

Buddhism in Central Asia II

Practices and Rituals, Visual and Material Transfer

Edited by

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The ‘Sogdian Deities’ Twenty Years on: A Reconsideration of a Small Painting from Dunhuang

Lilla Russell-Smith

1 Introduction

Since 1996, when I first started working on Uyghur patronage in Dunhuang (敦煌), I have often encountered unusual iconography, images that could not be easily explained by standard written sources. I published some in 2005 in my book.¹ Since I became curator of the Turfan Collection in the Museum

1 ‘Uyghur’ style in this article refers to the art of the Xizhou Uyghurs from the Turfan area, a style variations of which were also used in Ganzhou (甘州) and Shazhou (沙州, traditional name for Dunhuang) by the Uyghur rulers and donors. There was regular contact between the rulers of Dunhuang and the rulers of central China, but Shazhou in the 10th century was *de facto* independent, and its rulers had to fight and negotiate with the rulers of the surrounding regions in order to preserve their power. The Cao (曹) clan ruled Dunhuang, and although, as Rong Xinjiang argues, they themselves may have had a Sogdian origin, the art they commissioned was distinctly a local style. For the Cao family see Rong Xinjiang 荣新江, “Dunhuang Guiyijun Cao shi tongzhizhe wei Sute houyi shuo 敦煌归义军曹氏统治者为粟特后裔说 [Theory that the Cao Family from Dunhuang has a Sogdian Origin],” *Lishi yanjiu* 历史研究 [Historical Research] 1 (2001): 65–72. In my book, I investigate the possible role of Ganzhou Uyghur donors. The Ganzhou Uyghurs became very important after the fall of the Uyghur Empire in 841. Firstly, they had a strategically important position, with their centre near today’s Zhangye (张掖). Only one route leads from Dunhuang to central China, between the mountains in the Hexi Corridor (Chin. Hexi zoulang 河西走廊), so from the second half of the 9th century, the Ganzhou Uyghurs could cut this route off, which caused trading caravans to have to make a huge detour to the north. As Dunhuang could not defeat the Ganzhou Uyghurs, from the beginning of the 10th century, mutual marriage links were established. The most important was Cao Yijin’s (r. 914–935, 曹议金) main wife, who was Uyghur, and in turn became the mother of subsequent rulers, who also took Ganzhou Uyghur wives. The main branch of the Uyghurs settled around Turfan and are known as the Xizhou Uyghurs. They acknowledged that the Ganzhou Uyghur ruling family was descended from the Yaglagar line, the rulers of the Uyghur Empire. See also Jens Wilkens, “Buddhism in the West Uyghur Kingdom and Beyond,” in *Transfer of Buddhism across Central Asian Networks (7th to 13th Centuries)*, ed. Carmen Meinert (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 243. In caves, such as Dunhuang Cave 98, we also see that the Ganzhou Uyghur women’s clothing resembled the Xizhou Uyghur fashions of the time. In commissioning portable paintings on silk and paper, the Ganzhou Uyghur wives likely played an important role. For more definitions and

für Asiatische Kunst in Berlin in 2007, it has struck me more than once how frequently the interpretations are divided along areas of expertise and geographic lines. This is due to repeating earlier research without further investigation, and also specialists are far too often simply not aware of research results, due in part to language difficulties and the complexity of the topics. Often, at least some knowledge of the *Bildersprache* and main textual sources of several religions is necessary, in most cases, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Manichaeism, and Christianity. Carrying out my daily work at the museum and receiving information on various aspects of research, sometimes I have the feeling that I stand between various parallel lines, all of which I can observe, but which will never meet on the horizon.

In this article,² I reconsider the reasons why the so-called Sogdian deities became so well-known in Dunhuang studies, Silk Road studies, and Zoroastrian studies and present a new interpretation that supports my original view that this small painting, P. 4518 (24) (figs. 5.1a–b) was made for a specifically Uyghur donor who was most probably Buddhist.³

background, see Lilla Russell-Smith, *Uyghur Patronage in Dunhuang: Regional Art Centres on the Northern Silk Road in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), especially 59–76.

- 2 I would like to thank all participants at the Workshop in Bochum in September 2019 for their valuable comments. Special thanks are due to Christiane Reck for all her suggestions, and also especially to Antonio Panaino for his suggestions and for developing the arguments presented here further in his new article: Antonio Panaino, “About the Debated Iconology of Two Beautiful Maidens from Dunhuang,” in *Dunhuang and Cultural Contact along the Silk Road*, ed. Imre Galambos (Budapest: ELTE, 2022), forthcoming. My chapter in the same volume will also explore further aspects that could not be presented here, Lilla Russell-Smith, “Gods, Goddesses, Demons, Demonesses—Transmissions, Transformations and Ambiguities in Artefacts from Eastern Silk Road Regional Art Centres and Beyond,” in *Dunhuang and Cultural Contact Along the Silk Road*, ed. Imre Galambos (Budapest: ELTE, 2022), forthcoming. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewer for the valuable comments.
- 3 I first considered this in Lilla Russell-Smith, “Wives and Patrons: Uyghur Political and Artistic Influence in Tenth-Century Dunhuang,” *Acta Orientalia Hungaricae* 56 (2003): 414 (Chinese translation: Lilla Russell-Smith (Bi Lilan 毕丽兰), “Qishi yu gongyangren: Huihu zai Dunhuang 10 shiji shiqide zhengzhi he yishu yinxiang 妻室与供养人: 回鹘在敦煌 10 世纪时期的政治和艺术影响,” *Nei Menggu yishuxueyuan xuebao* 内蒙古艺术学院学报 [Journal of Inner Mongolia Arts University] 16.2 (2019): 75); See also Russell-Smith, *Uyghur Patronage*, 6, 99–104, 111 and pl. 2.



FIGURE 5.1A Two female deities, ink and colours on paper, recto. 30.5 × 37.8 cm. Dunhuang, 10th c., P. 4518 (24), BnF

2 Description

Besides the unmistakably Buddhist content, painting P. 4518 (24) may also show Manichaean features, as Uyghur Buddhist art in the early period frequently did, as I demonstrate below.

It has always been my conviction that the complex problems we face in the research of Buddhist art from Dunhuang, Turfan, Kuča, Khotan, and other important sites on the Silk Roads can only be solved through teamwork.⁴ We

⁴ I established the Circle of Inner Asian Art together with three other PhD candidates at SOAS, University of London, in 1995 organising lectures across disciplines, and publishing a Newsletter (1995–2005) as well as hosting a website, one of the first in the field (starting in



FIGURE 5.1B Two female deities, ink and colours on paper, verso. 30.5 × 37.8 cm. Dunhuang, 10th c., P. 4518 (24), BnF

may never have a definite answer, but it is important to consider new research and new discoveries in research on Buddhist art from Dunhuang. This small-scale painting is today in the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (fig. 5.1a–b).⁵ I refer to it as P. 4518 (24) in this article. Found in Cave 17 in Dunhuang by Paul Pelliot, it is a painting in ink with colouring in light orange red on a single sheet of paper; the *verso* is blank.

