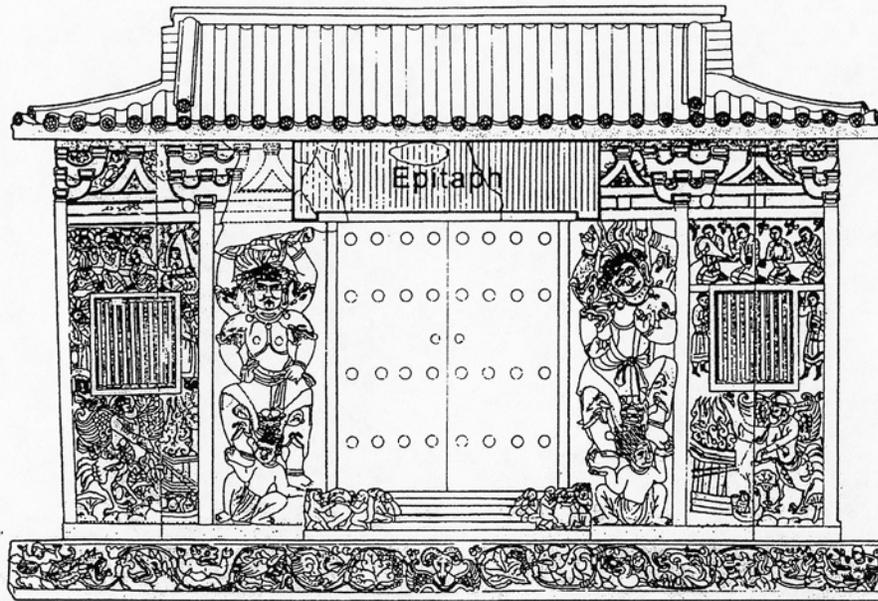
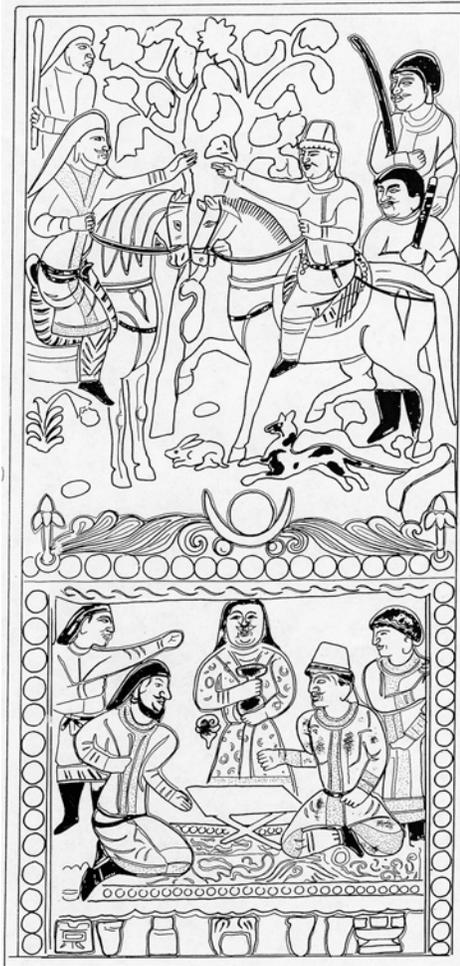


Fig. 4. Meeting of An Jia and a Turk. After: Xi'an Bei Zhou An Jia Mu (Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, 2003), Fig. 24d.

argue that these have an autobiographical element. That may explain why Turks, with whom the Sogdians had close relations in their commercial dealings, appear in some of these tombs. The tomb of An Jia 安伽, a sabao who also died in 579, was near to that of Master Shi. A central panel at the back of the coffin couch from An Jia's tomb features a meeting between An Jia and a Turkish leader, both on horseback, accompanied by aides, and we see them below in discussion [Fig. 4] (Shaanxisheng 2003; 2000). As An Jia was a sabao, or head of a Sogdian community composed primarily of merchants, these contacts may have been in line with his official duties, or they may relate to his personal dealings. If we knew more about his life, we might be able to construct a vita as depicted in the panels from his tomb.

The French scholars Frantz Grenet and Pénélope Riboud have attempted to do exactly that with the panels from the vault of Master Shi. In what they call a continuous narrative



they trace the life of Master Shi [Fig. 5].

- At 'a' they believe Master Shi as a youth and his father came by horse to call on a couple wearing crowns that indicate they are regal. Note the child that is being held on the lap. I will have more to say about that.

- In 'b' the ruler hunts as a caravan moves at the bottom of the panel. Of interest is the man using a telescope to look out for bandits that may be lurking about.

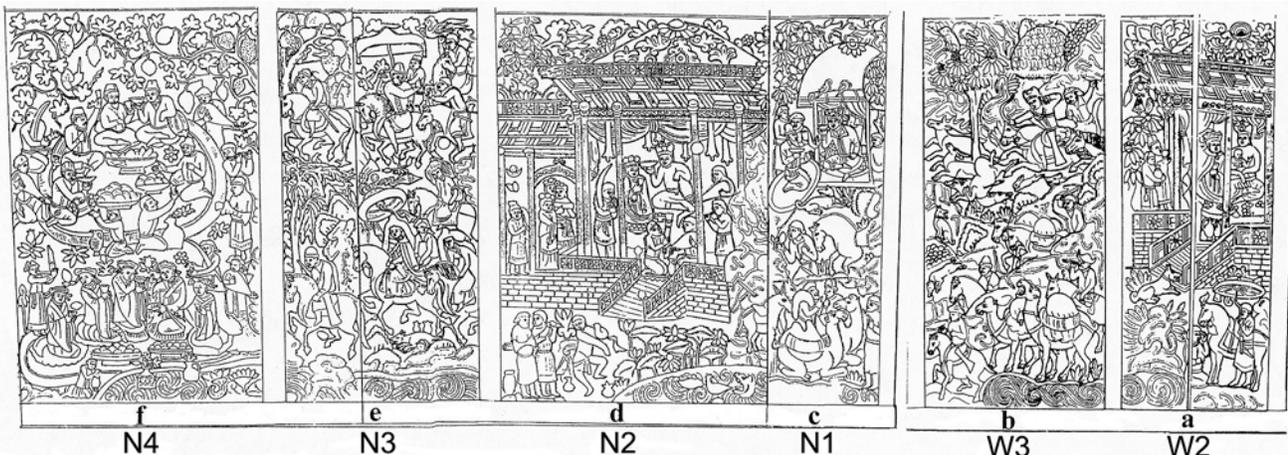
- In 'c' the caravan now rests by a river as the Sogdians, presumably still Master Shi and his father, visit yet another ruler sitting in his yurt.

- In 'd' the regal couple (the ruler's crown is the same as in the first scene, though the queen's is different) have a grand reception, with music and dance. Here we see no evidence of Master Shi, but there are three ladies in the

wings who seem to be bringing presents.

- In 'e' we no longer see the foliage typical of the previous scenes, as Master Shi, now grown, rides with his wife, both shielded by umbrellas. Master Shi exchanges a gesture of blessing with one of the riders. Grenet and Riboud ask if this is the marriage that is mentioned in the epitaph.

Fig. 5. Scenes from the stone sarcophagus. After: Grenet and Riboud 2003, p. 135, Fig. 1 (drawing by François Ory).



- 
- Finally, in 'f' one sees a party, with five men at the top, sitting on a carpet, and exchanging toasts. Musicians and servants with large dishes of food surround them. Below, five women also sit on a rug and drink.

In the interpretation of Grenet and Riboud, Master Shi followed the family tradition and travelled in several countries, trading in both the cities and the steppe, and came to marry and was appointed sabao in Guzang, or Liangzhou as in the Chinese epitaph. The party scene, they believe, is perhaps a celebration at Nowruz, the Iranian New Year, for Master Shi is now a high dignitary and needs not travel any more, he can just sit back and enjoy the good life. This is rather ingenious and may well be accurate, though there is no way to say for certain, and other narratives may be possible. For example, why is the central panel ('d') without evidence of Master Shi?

In their article, Grenet and Riboud (2003, pp. 136-140) make much of the crowns shown in these scenes, where they are identified as being worn by the rulers of the Hephthalite state whom Master Shi would have visited in his journeys. The Hephthalites had established a state in the Oxus watershed in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century, and had expanded their rule over Sogdia, Afghanistan, and on into northern India. They were driven from power by a joint attack of the Turks and Byzantium in 560-63 (Enoki 1959; Tremblay 2001, App. D, pp. 183-188; Litvinsky 1996).

One problem with this dependence on the crown for the interpretation is that there are no depictions of Hephthalite crowned figures. It does resemble that of Peroz, the Sasanian king who ruled 457 to 484 and came to be a tributary of the Hephthalites until he turned on them but lost his life as a result. The crown in Master Shi's tomb closely resembles that on a massive issue of coins by Peroz in 476-477 when he was paying tribute to the Hephthalites, as well as on some other coins of the post-Hephthalite period. Grenet and Riboud's hypothesis is that the style was set by the Hephthalites themselves, though there is no direct evidence. Frankly I think this is a stretch, but it is necessary if the scenes with crowned figures are to be seen as Master Shi's visits to the Hephthalite court. We should remember though that Peroz's coins which could have served as a model in Master Shi's tomb were available in large numbers

in China: in an article published in 1972, as many as 122 of his coins were reported found in China, demonstrating their relative plentitude (Xia 1972).

At this point it would be useful to pay particular attention to the information contained in the Chinese epitaph. The name of the reign title during which Master Shi received his appointment as sabao is missing in the epitaph and so there is a problem in establishing the exact date of that appointment. The appointment was made in the fifth year of a reign title, but the space where the name of the reign title should appear is blank. There are a number of places in the epitaph where it had been damaged and some of the text has been lost. In my aforementioned article I assumed that the graphs for the reign title had been similarly lost. Since reign titles in a narrative are not repeated, and that of *Datong* 大統 (535-556) had already been mentioned in reference to his first appointment to office, that would mean that the blank space would have contained a subsequent reign title that had five or more years in length, and the possible dates would be 565, 570 and 576, meaning Master Shi would have been 71, 76 or 82 years old. However, in July 2009, I had the opportunity of examining the epitaph first-hand, and it is clear that no characters had been written in that space. Whatever the reason that a space was left at that point, the date of the appointment was probably 539, when Master Shi was 45 years of age.

I agree with Grenet and Riboud that there is a biographical narrative here, and if that is the case, then the observation by Yoshida Yutaka, the Japanese scholar, is significant. He has noted that there are several panels in which Master Shi is accompanied by three people who could be his three sons (Yoshida 2005: p. 63).

In my reading of this as a biographical narrative, I follow the panels in the same clockwise manner. In the first panel, 'a' (W2), one finds a couple seated in a dwelling, attendants to the side and a groom and horse below. The couple are shown wearing crowns, but, unlike Grenet and Riboud, I see the crown as a sign of elevated status, not of royalty. When Master Shi and his wife are depicted on their way to Paradise elsewhere on the vault, they are shown wearing those crowns [Fig. 6, next page]. Grenet and Riboud did not mention



Fig. 6. Master Shi and his wife being transported to Paradise. After: Wenwu 2005/3, p. 20, Fig. 27.

this. As mentioned earlier, the style of the crown would have been known at the time from coins such as those of Peroz. The man holds an infant on his lap. I see the crowned couple as a reference to Master Shi's grandfather who had also served as a sabao, and the child then is the grandson, Master Shi. The epitaphs of the Sogdians in China are certain to record whether the deceased or any progenitor held the office of sabao, and the depiction of the sabao as wearing the crown would confirm the importance of the office and the high esteem in which the office was held by the Sogdian community.

The next panel, 'b' (W3), depicts a caravan with Master Shi and his three sons. Above is a scene of hunting both with archery and with

hawks. Master Shi, born in 494, was in his 40's before his first official appointment, and this scene may represent those decades of his life.

In the next scene, 'c' (N1), the caravan has stopped at a river bank. Master Shi holds up a finger as he instructs one of his sons. Above, a crowned man sits in a tent, accompanied by three men while a fourth, bearded, kneels as he and the crowned person in the tent exchange toasts. I take this to represent Master Shi's appointment in 535 as Chief of the Supervising Affairs Section of the Sabao Bureau. The person facing him is bearded and so is not to be confused with Master Shi, who is not shown with a beard elsewhere in these reliefs. Rather, as in the first scene, this may be Master Shi's father. The relatively lowly office would explain the modest size of his dwelling.

Next, in 'd' (N2), we see a crowned couple surrounded by attendants and musicians. The elegant dwelling and host of entertainers may then represent the Master Shi's promotion to be sabao at Liangzhou. The three sons are nowhere to be seen — there are three young women. Perhaps he had three daughters who are not listed in the texts, or these are the wives of his sons.

Then, 'e' (N3), we see the couple in transit, again with the three sons. The person in the rear is bidding farewell to Master Shi, a topos in the Chinese tradition, where esteemed officials were accompanied for a distance when they departed office. Finally, 'f' (N4) in Chang'an, where Master Shi can spend his retiring years, we see again the three sons, and an elderly guest. Below is his wife presiding over a meal with the three who may be daughters. Both Master Shi and his wife each are hosting a guest.

It may be that a discussion of *sabao*, both the term and the office, may be appropriate here, and help to decide whether my interpretation of the scenes depicted on the 'stone hall' is correct.

As to the word itself and its origin, the discovery of the word *s'rtp'w* in a Sogdian letter of ca. 314 has stimulated much discussion. Is *s'rtp'w* a Sogdian word, based upon a Sogdian etymology, or is it based on a Chinese transcription of a Sanskrit word? The Sogdian word, according to Yoshida Yutaka, is a combination *s'rt* from the Skt. *sārtha* and *p'w* from the root of ancient Iranian *\*pāwan-* 'to

protect, protector' (Yoshida 1988).<sup>1</sup> Yoshida, the first to notice the occurrence in the letter, maintains that the Chinese transcriptions *sabao* 薩保, 薩寶 and *safu* 薩甫 (ancient *sat pâu* and *piu*) are derived from the Sogdian *s'rtw*, as was Uighur *sartpau*, rather than more directly from Sanskrit *sārthavāha*, 'merchant or caravan leader,' because, he believes, the ancient initial *p-* of *p'w* could not render the *v-* of the Sanskrit *sārthavāha*. This ignores examples that I had cited in an earlier article, *I-ye-bo* (anc. \**pua*)-*lo* for Iśvara and *Pi* (anc. \**pjie*)-*ma-lo-cha* for Vimalākṣas, where *v > p* (Dien 1962, p. 343 n. 66). The point here is that the direction of the loan may well have been the reverse, that is, that the Sogdian form was derived from the Chinese which in turn came directly from the Sanskrit or a Prakrit form. Besides the argument from Occam's razor I will cite two points to be considered.

The first is that the various forms of *sabao* were recognized in the Sogdian community as being of Sanskrit origin. In the epitaphs of Sogdians who held this title, quite often (five of twelve) the term is preceded by the word *mahe* 摩訶, for Sanskrit *maha*, 'great' often (four of the five) with *da* 大 'great.' That is, such words for 'great' in Sogdian as *γrf*, *mzyx*, or *wz'rk* were not used (Dien 2006, p 205).

For the second point, there is the Indian connection. I do not want, at this time, to go into detail about the occurrence of *sārthavāha* in Buddhist terminology, as an epithet of the Buddha who leads the believers through the perils of this world to paradise. It would complicate the issue. But it is necessary to mention the possible role of Indian merchants on the Silk Road. The term *sārthavāha* was used as the title of the heads of groups of merchants in India.<sup>2</sup> One finds evidence of the India presence along the Silk Road, especially along the southern route in the Tarim Basin, in the use of Prakrit and the Kharosthī documents (Agrawala 1970, p. 277). At the same time, the term *sārthavāha* as caravan leader occurs in a Brāhmi inscription from Mathura in the Kushan period (Konow and Venkayya 1909-1910, p. 6; Puri 1945, p. 84; Puri 1940, p. 423),<sup>3</sup> and as *sārtwā* (*s'rtw'/srtw'*) in a Sasanian Pahlavi text (Tafazzoli 1974, p. 195). During the period of Kushan influence and even control, the first centuries of this era, the trade routes were well-established (Brough 1965, pp. 586-587), and one would expect that Indian merchants of the

time had established their own colonies, and the heads of these *fonducs* might well have carried the title of *sārthavāha* there as well as in India itself. Since the published Kharosthī material post-dates the period of Kushan eminence and deals almost entirely with internal affairs, there is no corroboration for this,<sup>4</sup> but a recent work by Doug Hitch, focusing on the distribution of languages in the Tarim Basin, also argues for this period of Indian influence (Hitch 2009, pp. 12-37). It would have been at this time that the Chinese became aware of the term *sārthavāha* and have devised their transcription of it. Possibly the earliest textual occurrence of the Chinese transcription, in this case, *sabo* 薩博, is in the account written by Faxian around 400 AD who mentions he had met *sabo* merchants in Ceylon (*Foguoji* 1924-1932/1962, 51.865a; Legge 1965, p. 104).<sup>5</sup> We cannot know if Faxian used the term in reference to Sogdians or if he knew it as a general term for Silk Road merchants.