1998) for this very reason. *The Journal of Inner Asian Art and Archaeology* (JIAAA) grew out of this, I co-edited the journal 2006–2016. (This in turn has now been replaced by a book series published by Brepols *Inner and Central Asian Art and Archaeology* or IAAA).

⁵ Accessed May 21, 2020. Public domain identifier: [ark:/12148/bt1b8300094w](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:5:1-63864-p0094-w0000-9).

This is how I describe it in my book:

Two seated females are shown holding various attributes: the one on the left holds a foliated cup and a tray upon which sits a dog. The female on the right is seated on a wolf: she has four arms, the upper two supporting the sun and moon disks, and the lower two holding a scorpion and a snake.⁶

3 Interpretations So Far

Jao Tsong-yi was the first to publish this small painting in 1978 in his book on monochrome art from Dunhuang,⁷ but it only attracted attention in 1988 after Jiang Boqin suggested at a conference in Beijing that the sketch was Zoroastrian and depicted Nana.⁸ Its fame grew after it was selected for the ground-breaking *Sérinde* exhibition in Paris, held 1995–1996, where I first saw it.⁹ The catalogue of the exhibition presented a new interpretation: whilst identifying the female

6 Russell-Smith, *Uyghur Patronage*, 6. I return to the iconography, and especially to the identification of the animal on which the figure on the right sits, in the second part of this article.

7 Jao Tsong-yi (with Pierre Ryckmans and Paul Demiéville), *Peintures monochromes de Dunhuang (Dunhuang baihua): manuscrits reproduits en facsimilé, d'après les originaux inédits conservés à la Bibliothèque nationale de Paris* (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1978).

8 Jiang Boqin 姜伯勤. "Dunhuang baihua zhongde sute shenqi 敦煌白画中的粟特神祇 [Sogdian Deities in a Drawing from Dunhuang]," in *Dunhuang tulufanxue yanjiu lunwenji 敦煌吐鲁番学研究论文集*, ed. Zhongguo dunhuang tulufanxuehui 中国敦煌吐鲁番学会 (Shanghai: Hanyu dacidian chubanshe, 1990), 296–309. For Nana, see Shervin Farridnejad, *Die Sprache der Bilder: Eine Studie zur ikonographischen Exegese der anthropomorphen Götterbilder im Zoroastrismus* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2018), 268–269. This goddess, originally from the ancient Babylonian Uruk, merged with other female deities.

9 "*Sérinde, Terre de Bouddha. Dix siècles d'art sur la Route de la Soie*," Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, Paris 24 October 1995–19 February 1996. Catalogue: Jacques Giès and Monique Cohen ed., *Sérinde, Terre de Bouddha. Dix siècles d'art sur la Route de la Soie* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1995). As Helen Wang demonstrated in her recent talks, this major exhibition was a result of the important UNESCO Project (1988–1996 and 2002). Another project was started in 2011. Helen Wang gave the conference paper at the China National Silk Museum, Hangzhou (Curators Forum for the exhibition *Life along the Silk Road*, 22–23 June 2019. mins. 12:00–13:15), accessed May 13, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uC4GzjoxHbk&t=8s>. There was also a discussion at the British Museum workshop *Stein Collection and the Silk Roads*, February 21, 2020. About the project, see UNESCO digital library *The Integral Study of the Silk Roads: Roads of Dialogue (1988–1997)*, accessed May 13, 2020. <http://www.silkroads.org.cn/article-1472-1.html>.

deity on the left as the good Daēnā Frantz Grenet described the female on the right as the negative counterpart of the other deity, a kind of demonic version, a bad Dēn.¹⁰ In January 1996 during the conference associated with the exhibition, Zhang Guangda presented a paper confirming Grenet's identification, arguing in more detail for a Zoroastrian meaning, and connecting the image to the Sogdians resident in Dunhuang. According to him, on the left we see a positive Daēna/Dēn¹¹ and on the right a negative Dēn or Druj. Druj is a very negative demonic aspect, who is connected to the bad deeds of the deceased in eschatology.¹² The headdresses of both female figures were not discussed at the conference; they were referred to as Sogdian deities and have remained known as such ever since.¹³

10 Giès and Cohen, *Sérinde*, cat. nos. 225, 293–294.

11 About Daēnā/Dēn, see Azarpay, Guitty “Imagery of the Sogdian Dēn,” in *Maitre pour l'éternité: Florilège offert à Philippe Gignoux pour son 80e anniversaire*, ed. Rika Gysele and Christelle Jullien (Paris: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes, 2011), 55–56 and <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/den>, accessed May 1, 2020.

12 “Druj is the reference point for the fabricated words of the bad divinities (31.1, 53.6). In the eschatological sphere the refuge for the souls of the dead depends upon their merits: either the ‘residence’ (*dam-*) of Ahura Mazdā or that of Druj (46.11, 49.11, 51.11: *drījō dāmānē*). It should be noted that *druj-*, like all words expressing negative concepts, is not attested in the *Yasna Haptanhāiti*.” Jean Kellens, “Druj-,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online version, 1996, last updated 2011. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/druj>, accessed May 1, 2020.

13 I was present at the discussion. Zhang mentioned the unusual headdress in the published version, but he only concludes that it is not Chinese. Zhang Guangda, “Une représentation iconographique de la Daēnā et de la Daēva? Quelques pistes de réflexion sur les religions venues d'Asie centrale en Chine,” in *La Sérinde, terre d'échanges: art, religion, commerce du I^{er} au X^e siècle: actes du colloque international*, (Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, 13–15 février 1996), ed. Monique Cohen, Jean-Pierre Drège, and Jacques Giès (Paris: la Documentation française, 2000), 191–202. The BnF database entry refers to the headdresses. See Archives et manuscrits, “Pelliot Chinois 4518,” accessed May 18, 2020. <https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc1207883/ca000034>. The Wikipedia entry, quoting my research, also refers to the headdresses. See Wikipedia, “Sogdian Daēnās,” accessed May 18, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sogdian_Deities. Although Rong Xinjiang argues that the ruling Cao clan may have a Sogdian origin, Uyghurs and Sogdians in Dunhuang are by no means identical and interchangeable. Rong, “Dunhuang Guiyijun Cao.” Sentences like “[...] her retinue that includes Sogdian Cao family princesses, shown in Uighur tailored coats with wide lapels [...]” show that Azarpay uses these as interchangeable terms, which is an oversimplification. Furthermore, Dunhuang Cave 409 dates to the 11th century. It used to be considered Tangut, but it is now considered to date to the time when Shazhou was under Xizhou Uyghur rule, because both the male and female donors wear Uyghur dress. Azarpay, “Imagery of the Sogdian Dēn,” 73; cf. my detailed argument about these donors in Russell-Smith, *Uyghur Patronage*, 69–75.