The Sogdian presence was known early on these routes as being involved with Buddhism, but by the fourth century their commercial activities began. As Aleksandr Naymark has remarked, 'It looks as if, following the collapse of the Kushan Empire in the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, the Sogdians invaded the trade infrastructure originally created in Southern and Eastern Central Asia by Indian merchants and colonists' (Naymark 2001, pp. 68-69).

Of course, whether the term *sabao/sabo* was based directly on a Sanskrit/Prakrit source or on the Sogdian makes little difference to the role of the *sabao/sabo* in China. It was co-opted by the Chinese bureaucracy to be the title of the community leaders of the Sogdian communities. In reference to the title of *sabao/s'rtw* as head of Sogdian merchant communities, it is interesting to note a similar pattern among other groups. In my article on the derivation of the term, I mentioned the qadi and sheik among the Arab traders at the coast (Dien 1962, p. 340). At the other end of the Silk Road, at Palmyra in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, one finds the title in Aramaic, the word for caravan being *šyrt* (from the verb *šy* 'to accompany' and the caravan or community leader is *raš šyrt* (head of the caravan) or *reb šyrt* (caravan leader). Interestingly, the Greek term was *sunodiarchos*, from *synodia* 'caravan' and *arch(os)* 'chief' or 'head.' A consideration of the nature of the caravan trade makes clear the need for such

---

community leaders and the role they played in facilitating that trade, settling disputes, offering assistance in case of emergencies, handling money matters involved with differing currencies, and so forth. But in China, where group responsibility has always been a means of social control, the position was made an official one. Thus the sabao was also in charge of the government office that administrated the affairs of that community. Personally engaging in long-distance trade would probably interfere with the duties attached to that office.

To review, I see here a depiction of Master Shi's career with an emphasis on his appointment as sabao. For the first time we have specific dates of appointment, how they were chosen, the age at appointment, and a vivid depiction of the honor in which that position was held. What we need here are some labels to settle the matter, whether my interpretation or that of the French scholars is the better one, but up to now such labels are not forthcoming.

### About the Author

**Albert E. Dien** is Emeritus Professor, Asian Languages Department, Stanford University. His first articles on the subject of Sogdians and sabao were 'A Note on *hsien* "Zoroastrianism",' *Oriens* 10 (1957) 284-288; and "'Sa-pao" Re-examined' (1962), cited below. He may be reached at <aldien@stanford.edu>.

### References

Agrawala 1970  
Ratna Chandra Agrawala. 'Some Aspects of Indian Culture in the Kharosthī Documents from Chinese Turkestan.' In: *India's Contribution to World Thought and Culture*. Madras: Vivekananda Rock Memorial Committee, 1970, pp. 275-280

Brough 1965  
John Brough. 'Comments on Third Century Shanshan and the History of Buddhism.' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 28/3 (1965): 582-612.

Burrow 1940  
Thomas Burrow. *A Translation of the Kharosthi Documents from Chinese Turkestan*. London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1940.

Dien 1962  
Albert E. Dien. 'The "Sa-pao" Problem Re-examined.' *Journal of the American Oriental*

*Society* 82 (1962): 335-346.

Dien 2003

Albert E. Dien. 'Observations Concerning the Tomb of Master Shi.' *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 17 (2003): 105-115.

Dien 2006

Albert E. Dien. 'Further Thoughts on *Sārthavāha*.' In: Xinjiang Tulufan diqu wenwuju 新疆吐鲁番地区文物局. *Tulufanxue yanjiu dierjie Tulufanxue guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 土魯番學研究第二屆土魯番學國際學術研討會論文集. Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2006, pp. 203-210.

Enoki 1959

Kazuo Enoki. 'On the Nationality of the White Huns.' *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 18 (1959): 1-57.

*Foguoji* 1924-1932/1962

*Foguoji* 佛國記. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭, eds. *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經. Tokyo: Taisho shinshu daizokyo kanko kai, 1924-1932; repr. 1962.

Forte 1999

Antonio Forte. 'The Sabao 薩寶 Question.' In: *The Silk Roads Nara International Symposium 1997*, Record no. 4 (1999), pp. 80-100.

Grenet et al. 1998

Frantz Grenet, Nicholas Sims-Williams & Étienne de la Vaissière. 'The Sogdian Ancient Letter V.' *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 12 (1998 [2001]): 91-104.

Grenet and Riboud 2003

Frantz Grenet and Pénélope Riboud. 'A Reflection of the Hephtalite Empire: The Biographical Narrative in the Reliefs of the Tomb of the Sabao Wirkak (494-579).' *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 17 (2003): 133-143.

Hitch 2009

Doug Hitch. 'The Special Status of Turfan.' *Sino-Platonic Papers* 186 (Philadelphia: March, 2009).

Konow and Venkayya 1909-1910

Sten Konow and V. Venkayya, *Epigraphia Indica and Record of the Archaeological Survey of India* 10 (1909-10) (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, n.d.)

La Vaissière and Tombert 2005

Étienne de la Vaissière and Éric Trombert, eds. *Les Sogdiens en Chine*. Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2005.

- Legge 1965  
James Legge, tr. and annot. *A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms; being an account by the Chinese monk Fâ-hien of his travels in India and Ceylon (A.D. 399-414) in search of the Buddhist books of discipline*. New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1965; orig. ed. Oxford, 1886.
- Litvinsky 1996  
Boris A. Litvinsky. 'The Hephthalite Empire.' In: *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*. Vol. 3: *The crossroads of civilizations A.D. 250 to 750*, Ed. B. A. Litvinsky et al. Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1996, pp. 135-62.
- Naymark 2001  
Aleksandr Naymark. 'Sogdiana, Its Christians and Byzantium: A Study of Artistic and Cultural Connections in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages.' Unpublished PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 2001
- Puri 1940  
Baij Nath Puri. 'Economic Guilds in the Kushana Period.' *Indian Culture* 6/4 (1940), pp. 421-428.
- Puri 1945  
Baij Nath Puri. 'Some Aspects of Economic Life in the Kushana Period.' *Indian Culture* 12/1 (1945), pp. 82-87.
- Raschke 1978  
Manfred Raschke. 'New Studies in Roman Commerce with the East.' In: Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase, eds. *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung*, II Teil, Bd.9/2 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1978).
- Renou 1959  
Louis Renou. *The Civilization of Ancient India*. Tr. Philip Spratt. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Calcutta: Susil Gupta Private Ltd., 1959.
- Rong 2005a  
Rong Xinjiang 榮新江. 'Bei Zhou Shijun mu shiguo sojian zhi Sute shangdui' 北周史君墓石槨所見之粟特商隊 [Sogdian caravans seen in the stone vault in the tomb of the Northern Zhou Lord Shi]. *Wenwu* 2005/3: 47-56;
- Rong 2005b  
Rong Xinjiang. 'Sabao or Sabo: Sogdian Caravan Leaders in the Wall-Paintings in Buddhist Caves.' In: La Vaissière and Trombert 2005, pp. 207-30.
- Shaanxisheng 2000  
Shaanxisheng kaogu yanjiusuo. 'Xi'an beijiao Bei Zhou An Jia mu fajue jianbao' 西安北郊北周安伽墓發掘簡報 [Brief report on the excavation of the An Jia tomb of the Northern Zhou in the northern suburbs of Xi'an]. *Kaogu yu wenwu* 2000/6: 28-35.
- Shaanxisheng 2003  
Shaanxisheng kaogu yanjiusuo. *Xi'an Bei Zhou An Jia mu* 西安北周安伽墓 [The Northern Zhou tomb of An Jia at Xi'an]. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2003.
- Sun 2005  
Sun Fuxi 孫福喜. 'Investigations on the Chinese version of the Sino-Sogdian bilingual inscription of the tomb of Lord Shi.' In: La Vaissière and Trombert 2005, pp. 47-55.
- Tafazzoli 1974  
Ahmed Tafazzoli. 'A List of Trades and Crafts in the Sassanian Period.' *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* 7 (1974): 191-195.
- Tremblay 2001  
Xavier Tremblay. *Pour une histoire de la Sérinde. Le manichéisme parmi les peuples et religions d'Asie Centrale d'après les sources primaires*. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2001 (Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Iranistik, 28).
- Wang 2008  
Wang Weikun 王維坤. 'Lun Xi'an Bei Zhou Suteran mu he Jibinren mu di zangzhi he zangsu' 論西安北周粟特人墓和罽賓人墓的葬制和葬俗 [Burial arrangements and burial customs of the Sogdians and Kashmiris in the Northern Zhou at Xi'an]. *Kaogu* 2008/10: 935-45.
- Xia 1972  
Xia Nai 夏鼐. 'Zongshu Zhongguo chutu Bosi Sashanchao yinbi' 綜述中國出土波斯薩珊朝銀幣 [A summary of the Persian Sasanian silver coins unearthed in China]. *Kaogu xuebao* 1972/1: 91-110.
- Xi'anshi 2005  
Xi'anshi wenwu baohu kaogusuo 西安市文物保護考古所. 'Xi'an Bei Zhou Liangzhou sabao Shijun mu fajue jianbao' 西安北周涼州薩保史君墓發掘簡報 [Brief report on the excavation of the tomb of the sabao Master Shi of the Northern Zhou at Xi'an]. *Wenwu* 2005/3: 4-33.
- Yang 2003  
Yang Junkai 楊軍凱. 'Bei Zhou Shijun mu shiguo

---

dongbi foudiao tuxiang chutan' 北周史君墓石槨東壁浮雕圖像初談 [Preliminary remarks on the sculpted images on the eastern panels on the stone vault of the tomb of Master Shi of the Northern Zhou]. *Yishushi yanjiu* 2003/5: 189-98.

Yang 2005

Yang Junkai 楊軍凱. 'Carvings on the Stone Outer Coffin of Lord Shi of the Northern Zhou.' In: La Vaissière and Trombert 2005, pp. 21-45.

Yoshida 1988

Yoshida Yutaka. 'Sogdian go zatsuroku' ソグド語雜錄 (II) [Miscellaneous notes on the Sogdian language]. *Oriente* 31/2 (1988): 168-71.

Yoshida 2005

Yoshida Yutaka. 'The Sogdian version of the new Xi'an inscription.' In: La Vaissière and Trombert 2005, pp. 57-72.

### Notes

1. Yoshida cites as a parallel the ancient Persian *xšaçaṇpāvan* 'defender of the state.' Note the difference between *-pavan* and *-pau* (*p'w*).

2. Louis Renou, *La civilisation de l'Inde ancienne d'après les textes sanskrit* (Paris, 1981), pp.

143 and 153, as cited in Grenet et al. 1998, p. 98. In the edition available to me (Renou 1959), the pages are 131 and 141. 'Among the corporative bodies, that of the merchants is the most often mentioned, especially in the South, and the *sarthavaha* who headed such bodies was originally the leader of a caravan.'

3. The inscription records a religious donation by a woman who is termed a *sarttavâhini* (cited by Raschke 1978, p. 811 n. 790).

4. There is mention of the sale of a camel to a *suliga*, that is, a Sogdian (Burrow 1940, #661, p. 137).

5. The translation as Sabaeen is not correct. I do not understand the basis for the distinction between *sabo* and *sabao* made by Rong Xinjiang (2005, and elsewhere). The word *bo* also has the pronunciation *bao*. I believe them to be simply the use of different characters in the transcription of the same Sanskrit word. As for *safu* 薩甫, the suggestion by Antonio Forte (1999, p. 94) that *fu* is an abbreviation of *bo* 博 also provides a solution that erases that anomaly.

---

---

# Buddhism in Mongolia Today

## Introduction

**Zsuzsa Majer**  
**Krisztina Teleki**  
*Budapest*

**B**uddhism had been flourishing in Mongolia for three centuries before the destruction of monasteries, purges and mass executions in 1937-1938, when almost all the temples of the monastic capital city (present-day Ulaanbaatar) and the more than 1000 monastic sites in the countryside were destroyed. For decades, Gandan monastery in Ulaanbaatar, partly reopened in 1944, was the only operating assembly in the whole country. Though restrictions gradually became a bit looser after 1970, local people could practice Buddhism freely again only after the democratic changes in 1990, when Buddhist temples and institutes re-opened. The old survivor ex-lamas, who had avoided execution only by being young, not yet highly educated, and not bearing high ranks that time, were the key figures of the religious revival. Funds for reconstruction and for establishing new temples came mostly from alms given by local individuals, foreign organizations and Buddhist institutions. Rinpoches who embraced the Buddhist revival in Mongolia included Gurudeva, a highly esteemed monk of Inner-Mongolian origin, and Kushok Bakula (1917-2003), a Geshe Lharampa from Tibet's Drepung Losaling Monastery and the Indian ambassador to Mongolia beginning in 1989. Both provided important financial and spiritual support for the rebuilding.

Currently, 20 years after the democratic changes, it is estimated that about two hundred monasteries and temples exist in the country. Though several reopened temples, mainly in the countryside, are now closing, foundation of new ones continues, mostly in Ulaanbaatar, where monastic life is quite active. While by and large the old monks have managed to transmit the old traditions, today the most serious problem is how these practices can be preserved and deepen. In the countryside with the passing away of the old masters and the lack of training, motivation and the financial means of supporting new lamas, temples have been completely abandoned as the young lamas go to Ulaanbaatar or secularize and scatter in all directions. Thus, although there

were numerous temples founded after 1990, now it is rather rare that an actively working temple operates in a sub-province.

The two articles below deal with different issues of Mongolian Buddhism today. The first mainly analyses the general features and problems connected with the re-establishment of the Buddhist temples and the extent to which Mongolian Buddhism maintains earlier traditions after a hiatus of 50 years and follows or deviates from Tibetan Buddhist standards. The second article focuses on aspects of the situation in the countryside: the condition of monastic ruins, the memories of old monks, and the operation of the present-day temples.

Since 1999 the authors have been to Mongolia six times for extended periods researching the past and present of Mongolian Buddhism. Many of their observations in the articles are based on the experience obtained in Ulaanbaatar and in three provinces within the framework of the project called Documentation of Mongolian Monasteries organized by the Arts Council of Mongolia (ACM; see [www.mongoliantemples.net](http://www.mongoliantemples.net)) which aims to document the current situation of each former or current monastic site in the country.

## Acknowledgements

The articles are based on the papers the authors presented on 14 November 2008 at the conference 'Contemporary Mongolia - Transitions, Development and Social Transformations' held at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. We wish to express our thanks to Professor Julian Dierkes for organizing the conference. Scholarships from the Hungarian Scholarship Board, the Stein Arnold Exploration Fund of the British Academy, the Gate of the Dharma Buddhist Foundation, the Hungarian State Eötvös Fellowship, and the OTKA 62501 research support helped our research work between 1999-2009.

## About the authors

The authors received M.A. degrees in Mongolistics and Tibetology (2002, 2003) and defended their Ph.D.s in Mongolian Linguistics in 2009 at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary. Their respective e-mails are: <[zsumajer@yahoo.com](mailto:zsumajer@yahoo.com)>; <[krisztina\\_teleki@yahoo.com](mailto:krisztina_teleki@yahoo.com)>.

---

# Continuation or Disjuncture with the Past and the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition

Zsuzsa Majer

As it spread to different countries, Buddhism always had the ability to adapt to their cultures by integrating its teachings with local practices and beliefs and veneration of local deities. In Mongolia, local Mongolian conditions and customs dissolved into the Tibetan form of Buddhism. Even though it developed special characteristics, the basis of the religion remained the same. All the 'rules' of Tibetan Buddhism, contained in Vinaya (*Dulvaa / Vinai*, Tibetan 'dul-ba'), and in the volumes of Kanjur (*Ganjuur*, Tibetan *bka'-gyur*), considered to be the words of Buddha himself, are deemed valid for Mongolian Buddhism and to be followed by it invariably. The ceremonies, monastic rules and even the ceremonial language remain the same, just as they are for Western Buddhist monasteries and lamas.

Yet there are differences between the Tibetan tradition and that in Mongolia which have been interpreted as 'deficiencies' of the latter. No matter what historical occurrences or social conditions account for them, they cannot be considered as special features of the Mongolian form within the Tibetan tradition, but rather must be seen as deviations in what some call a 'degenerate' Mongolian Buddhism if measured by the standard of its original form in the Tibetan tradition. The extent of these 'degenerations' or deficiencies is greater now than it was in the Mongolian Buddhist past, a development which has, of course, roots in the recent history of Mongolia and in the way the revival was executed as well as in the modern social setting. In spite of the persecutions and tragic events of the 1950's Tibetan Buddhism managed to be preserved intact in exile. In contrast, Mongolian Buddhist traditions and lineages were completely broken for 50 years, with the few survivors forced into secular life (including getting married) for decades and religion restricted to secret meetings. When revival became possible, the only way to realize it was through the efforts of these mostly already married old lamas. Even had it been possible to rely on lamas coming from outside,

for example from Indian monasteries and institutions of the Tibetan tradition, this would not have been 'revival' but only a new wave of converting the Mongols to Buddhism. The temptations of modern life and the attractions of modern consumer society are the same for Tibetan Buddhist monks or Western ones and thus cannot be used as an excuse for the failure in Mongolia to observe traditional monastic discipline. What makes the situation more difficult in Mongolia though is the still almost complete lack of residential facilities, without which the lamas still do not live a monastic life. Moreover, there are still very few highly educated lamas available to carry on the tradition. There is as yet no high-level monastic education in Mongolia, and so far only a very few Mongolian lamas have been able to study in monastic schools of India and return to share their knowledge.

Among the challenges for Mongolian Buddhism are those concerning leadership of the faith. The 9<sup>th</sup> *Jevtsündamba khutagt*, Jambal namdol choiji jaltsan (1932-), a Tibetan lama living in Dharamsala, is considered to be the reincarnation of the first Jevtsündamba khutagt, and the leader of Mongolian Buddhists. However, he has visited Mongolia only once, in 1999, at which time there were serious issues concerning his visa. The Jevtsündamba khutagt, also called *Bogd gegeen*, Tibetan Buddhism's third highest incarnation after the Dalai and Panchen lamas, was the highest Buddhist dignitary in Mongolia up to 1924. The 9<sup>th</sup> incarnation was officially recognized in Mongolia in 1991, though Reting Rinpoche, at the time Regent of Tibet, originally recognized him in 1936. On the other hand, the abbot of Gandan Monastery, the main monastery located in Ulaanbaatar, is currently referred to as the head abbot of the whole of Mongolia, and of Mongolian monastic establishments. Historically, this 'duality' also existed. The Bogd was the religious leader of the country, and on the other hand, the old monastic capital had a head abbot (*khamba nomon khan*), the most important of the seven highest ranking lamas, all of whom were appointed by the Jevtsündamba khutagt himself. The khamba nomon khan was the highest religious office

holder in Ikh khüree (the capital), the most significant cleric apart from the Bogd. So having a head abbot besides the Jevtsündamba khutagt follows the old pattern. This is more necessary at present, where he has to serve as leader of all Mongolian Buddhists in the circumstance where the political situation with China prevents the present Bogd from living in Mongolia. However, as there is no organized system of monasticism in the classical sense in present-day Mongolia, the leadership of the Gandan abbot is partly nominal. Nonetheless, he is completely accepted and well respected in all the temples countrywide. In earlier times hundreds, if not thousands of *khutagts* ('saints') and *khuvilgaans* ('reincarnations') were worshipped in different areas and monasteries in Mongolia. Several of them, related to certain monasteries or lineages, have been searched for and some have been identified by now. But in most cases their recognition is controversial, or they are recognized by only a small group.

Our survey of the active monasteries and temples in the Ulaanbaatar area reveals that monastic life in Buddhist temples is quite vigorous in the capital (though in some aspects within peculiar circumstances). There are many active temples and assemblies of different sizes [Figs. 1, 2]. Three of the temples were opened in 2007, signaling that the revival and dissemination of religion is still in progress, in



them from their ruins and revive ceremonies in them, from the very beginning this could not be achieved in the capital, given the fact that there were scarcely any ruins that could be used. Almost all old temples and monasteries had been completely destroyed.<sup>1</sup> In the event only three of the some 36 current temples in Ulaanbaatar — Gandantegchenlin Monastery, Dambadarjaa Monastery and Züün khüree Dashchoilin khiid (which operates in two remaining wooden ger [yurt] temples) — are revived old temples on the same site, where part of the earlier buildings remained. In some other cases, the earlier temples or institutions have been revived, but on new sites. Several new temples have the same name as an old temple and even claim to be the revivals of the old ones, but there is no proven connection between them and the old ones. Some old temple buildings have been used for establishing new communities of lamas, such as Gandan's Badamyogo datsan, established in some of the remaining buildings in the old Western Geser Temple, and the Dar' Ekh khiid / Dulmalin khiid in the old Tara Temple. These and all the rest are completely new foundations, established by individuals after the democratic change, often with connections to the pre-1937–39 Ikh khüree or provincial monastic foundations through the traditions of their founding old lamas.

Since Mongolian Buddhism derives from Tibetan Buddhism, the Buddhist sects of the latter are found today and have been present historically in Mongolia. The most widespread of them after

*Fig. 1 (left). One of the middle-sized Ulaanbaatar monasteries. Unless otherwise noted, all photographs are copyright © 2009 Zsuzsa Majer and Krisztina Teleki.*

*Fig. 2 (below). A yurt (ger) temple in Ulaanbaatar.*

contrast to the situation in the countryside.

Most Ulaanbaatar temples are completely new foundations, i.e., established by individuals after the democratic change, and only a few are revived old temples on the same site or on new sites (in the countryside most temples are revived ones even if not on the original site but in the *sum* centers). Even though it had been the intention to revive old temples, rebuild



Fig. 3. A statue of Tsongkhapa. Collection of the Choijin Lama Museum, Ulaanbaatar. Photo copyright © 2008 Daniel C. Waugh.

the 17<sup>th</sup> century is the Gelukpa or reformed Yellow Sect, founded by Tsongkhapa (Zonkhow, 1357–1419) [Fig. 3]. Red Sects playing an important role in the early history of Buddhism in Mongolia included the Sakyapa, since the Sakya pandita and Phagwa lama established strong connections with Mongolian khans in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and the Kagyüpa (also from the 13<sup>th</sup> century). A subset of the latter, the Karmapa, was widespread until the Manchus came to power in 1644 and until the time of Öndör Gegeen (1625–1723) [Fig. 4]. There were also followers of the Nyingmapa sect. In Ikh khüree, Öndör Gegeen created separate *aimags* (lama residential districts with temples) for these sects, because they had been established in earlier times. These sects were represented in the capital to some extent even later during the time of the 8<sup>th</sup> Bogd, and in the countryside there were also important Red Sect centers. All big monastic towns were Gelukpa ones, but small Red Sect temples and places of the tantric *Zod<sup>2</sup>* practitioners were scattered throughout the country, albeit outnumbered by small Yellow Sect temples.

The majority (25), of the Ulaanbaatar monasteries / temples, belong to the Gelukpa or Yellow Sect (this includes one nunnery and two women's centers and a Mongolian reading temple). Eleven temples are Red Sect, mostly Nyingmapa temples, including one women's center. However, despite considerable investigation, this categorization is relative. For example: Badamyogo datsan of Gandan, Tögs bayasgalant khiid and Baldankhajidlin were all described by our informants as Gelukpa temples, although they also manifest some Nyingmapa (Red Sect) features and could be called mixed temples. In fact, as both Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhism embody



a mixture of the sutra and tantra traditions (*sudriin yos*, *tarniin yos*), tantric rituals are parts of the ceremonies in all Gelukpa temples, though some are especially characteristic in Nyingmapa ones. It would appear that all the Red Sect monasteries in Ulaanbaatar belong to the Nyingmapa sect, worshipping Padmasambhava or Guru Rinpoche. There is currently only one Kagyüpa temple in the capital, Garma garjid Ürjin perenlailin monastery, which operates in an office building.

While Red Sect temples are a significant proportion of all temples in the capital (almost one-third), in the countryside these are rather rare. Their strong presence in the capital, however, is not due to strong proselytizing activity on the part of Nyingmapa here. Rather, it simply happens that many Nyingmapa lamas also founded their own private temple alongside those Red Sect temples such as Namdoldechenlin khiid, Ürjin Shaddüvlin khiid, Dechinchoinkhorlin khiid or Puntsoglin khiid, which have a considerably longer history and from which these lamas often have come.

As it was throughout Buddhist history in the country, the ceremonial language in almost all Mongolian monasteries is Tibetan: Tibetan language texts are recited during the ceremonies, training is conducted by use and study of different Tibetan ceremonial and philosophical texts, and all religious terminology is based on Tibetan. This important feature of Mongolian Buddhism did not change even after fifty years of suppression and leaves it a local 'variant' of Tibetan Buddhism, even though there have been attempts from time to time in certain monasteries, especially in today's Inner Mongolia, to conduct the ceremonies in Mongolian.



Fig. 4. A statue of Öndör Gegeen Zanabazar. Collection of the Choijin Lama Museum, Ulaanbaatar. Photo copyright © 2005 Daniel C. Waugh.

---

Because of this, devotees do not understand the ceremonies, and the language barrier makes it less easy for them to improve their knowledge and understanding of their religion. Traditionally, it is not the duty of Buddhist lamas to educate people in religion, especially in the tantric Buddhism, as tantric practices should be kept secret. However, in the past few years basic Buddhist texts, ranging from basic prayers to complete philosophical treatises, have been translated into modern Mongolian and published so that interested people could have a better understanding of Buddhist teachings. Until now there is only one Mongolian reading temple (Buyan arvijikhui khiid) in Ulaanbaatar (there existed another one, but that closed down in 2006). Here the daily ceremony, special ceremonies and the readings requested by the believers are all recited in modern Mongolian (with the texts themselves written in Classical Mongolian). This community feels that this enables the people attending the ceremonies to understand and follow the meaning of the readings. Still, only some part of the chanting is understandable to the believers: the texts are chanted in a very elaborate literary language far from the vernacular, and also the devotees should know religious vocabulary in order to comprehend the texts in full. Moreover, special tantric texts which can be heard only by those who have received initiations on them are chanted in such a way as to prevent listeners from understanding them and thus prevent any harmful consequences.

There are several temples for Buddhist women (though as yet none in the countryside), but the only authentic nunnery in the country is Dar' Ekh khiid / Dulmalin khiid in Ulaanbaatar where female lamas have taken the *getselmaa* (female novice) vows, wear traditional nuns' robes and are permanently resident. The nunnery is supported by the Foundation of the Preservation of Mahayana Tradition (FPMT), Söpa Rinpoche's center, and has connections with a nunnery in Nepal, which makes it possible for some of their nuns to study there. This is a great improvement compared to earlier times, since historically no nunneries existed in the country. Most of the women in the other temples can only be termed lay practitioners. They have lay vows and therefore do not wear traditional religious robes, though some wear a type of uniform that differentiates them from laywomen. However, they are effectively laywomen and, as such, can and do marry,

have children, have long hair and wear makeup. (See below regarding the different vows in the present system of Mongolian Buddhism.)

There are also numerous religious associations or centers mostly led by an individual lama (Mongolian or Tibetan) who gives Buddhist talks, readings and ceremonies with the aim of providing basic religious education for lay people. These are not temples, but similar to western Dharma centers, having no real assemblies and no daily chantings but only occasional or weekly gatherings. They carry out rather different though very useful tasks. Monastic schools of Gandan and Betüv monasteries also organize lessons for devotees led by their residing Tibetan masters or one of their Mongolian teachers.

For lay people participating in the rituals, these centers usually distribute in Cyrillic transcriptions the Tibetan texts of the prayers being chanted, so that people can join in the chanting even though they cannot read Tibetan.<sup>3</sup> This method is used likewise in western Buddhist assemblies. Most devotees participating regularly learn these by heart together with the appropriate melodies so that some of them can chant like a lama even texts of longer ceremonies, not just basic prayers. Complementing this are detailed explanations of the meaning during the lessons or in some publications providing translations and added explanations. However, absolute faith still characterizes most Mongolian Buddhists. Only a very few have ever heard of any of the basic Buddhist teachings, even though masses of devotees were and are still active in accumulating virtues by making prostrations, offerings and giving donations.

### **Main problem areas surrounding the re-establishment of the Buddhist temples**

#### *Registration of temples / permission for operation, and criteria for founding a temple*

After the democratic change, the authorities decided that all religious institutions and organizations (Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Muslim etc.) were to be registered with the Ministry of Law and Interior (*Khuul' züi, dotood khergiin yaam*). Although it was not dated, the first permit on the register was given to Gandan, the main monastery, and the third was issued to Züün khüree Dashchoilin Monastery in 1994 (the second permit is for another religious community). However, to date only about half

of all active Buddhist temples in Ulaanbaatar have registered (not to mention many active countryside temples, very few of which have been registered). Somewhat strangely, some of the biggest and best known temples have yet to register. Even among the registered temples, the registration date is some years later than the temples' actual foundation date. It is important to mention here that the main monastery, also known currently as the Center of Mongolian Buddhists, Gandan does not have any authority to grant permission for the foundation / operation of Buddhist temples in Mongolia, i.e., it does not register temples or give permissions for temples to operate. Despite this, Gandan does attempt to keep a list of active Mongolian Buddhist temples, which is overseen by the *da lam*, Byambajav (in office since autumn 2005). Strangely this list is the same as that for registered temples found in the Justice Ministry. Given that frequently the date of registry of some temples is more recent than the date of their foundation, it is likely that sooner or later other now active but still unregistered temples will register, this seeming to be only a question of time and money.

There seems to be no intention here to restore the very strong and well refined organization that once characterized the Mongolian Buddhist establishment. All in all, buddhist temples today are totally independent of each other (though branch temples do exist). At present, any man (lama) can establish a monastery and be its head, if he is able to find other lamas who accept him as head, and if he can find a place for the regular chantings, even if this is a ger. A new temple's survival effectively depends on its having donors who provide financial support. In the countryside, the situation is similar, but since there survival is much more difficult, most new temples are founded only in aimag centers.

#### *The number of lamas in the communities*

Historically, the types of monasteries differed, depending on the way they had been established, the date of founding, size, and location. They ranged from monastic complexes founded by Manchu decree and monastic cities with a thousand monks to monasteries with about 50–500 monks, temples with some dozens of monks, and assemblies with only a few monks or having only temporary ceremonies. However, this was in a time when almost one-third of



*Fig. 5. Migjid Janraisig Temple, Gandan Monastery, Ulaanbaatar. Photo copyright © 2005 Daniel C. Waugh.*

the male population belonged to one of the approximately 1000 monasteries and temples, i.e., some 110,000 lamas in all.

Today there is great variation in the number of lamas in the different temples in the Ulaanbaatar area. Gandan Monastery [Figs. 5, 6], the modern center of Mongolian Buddhism, has more than 500 lamas. In Züün khüree Dashchoilin Monastery there are 150 lamas. All the other larger temples — still a small proportion of the total of 36 temples — have about 10–20 lamas, which seems to be the maximum for countryside temples as well. However, in many newer and smaller temples there are only one or two adult lamas and one or two very young novices. Note that these data count all members of the assembly, not only ordained lamas and especially not only the fully ordained ones (see the problem of the vows below). From the Buddhist point of view,

*Fig. 6. One of numerous temples on the way leading to the Gandan Monastery, Ulaanbaatar.*



---

four *gelen* or fully-ordained lamas would be necessary to form a *Sangha* (community). It is shocking to learn that this criterion is fulfilled only in 3 of the 36 Ulaanbaatar monasteries. Thus, strictly speaking, all the others could not be called 'temples.'

The number of lamas and the lack of fully-ordained ones affects all aspects of the monastic life of these temples, as this has to be adapted to the small number of lamas. It is estimated that today there are about 2000 (at most 3000) lamas in Mongolia, of which about 1000 are affiliated with one of the Ulaanbaatar temples. (This is in the context of a population in Mongolia of 2.5–2.7 million, of which about one million resides in the capital and many of the rest in the aimag centers.) Of the 1000 lamas in Ulaanbaatar about 660 belong to the two largest monasteries, just as in the countryside there is a concentration of lamas in the temples in the aimag centers.

#### *Finance, survival, mobility and relocation*

Before the purges, economic units of the temples were called *jas* (public accumulation / reserves), with all monasteries having several such units, while smaller temples had only one. Monasteries were maintained by locals in the area (the subordinates) and by taxes. Also devotees' donations (herds, flocks, brick tea, meat, dairy products, flour, fat, silk scarves [*khadag*], silk, juniper, grains and fruits, and, later, money) contributed to the income of these units. Everyday affairs, such as performing ceremonies, making offerings to the deities, preparation of lamas' meals and bigger expenses like repairing the temples were all paid from the assets of these units. Today's situation cannot be compared to that of the old monastic system: now temples rely entirely on donations from individuals or in fortunate cases on donations coming from different foreign or local organizations.

As almost all the temples were either totally destroyed or, in Ulaanbaatar, had only partial remains; most new temples have been set up in newly-constructed buildings. The common pattern for new communities even today and even in the capital is to set up their 'temple' activities in a ger and erect the temple building later according to their means (i.e. financial support from their supporters). Indeed, when the survey was being carried out, six Ulaanbaatar temples were operating in gers, namely

Jüd datsan, Gandangejeelin khiid, Agrim datsan, Choin dechin dashesünbrellin, Dechin choilin tavshi sünbrellin datsan, and Mongol Unshlagat Buyan arvijikhui khiid. The community carrying out the daily chantings and readings thus creates a temple not in a permanent building, even in modern times. This practice, common both in Ulaanbaatar and countrywide, has its roots in the nomadic Mongolian tradition — mobile ger temples also existed in the old times, though only complementing the very detailed system of monastic cities, larger and smaller monasteries — and as well is a consequence of financial factors. In the last few years many small temples have been erected in the capital. At the time of the survey, most of the suburbs (ger districts) of the capital have their own temples, usually housed in a ger or a small wooden building. In many of these newly established private temples there are only one or two adult lamas who serve devotees in reading texts on their request as a means of earning some income and who endeavor to teach young novices, i.e., to educate the next generation.