Only while preparing for this paper did I realise how iconic this image has become—especially in China. There is even a Wikipedia entry in several languages under the heading “Sogdian Daēnas” (also known as Sogdian deities, Chin. *Sute shengqi baihua* 粟特神祇白畫).¹⁴ My research is listed there, as I only discovered in preparation for this paper. In early 1996 on my return to London from the *Sérinde* exhibition in Paris, I quickly recognised the hairstyle and headdress as typically Uyghur. This subsequently, and within a short time, led me to the realisation that Uyghur donors played a very important part in 10th-century Dunhuang, which became my PhD research topic from then on.¹⁵

After the painting became famous, due to its exposure in the *Sérinde* exhibition and accompanying catalogue, and subsequently in the exhibition in Tokyo,¹⁶ more publications considered the elusive meaning of this simple but intriguing painting. Almost all authors argue that this sketch is Zoroastrian and, therefore, important proof for the existence of a Sogdian Zoroastrian community in 10th-century Dunhuang.

In China, its identification as an important example of Zoroastrian art is now universally accepted. Jiang returned to this topic once again in 2004, and saw his identification confirmed through research outside of China.¹⁷ Jiang concludes his study by quoting an article by Guitty Azarpay, who identified a figure on a silver bowl as Daēna. This female is surrounded by animals, and Azarpay identified one of these accompanying animals as a dog.¹⁸ Jiang's article appeared in an important handbook on Zoroastrian art, and so his interpretation is now repeated with certainty by everyone in China. But there is a problem with using this methodology when there is not sufficient evidence: for iconographical and iconological research, we need reliable textual sources and good comparative material, both of which are lacking in this case. Many of the older text passages Jiang cites are from the Avesta. The bowl that Jiang uses as his evidence has since turned out to be a (partial) fake. Since this fact

14 “Sogdian Daēnās,” accessed May 18, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sogdian_Deities.

15 Russell-Smith, *Uyghur Patronage*, 6, 99–104.

16 *Shiruku Rōdo daibitsuden* シルクロード大美術展. *Grand Exhibition of Silkroad Buddhist Art*, comp. Tōkyō Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan 東京国立博物館 (Tōkyō: Yomiuri Shinbunsha, 1996), cat. nos. 180, 162.

17 Jiang Boqin 姜伯勤, *Zhongguo xianjiao yishushi yanjiu* 中国祆教艺术史研究. *A History of Chinese Zoroastrian Art* (Beijing: Shenghua dushu xinzheng sanzhen shudian, 2004), 237–270. Jiang disagreed, however, with the identification by other authors in Tokyo of the animal as a wolf (rather than a dog) and returned to the idea of a dog because of its importance to the Daēna/Dēn interpretation.

18 Jiang, *Zhongguo xianjiao*, 13–14; Guitty Azarpay, “The Allegory of Dēn in Persian Art,” *Artibus Asiae* 38.1 (1976): 37–48.

can only be found as a side reference in a more recent article by Azarpay, most Chinese scholars may not be aware of this correction.¹⁹

In this more recent article, Azarpay introduces the idea of a syncretic Manichaeo-Zoroastrian belief among the Sogdians in China, for which her most important proof is Étienne de la Vaissière's theory that on the funerary bed of Wirkak, one can see Manichaeo elements and an image of Mani. However, this has since been rejected by Zsuzsanna Gulácsi and Jason BeDuhn, who see no evidence that the Sogdian donors of the funerary bed were Manichaeo, or that Manichaeo iconography could be identified on it. They point to the importance of considering the entire context of all available evidence and warn against investigating details separately.²⁰ In December 2019, de la Vaissière in turn published a new article listing evidence reaffirming his original view.²¹ No doubt a counter article by Gulácsi and BeDuhn will be published in due course, restating their view. This ongoing friendly but firm scholarly debate demonstrates the complexity of the topic, and we cannot expect easy answers.

Why is it necessary to reassess the evidence now? Firstly, having summarised all known identifications, we can see that there is no consensus at all on the meaning of these female figures, even among scholars arguing for a Zoroastrian background.

Secondly, few authors mention the close parallels to several examples found in securely Buddhist context from the Turfan area. These examples are listed in table 5.1. I will return to these points later. Two similar female deities in two separate Buddhist cave temples in Bezeklik were documented by Albert Grünwedel about one hundred years ago. As these figures are now almost completely destroyed, they are only known from these drawings kept in the Museum für Asiatische Kunst in Berlin, but they had been published

19 Azarpay, "Imagery of the Sogdian Dēn," 56–57 and fn. 11.

20 Étienne de la Vaissière, "Mani en Chine au VIe siècle," *Journal Asiatique* 293.1 (2005): 357–378; Étienne de la Vaissière, "Wirkak: Manichaeo, Zoroastrian, Khurrami? On Bilingualism and Syncretism in Sogdian Funerary Art," *Nairiku Ajia gengo no kenkyū* 内陸アジア言語の研究 [Studies on the Inner Asian Languages] 30 (2015): 95–112; Zsuzsanna Gulácsi and Jason BeDuhn, "The Religion of Wirkak and Wiyusi: The Zoroastrian Iconographical Program on a Sogdian Sarcophagus from Sixth-Century Xi'an," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 26 (2016 [2012]): 1–32.

21 Étienne de la Vaissière, "The Faith of Wirkak the Dēnāwar, or Manichaeism as Seen from a Zoroastrian Point of View," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 29 (2015–2019): 69–78. I would like to thank Nicholas Sims-Williams for drawing my attention to this article.

by Grünwedel. Even so these important parallels were only referred to by Bhattacharya-Haesner and Hintze, apart from myself.²²

4 Format and Clothing

A full description of the painting's format is given in the Bibliothèque nationale's database.²³ I say more about the significance of this small, portable format later.

Let us first consider the clothing. The headdresses and hairstyles are the most prominent and unusual features of this painting. I gave a detailed description of the female deities' appearance in an article comparing them to examples from Dunhuang and Turfan.²⁴ The clothing is not remarkable and is known from other examples from that area.²⁵

It is important to note that both figures are female.²⁶ Not only their rosy cheeks, but also the clothing of the deity on the left prove this. Even though

22 Albert Grünwedel, *Altbuddhistische Kultstätten in Chinesisch-Turkistan. Bericht über archäologische Arbeiten von 1906 bis 1907 bei Kuča, Qarašahr und in der Oase Turfan* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1912), figs. 516 and 531. Independently of myself, but at the same time, Chhaya Bhattacharya-Haesner, who was already working on her important catalogue of Central Asian temple banners in the collection of the then Museum für Indische Kunst in Berlin in the mid-nineties, also recognised the Uyghur headdress of these female figures and talked about them for the first time at the ICANAS Conference in Budapest in 1997, where I also presented a paper including P. 4518 (24). See Simone-Christian Raschmann, "IDP Symposium: Dunhuang and Turfan" in IDP News 8–9, British Library London Summer–Winter 1997. Available online http://idp.bl.uk/archives/news08_09/idpnews_08_09.a4d, accessed July 7, 2020. Chhaya Bhattacharya-Haesner, *Central Asian Temple Banners in the Turfan Collection of the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2003), 35–38; Almut Hintze quoted my research in: "A Zoroastrian Vision," in *The Zoroastrian Flame: Exploring Religion, History and Tradition*, ed. Alan Williams, Sarah Stewart, and Almut Hintze (London: Tauris 2016), 77–96.