Another common occurrence of late is that several monasteries located in the countryside are setting up small branch temples in Ulaanbaatar with a number of their lamas residing there. For example, there are a temple with lamas from Zavkhan aimag, a temple with lamas from Sükhbaatar aimag and two temples founded by lamas of Arkhangai aimag.

New communities of lamas and temples still appear all the time, mainly in the capital. On the other hand, long-term survival, which is even more difficult than establishment of a temple, is not easy for many of the small communities that have tried to establish themselves. Problems of all kinds arise, among them financial ones. Closing down and relocation is a common occurrence: indeed one of the temples whose head was interviewed in September 2005 during the survey in Ulaanbaatar disbanded a month later, and its lamas scattered. One assembly (Baldankhajilin) was temporarily not working due to its relocating during the time of the survey, while two others were able to continue their ceremonies while relocating (Mongol Unshlagat Buyan arvijikhui khiid and Agrim datsan). In summer 2007 some new temples were found that had opened since the time of the earlier survey (further changes were found in a survey in in the summer of 2009). Thus it is clear that

---

new temples are still being established. Today, except for Gandan, the center of Mongolian Buddhism, there is no state funding; so temples operate as private 'enterprises' wherever they depend on donations of devotees visiting (and requesting recitations) on a daily basis or on great ceremonial days, and on donations from companies and various organizations.

*The problem of purity of vows or the 'different interpretation of vows' in Mongolia*

Lamas can take different levels of religious vows. All new lamas or female lamas on entering a temple or monastery (usually young boys at any age from 3–6 and upwards) take the basic *genen* lay vows for males or *genenmaa* for females, which are five precepts that any Buddhist believer can take. These five precepts can be 'strengthened' for young lamas by taking the *barmaravjin / barmaravjün*, that is, the pre-novice, renunciate or 'intermediate' vows, at which time the novice is given a new, monastic name. This includes the same five precepts and in addition a few outer signs prescribed for monastic life such as wearing monastic robes and shaving one's head [Fig. 7]. In Mongolia, however, the term *genen* is often used for members of assemblies with *barmaravjin* vows. After this and an interval of some years, the lama can take the next step by becoming a *getsel* and a female lama a *getselmaa*, which involves keeping ten precepts. A lama becomes

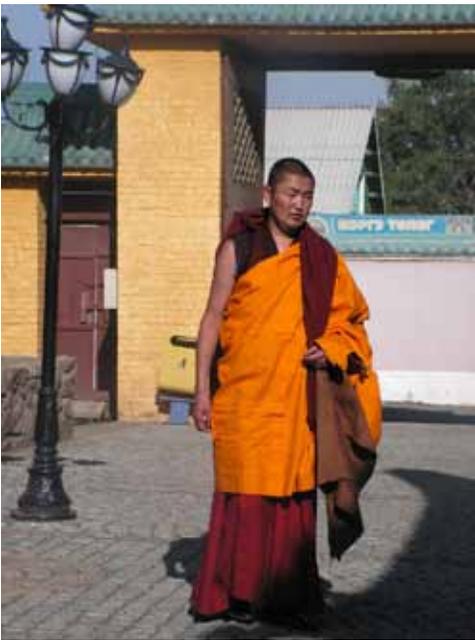


Fig. 7. A monk in full monastic robes.

fully ordained when he becomes a *gelen*, whereby he agrees to live by 253 precepts. The equivalent of this *gelen* level of vows for women is the *gelenmaa* vow of the fully ordained female lama with 364 precepts, but the lineage of *gelenmaa* has never existed in Mongolia nor in Tibet (although some claim it existed in Tibet before the lineage was lost). Thus currently there is no full official women's ordination in the Tibetan Buddhist lineages; so consequently there are no *gelenmaa* in Mongolia today.

Historically, there was a large number of lamas in Mongolia who had taken monastic vows, spent some time in one of the monasteries, but then lived with their families, herded animals, etc., while remaining lamas. The majority belonged to and lived in and around the monasteries, where celibacy was strictly upheld. However, there were married lamas who always had their assemblies outside, though in many cases right beside the big monastic complexes. In most cases, these married lamas belonged to different Red Sect assemblies (the rules of which, though, are exactly the same as those of the Vinaya). It was also possible that a married lama living in the countryside with his family gathered regularly or on great festival days in the monastery he belonged to originally. It was not rare for Mongolian lamas of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to have a family. In this way families developed where father, son and by now, after the revival, grandchildren became lamas, and where being a lama is said to be a tradition in the family. Such families (as well as married lamas) can be met now even among the highest ranked lamas of the main monastery.

The present situation in the monasteries was also influenced by the political history of Mongolia after the purges and by the manner of revival. The handful of lamas of Gandan after 1944 were carefully chosen by the authorities and not based on their knowledge: lamas who had been lamas before the purges were not accepted. During the 1970's the number of lamas increased gradually, but most of the new ones accepted to Gandan were middle-aged men already married, and still not the old ex-lamas. Married men were offered by the authorities the right to become lamas. Later, the main drivers of the revival were the old lamas, who were lamas before the purges, with the majority of them by now married, mainly under compulsion. It must be admitted that revival would not have been possible at all without

them, nor would it be possible to solve or to prevent this problem to say to the new young novices that while their teachers are married they cannot do the same. The only way rules of monastic celibacy could have been enforced or might be in the future would be through serious education in the Vinaya rules.

Today the failure to observe the purity of vows is heavily and rightly criticized by lamas of the Tibetan and Western Buddhist traditions. Young Mongolian lamas and even many of their masters are not able to follow the traditional monastic lifestyle in the present society and after such a long break in religious practice. Thus today, maintaining the lama community and upholding purity are the focus of the greatest concern.

In Mongolian the term *lam* (T. *bla-ma*), 'lama' is used for all members of the monastic assembly be they *gelen*, *getsel* (even for married lamas who do not keep the Vinaya rules purely) and *genen* or *barmaravjin*. The same applies to the word *emegtei lam* ('female lama'), or to the more honorific *ane* (T. *a-ne*) for female lamas (members of nunneries / women assemblies), though *genenmaas* are often called *khandmaas* (T. *mkha'-gro-ma*, *ḍākinī* / *yoginī* or female sky-goer, used for female practitioners). It must also be emphasized that in Mongolia for many being a *barmaravjin* is not the first step on the way to becoming ordained (which usually can be done at the age of 7–8) and later fully ordained (traditionally around age 20 or

above), but a position they will remain in all their monastic life while being still considered full members of the assembly [Fig. 8].

The present situation in Ulaanbaatar's monasteries is that *gelen* are found in the required number (at least four) only in the monastic schools of Gandan, in Betüv and in Züün khüree Dashchoilin monasteries, all of which have close connections with Tibetan monastic schools in India where many of their lamas are studying. It is also the case that discipline is stricter in the above monastic schools and Betüv partly due to this and partly due to the resident Tibetan teachers. Of the countryside temples only a few are in so fortunate a position that their lamas have the same possibilities to study in India (these maintain stricter discipline, too, and have *gelen* lamas in adequate number). In other Ulaanbaatar and countryside temples there may be often only one or two *gelen* or none, and most typically in many of the smaller there are neither *gelen* nor *getsel*. The latter tend to have only *genen* or *barmaravjin* lamas. This seems to be the case especially in the Nyingmapa (Red Sect) temples in Mongolia.

The women's assemblies in Ulaanbaatar include only one residential nunnery, all of whose female lamas take the *getselmaa* vow requiring the observance of celibacy, a vow which is strictly observed. In addition, there are three women's centers, where there are only a few female lamas observing the *getselmaa* vow (one is at the Tögs bayasgalant Center). Most of their members observe only the *genenmaa* ('laywomen') or *barmaravjun* vows and thus effectively live a lay life and can marry.

In the current situation, unlike their female counterparts, Mongolian *getsel* lamas do not necessarily observe the vow of celibacy as it is prescribed in the Vinaya and followed in Tibetan Buddhism. That vow is kept here only by the *gelens*. Despite the monastic precepts, many Mongolian *getsel* lamas have a wife or a girlfriend. The *getsel* vow, excluding as it does



Fig. 8. Masters and novices, Dundgov' aimag, Mandalgov' city.

---

the possibility of marriage, is still adhered to in Tibetan monasteries, but it is currently kept in Mongolia only in a very few strict monasteries (those mentioned above). In all other temples the getsel lamas 'decide' for themselves. Married getsel 'lamas' are so common that it is often said marriage does not constitute breaking the vows. However, Tibetan and other Buddhist lamas do not accept the Mongols' assertion of a different interpretation of the monastic rules, saying this is a serious and continuous breach of the rules laid down in the Vinaya by Buddha himself. They say the Mongolian lamas not keeping celibacy are simply not following the Vinaya purely and, therefore, they should not be called lamas, be considered full members of the assembly, or wear the lama robes. There is also a prevalent misconception today in Mongolia that Red Sect traditions have different regulations. According to this interpretation, these allow for behavior not permitted in the Gelukpa Sect, and, therefore, it is especially in these Red Sect temples that almost no lamas live a celibate life.

There is a strong interest in monastic life today. For many young men, true devotion motivates the decision to join a monastery or temple, but for others the chief consideration may be that in the biggest temples lamas receive a modest income, not to mention food that is provided in all temples in addition to the donations from the devotees. In this way, being a lama or female lama is tantamount to a job in the eyes of many, not to mention that it also means social recognition. On the other hand, some who may really have a true desire to become lamas lack proper education in the Vinaya and thus have no real understanding of what it means to be a lama even when they are already ordained. Considering this, it is not surprising that young lamas, having changed their lama robes for lay clothing after finishing 'work' in the monastery in the afternoon, are involved in exactly the same activities as other Mongolian teenagers or adolescents.

Indeed the vast proportion of lamas in Mongolia do not reside in the monasteries, but live with their families and therefore share in the problems of everyday life with all its temptations. Without proper monastic facilities, lamas are not given the chance to dwell apart from the distractions of everyday living. In Ulaanbaatar, even in Gandan only a small number of lamas reside in the monastery, but

this is not possible in other monasteries and temples. The only fully residential monastery is Betöv. In 2006 the residence building for its lamas was opened at the behest of Bakula Rinpoche, who encouraged a return to the original discipline in his teachings and visits throughout the country and also emphasized that a proper residential environment enhances purity among lamas. We have also found only two monasteries in the countryside to be residential. All the other temples, most having only one temple building and very few lamas and lacking financial resources, have no lamas' residences. Their lamas live in their own accommodations in different districts throughout the city of Ulaanbaatar (or in the area of their temples in the countryside).

In these circumstances, there is a movement to ensure that more lamas have appropriate vows including full ordination, and also observe the purity of those vows. Upon his frequent visits to Mongolia the Dalai Lama administers ordinations, as do various visiting Tibetan rinpoches. They all are encouraging Mongolian lamas in this matter both in words and by their personal examples. On his last visit in summer 2006 the Dalai Lama administered full ordination to about 100 Mongolian lamas, a remarkable number considering the Mongolian conditions, and an indication that there is some hope for a future restoration of proper observance of Buddhist precepts.

#### *'Quality' of religious education and training*

In earlier times Mongolian monasteries produced outstanding scholars who contributed significantly to the different branches of Buddhist knowledge with their Tibetan language works. There were high education standards throughout the several hundred monastic complexes and their specialized monastic schools (*datsan*) where lamas were able to acquire high degrees. However, all highly educated lamas with deep understanding of Buddhism and its philosophy were executed in the purges, and also all Mongolian lineages were broken. The training of the new generation of lamas had to be restarted from the basics again with higher Buddhist education becoming possible only later with help from India or Tibetan Buddhist institutions.

Today, as was the case in the original system, apart from being educated in ritual practice by taking part in the daily chanting, novice lamas

receive further training from their tutor lamas. First, they study the Tibetan alphabet and learn short and long eulogies and prayers by heart together with their proper style of recitation. Then they master longer ceremonial texts and the practice of their performance. There is as well some instruction in the deeper meaning of the texts and in Buddhist philosophy. Today only larger monasteries may have resident Tibetan masters or properly trained Mongolian lama teachers who have completed their studies in Tibetan institutions. Notwithstanding their limited resources, all the temples try to provide basic religious education.

Additional levels of traditional education — on subjects such as philosophy, traditional Buddhist medicine and astrology and tantra — which once had been found in monastic colleges of all bigger monasteries countrywide, are today offered only in the monastic colleges in the greater

*Fig. 9. Monks and novices in front of Idgaachoinzinlin Datsan, Gandan Monastery. Photo copyright © 2005 Daniel C. Waugh.*



Gandan complex [Fig. 9]. These are the datsans Dashchoimbel, Gūngaachoinlin, Idgaachoinzinlin, Dechingalav, Jūd(iin), Mamba and Badamyogo. In some of them, however, this instruction is still incomplete and far from being authentic. Only three of the schools (Dashchoimbel, Gūngaachoinlin, Idgaachoinzinlin) focus on the old curriculum of philosophical studies; only one of these, Dashchoimbel, offers all 14 monastic classes (zindaa) of the earlier curriculum.

The 14 classes are grouped into elementary, intermediate and higher classes, each of which, following tradition, requires 1–5 years of study. In Dashchoimbel Monastic College, the highest philosophical exams, such as *gavjiin damjaa* (meaning 'ten hardships'), were re-commenced in 1990, allowing students now to attain the highest philosophical qualification.

Larger monasteries such as Gandan, Zūūn khūree Dashchoilin and Betūv have their own schools, colleges or classes that operate in a modernized form reflecting new necessities and requirements of the changing times. Since 1990 Gandan Monastery has had an officially recognized secondary school, where for lamas aged 12–16 the curriculum includes both Buddhist subjects and regular academic ones in line with the national curriculum. In Zūūn khūree Dashchoilin, apart from religious training, school-aged renunciates and novices receive instruction in regular school subjects. This makes it possible for the schools to be certified by the Ministry of Education.

On the higher level, the monastic colleges also provide a complete educational opportunity to young lamas without compromising on their monastic studies. The oldest and most famous of the higher institutions of Buddhist learning is Zanabazar Buddhist University of Gandan, started originally in 1970 in the limited form authorities approved at that time. The university combines the modern education system with traditional Buddhist teaching methods. Four years' study in one of the two departments leads to a Bachelor's Degree. The Department of Internal Sciences includes majors in

Buddhist philosophy and chanting, and the Department of Common Knowledge includes Tibetan, Sanskrit and English language majors, traditional medicine, and astrology majors. While the students are mainly lamas, laymen have been admitted since 2001. Furthermore, starting in September 2002, the university opened a class for the Buddhist female lamas in the Tögs Bayasgalant women's center; its first class has now graduated. Another

---

of the institutions of higher learning is the Züün Khüree Monastic College of Dashchoilin Monastery, founded in 1998, where 'modern' subjects taught in the four year course include English, management, computer skills, History of Mongolian Buddhism, and Mongolian History. Traditional Buddhist subjects include recitation, Buddhist philosophy, *Lamrim* (The Gradual Path, the main work of Tsongkhapa), Tibetan grammar and translation, and traditional Tibetan medicine. In Betüv Monastery the religious school was started in 1991 by Bakula Rinpoche himself, well before the founding of the monastery (the monastery was opened in 1999). In addition to the study of Buddhist texts, Mongolian and Tibetan languages, lamas are taught modern school subjects such as science, mathematics, social studies or English.

In addition to the provision for education made by the large monasteries, from the beginning of the revival many lamas from these communities, mainly from the monastic schools of Gandan, have been sent to study all aspects of Buddhism to a very high level in the Tibetan monastic colleges and institutions in India. This is important not only for studying the Tibetan language and a variety of texts, but for receiving the proper written guidance and training in ritual practice and also for having a chance to experience the hardships of real monastic life. There are exchange programs with a number of monastic universities in India — notably, Drepung (South India, Mundgod, Karnataka state), Sera (South India, Bylakuppe, Mysore district, Karnataka state), Ganden (Mundgod) and Namdroling (Bylakuppe) — which have enrolled some hundreds of Mongolian lamas over a period of years. A few lamas have also been educated in Kumbum (Gumbum) and Labrang (Lavran) in China. Such foreign study is limited though by the fact that lamas usually can be sent for no more than one year, which is inadequate in a system originally containing about 20 years of study. This is far from enough to ensure that when they return to Mongolia they can effectively enhance the knowledge of a younger generation of Mongolian lamas and female lamas, nor is such a short term of study sufficient to improve ethics and morals among young lamas. Those completing as much as ten years of study and returning to teach are still rare.