23 <https://archivesetmanuscripts.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc1207883/ca000034>, accessed May 21, 2020.

24 Russell-Smith, "Wives and Patrons", 410–413.

25 Even though several authors considered this, the belt of the figure on the right does not seem to play an important role. It is not likely that the *kusti*, a leather belt used by Zoroastrians to the present day, would be shown here. See also Azarpay, "Imagery of the Sogdian Dēn," 69–70.

26 The anonymous reviewer draws attention to the possibility of syncretism and the possibility for sex-change for deities transmitted from Iran. The reviewer suggests: "They could be Nana and Tištrya/Nabu dressed as a woman and not two goddesses." Although in general the study of syncretism and sex-change in deities is important for future research, at

bodhisattva-like, it is comparable to clothing worn by female deities from the Turfan area, such as *ḍākinīs*.²⁷ The water-drop-shaped headdresses both females are wearing are very important, as I already argued in detail: without a doubt these are Uyghur headdresses.²⁸ As I wrote in my book, “The headdress shown here, a flat water-drop shape, was worn by high-ranking Uyghur women.”²⁹

I am convinced that in Dunhuang Cave 98 and in other instances the headdresses are not interchangeable and were deliberately chosen markers to indicate identity. As I describe in my book, depicting a certain type of clothing in art was then—as it is today—a useful tool for political statements and propaganda. In this case, the use of the Uyghur headdresses for both female figures is a very central feature and clearly emphasises a connection with the Uyghurs.³⁰ On the left is a typical, simplified depiction of a seat supported by lotus petals, such pedestals are well known in the Buddhist art of Dunhuang. This is already hinting at a Buddhist context as already stated in my book.³¹

Most discussions concern the attributes the deities are holding. Because the scorpion or bug and the snake that the seated female on the right holds have been interpreted by all as negative attributes, scholars have struggled to identify the female deity on the right, as her beauty and youth contrast with

present we do not have sufficient evidence to understand the specific circumstances for transmission in Eastern Central Asia. The connections to astrology and to Tištrya will be discussed below.

- 27 Similarities to *ḍākinīs* were investigated by Bhattacharya-Haesner. Azarpay compared the clothing to a Manichaean example and a Buddhist painting from the Turfan area. Bhattacharya-Haesner, *Central Asian Temple Banners*, 36–37; Azarpay considered images from the Turfan area as stylistic comparison, including or two figures in a Manichaean context (III 4614, *ibid.*, fig. 30). Azarpay, “Imagery of the Sogdian Dēn,” 70, 72–73. Gulácsi considers that III 4614 shows female figures. Zsuzsanna Gulácsi, *Manichaean Art in Berlin Collections* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 144, cat. no. 65. See fig. 5.29 in this article.
- 28 Russell-Smith, “Wives and Patrons,” 404–406.
- 29 Russell-Smith, *Uyghur Patronage*, 6 and fig. 1.
- 30 Azarpay refers to the Uyghur headdresses. Zhang describes them as a strange shape, like a bulb, and writes that they are not Chinese. Jiang also mentions the headdresses, but he does not attempt to identify which community the donor may have belonged to and uses Tangut, Uyghur, and Dunhuang as interchangeable terms for the late headdress. We see above in fn. 13 that Azarpay also considers Sogdian and Uyghur as interchangeable terms in this context in Dunhuang.
- 31 Russell-Smith, *Uyghur Patronage*, 99–104. Chiara Silvi Antonini also independently recognised this in her important critical article. Chiara Silvi Antonini, “Breve Nota su un Manoscritto Pelliot da Dunhuang,” *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 78.3–4 (2005): 495. She does, however, wonder whether the figure on the left could be male. I would like to thank Antonio Panaino for drawing my attention to this article recently.



FIGURE 5.2 (left) P. 4518 (24) detail of Fig 5.1a



FIGURE 5.3 (right) Earthenware figurine of a dog, China, Tang Dynasty, 7th–8th c.
OBJ. NO. FE.155–1974
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a negative meaning. On the other hand, most authors agree that the figure on the left shows the Good Daēnā.

There is not even consensus among authors on what animal the female figure on the right is sitting on. Is it a wolf? Is it a dog? Most authors identify it as a dog. But let us consider the figure on the left: she holds an animal on a tray that can with certainty be identified as a dog. In fact, that animal looks like the Central Asian representation of a dog known from wall paintings that is identifiable as a Saluki (or Saluqi) breed.³² Why then would the artist choose two such contrasting representations if the two are meant to be the same animal, and one is depicted as a specific breed? Therefore, I am convinced that the animal on the right has a different meaning and is not an ordinary dog. We will return to this question later in the article.

The identification of the two figures as the Good and Bad Daēnā/Dēn seems hard to accept, because the female on the right does not look like an ugly old woman. There is an excellent summary of the significance of Daēnā in the latest study by Kianoosh Rezania:

32 For images of Saluki dogs, see, e.g., Sir Terence Clark, “Hunting Hounds along the Silk Road—Which Way Did They Go?,” *The Silk Road* 4.2 (2006/2007): fig. 4, accessed July 7, 2020. <https://edspace.american.edu/silkroadjournal/volume-4-no-2-winter-2006-7/>.

A significant example of the eschatological reinterpretation of ritual transcendence can be read in V. 19, in which the destiny of the breath-soul after death is represented. At dawn following the third night after death, the breath-soul is led to the bridge of mason. This soul and the consciousness of the deceased are asked about their contribution to the world during their material existence. Afterwards, Daēnā appears with her dogs. She throws the breath-soul of the deceitful one into the darkness and lets the breath-souls of the orderly man traverse the bridge of mason [...] Furthermore, the vision-soul of the dead person seems to advance [...] in the form of—to quote the Avestan passage HN 2.9—‘a maiden, beautiful, bright, with white arms, strong, well-shaped, well grown, tall, with high (standing) breasts, with a body from song, noble, from a brilliant lineage, fifteen years old in look, in form much more beautiful than the most beautiful creatures.’ Verse 11 of this text develops the relation of the OAv. *daēnā*- with the Zoroastrian ethic triad to their identification. The represented Daēnā to the breath-soul is his/her own thought, word, and deed.³³

The greatest difficulty with identifying the figure on the right as the Bad Daēnā is her beauty: she is shown as a young female with rosy cheeks. The Bad Daēnā is imagined as an ugly old hag, reflecting the bad deeds of the person who just died. The identification of the figures as the Good and Bad Daēnā/Dēn from Zoroastrianism is also difficult to prove, as no comparable illustrations exist.³⁴ Azarpay rejects Grenet and Zhang’s identification and says the identification of “[...] ‘bad Dēn’ as opposed to the Zoroastrian ‘good Dēn’ on the left is unsupported by textual sources.”³⁵ She then identifies the female deity on the right as Nana. Michael Shenkar lists P. 4518 (24) in his important study of Zoroastrian iconography without detailed explanation or references to previous research. He indicates that the figure on the right could be either Daēnā/Dēn or Nana.³⁶

33 Kianoosh Rezaia, “‘Religion’ in Late Antique Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism: Developing a Term in Counterpoint,” *Entangled Religions* 11.2 (2020): paragraph 19, accessed May 18, 2020. <https://er.ceres.rub.de/index.php/ER/article/view/8556/8125>. In fn. 28 in this quote, Rezaia also refers to the depiction under consideration here, among others, but without going into detail. He also explains the meaning of *dēn* as “religion”. See also Azarpay, “Imagery of the Sogdian Dēn,” 55–56.

34 *Shervin Farridnejad, Die Sprache der Bilder*. This is a most extensive study with no comparable depictions of Daēnā. Farridnejad does not include representations from China, because much is still debatable.

35 Azarpay, “Imagery of the Sogdian Dēn,” 75.

36 Michael Shenkar, *Intangible Spirits and Graven Images: The Iconography of Deities in the Pre-Islamic Iranian World* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 96, 127.

The identification as Nana is also problematic because the main evidence in support of that argument is the sun and the moon held up in the two upper arms of the female figure. However, none of the other details match representations or descriptions of Nana. Practically all known female deities identified as Nana seem to be seated on a lion, which is actually how Madhuvanti Ghose identifies Nana in a Hindu context.³⁷ Very few representations of Nana are known without a lion and none with a wolf, a scorpion, and a snake as attributes. Azarpay argues that the Zoroastrians in Dunhuang changed the animal associated with Nana because the lion was too closely associated with Buddhism. This seems a very unlikely reason to me. She also says that the negative attributes (including the wolf) show that Nana is shown here as a goddess who can control the creatures abhorrent to Zoroastrians.³⁸

Almut Hintze does not agree with this. She points out that the negative attributes are not compatible with a benevolent deity such as Nana. She has put forward yet another explanation:

Just as the two forces, the creative and the destructive, are presented as 'twins' in an earlier stanza of the same hymn, *Yasna* 30.3, so also the two Daēnās here appear to be mirror-images of one another. However, just like the two antagonistic forces, in reality they are fundamentally different, incompatible with one another and mutually exclusive. The fact that the Daēnās are shown as a pair is explainable within the framework of Zoroastrian dualism. Looking at the Sogdian drawing from an Avestan point of view, the feature of four arms could be an iconographic marker which the Dunhuang Zoroastrians employed to represent a non-Avestan deity of a religion of Indian origin where *devá* means god. The figure on the right would then represent what the Avesta calls the *daēnā daēuuaiiasnanqm*, 'the Belief of those who worship *daēvas*', in the form of a four-armed goddess, a *devī*. The figure on the left, by contrast, personifies the *daēnā māzdaiiasni*, 'the Belief of a person who worships Mazda' and represents the *daēnā* as the *yazata* to whom the 24th day of the Zoroastrian month is dedicated.³⁹

37 Madhuvanti Ghose, "Nana: The 'Original' Goddess on the Lion," *Journal of Inner Asian Art and Archaeology* 1 (2006): 97–112. Nana herself is a composite deity with links to other goddesses from Iran, Egypt, and Mesopotamia, which makes the identification as Nana even more complex.

38 Azarpay, "Imagery of the Sogdian Dēn," 75.

39 Hintze, "A Zoroastrian Vision," 92.



FIGURE 5.4A Heavenly Kings (*lokapālas*), pigments on ramie, recto. Toyok
 OBJ. NR. III 7305 © MUSEUM FÜR ASIATISCHE KUNST, STAATLICHE
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FIGURE 5.4B Heavenly Kings (*lokapālas*), pigments on ramie, verso. Toyok
 OBJ. NR. III 7305 © MUSEUM FÜR ASIATISCHE KUNST, STAATLICHE
 MUSEEN ZU BERLIN/JÜRGEN LIEPE

This seems to be a very text-based attribution to me, one that assumes high-levels of literacy in the *Avesta* and other Zoroastrian sources in a community where Zoroastrianism did not play a central role. None of the representations securely identified as Daēnā so far contrast a positive Daēnā with a negative counterpart.

Almut Hintze draws attention to the difference in depicting the eyes of the two figures. However, the different eyes cannot have such a drastically different meaning as indicating good and evil and clear mind, as Hintze suggests, since there is a banner painting with two almost identical *lokapālas* on both sides in the Berlin collection: the eyes are depicted in similar contrasting ways, but evidently neither refers to a negative meaning (on one side we see bulging eyes in this case, which is of course to frighten off negative forces) (fig. 5.4a–b).⁴⁰

We can thus conclude that traditional iconographical research comparing the two females to texts and other works of art, for example, from Iranian Zoroastrian sources and Sogdian art, has not brought conclusive evidence and is not convincing. So let us examine the painting with fresh eyes once more.

5 Similar Examples from the Turfan Area

Female deities with comparable iconography from the Turfan area have been published by me in some detail and, simultaneously and independently, they were also examined by Bhattacharya-Haesner. Later Almut Hintze cited my research, still these examples are seldom mentioned in China. One reason for this may be that P. 4518 (24) is usually studied only in the context of only Dunhuang art.⁴¹ The comparative examples from the Turfan area published in my book are listed in table 5.1. Since then, I have become aware of

⁴⁰ Hintze, “A Zoroastrian Vision,” 84. See Russell-Smith, *Uyghur Patronage*, 103 for further examples from Dunhuang. In Samra Azarnouche and Olivia Ramble, “La Vision zoroastrienne, les yeux dans les yeux. Commentaire sur la Dēn selon Dēnkard III.225,” *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 237.3 (2020): 369–371, Olivia Ramble also describes P. 4518 (24) and considers the links to Dēn and the possibility that the open eyes of the deity on the left symbolise Zoroastrian “vision.” She repeats Hintze’s arguments with regards to this painting and has the same philological approach with an emphasis on Passage 225 of the Dēnkard III, commented for the first time. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this new publication, which was published after I submitted this article.

⁴¹ Chen Aifeng (陈爱峰) from the Turfan Research Academy intends to address this. I would like to thank him for sending me the first part of his article in preparation. The Chinese translation of my article was only published last year, Russell-Smith (毕丽兰), “Qishi yu gongyangren.”

and have examined two further examples of comparable iconography (2 and 6 in table 5.1): one is from in Yarkhoto Cave 4, where identical female deities with snakes appearing behind them in a clouds are depicted on both sides of the entrance to a rear cella, and an interesting example in the newly discovered Toyok Cave 66.⁴² Although Toyok Cave 66 is closed to visitors, in 2017 our museum team (three conservators and myself) received special permission to study the wall paintings in that cave temple, together with Chinese colleagues.⁴³ We assume that this small cave was commissioned for a wealthy and high-ranking person because of the depiction of the donors wearing elegant Uyghur clothing and the amount of gold used.