Another way in which the revival of Buddhist traditions has been supported is by visits of

Tibetan teachers and esteemed lamas, such as Rinpoches, who are invited to the largest monasteries to offer teachings and initiations mostly to the lamahood but also to a wider audience. For the most part though, it is the lamas of the larger Ulaanbaatar temples (where there are also resident Tibetan teachers) who can take advantage of these opportunities for higher Buddhist education. A very few are fortunate enough to be sponsored by one of the foreign projects supporting the Buddhist revival and education of lamas.

Such efforts notwithstanding then, the average knowledge of Mongolian lamas is still rather poor. Even basic Buddhist education of a high standard is still lacking in everyday life at most of the smaller temples. Many lamas still recite the Tibetan texts without understanding their meaning, and few indeed speak and write Tibetan on a high level, some being even unable to write down words in Tibetan. Also, one can meet lamas in their 20s who can hardly read and write in their mother tongue, given that in their primary school years at the start of the revival they were made lamas before they had even begun to attend state schools. They learned from a Tibetan master, in some cases living with him and helping him with the household chores. Thus they learned Cyrillic letters only later and did not have the opportunity to master written Mongolian. Even today this problem continues, except for those who can attend the schools of the larger Ulaanbaatar monasteries that offer modern education in addition to religious subjects.

*Fig. 10. Participants in the Khailen ceremony, now performed only at some of the larger monasteries.*



---

## Summary

The Buddhist revival has been successful in Mongolia. There are ceremonies being held in many monasteries and temples, even if the more complex rituals could be revived only in a few places [Fig. 10, previous page; Fig. 11], and many specialized rituals once performed in particular temples have been discontinued for



*Fig. 11. One of the larger ceremonies involving special musical instruments.*

lack of facilities, financing and, most importantly, well-trained and determined lamas. This last problem, together with the need to maintain the purity of the vows, is the greatest challenge for Mongolian Buddhism today. Those who care

about its future can only hope that the current deficit in well-trained younger monks who can assume the places of the older generation as it passes away will be short-lived and that once again there will be sufficiently large body of well-educated monks dedicated to observing the purity of their vows and passing these time-honored traditions on to the next generation of monastic leaders.

## Notes

1. No monasteries or temples survived completely intact. There are partial remains of 8 temples/monasteries in varying states of repair and used for different purposes now, but no remains from any of the other temples/monasteries. See the results of our survey: Zsuzsa Majer and Krisztina Teleki, *Monasteries and Temples of Bogdiin Khüree, Ikh Khüree or Urga, the Old Capital City of Mongolia in the First Part of the Twentieth Century*, Ulaanbaatar 2006 (on-line at: [www.mongoliantemples.net](http://www.mongoliantemples.net)).

2. *Zod* or *Chö*, 'cutting through' — a system of practices for the purpose of cutting through the four Maras (demonic forces or influences that create obstacles for enlightenment) and ego-clinging.

3. Modern Mongolian is written in the Cyrillic alphabet, which officially replaced the Uighur script in 1941.

---

---

# Building on Ruins, Memories and Persistence: Revival and Survival of Buddhism in the Mongolian Countryside

Krisztina Teleki

During the three-month survey organized by the Arts Council of Mongolia in summer 2007, our team documented 190 monastic sites in Övörkhangai, Dundgov' and Töv provinces,<sup>1</sup> and recorded 74 interviews, 35 of them with old monks or old ex-monks.<sup>2</sup> Searching for ruins and informants in the countryside is not easy, as in Mongolia there are large, scarcely inhabited provinces, and moving to distant pastures due to droughts or harsh winter is frequent. Thus, local people today are sometimes not descendants of the original local families who lived in the area in the 1930s. During the fieldwork a threefold problem was experienced which is relevant for the whole country: the remnants of the old monastic sites are exposed to pillage; there is no guarantee that the fading memories of the old monks will be preserved; and once the old masters have passed away, almost half of the monasteries they had revived have ceased operation, due to the lack of effective recruitment of new monks.

## Ruins

The administrative divisions of Mongolia at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were totally different from that of today's Mongolia. The old *aimag* ('province') divisions were divided into smaller units (*khoshuu*, 'banner, battalion, administrative unit'), the center of which was the monastic city (*khüree*) mostly occupied by nobles (*khan, beil, beis, gün*, etc.). While today a monastery (*khiid*) means mostly only one temple building, in the old times various types of monastic sites existed: monastic cities with numerous buildings and about 800-2000 monks, and a lay population living in quarters outside the monastic area; monasteries (*khiid*) with some temple buildings housing 50-500 monks; temples (*süm* or *dugan*) with some dozens of monks; and assemblies (*khural* or *jas*) operating mainly in gers (yurts) with a couple of monks, or guarded by only one monk. Moreover, small assemblies were formed next to the relay stations (*örtöö*) on the commercial routes, established about 30 km from each other. Connections between monasteries



Fig. 1. Remains of Ilden beil's monastic city, Övörkhangai aimag, Ölziit sum. Unless otherwise indicated, all photographs are copyright © 2009 Krisztina Teleki and Zsuzsa Majer.

situated near each other were close: monks visited each other's monastery, went for special ceremonies or studied there for a period. In every *khoshuu*, there was a central monastery which was the biggest of the area.

While buildings of some large monasteries partly survived the destruction, were renovated and are currently used as temples (e.g. Erdene zuu, Amarbayasgalant, Gandan, Baruun khüree), today there is not much evidence of the vivid religious life of the past [Fig. 1]. What was not completely destroyed in the 1930s disappeared during the 70 years that have elapsed, as the remnants are exposed not only to the weather but also to 'resourceful passers-by.' The few buildings which remain but were not revived are in an extremely bad state of repair. All of these buildings deserve protection and renovation, which could only be achieved with local, national, monastic, and probably foreign funding.

Except for assemblies which once operated in gers there are visible remains on each monastic site: foundations, scattered stones and bricks [Fig. 2, facing page]. The current condition of the remains depends considerably on the construction material.<sup>3</sup> Obviously more remained of the stone buildings (usually not



Fig. 2. Bragri lama's monastery in Dundgov' aimag, Saikhan-Ovoo sum.

Sometimes they 'move into' the remains, and use a still standing monastic dwelling or walls as winter quarters or as a shelter after making the required repairs or changes. When a family spends a season nearby, they may use the ruins, if only foundations remained, as waste disposal places. Even in such situations, it seems that people do not know or do not care that they use and damage old monastic sites, which is officially prohibited. The main reasons for this misuse of historic sites are poverty and lack of information.

more than the foundations, but these are easy to discern) and of the brick buildings (some walls or wall remnants still standing) than of the wooden structures.<sup>4</sup> Except for some cases when the metal lock and nails that did not burn in the fire remained, nothing is left of these; even the exact sites where they stood within a complex is impossible to determine.

The usefulness of the materials also determines the present condition of the remains. During the socialist period, most of them were used for different purposes such as buildings, party offices or warehouses of agricultural cooperatives. Sometimes the so-called *brigad* (workshops inside the agricultural cooperative, in 1960-1990) and *bag* ('village') centers were put up on old monastery sites with the purpose of utilizing the buildings. From sites situated near inhabited areas, the materials were taken away later to erect other buildings such as clubs, hospitals, and museums. In socialist times this happened by an order from the Communist Party; since then families living nearby remove and use the building materials (mainly bricks) to construct shelters for their livestock.

Moreover, traces of unauthorized digging can be observed at several sites. They are abandoned and thus exposed to treasure hunters. Treasure hunting is not influenced by the location of a site: it can be either near or distant from inhabited centers. Although the most valuable gold and silver artifacts were collected, destroyed or stolen during the purges, it seems that there are still enough antique articles worth finding [Fig. 3]. It is said that monks hid artifacts in

Fig. 3. Remains from a stupa, Dundgov' aimag, Ölzii sum.



---

boxes under temples' floors prior to the purges; also it can be supposed that when the temple walls were pulled down, precious objects were buried by the ruins. Those who dig 'innocently' primarily for bricks that can be reused also take away (and keep or sell) all the ritual objects they happen to find. Less innocent are searches carried out with metal detectors or systematic excavations involving the digging of dozens of holes and leaving spades on site to be used next time.<sup>5</sup> Of the 150 old sites visited, not more than 3–4 had signs indicating that they are old monastic sites under state or aimag protection. Only in a few cases had monuments or stupas been erected as memorials drawing attention to the historical heritage.

At almost every site there are fragments of various, mainly metal, articles for personal use, such as vessels and bows, scissors, horseshoes, etc. Furthermore, on some sites there remain generally damaged or broken fragments of Buddhist sculptures, terracotta figures, ornamental friezes, roof tiles and bricks, offering cups and other objects of worship, together with leaves of Tibetan language holy scripts and pages of foxed newspapers from the 1930s [Fig. 4]. Sometimes fragments found by



*Fig. 4. Fragments of a sculpted relief, Dundgov' aimag, Gurvan-Saikhan sum.*

local people were arranged as memorials, while others, brought to the surface by rain or erosion or thrown away by treasure hunters, still cover the ground. These findings should be collected and given to local museums, monasteries, or the authorities.

All in all, the phenomenon of illegal digging is supposed to have increased after the democratic change, or shortly before it, when the consequences became less serious. It is a growing concern of today's Mongolia that old books, artifacts and antique ritual objects are sold in art and souvenir shops at every corner in Ulaanbaatar. It is possible to sell what is found without any risk, mainly to foreigners who do not ask (or are not informed) about the objects' origins. It seems that unearthing and selling precious objects to gain some capital and stealing bricks to build shelters for livestock are presently more vital for the personal survival of Mongols than fear of any punishment or the anger of Buddhist wrathful deities. Thus, effective protection can hardly be achieved, given the fact that most of the sites are situated afar, making it impossible to monitor them. Also, it is clear that any protection could be realized only through the close co-operation of the local governments. A competent archaeological team should excavate several of the sites in order to avert their being pillaged by organized gangs.

### **Memories**

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the revival, one has to be aware of the monastic life of the past. Aleksei M. Pozdneev and Charles R. Bawden provide an overview of Buddhism in Mongolia at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the number and religious activities of monasteries and small assemblies as they developed further under the reign of the Bogd khaan (1911-1921).<sup>6</sup> There are almost no written sources about the majority of monasteries, monastic life, the morality of monks and ceremonies that were once observed. The collection of the National Central Archives in Ulaanbaatar includes sources about the operation and finance of the most important rural monasteries, and some old photos are kept in the Film Archives. Therefore, reminiscences by old monks or ex-monks have great significance as a unique source concerning the arrangement of temple buildings and the active life of a given monastery. Apart from the clerics, a very few elderly local people can give basic information (the younger generations can at best point out

---

some of the ruins). Local authorities in the sub-province centers can explain the approximate location of the old sites, but usually they do not know all these sites in their own area. In some sub-provinces (*sum*), a book was published for some anniversaries which might contain scattered data on monasteries. If the sub-province has an active monastery (which is rare) its monks can also provide information. However, in monasteries which no longer have any old monks, the young monks usually know about these sites only if they had some personal experience of them (e.g., they were shown them by their master).

A considerable number of old (ex-)monks of all provinces have moved to the capital and aimag centers following their families; so a lot fewer of them live still in the countryside. Finding old (ex-)monks in the capital city who do not belong to any monasteries is very difficult, although advertisement could probably help. We estimate that about 250 old monks, born in the 1910s–1920s, are still alive.<sup>7</sup> Some of them are in very bad health, and many are hard of hearing or seeing, but all of them have clear minds and remember the past. Generally, these monks started to learn Tibetan prayers at 5–7 years of age, then became monks in the community of a monastery. Sometimes they joined another one for further studies. The monks were forcibly de-frocked in the 1930s (mainly in 1937) and fulfilled military service for 5–10 years. After disarmament they usually became shepherds and married. However, almost all of them participated in the revival ceremony of their former monastery or for a new temple in the *sum* center.

These valuable informants have provided a wide range of data for our project: the name of the monastery and its monastic schools, temples, buildings and stupas; the exact location of the monastic site in accordance with the old and new administrative system; the geographic name of the area, mountains, sacred stone or wood heaps (*ovoo*), and springs that were worshipped; the main protectors of the monastery; the approximate number of monks; famous monks, saints and incarnations

if there were any; ranks in the monastery, names of some of the ranked monks, and names of tantric practitioners (*zoch*) living nearby; building material of the temples and other buildings; the handbook of the particular philosophical monastic school; the main ceremonies and events in the monastery; and the closing of the monastery, names of high-ranking monks who were arrested, and names of old monks still alive. They also mentioned whether lay people or the poor had lived nearby, and whether there were Chinese merchants, their stores, and Chinese workers in the area. They were able to help draft a map of the old monastery site. Since the events of the purges were a sensitive topic, monks were not asked about executions in detail, but some old monks shared their experiences unasked.

The interviews confirmed that as in other areas of Mongolia, the Gelukpa Sect was dominant in the region of our survey. Only a couple of Sakyapa, Nyingmapa, and Kagyüpa Sect temples existed in the rural areas. There were very few Muslim, Catholic, and Chinese temples or temples with services in Mongolian in the countryside, and it seems that nunneries were non-existent, even though women practitioners belonged to *zod* tantric assemblies. Ceremonies were based on Tibetan texts. The most important annual festivals were the *Tsam* religious dance [Fig. 5], the

*Fig. 5. Tsam ceremony in Ikh khüree, painting by Dulamjav Damdinsüren, 1966. Collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Ulaanbaatar. Photo copyright © 2004 Daniel C. Waugh.*





Fig. 6. The circumambulation of the sculpture of Maitreya at Ikh khüree, painting by Dulamjav Damdinsüren, 1964. Collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Ulaanbaatar. Photo copyright © 2004 Daniel C. Waugh.

circumambulation of the sculpture of the future Buddha Maitreya [Fig. 6] and the volumes of the Kanjur, the summer retreat lasting for 45 days, the commemoration days of Buddha, and the New Year Festival. The lay population did not reside in the monastic area, and monks kept their vows strictly. Believers often visited the monasteries for pilgrimage and worship, or visiting their sons, brothers or other relatives who belonged there, and the monasteries were sustained by their donations — brick tea, dairy products, livestock, silk, juniper, flour, wheat, etc. Monasteries had livestock herds on remote pastures. According to the informants, monks occasionally came for some days from Tibet or mainly from Ikh khüree, the monastic capital city, to give initiations and teachings to the monks of the countryside. Tibetan monks lived only in very few monasteries as separate individuals, not in a group. Itinerant monks wandered over extensive areas for pilgrimage collecting alms. *Zoch* tantric masters also wandered in the countryside to meditate and engage in their practices. At certain times, they would also stop at monastic complexes and hold their ceremonies there or nearby, or study with the local *zoch*.

This heyday of Mongolian monasticism ended in the 1930s. The decline began with political and economic sanctions introduced during 1924–1937 and ended with the total confiscation of all monastic property and destruction of the monasteries. The informants claimed that the majority of the monasteries were destroyed in 1937–1938, but some

mentioned this happening as late as 1945. During the soviet period secret ceremonies were held by some groups of ex-monks. From 1990 they started to gather again in private gers or rooms of state buildings in a very active and enthusiastic way. Old Tibetan books, sacred sculptures and images, and ceremonial accessories that they had hidden saw the light of day. With the support of devotees who provided catering and alms, the old monks started to hold ceremonies again for the benefit of all sentient beings and to educate a new generation of young new monks. This monastic education happened in the same way as in the old times, i.e., after the proper formalities the novices began to learn the Tibetan alphabet and basic prayers, then they were introduced to the meaning of the texts and learned how to recite special melodies and ceremonies.

Funds for reconstruction of a temple building were obtained locally mainly from individuals, from the local party officials or other authorities in the previous system, and in some cases from Gandan, the Mongolian state, or foreign foundations. Old monks either reconstructed a

Fig. 7. A model of the main temple at the Amarbayasgalant Monastery. Collection of the National Museum of Mongolian History, Ulaanbaatar. Photo copyright © 2004 Daniel C. Waugh.



Fig. 8. Temple at the Erdene Zuu Monastery. Photo copyright © 2005 Daniel C. Waugh.

temple in their own ruined monastery or joined with all the old monks from different nearby monasteries to establish a single new temple in the provincial or sub-provincial center. Aware that their days were numbered, they moved quickly to take advantage of the strengths such combined efforts afforded. Thanks to such efforts, the traditions of a few famous monasteries and monastic cities that once had housed hundreds and thousand of monks (e.g. Amarbayasgalant, Erdene zuu, Daichin vangiin khüree, Sain noyon khanii khüree) became active again along with some small assemblies of no particular renown [Fig. 7, facing page; Fig. 8]. In the case of some old sites which had had the larger populations it was not rare that 40–50 old monks participated in the re-openings, whilst in isolated places sometimes only one or two monks tried to revive the faded belief. The old monks became the high-ranking monks of the new assemblies, fulfilling such duties as abbot, lord of religion, master, disciplinary master, chanting master, and offering preparer. Their disciples became more or less familiar with Buddhist views and practices not only at the ceremonies but during their services, as they lived together with one of the old monks running his kitchen and helping him in other ways in return for receiving his knowledge. This system had worked perfectly in former times, too.