In Toyok Cave 66, a female with a wolf appears yet again on one side of a door (fig. 5.5), like in the case of the Bezeklik caves listed in my book and in table 5.1. Her animal is quite clearly a grey wolf, and in this case, is shown lying down behind her. Unfortunately, the upper part of the painting has been destroyed, so we cannot see whether the female figure once held the sun and the moon there too. In her hands still visible, she holds a tray of flaming jewels, or *cintāmaṇi*, emphasising a full transformation to a Buddhist context. In this case, on the other side of the door, for the first time, we see the remains not of another female deity (identified as heavenly maiden or *tiannü* (天女) in the report), as in the other instances, but the lower half of a *lokapāla* (fig. 5.6).

In table 5.1, I list examples of other figures that share iconographic features of the deity on the right of P. 4518 (24).⁴⁴ As this deity appears in all these instances as one half of a pair, I also list whether she is seemingly duplicated or whether another deity is paired with her.

Many authors investigated the so-called 'Sogdian deities' only within the context of the Dunhuang corpus, unaware of the similarities to representations in the Turfan area. This table demonstrates how closely integrated P. 4518

42 I published Yarkhoto Cave 4 in Lilla Russell-Smith, "Traces of a Goddess: Deciphering the Remains of Buddhist Art in Xinjiang," in *Elegante Zusammenkunft im Gelehrten Garten: Studien zur ostasatischen Kunst zu Ehren von Jeong-hee Kalisch, Elegant Gathering in a Scholar's Garden: Studies in East Asian Art in Honour of Jeong-hee Lee-Kalisch*, ed. Annegret Bergmann, et al. (Weimar: Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswissenschaften (VDG)), 2015, 30–36. I publish Toyok Cave 66 here for the first time.

43 I would like to thank Xia Lidong (夏立栋) from the Institute of Archaeology at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), Beijing for sending high-resolution images of Toyok Cave 66 immediately after publication of the archaeological report in May 2019, and I would also like to thank Chen Aifeng (Turfan Research Academy) for drawing my attention to this example in 2016.

44 The list is not exhaustive. III 7243, a painting found in Hasar Shahri, will be discussed in a future article.



FIGURES 5.5–6 Heavenly Maiden (left) and Heavenly King (right), wall paintings in Toyok Cave 66

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(24) is with the female deities that have comparable iconography from the Turfan area.

Considering the damaged condition of most of the remains of Uyghur art, it is really surprising how many examples have survived of this female deity in the Turfan area. We can conclude that there are elements that are constant in her appearance: in particular she always appears elegantly dressed like a lady, and, if her head is preserved, she always has a typical Uyghur hairstyle and usually has a halo. Her accompanying animal (if the lower part is preserved) is a wolf or a fierce dog (more about this later). She holds fruits or flaming jewels, except in P. 4518 (24), and she always appears with an accompanying figure, who has changing attributes but is almost always also female (with the exception of Toyok). Apart from the portable examples (P. 4518 (24) and the banner painting from Kočo), the others are all wall paintings from securely Buddhist contexts, where the female deity is always positioned in a very important position: at the entrance to the cave temple or to an inner sanctum (as in Yarkhoto). This emphasises her central role and also that she is different from all known Buddhist deities depicted in a similar position (as, for example, the Heavenly King in Toyok).

The female deity associated with the fierce dog or wolf and snake(s) must have been recognisable to the donors and worshippers in Buddhist settings in the Turfan region, regardless of whether she was paired with another deity or duplicated, as appears to be the case in Bezeklik and Yarkhoto. In contrast to the text-based interpretations listed above, in my opinion, there was no need-to-know scriptural sources to be able to identify these popular images that were so well-known in the Turfan area, and by extension, in Dunhuang. We know what an important role Uyghurs played in 10th-century Dunhuang.⁴⁵ This female deity must have originated in a non-Buddhist context. But was this context Zoroastrian?

6 Astral Considerations

I referred to the problem of the negative attributes held by the figure on the right: a scorpion or bug-like animal and a snake. The wolf can also have negative connotations.⁴⁶

45 Russell-Smith, *Uyghur Patronage*, 59–76, with further references to historical research listed in the bibliography.

46 Although steppe cultures, including the Tujue (突厥, ancient Turkic groups), had legends describing that their people originated from the wolf, and therefore the wolf's meaning

However, there is one positive context for similar attributes that has not been explored in detail by any author so far: considering that the deity holds the sun and the moon, the above-mentioned animal attributes could also have an astral aspect: the astrological signs Scorpio and Cancer are shown in a very similar way around the 10th century in tombs (e.g., Khitan tombs).⁴⁷ The same type of image usually appearing in circles, is also depicted in this way in Tangut paintings and prints that show Tejaprabhā (figs. 5.7–5.8). Famously, these astral images in circles crossed over into Japanese esoteric Buddhist art, where rituals involving stars became very important in some traditions.⁴⁸ Viewing this comparative material I developed a hypothesis according to which the female deity on the right of P. 4518 (24) is linked to Buddhist astral rituals. In her hands she holds not only the Sun and Moon, but also Cancer and snake: a zodiacal sign and a frequent astral symbol. In the second part of this article, I list the reasons for this hypothesis.

In Bezeklik Cave 18, I identified a representation of Tejaprabhā accompanied by deities representing the planets and the Chinese zodiac (fig. 5.9).⁴⁹ Unfortunately, this wall painting was destroyed during the bombings of the Second World War.

While preparing for this paper, I noticed that in one of the scenes below the main representation of Tejaprabhā and his assembly, we see the small figure of a Brahmin pointing to circles linked with lines in the sky—these can clearly be interpreted as the stars, shown according to the Chinese tradition, such as in the famous Dunhuang star map (fig. 5.10).

We see a small figure floating on a cloud, whose rebirth is about to be foretold based on the positions of the stars. This detail could be a clue for the

could be positive, in Buddhist contexts, the wolf often has a negative meaning. This was the case for the Uyghurs too, as discussed at the workshop in Bochum. More on this in Russell-Smith, “Gods, Goddesses, Demons, Demonesses.”

47 Tansen Sen, “Astronomical Tomb Paintings from Xuanhua: Mandalas?,” *Ars Orientalis* 29 (1999): 29–54, especially figs. 2–5, 12.

48 Michelle McCoy, “Astral Visuality in the Chinese and Inner Asian Cult of Tejaprabhā Buddha, ca. 900–1300 AD,” (PhD diss., UC Berkeley, 2017), accessed May 18, 2020. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3db7f5td>. Tejaprabhā assembly, excavated at Karakhoto, Inner Mongolia, now State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, accessed May 21, 2020. <http://hermitagemuseum.org>.