The ceremonial system of the revived temples has been following the old traditions. Where it was known, the old protective deity became the protector of the new assembly, and the preserved artifacts were placed on the altars again. Ceremonies were held and offerings were prepared in the old way as the old monks remembered it. These old monks had been at most teenagers and at different levels of monastic training when they disrobed. Hence only a few of them acquired



deeper tantric practices, such as the rules of the *Tsam* masked dance [Fig. 9]. Thus, it seems that the 50 years of total repression was too long a period for a complete revival to take place after 1990. The broadly knowledgeable high-ranking masters were executed in 1937–1938, and those who were also experienced but not executed have been passing away during the intervening decades. This is the reason why some ceremonies, such as everyday chanting (*Tsogchin*) and the monthly worship of the wrathful deities (*Sakhius*) could easily be revived, while complicated ceremonies could be revived only in very few places (for example the *Tsam* dance was revived only in Amarbayasgalant in Selenge Province,

Fig. 9. The *Tsam* ceremony.



Dashchoinkhorlin in Bulgan Province, and Züün Khüree Dashchoilin Monastery in Ulaanbaatar). However, we can state that thanks to the active role of the relatively high number of surviving monks and the support of the local communities, the revival was successful in the given circumstances.

### Persistence

In the past monasteries were the only centers of education and culture among the numerous gers scattered throughout the country, while nowadays they are merely religious institutions. Apart from the very few partly preserved or reconstructed monasteries, real monasteries with more than one functioning building and a monastic community are to be found almost nowhere. As the temples today are not self-supporting, their operation cannot be maintained without donations. Buddhism is said to have been reborn in Mongolia, which in reality means that it has retained its original roots but with new sprouts. Although the old monks did and still do their best, the young monks are not able to follow the old lifestyle in the present society; thus today maintaining the monastic community is the most challenging task.

During the survey 40 operating temples were identified in the three provinces (21 in Övörkhongai, 17 in Dundgov', and two in the south part of Töv). Considering that there are 150 sites of former monasteries in the area, this number is not so bad. Although in the past Dundgov' had twice as many temples as Övörkhongai, today there are fewer temples, as its area is more sparsely populated. Some 90% of the currently operating temples are revived former ones, but these are now situated mostly

in the sub-province centers, not on their old sites [Fig. 10]. Old monks can gather in these centers, which have a permanent population and devotee communities to ensure regular donations, and people from the rural gers visit the sum center from time to time and can participate in ceremonies. A sum center is also good for enabling youth (young monks) to keep connected with modern life. All in all, the sum centers and even the aimag centers, and, above all, Ulaanbaatar are more favorable places for the operation of a monastic community than are remote and isolated places.

Some 5–6 of the 40 current temples turned out to be newly founded temples with no proven connections with old monasteries, though sometimes old monks participated in their establishment as well. After 2000, new private temples also opened in aimag centers, headed by monks who had previously studied in Ulaanbaatar. For example, in Arvaikheer is the only Red Sect (Nyingmapa) temple of the area, headed by a young monk who studied under Kh. Banzar (1914–2009), the famous *zoch* master of Namdoldechenlin monastery in Ulaanbaatar. Another temple in Arvaikheer was founded to honour the Khalkha khan ancestors. Apart from these two, the heir to the old Arvaikheerlin khüree is also very active with its 40 monks.

The ability of Arvaikheer to support three temples may be exceptional for a regional center. A very sad fact is that almost half of all temples founded after the democratic change are now inactive. In these cases the temple buildings are allowed to decay, their ritual objects removed or stolen. Of the surveyed 40 temples, 9 are totally inactive, without monks, and 14 are only partly active, with only monthly or annual ceremonies for which monks may return from Ulaanbaatar. The time elapsed since the democratic change has not been long enough for the old monks in rural areas to educate and form a stable local community of recruits and devotees. As the old monks pass away, their pupils who moved to the capital to learn and deepen their faith (mainly



*Fig. 10. A temple which survived and has now been revived, Dundgov' aimag, Erdenedalai sum.*

---

to Gandan and its Buddhist University) almost never return permanently. They may remain in the city either for permanent salaries or higher donations. Thus, only 17 of the 40 rural temples are active in that they have the required minimum of least four monks and everyday chanting. The biggest of them have 20-40 monks, but most have considerably fewer.

So the main reason for the closure of the temples is the lack of recruitment. Typical are the examples of the monk who by himself was not able to renovate a small ger-shaped temple building due to lack of money; three not yet adult novices who cannot operate a beautifully decorated small temple now that their teacher has passed away; two monks who are so old that they were forced to close their temple years ago. Such examples may be multiplied for the country as a whole. Due to the lack of teachers and donations, the revived small temples are not able to survive after their masters pass away. It would be a pity for these revived sites to be neglected now, but without immediate funding and new generations of monks this is going to happen.

Since the time of Buddha Shakyamuni donors have had a very important role in the maintenance of the monastic community. Today, places situated far away from devotees or other financial sources cannot survive. Only very few temples were revived on the old sites and in still fewer cases do they remain active, mainly in very famous historic sites that attract local pilgrims and tourists (e.g.: Erdene zuu founded as the first monastery in Mongolia in 1586, Baruun khüree founded by Öndör Gegeen Zanabazar in 1654, Amarbayasgalant, the summer monastery of the Bogds), or if they are situated in easily available places with good transport connections. In some cases a monastery was revived at its former distant site, and later moved to the sum centre. Only some small shrines that were reconstructed on distant old sites are still working, mainly isolated hermitages (e.g. Yargait), pilgrimage sites (e.g. Tövkhön) or sites in spectacular places (e.g. Bragri lamiin khiid in Dundgov', that has three or four tourist ger camps nearby).

After the democratic change, the construction of several new temples was nationally supported. Gandan and other main monasteries (e.g. Erdene zuu, Delgeriin Choir) have played a significant role in the revival of the spiritual lives of several rural monasteries. Teachers

and graduates of the Mongolian Buddhist University have also contributed to the revival: for example in Dundgov' aimag Sh. Soninbayar, a master of Gandan monastery, participated in several opening ceremonies. Some old monks of Gandan, among them D. Danzan (1916–2005), had significant roles in the reconstruction of several temple buildings, and also in the revival of the Tsam dance in Düinkhor datsan of Gandan, Amarbayasgalant Monastery, and Dashchoinkhorlin Monastery in Bulgan aimag where he belonged before the purges. Thanks to the distinction of this master, his disciples, the young monks of these three monasteries, still keep in touch and contribute to each other's dance every year. In Ulaanbaatar, Züün Khüree Dashchoilin Monastery also managed to revive the traditions of Tsam thanks to the reminiscences of its talented masters such as D. Dashdorj (born 1908). Thus, the practices of Tsam could be preserved and go on in three places in the country. The reputation of Gandan and Züün Khüree Dashchoilin monasteries is nation-wide; thus, their monks' visits can increase the faith of local people and develop the religious practices of local temples.

Certain heads of rural temples are making efforts locally to preserve the traditions left by the old masters. The young head of Erdene zuu and the heads of the temple in Khujirt, Bragri lamiin khiid, Delgeriin Choir and a few other places are trying to develop their monasteries and educate novices. In the countryside though, where fully-ordained monks are few in number, it is mainly the old monks who observe the strict regulations. Some monks, even of the younger generation, take their calling seriously and try at least on an individual basis to observe their vows and set an example. An example is a monk (born in 1979), who, after his master passed away and the other monks returned to lay life, lives alone in a dreary place called Yargait in a ger near the reconstructed temple. He received full ordination from the Dalai Lama recently. A fifty-year-old monk without special vows has been living alone in Tövkhön for 15 years looking after the hermitage and supplying a retreat for some novices in summer. These somewhat exceptional cases show that some monks have enough faith to attempt to make Buddhism flourish again.

However, due to the lack of finances many monks give up and even leave their calling for higher-paid professions. Therefore, the majority

of present-day monks are not very eminent, nor are they as virtuous as they should be. Rural monks educated by old monks often did not enrol in school and studied Cyrillic only in the past few years, leaving them almost incapable of writing a sentence without assistance. Meanwhile, although they are good at recitation they do not know the correct spelling and meaning of Tibetan words. Oral transmission of texts and rituals is still more common than written. For many monks it is difficult to observe the ethical standards prescribed in the Vinaya. While in the old times the monastic calling meant prestige and a continuous supply of food, by now it has been degraded into a meagrely paid job. Spiritual substance has almost disappeared, replaced by only a lazy way of getting money. Some young monks are not motivated enough to achieve goals due to the typically Mongolian slow pace of life or lack of interest.

In the face of these challenges, Buddhist organizations outside of Mongolia have undertaken significant efforts to strengthen Mongolian Buddhism. Among the most important of these initiatives are The Mongolian Buddhism Revival Project of Kunzang Palyul Chöiling (KPC), an American Nyingmapa organization, and the Canadian Gaden Relief Project. They have supported foreign study for Mongolian monks (male and female), both in Tibetan monasteries in India and in monasteries such as Rabten Choeling in Switzerland. Thus, several monks of Amarbayasgalant and Delgeriin Choir have studied in the latter institution and then returned as fully ordained monks committed to observing the Vinaya strictly. The Gaden Relief Project has also contributed to restoration and rebuilding, so that now Delgeriin Choir is decorated with expensive silken scrolls and valuable sculptures, beautiful silk covers the temple walls, glass screens protect the sculptures of the most honoured deities, just like in European museums, and a 'modern' infrastructure (water and energy supply) make the community's life easier. In similar fashion, the Mongolian Buddhism Revival Project has sponsored foreign study by young lamas and women from Khamriin khiid (Dornogov'). This revived monastery of Danzanravjaa (1803-1856) has now become a famous Red Sect monastery, enjoying a location near meditational caves and areas with natural beauty

that attract foreign tourists. The revival of these rural monasteries has also benefited by visits from the few Tibetan teachers and respected monks who live in Ulaanbaatar and bring to the localities invaluable experience and knowledge that contributes to the education of local monks and devotees.

Acknowledging monks as reincarnations of eminent monks of the past is one manifestation of the present need for religious dignitaries to lead other monks and devotees in religious affairs. Three reincarnations have been identified in the survey area; all of them met with the survey participants. One is N. Davaa (1913-), an old monk known as Naidan lam, who was a monk in Bragri lamiin khiid and participated in its revival. He has been recognized as the reincarnation of master Minjüür Yonzon from that monastery, who was arrested and disappeared in 1925. Currently Davaa belongs to the revived temple built on its ruins, but, being very old and ill, rarely participates in ceremonies. Batmönkh (born in 1942, known by his monastic name Batnyam), was recognized in 2002 as the 5<sup>th</sup> reincarnation of Lovon khuvilgaan of Baruun Choir (Borjignii Baruun Janjin choir khiid). He formally belongs to the new temple, but he visits there very rarely because he lives in the countryside. The 30-year-old Luvsandarjaaperenlainamjil, head of Delgeriin Choir Monastery, was recognized in 2000 as the reincarnation of Zava lam Damdin (1867-1937), the eminent polymath [Fig. 11]. He is widely known throughout the

*Fig. 7. The reincarnation of Zava lam Damdin, Dundgov' aimag, Delgertsogt sum.*



---

country, and leads an active monastery with good connections with India and Switzerland. He moved to Delgeriin Choir Monastery in 2005 and started to reform religious life there and in other nearby places; so he has a very significant role in the religious life of the province. At present he is on a three-year meditation retreat. Approximately 20 young monks live in his monastery, forming a very learned community. Apart from these three there are other reincarnations in the country, such as the famous Luvsandanpüljinjigmed (born 1972, recognized in 1989), the 15<sup>th</sup> reincarnation of the Khalkha Zaya Pandita. These reincarnations are acknowledged by the Dalai Lama; an indication of the ever closer connection with Tibetan Buddhism.

### Summary

Although apparently the monastic ruins and old monks' reminiscences belong to the past, they have to be preserved as cultural heritage and the basis for the revived local Buddhism. The new temples' development effectively depends on the calling and education of their monks and the generosity of donors who provide the financial background of the monastic community. Apart from the revival of Buddhism based on earlier tradition, nowadays new waves of Buddhist conversion can be observed coming from Tibetan monasteries of India, Europe, and U.S.A., etc. and supporting the (re)formation of Buddhist centers in the countryside. Yet the smaller temples are left abandoned, due to the lack of financial support. While the preservation of the sites that remain should be the task of the government, the education of monks should be the responsibility of Gandan and local religious centers. The maintenance of living temples is still the task of devotees. As we observed in Övörkhongai and Dundgov', only very few Christian churches exist, yet their missionary activity often is more effective than the efforts undertaken by the Buddhist communities. The education and efforts of the lay and monastic communities are essential if Buddhism is to hold its own and gain ground in the Mongolian countryside.

### Notes

1. The survey documented the present condition of a total of 150 old monastic sites (49 in Övörkhongai, 77 in Dundgov', 24 in the south part of Töv) and 40 present-day temples (21 in Övörkhongai, 17 in Dundgov', and 2 in

the south part of Töv).

2. An additional 16 interviews were recorded with other elderly people living in the vicinity of old sites or knowledgeable about the old sites, while 23 were recorded concerning currently working or revived temples with their young heads or other ranked monks. In addition 19 old monks living presently in Ulaanbaatar were interviewed (in 2006 and 2007) about their former and present-day monasteries that are situated in the area of the three provinces surveyed.

3. In the Gov' area almost every building was made of brick and mud, while in the northern areas with extensive forests wood was dominant. However, there are some legends about how high-ranking monks delivered wood on ox-carts or camel-carts from the north to construct temples in the Gov'.

4. Brick was fired in a kiln (*baayuu*) situated near the monastery site, mainly by the Chinese. Chinese workers often took part in monastery construction, carving, and the decoration of the temples; so there were often Chinese settlements near larger monastery sites.

5. Smaller sites which consisted of only a few buildings and have almost no visible remnants or ones where the buildings were made of wood tend not to be dug up, as there are no useful materials and in any event they are not so well known by people. At other sites though, even the surveyors caught people digging.

6. In particular, for the situation in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Aleksei M. Pozdneyev, *Religion and Ritual in Society: Lamaist Buddhism in Late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Mongolia*, tr. Alo and Linda Raun; ed. John R. Krueger (Bloomington, IN: The Mongolia Society, 1978, originally published in Russian in 1887). See also his *Mongolia and the Mongols*, tr. John R. Shaw and Dale Plank; ed. John R. Krueger (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1971) and his *Urginskii khutukhty. Istoricheskii ocherk ikh proshlago i sovremennago byta*, Travaux de la Troisième Session du Congrès International des Orientalistes, St. Petersburg, 1880 (repr. 1980). Charles R. Bawden, *The Modern History of Mongolia* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968; rev. edition: KPI, London 1989) contains data about the period of the Bogd Khan.

7. The exact number (as of 2007) will be clear from the conclusion drawn by ACM based on the interviews conducted by the six teams.

## **OVER THE HIGH PASSES**

**Frank Harold**

*University of Washington, Seattle (USA)*

Photographs by **Ruth Harold**

**A**t the heart of the Asian continent sprawls a knot of colossal mountains. Whether the journey takes you north across the plains of India, west from China or east through the deserts of Turkestan, giant ramparts of rock and ice rear up to bar the way. The immensity of that uplift is best grasped from the air: fly from Delhi to Kathmandu, or from Chengdu to Lhasa, and marvel at the sea of whitecaps below, range upon range as far as the eye can see. It is hard to credit that men on foot, guiding laden animals, could have routinely traversed these forbidding wastes.

But they did, year after year for many centuries, and in a few places they still do so today [Fig. 1]. Merchants, missionaries and bandits worked their way up the river gorges and located the passes that offered access to the lands behind the ranges. The Silk Roads and their feeders traversed the Pamirs, the Karakoram, Hindukush, Tien Shan and the Great Himalaya, not to mention a score of lesser ranges. Other routes skirted the mountains, passing across the Gobi Desert and north of the Tien Shan, down the Ili Valley. Travelers carried their goods on the backs of camels, yaks, horses, mules, even sheep and goats, often supplemented by files of overburdened porters; and all of them left their bones along the tracks that knit the disparate regions of Eurasia into a globalized economy. Today's travelers, sped on their way by paved roads and concrete bridges, encounter few of the hardships that earlier wayfarers took in their stride; but the landscape remains much as they saw it, and here and there an ancient town or crumbling building recalls the old days. This article is a tribute from a latter-day traveler to all who went before, especially to

those who told us of their journeys.