49 Lilla Russell-Smith, “Stars and Planets in Chinese and Central Asian Buddhist Art from the Ninth to the Fifteenth Centuries,” *Culture and Cosmos* 10.1–2 (2006): 99–124, accessed May 18, 2020. <http://www.cultureandcosmos.org/issues/vol10.php>. The wall painting was published in Albert von Le Coq, *Die Buddhistische Spätantike in Mittelasien*. Vol. 4 (Berlin: Verlag Dietrich Reimer/Ernst Vohsen, 1934), pl. 22. For an enlargeable picture, see <http://dsr.nii.ac.jp/toyobunko/viewer/index.html?pages=LFB-2/V-4&pos=22&lang=en>, accessed May 18, 2020.



FIGURES 5.7–8 Tejabrahmā assembly, ink and colours on silk, 67 × 104 cm. Karakhoto, ca. 12th c. and detail

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FIGURE 5.9 Tejaprabhā assembly from Bezeklik Cave 18, wall painting destroyed in World War II

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importance of astrologers and possibly the astrologers who cast horoscopes in determining rebirth in Uyghur art and culture.

One of the best examples of the female figures under discussion in this article is in the entrance of Bezeklik Cave 18. She once looked strikingly similar to the female deity on the right in P. 4518 (24) (fig. 5.11).⁵⁰

Today, only her shoes and a part of the wolf or dog's head are left, due to exposure to strong sunlight and erosion by the wind and sand that blew into the open caves before doors were fitted in the 1980s. But Albert Grünwedel could still sketch this figure in the early 20th century. There was a caption next to her, and although the characters are illegible, it does not seem to say Nana.

50 A drawing of the female deity in Bezeklik Cave 18 (in Grünwedel's numbering Anlage 8) was published in Albert Grünwedel, *Altbuddhistische Kultstätten in Chinesisch-Turkistan. Bericht über archäologische Arbeiten von 1906 bis 1907 bei Kuča, Qarašahr und in der Oase Turfan* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1912), fig. 531.



FIGURE 5.10 Detail from the scene under the Tejabrabhā assembly from Bezeklik Cave 18, wall painting destroyed in World War II

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As we see above, both female deities have a similar headdress and hairstyle, with a straight hairline; they both have four arms, with the upper two holding up the sun and the moon; they have similar clothing, and a wolf or a fierce dog appears behind both of them. The differences are that in the Dunhuang painting, the female deity is shown sitting on the wolf or dog, and her lower two hands are holding animals, including a snake, whilst in Bezeklik the snake appears behind the deity in a cloud, and the dog or wolf also simply stands behind her. There are other examples of similar female deities in Bezeklik Cave 16. There too, these images appeared on the two sides of the entrance to the cave temple. In this case, several fragments of the image of a female with raised arms and an Uyghur hairstyle were found: presumably originally she too held the sun and the moon (fig. 5.13). Another example showed a female deity with a wolf behind her. Only the lower part of this female wearing trousers



FIGURE 5.11 Drawing of a female deity in Bezeklik Cave 18 (in Grünwedel's numbering, Anlage 8)
GRÜNWEDEL, ALTBUDDHISTISCHE KULTSTÄTTEN, FIG. 531



FIGURE 5.12 Detail of Fig. 5.1, female deity on the right



FIGURE 5.13 Drawing of a female deity in Bezeklik Cave 16
GRÜNWEDEL, *ALTBUDDHISTISCHE KULTSTÄTTEN*, FIG. 517

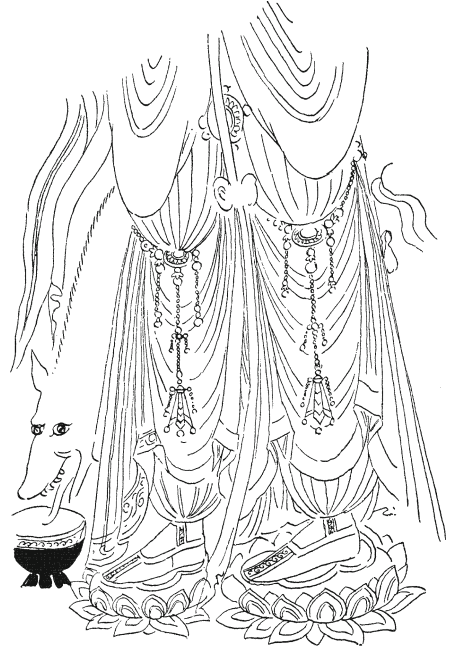


FIGURE 5.14 Drawing of a female deity in Bezeklik Cave 16
GRÜNWEDEL, *ALTBUDDHISTISCHE KULTSTÄTTEN*, FIG. 516

and fashionable shoes typical for an Uyghur woman, was preserved when Grünwedel sketched it, so there is no way to tell whether she too was multi-armed. In view of the other examples however, it is very likely that it was a mirror image of the female opposite with hands held up and with a fashionable Uyghur hairstyle (fig. 5.14).⁵¹

There are close similarities to Tangut art and iconography in Bezeklik Caves 16 and 18.⁵² However, to my knowledge, there are no deities similar to the female figures shown in P. 4518 (24) from Karakhoto, which is further proof

51 Grünwedel, *Altbuddhistische Kultstätten*: 243, figs. 516–517.

52 In a recent article, Kōichi Kitsudō also draws attention to the extreme similarity between the hell scenes from this cave temple (today in Berlin) and a Tangut manuscript. Kitsudō Kōichi 橘堂晃一 and Arakawa Shintarō 荒川慎太郎, “Kanjin jippōkai-zu’ wo meguru shinkenkyū-Seika to Uiguru no jirei wo chūshin ni 「観心十法界図」をめぐむ新研究—西夏とウイグルの事例を中心に [New Research on the Guanxin Shifajietu (Illustration of the Ten Realms of Mind Contemplation). The Case of the Xixia and the Uyghur Kingdoms],” *Kokka* 國華 [A Monthly Journal of Oriental Art] 1477 (2018): 5–20.

that these female figures had important meaning specifically for the Uyghurs and not for others, like the Chinese, Tibetans, Tanguts, or even the Sogdians.

In addition to proving the importance of astral images for the Uyghurs, this indirect evidence from Bezeklik Cave 18 strengthens my hypothesis that P 4518 (24) may have been used in a Buddhist star-related ritual.⁵³

7 Paper: Material for Astrology

Let us consider the format again: a single sheet of paper. P. 4518 (24) is of a small, portable format, so it could have been carried easily from elsewhere. I find it quite surprising how little attention other authors pay to this possibility. I consider this in my book and conclude that the style of the painting is consistent with that of 10th-century Dunhuang, and, therefore, it is likely that it was made there.⁵⁴ However, in my opinion, the possibility that it was brought to Dunhuang from elsewhere, for example by Uyghurs from the Turfan area, cannot be excluded completely.