### **The Routes**

Where did those mountain passages run, and how do we know that? In the nineteenth century, European explorers began mapping the mountains systematically, sometimes for the sake of geographical knowledge alone, more often with economic or political ends in mind. One of the first was William Moorcroft (1767 – 1825), a veterinarian ostensibly in search of superior stud horses to improve the breed of cavalry mounts for the army in India. His two semi-official expeditions took him into Tibet, Ladakh, Kashmir and Afghanistan; he reached Bukhara, but died of fever on the way home. Other adventurers followed, chiefly British and Russian, during a century of intense exploration between 1830 and 1930. The context was supplied by the Great Game, the rivalry between the British and Russian empires for mastery of Central Asia. Some of the most valuable work was done by the 'pundits,' native Indians who could pass in those parts without attracting undue attention, and who were trained to conduct basic surveys in secret. Western scholars came next, including Col. Henry Yule who worked out the historical background, and the redoubtable M. Aurel Stein and Sven Hedin. Thanks to their labors we know what routes were used in the nineteenth century, and can extrapolate back to earlier times.

*Fig. 1. Yak caravan on the high pass between Nepal and Tibet, Mt. Shishapangma in the background. Photograph courtesy of Vassi Koutsaftis. Copyright © Vassi Koutsaftis <<http://www.arclight-pictures.com>>.*



The map [Fig. 2] shows the main traditional trade routes across the western portion of the Himalayan uplift, omitting many local routes for the sake of clarity. Another net of tracks extended eastward, to Lhasa in Tibet and beyond, linking up with the Tea and Horse Road. To make sense of the map, note the major drainages. The Indus River, rising far to the east on the Tibetan Plateau, drains a vast basin that includes both the northern and the southern flanks of the Great Himalaya, and

also the southern slopes of the Karakoram and Hindukush. The Tarim River runs eastward, to be lost in the sands of the Taklamakan Desert. The Amu Darya (the Oxus of the classical literature) runs west from the Pamirs into the Aral Sea; so does the Syr Darya (classical Jaxartes), from the central and southern Tien Shan. The continental watersheds along the crests of the mountains thus divide the main river basins: the Karakoram Mountains separate the Indus from the Tarim; the Pamir Plateau

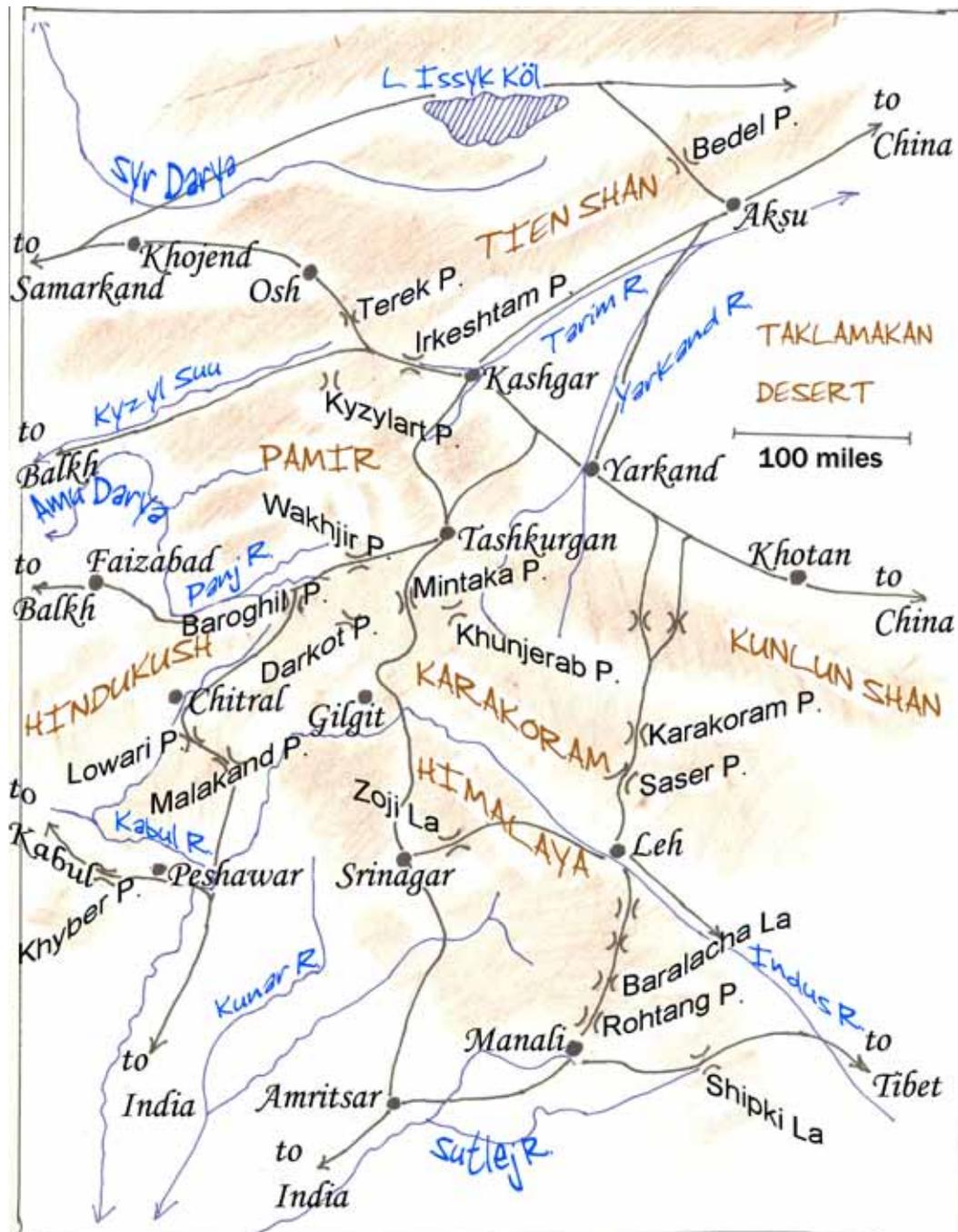


Fig. 2. Traditional trade routes of the Western Himalayas.



*Fig. 3. The Great Himalaya from just above the Baralacha La, between Manali and Leh, 1991.*

could also be reached from Srinagar in Kashmir, by way of the relatively easy Zoji La (3,529 m/11,580 ft); that was the only way a laden animal could be taken into Ladakh from Kashmir. Leh was a major entrepot, particularly for the trade in 'pashm,' the soft warm undercoat grown by a particular breed of domestic goat raised on the frigid uplands of western Tibet. Pashm is the raw material for the pashmina shawls, woven exclusively in Kashmir and distributed throughout India and even to Europe. Leh is very quiet today, but many relics remain from the time when it was the capital of an independent Buddhist kingdom [Figs 4 and 5]. The ruined palace of the Gyalpos still looms over the town, the bazaar operates from

and Hindukush divide the Indus from the Amu Darya; and the Tien Shan (the 'Heavenly Mountains') lie between the Tarim and the Syr Darya. Only seven significant routes traversed that enormous highland arc. Clockwise from India these are the Karakoram, Gilgit and Chitral routes; two from Afghanistan, via the Wakhan (upper Oxus) and the Kyzyl Suu valley; from Samarkand in Central Asia, by way of the Ferghana Valley and the Terek Pass; and finally from the steppes north of the Tien Shan, via either the Bedel Pass or the Muzart Pass. Let us take them in turn.

The principal caravan route between the plains of India and China ran from Amritsar (and nearby Hoshiarpur) to Yarkand by way of Ladakh, and then across the Karakoram Pass, a journey of sixty days. The distance is less than 400 miles as the crow flies, but bipeds and quadrupeds were obliged to cross a succession of laborious passes. First came the Rohtang Pass into Lahoul, then the Baralacha La (4,891 m/16,047 ft; Fig 3) across the Great Himalaya (for some reason, certain passes are commonly designated by the English word, others by its Tibetan equivalent, 'La'). Several yet higher passes crossed the Zaskar Mountains before the track descended to Leh, the capital of Ladakh on the Indus River. Leh



*Fig. 4. Leh with the palace of the former kings of Ladakh, 2001.*



*Fig. 5. In the bazaar, Leh, 2001.*

Fig. 6. Lamayuru Monastery, on the high road from Leh to Kashmir, 2001.

its old site, and many of the nearby monasteries date back to caravan days (Fig. 6).

Northward from Leh the track led across the notorious Karakoram Pass — not particularly difficult and usually open even in winter, but cold, bleak and very high (5,540 m/18,176 ft). The chief obstacles came before and after, especially the glacier-bound Saser Pass. There were no settlements along the route and very little grazing; food and fodder had to be carried for at least 14 days. All travelers comment on the route's melancholy air, marked as it was by numberless skeletons of pack animals that had perished along the way. There was the intense cold in winter, bugs and flooded streams in summer, and at all seasons the danger from raiders 'licensed' by the mir of Hunza, in search of booty and slaves. None of this proved a serious deterrent to trade. G. T.



Vigne, who traveled in Ladakh in the 1830's, reported that 'the merchandise that travels from Yarkund [*sic*], via Ladakh to Hindustan, consists of gold in ducats from Russia, in old coins from Bukhara, silks, silver and porcelain from China, musks, furs, sables ...tea of three kinds' and other luxury goods. Janet Rizvi, who gives a detailed account of that commerce, adds further items: felts and carpets, very popular in Leh, and charas, the marijuana of the day. Goods taken north from India included spices, sugar, indigo, fine finished muslin and silk cloth, and the irresistible opium. Later in the century Indian tea and English woollens and broadcloth joined the list, with the balance of trade in India's favor. The trade was controlled by a handful of established and wealthy families. Yarkandi merchants resided in Leh, Punjabis in Yarkand, and British missions to western China found organized communities of the Empire's citizens at trail's end.

An alternative but no less challenging route ran from Srinagar in Kashmir to Kashgar via the remote outpost of Gilgit, deep in the mountains on the western side of the Indus. It continued north into the domains of the mirs of Hunza, independent until the British subdued Hunza in a lovely little war in 1891, putting a stop to the agreeable occupation of caravan raiding. Hunza remains one of the most spectacular places on earth, a fruitful valley at the foot of stupendous mountains that soar abruptly to 24,000 ft; the castles of the mirs, built more than 700 years



Fig. 7. Baltit Fort looms over the valley of Hunza in the Karakorams, 2008.

ago, still brood over the villages (Fig. 7). But all who passed this way remember the terrifying gorges of the lower Karakoram, 'as difficult a tract of country as can be found anywhere in the world. In the gorges by which the Hunza River cuts its way...the road, seldom more than 2 feet wide and often much less, is carried from ledge to ledge of the almost perpendicular cliffs on stakes let into the rock; glaciers, of which the greatest is the seventy-mile-long Batura, have to be crossed, and falling rocks dodged on the numerous "stone-shoots" where no path can be kept up and the traveler must pick his way apprehensively across the unstable mountain-face' (Skrine 1925, p. 232). In places the cliff path, long disused, can still be seen today [Fig



*Fig. 8. Cliffside track in the gorge of the Hunza, 2008.*

8]. Several days and many gorges later the track crossed the mountain crest, usually by the Kilik or the Mintaka Pass (4726m/15505ft) — glaciated but not too arduous as these things go. The Khunjerab Pass nearby, which today carries the Karakoram Highway, was seldom used. From the pass the track descended to the Chinese frontier post of Tashkurgan, and thence by a choice of routes to Kashgar. C.P. Skrine and his wife, who traveled that road in 1922 to take up his appointment as British Consul General in Kashgar, spent seven weeks en route, and clearly had the time of their lives; but since the Gilgit route would have been difficult for heavily laden animals, it seems unlikely that it ever served as a major artery of trade. Indeed, Skrine sent his heavier baggage via the Karakoram Pass route starting in Leh.

Further still to the west, the third route ran via the semi-independent principality of Chitral, and then crossed the fearsome Hindukush ('Hindu Killer') Mountains by the Baroghil Pass. Notably

low and gentle at a mere 3,804 m/12,480 ft, the Baroghil gives access to the district long known as Wakhan: the uppermost headwaters of the Oxus (Amu Darya), locally called the Panj River. Today, this area is part of the Wakhan Corridor, a narrow salient of Afghanistan that separates Pakistan from Tajikistan (see map, Fig 11, p. 81). Keeping the Russian and British empires apart was precisely the object of creating this unwieldy border. From the junction at the northern foot of the Baroghil Pass, one track followed the Panj downstream into Afghanistan; the other led eastward into China, across the demanding Wakhjir Pass (4,923 m/16,152 ft). M. Aurel Stein, whose indifference to physical hardship was legendary, struggled across this route in the snowy spring of 1906 and was not dismayed. Westerners seldom came this way, because it led through the territory of the unruly tribes of the Northwest frontier, and required permission from the Emir of Afghanistan; but it seems to have been a significant trade route in earlier times. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this also became a favorite road for pilgrims traveling from East Turkestan to Mecca: they would cross the Pamirs in April, make their way via Chitral and Peshawar to Bombay, and then take ship for Jeddah.

Merchants on the Silk Roads that linked China with Central Asia and points west could choose among several options. Coming from Afghanistan they would make for Faizabad, and thence cut across to the Wakhan valley (the lower reaches of the Panj River, hemmed into tremendous gorges, were utterly impassable until the Russians blasted the first bridle path out of the cliffs, late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century). Lt. John Wood of the Indian Navy, who explored this area in 1837 on his quest for the sources of the Oxus River, supplies a lively description of his journey in the depth of winter. From the upper Panj valley one could take the Baroghil Pass for India, or the Wakhjir into China. Both the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang and Marco Polo came through the Wakhan, which was clearly far more traveled in the Middle Ages than it is today.

An alternative approach from Afghanistan, and in principle a much more inviting one, crossed the Oxus well downstream, near Balkh (today's Mazar-e-Sharif), and continued by way of Hissar (just west of today's Dushanbe, capital of Tajikistan); the route then climbed onto the Pamir Plateau via the valley of the Kyzyl Ssu



*Fig. 9. Irkeshtam Pass, easy grasslands and spectacular scenery, 2008.*

(Red River). The valley is wide, well watered and offers ample pasturage all the year. At the head of the Kyzyl Suu, an easy pass across the grassy ridges of Irkeshtam (about 3000m/10,000ft; Fig 9) leads into China. Both Col. Henry Yule and Sir Aurel Stein argued persuasively that this valley must have been a major conduit of trade (as it is today, carrying heavy truck traffic between Kashgar and Dushanbe).

The trunk road from Central Asia led from Bukhara and Samarkand into the Ferghana Valley, and thence to Kashgar by way of the Terek (4,128 m/13,540 ft) and Irkeshtam Passes. This route became doubly attractive after the Russians constructed a railroad to Andijan in the Ferghana Valley; even the British Consul General in Kashgar, Russia's arch-rival for influence in Central Asia, came this way until it was closed by the Bolshevik Revolution. Travel time from Andijan to Kashgar was a mere twelve days: by coach to Osh, and then on horseback over the passes. Sven Hedin availed himself of the opportunity in 1899 on his way to Tibet and the Gobi Desert; he describes the route in detail, and once the railroad had been left behind, even in high summer it seems to have been no picnic.

Finally, and to round out the roster, tracks connected China and Central Asia across the Tien Shan, by way of either the Muzart Pass (off the map, open only in summer) or the Bedel Pass. The Tien Shan are high and rugged, challenging even mountaineers equipped with

*Fig. 10. Wheels on the Kegeti Pass, northern Tien Shan Mountains, Kyrgyzstan. Copyright © 1995 Daniel C. Waugh.*



wheels and gears [Fig. 10], but they offered short and direct links to major caravan routes along Lake Issyk K l and across the Gobi Desert into China proper. Owen Lattimore and his wife Eleanor, who spent their honeymoon on an epic journey from Peking to India in 1927, crossed the Muzart Pass (and later on, the Karakoram as well). The ascent to the grassy summit at 3602m/11,818ft was deceptively easy, but the long descent via a rotting and crevassed glacier, in fog and rain, was quite another matter.

### **Classic Journeys**

Thousands of merchants, monks, envoys and soldiers must have crossed the high passes in centuries past, but left no record of their passage beyond occasional graffiti on the rocks. Historical geographers must perforce rely on the few who wrote about their experiences, and fill in the details by matching the early accounts against those of more recent travelers.

The earliest tantalizing fragments come from the Greek geographer Ptolemy (2<sup>nd</sup> century CE), who recounts the journey of certain merchants across half of Asia to the land of the Seres, whence came silk. Neither Greeks nor Seres traveled the whole way; rather, they met beyond 'Mount Imaus,' at a place called the 'Stone Tower.' Mount Imaus is generally identified with the Pamir, but the location of the Stone Tower has given rise to much fruitless debate. The town that goes by this name today, Tashkurgan in far western China, remains one candidate. The crumbling fort that stands there is not ancient, but Stein found ruins of a far older one on the road south into the mountains. Nevertheless, both Stein and Yule prefer to put the Stone Tower in the western Pamir, possibly

---

in the valley of the Kyzyl Suu.

The most detailed account by far comes from Xuanzang (Hsüan Tsang), a Chinese pilgrim who journeyed to India in search of authentic Buddhist scriptures. Xuanzang set out secretly in 629 CE, in defiance of the emperor's ban; he returned in triumph sixteen years later, was pardoned and showered with honors, and settled down to pen the memoirs that make up our best source of first-hand information about the geography, politics and culture of Central Asia just prior to the coming of Islam. Best of all, he tells us exactly where he went (Sally Wriggins' contemporary account features detailed maps). On the way out he traveled to Aksu, and then made a harrowing traverse of the Bedel Pass in early spring, with the loss of many men and beasts. The survivors recuperated at warm Lake Issyk Köl, and then followed a route around the mountains rather than through them. Xuanzang traveled by way of Samarkand, Balkh, Bamiyan and Kabul, then across the Khyber Pass into India. But on the way home, leading a large party complete with an elephant and burdened with sacred books and statuary, he tackled the high passes. They traveled to Kabul, crossed the Hindukush by the high and snowy Khawak Pass, and then marched east up the Wakhan Valley. Xuanzang's 'Great Dragon Lake' is almost certainly the same as Lake Zorkul, or Sirikol, that spectacular source of the Oxus River on Bam-i-Dunya, the very roof of the world first introduced to Western scholars by the explorations of Lt. John Wood. They may have crossed the watershed at the Wakhjir Pass, but more probably utilized an easier route further north, eventually reaching Tashkurgan. The elephant, having made it across one snowbound pass after another, was lost in an attack by bandits as the expedition was threading the gorges on the way to Kashgar. The future held eternal fame as one of the greatest travelers of all time, symbolized by the familiar image of Xuanzang as a monk, toting on his back a frame pack full of scrolls.

There was never a shortage of violent strife in the high hills (Hunza and its neighbors being especially notorious), but to my knowledge only once were they the scene of a genuine military campaign. In 747 CE the Chinese general Gao Xianzhi led an army of 3000 out of Tashkurgan to conquer Hunza and Gilgit, then under Tibetan occupation. That required marching men and supplies over the Wakhjir

Pass, the Baroghil, and finally over the Darkot Pass (4575m/15010ft.), into the Hunza Valley. The hardest part will have been the Darkot, a spectacular and heavily glaciated notch in a high spur of the Hindukush (for a description see M.A. Stein's account [1912, I, pp. 52-60] of his own lightning foray to the pass in 1906). The expedition was a resounding success, and made a big impression on the Natives: C. P. Skrine notes that, even though the Chinese withdrew after a few years, as late as the nineteenth century the mirs of Hunza were still sending tribute to Kashgar.

For Westerners, the epitome of the far traveler is Marco Polo, the youthful Venetian who, in 1271 CE, accompanied his father and uncle on a mission to the Great Khan in Khanbaliq (today's Beijing). Marco's Description of the World, dictated years later in a Genoese prison while awaiting ransom, is clear enough on his general route but often short on detail. Having reached Balkh (in northern Afghanistan), the Polos made their way to Faizabad, then into the upper Oxus and east across the high country. 'The plain is called Pamier, and you ride across it for twelve days altogether, finding nothing but a desert without habitation or any green thing, so that travelers are obliged to carry with them whatever they have need of. The region is so lofty and cold that you do not even see any birds flying. And I must notice also that because of this great cold, fire does not burn so brightly, nor give out so much heat as usual, nor does it cook food so effectually.' (Yule translation; medieval travelers in general had no understanding of the nature of high altitude.) Just where was Marco? On the Pamir Plateau, clearly, though his comment on the absence of birdlife will be belied by anyone who has stood beside one of the many ponds in summer. It is simply not clear where he crossed, or why it ultimately took forty days to do so.

I must not conclude this section without acknowledging one of my personal heroes, Marc Aurel Stein (1862 - 1943). The British have a particular talent for nurturing men (and women) who combine physical prowess with excellence in scholarship, and Stein is a prime example. Born in Hungary into a Jewish family that had converted to Christianity, M. Aurel Stein became fascinated with India as a student, first in Germany and later in England. Having cultivated the right friends, he secured an appointment in India, first in administration

and later with the Archaeological Survey. Stein's abiding passion proved to be archaeological exploration, and by dint of infinite patience and persistence he wrangled funds and leave to pursue it. Three major expeditions to Central Asia took him deep into the Taklamakan Desert to excavate ancient Buddhist sites along the Silk Road. His most celebrated achievement was the acquisition of a great trove of manuscripts and paintings in Dunhuang, which Stein rescued (some would say, looted) on behalf of the British Museum. But Stein also loved the high mountains, and the wilder the better. A small man, wiry, tough and inured to hardship, he seized every opportunity to traverse and survey the high passes, and to examine that landscape with the sharp eye of one who was both archaeologist and geographer.

Rich in honors, including a knighthood, one ambition persistently eluded Stein: political obstacles always stood in the way of archaeological work in Afghanistan. At long last, in 1943, an invitation was granted. Stein was nearly 81 years old, but would not let that deter him. He fell ill shortly after arriving in Kabul, died and was buried in the foreign cemetery there, where his epitaph is an eloquent tribute:

Fig. 11. Mountains of Central Asia by road.



Mark Aurel Stein  
of the Indian Archaeological Survey  
Scholar, Explorer, Author  
By the Arduous Journeys in  
India, Chinese Turkistan, Persia and Iraq  
He Enlarged the Bounds of Knowledge.  
Born at Budapest 26 November 1862  
He became an English Citizen in 1904.  
He died at Kabul 26 October 1943.  
A man greatly beloved.

### Doing it in Comfort

Well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the mountain world that travelers experienced owed more to Marco Polo's time than to our own. Men and goods moved at a walking pace, on the backs of animals; they relied on peoples who had lived on that land for centuries, chiefly the Kyrgyz herdsmen and Tajik farmers; and what passed for central authority was far away. Contemporary events, especially the Second World War, unleashed change with a vengeance. Politically and technologically, today's wayfarer inhabits a world far different from that which Sir Aurel Stein knew [map, Fig 11].

With the rise of the People's Republic of China, followed by a war with India in 1962, the border between them closed and trade across the Karakoram Pass ceased. Pakistan split away from India, and that border, too, was effectively blocked. The Soviet Union shut off access to Central Asia, except for tours managed by Intourist (in 1970, when we came to the Soviet embassy in Tehran to inquire about entry from Afghanistan, they wouldn't even let us in the door). Afghanistan is still in a state of war, Kashmir is in turmoil and Pakistan increasingly dicey. The Karakoram Pass, Chitral and the upper Oxus are more remote today than they were a century ago. But this litany of troubles tells only half the story.



*Fig.12. Rohtang Pass, between Manali and Leh, 1991.*

highest road passes), before dropping down to Leh at 12,000 ft. Of all the towns in Central Asia, Leh remains the most traditional, and life in the monasteries and villages is far more representative of Tibet than what you see in Tibet itself [Fig 13]. Regulations have recently been relaxed to allow foreigners to cross the high Kardung La, the first obstacle on the caravan road to Yarkand, but the Karakoram Pass remains out of bounds. Open, too, but dubious is the road over Zoji La to Srinagar. We hope to see the day when that route, and the fabulous Vale of Kashmir, become once again sensible tourist destinations.

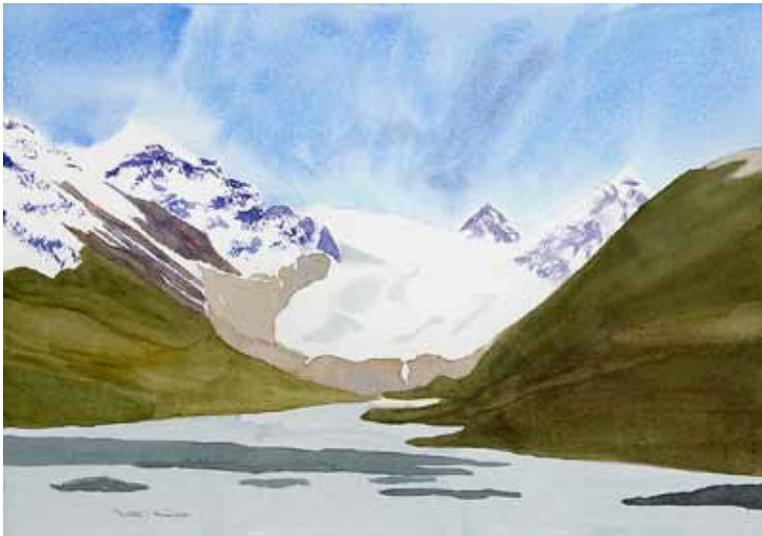
*Fig. 13. Women at Alchi, Ladakh, displaying traditional finery, 2001.*

China and Pakistan developed cordial relations, and constructed a motor road linking Kashgar and Islamabad across the Khunjerab Pass; it was opened to foreign travelers in 1986. In the aftermath of India's wars with Pakistan and China, Ladakh became more closely integrated with India than ever before; you can drive there now. And in 1991, the collapse of the Soviet Union spawned five independent republics in Central Asia. These five countries are prickly with tourists but eager for their hard cash and for the economic benefits of trade via the historic overland routes. So roads have opened from China into Kyrgyzstan over the Torugart and Irkeshtam Passes, and now also clear across the Pamir Plateau. Even those of us who are young only at heart can today explore large portions of those storied mountains by road, in reasonable safety and comfort.



A prime destination is Ladakh, that lofty high desert beyond the Great Himalaya — politically part of India, but culturally Tibetan. There are direct flights from Delhi to Leh, and good accommodations. Overland, it's a spectacular three-day drive from Manali: across the Rohtang Pass (3978 m/13051 ft; Fig 12), which divides 'the bedlam of rural India from the vast silences of Lahoul'; then by the Baralacha La over the Himalaya proper, followed by the Taglang La (at 5,359 m /17,582 ft one of the world's

Of the three historic links between the Punjab and China, only the Gilgit route is open at present, closely tracked by the Karakoram Highway. The road crosses the range at the Khunjerab Pass (4,934 m/16,188 ft), a few miles east of the traditional Mintaka Pass, perhaps because the Khunjerab Glacier is better behaved and does not menace the road [Fig. 14, facing page]. This is some of the most vertical landscape on earth; it makes a long but spectacular drive, with a break at Tashkurgan. We traveled the length of the Karakoram Highway in 1997: from the ancient caravan city of Kashgar, at that time still redolent of Central Asia, past Karakul



*Fig. 14. The Khunjerab Pass across the Karakoram Mountains, watercolor by Ruth Harold, 2008.*

via the valley of the Kyzyl Suu, is said to be very rough but carries much commercial traffic. It was a journey to lift the spirit: thank you, Roger, we are forever in your debt.

From a half-century of travel we have learned that, as the world turns, windows open and windows close. If you have a hankering to see for yourself 'the hills and the snows of the hills,' do not put it off. For the world keeps turning, and the only certainty is that things will change again.

Lake and over the pass, down into the gorges of the Hunza and Indus Rivers, all the way to Islamabad with detours to Swat, Peshawar and the Khyber Pass. A wonderful itinerary, but not altogether comfortable just at present.

We were fortunate to return to the mountains in 2008, with a small group of intrepid travelers led for Wilderness Travel by the one and only Roger Williams. From Kashgar, we first drove south into Hunza — peaceful, quiet and as welcoming as ever. After returning to Kashgar we headed west, to cut the Pamir Knot. The road lay across the Irkeshtam Pass, its grasslands dotted with the yurts and flocks of Kyrgyz herdsmen.

The road is appalling, even for jeeps, but the views of the Trans-Alai Range are tremendous. At the village of Sary-Tash in the Kyzyl Suu valley we picked up the Pamir Highway, originally a military road built by the Russians to help secure their turbulent eastern frontier, and now badly in need of maintenance. For the next four days we followed the Pamir Highway south and southwest: across the Trans-Alai Range at the Kyzylart Pass, along Great Karakul Lake, across the broad Pamir steppes [Fig. 15], and down to Khorog on the Panj River, the only substantial town in the Pamir region. Here the Panj, running through imposing gorges, forms the border with Afghanistan [Fig. 16], whose traditional villages, little changed over the past forty years, contrast with the modernized settlements on the Tajikistan side. We ended up in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, the modern city which has replaced the former caravan halt of Hissar. The direct road, from Irkeshtam to Dushanbe

### **About the Authors**

Frequent contributors to this journal, **Frank and Ruth Harold** are scientists by profession and travelers by avocation. Frank was born



*Fig. 15. Pamir landscape, 2008.*

*Fig. 16. In the gorges of the Panj River, 2008.*



---

in Germany, grew up in the Middle East, and studied at City College, New York, and the University of California at Berkeley. Now retired from forty years of research and teaching, he is Professor Emeritus of biochemistry at Colorado State University and Affiliate Professor of microbiology at the University of Washington. Ruth is a microbiologist who studied at the University of Arizona and the University of California at Berkeley; now retired, she is an aspiring watercolor painter. The Harold family lived in Iran in 1969/70, while Frank served as Fulbright Lecturer at the University of Tehran. This experience kindled a passion for adventure travel, which has since taken them to Afghanistan and back to Iran, across the Middle East, into the Himalayas and Tibet, up and down the Indian subcontinent, and along the Silk Road between China and Turkey. They can be reached at <frankharold@earthlink.net>.

### Sources

The basic scholarly references are the writings of Sir Henry Yule: *Cathay and the Way Thither*, 4 vols. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1866; rev. ed. 1916); *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, 2 vols., 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Murray, 1903) (available in electronic form at Project Gutenberg <<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/10636>>); and his 'Essay on the Geography of the Valley of the Oxus' (included in Capt. John Wood's *Journey to the Source*, etc, below). More recent works include Janet Rizvi, *Trans-Himalayan Caravans: Merchant Princes and Peasant Traders in Ladakh* (New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1999), a comprehensive account of the traditional commerce of Ladakh, based on interviews with men who took part in it; and Sally Hovey Wriggins, *Xuanzang – a Buddhist Pilgrim on the Silk Road* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996). An excellent article on 'The Roads to Kashgar' by C. P. Skrine (*Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* 12 (1925): 226 – 250), covers the present subject; it would have saved me many hours had I found it earlier!

The counterpart to the routes discussed here is the Tea and Horse Caravan Road, far to the east. See Jeff Fuchs, 'The Tea Horse Road,' *The Silk Road* 6/1 (2008): 63 – 71, and Yang Fuquan, 'The "Ancient Tea and Horse Caravan Road," the "Silk Road" of Southwest China,' *The Silk Road* 2/1 (2004): 29 – 32.

Western travelers have left an abundant literature. Moorcroft's pioneering account has been published in a much truncated version edited by Horace H. Wilson, as William Moorcroft and George Trebeck, *Travels in India Himalayan Provinces of Hindustan and the Punjab, in Peshawar, Kabul, Kunduz and Bokhara from 1819 to 1825*, 2 vols. (New Delhi; Madras: Asian Educational Services, 1989; reprint of 1841 ed.). I have drawn on Godfrey Thomas Vigne, *Travels in Kashmir, Ladakh, and Iskardo* (London: Coburn, 1844, reprinted, Delhi: Sagar Publications, 1981); John Wood, *A Journey to the Source of the River Oxus* (London: Murray, 1872); M. Aurel Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, 2 vols. (London; New York: McMillan, 1912 ; repr. New York: Greenwood, 1968); M. Aurel Stein, *On Ancient Central Asian Tracks* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Pr., 1933; repr. 1964); Sven A. Hedin, *Central Asia and Tibet*, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1903); Clarmont P. Skrine, *Chinese Central Asia*, London: Methuen, 1926; various later eds.); and Owen Lattimore, *High Tartary* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co, 1930; repr. ed. New York: Kodansha, 1994). For Stein's grave, see the photos and brief account of a visit in 2000 by Victoria Finlay in *IDP News: Newsletter of the International Dunhuang Project* 18 (2001) <[http://idp.bl.uk/archives/news18/idpnews\\_18.a4d#5](http://idp.bl.uk/archives/news18/idpnews_18.a4d#5)>.

The Great Game and the story of Himalayan exploration have been lovingly recounted by John Keay in *When Men and Mountains Meet: The Explorers of the Western Himalayas 1820-75* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1982) and *The Gilgit Game: Explorers of the Western Himalayas 1865-95* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1979; reprinted Karachi, etc.: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1990), and by Karl E. Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac in *The Tournament of Shadows* (Washington: Counterpoint, 1999). Boys between the ages of 8 and 80 should on no account miss Rudyard Kipling's novel, *Kim*; if that does not stir a longing for those 'hills and the snows of the hills,' you have no soul!

The maps are based on multiple sources, including the one in Janet Rizvi, *ibid*; Yuri Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia* (Boston: Brill, 2003); and the contemporary road maps published by Nelles Maps. With one or two exceptions, elevations of the passes (concerning which various sources have some discrepancies), have been taken from the military topographic maps published in Pakistan, Russia and Kyrgyzstan.

Finally, I am indebted to Vassi Koutsaftis and Daniel Waugh for permission to reproduce their photographs in Figs. 1 and 10, respectively.