In my opinion, the format of this small painting on paper is not unique, unlike Jiang's suggestion. The painting was first published in a book on monochrome painting from Dunhuang by Jao, as we have seen. Sarah Fraser and others have published many paintings on paper, some of which are preparatory sketches for bigger compositions. Others—especially in this small format—are very much in the same tradition as *maṇḍalas* and horoscopes that were probably made for personal worship and ritual. *Dhāraṇī* talismans were also popular in the 10th century in Dunhuang, some with direct links to astral deities.⁵⁵

In the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, there is also an astrological scroll from the Turfan area that was created by sticking sheets of paper together (fig. 5.15). In this case too, washes of light paint were added to the monochrome painting. Frantz Grenet and Georges-Jean Pinault were the first to realise the astrological

53 Further research will have to be conducted with regards to this question.

54 Russell-Smith, *Uygur Patronage*, 103. Also, Russell-Smith, "Wives and Patrons," 414.

55 For the importance of paper for images used in ritual, see Russell-Smith, *Uygur Patronage*, 136–138. Compare for example, Mercury and Ketu from the British Museum Collection: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_1919-0101-0-170, accessed May 18, 2020. Although I recognised the iconography of Mercury, I used the title given in the British Museum database, identifying the lady based on the inscription as the "Pole Star". This was corrected by Jeffrey Theodore Kotyk, "Buddhist Astrology and Astral Magic in the Tang Dynasty" (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2017), 207, accessed May 18, 2020. <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/54858>.



FIGURE 5.15 Astrological scroll (Detail), ink and colour washes on paper. Turfan region
 OBJ. NO. III 520 © MUSEUM FÜR ASIATISCHE KUNST, STAATLICHE
 MUSEEN ZU BERLIN/BIRGIT SCHMIDT

meaning of this scroll.⁵⁶ The Chinese text on the other (*verso*) side allows for the reconstruction of the correct order of the sheets, and so the relatively small missing areas can be reconstructed with some precision.⁵⁷ According to Grenet, it may be a document to explain astrological symbols. The Tocharian inscriptions leave no doubt as to the identification of the astrological topic: representations of the zodiac and decans (although not each figure has been identified).

56 Inv. No. III 520. Frantz Grenet and Georges-Jean Pinault, "Contacts des traditions astrologiques de l'Inde et de l'Iran d'après une peinture des collections de Turfan," *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 141 (1997): 1003–1063, accessed May 18, 2020. https://www.persee.fr/doc/crai_0065-0536_1997_num_141_4_15801; see also Frantz Grenet, "The Circulation of Astrological Lore and Its Political Use between the Roman East, Sasanian Iran, Central Asia, India, and the Türks," in *Empires and Exchanges in Eurasian Late Antiquity: Rome, China, Iran, and the Steppe, ca. 250–750*, ed. Nicola Di Cosmo and Michael Maas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 235–252, accessed 18 May 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316146040.019>.

57 Valérie Lavoix, "L'Anthologie des belles-lettres," in *La fabrique du lisible—La mise en texte des manuscrits de la Chine ancienne et médiévale*, ed. Jean-Pierre Drège and Costantino Moretti (Paris: Collège de France—Institut des Hautes Etudes chinoises, 2014), 196–200.

Interestingly, a scorpion identified by an inscription as *vršcika*, the zodiacal sign Scorpio, is shown together with a figure holding a snake. This can be identified as one of the decans under the sign of the Scorpio the decan is shown as a figure holding snakes in the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara, proving how enduring this iconography was across a vast geographical area.⁵⁸

Some of the figures depicted wear Indian style *dhotīs* and others more local costumes—the same interesting mixture of local and Indian-style clothing we observe in P. 4518 (24). The similar material, similar painting technique, unusual mixture of clothing within one scene, and unusual attributes link these two paintings.

Seeing these similarities let us investigate further whether P. 4518 (24) could have an astrological meaning?

Grenet briefly raised this possibility, but did not explore it further, which is surprising, especially since he published the astrological scroll at around the same time as researching P. 4518 (24). Grenet and Zhang refer to a loop that is also clearly visible in the newly available photo in the Europeana database.⁵⁹ This leads them to consider that this painting may have been used in Zoroastrian processions.⁶⁰ I find it unlikely that this small painting was used in actual processions, considering how fragile paper is and since we know that other materials for making banners were available. But the loop may have served for hanging the sketch in ritual use.

Undoubtedly, P. 4518 (24) shows Iranian features and *Formensprache*. But there is another, much more logical way for these characteristics to be present in a small painting that we can associate with Uyghurs in 10th century Dunhuang. This is the role of Manichaeism.

8 Possible Role of Manichaeism

The links to Manichaeism have not been sufficiently explored. Manichaeism was present in Dunhuang and, of course, played a major role in Turfan,

58 For links between the decans as depicted in Egypt and in Ferrara, and Aby Warburg's interest in these, see Marco Bertozzi, "Aby Warburg a Palazzo Schifanoia: Cent Anni Dopo," *Schifanoia* 42–43 (2012): 169–185.

59 http://www.europeana.eu/portal/en/record/9200365/BibliographicResource_1000055720803.html#rp=2, accessed July 8, 2020.

60 Frantz Grenet and Zhang Guangda, "The Last Refuge of the Sogdian Religion: Dunhuang in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 10 (1996): 181.

especially for the Uyghur ruling class, whose official religion it remained until the late 10th century.⁶¹

The most important point is, of course, that Manichaeism incorporated many important ideas from Zoroastrianism, including the idea of Daēnā/Dēn.⁶² As Christiane Reck points out:

Mani deliberately designed his religion to be syncretic. He wanted his system to incorporate all earlier systems and to be their completion and conclusion. At the same time, he wanted it to be comprehensible to the believers of other religions, and therefore he used their images to illustrate his own concepts. In this, he reached back not only to Judeo-Christianity, in which he grew up, but also to Buddhism and Zoroastrianism. The dualistic approach, cosmogonic ideas, and adoption of the names of Zoroastrian gods, alongside the translation of those names into Syriac-Aramaic, contributed to the Iranian face of Central Asian Manichaeism. In addition, eschatological details are borrowed from the Zoroastrian milieu, such as the Manichaean idea that after the death of the righteous person, the liberated soul encounters his own deeds in the form of a virgin, who accompanies him during his further ascent.⁶³

Reck introduces the Sogdian deities painting from Dunhuang in this article and, after some consideration, accepts Grenet's identification of it as Zoroastrian, although not without expressing some doubt, as the attributes are so unusual. She also does not consider the identity of the female figure on the

61 For this, see Yukiyo Kasai, "Uyghur Legitimation and the Role of Buddhism," in *Buddhism in Central Asia I—Patronage, Legitimation, Sacred Space, and Pilgrimage*, ed. Carmen Meinert and Henrik H. Sørensen (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 69–73.

62 Jason BeDuhn argues that Zoroastrians had to define their religion in the 3rd century, due to challenges from other religions, including Manichaeism, so Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism evolved in a similar way in this period. Jason BeDuhn, "The Co-formation of the Manichaean and Zoroastrian Religions in Third-Century Iran," *Entangled Religions* 11.2 (2020), accessed May 18, 2020. <https://er.ceres.rub.de/index.php/ER/article/view/8414/7832>. I am grateful to Antonio Panaino and Christiane Reck, who emphasised the importance of this new open access volume for my research. This important article was published too late to be considered in detail here.

63 Translated from Christiane Reck, "Die Beschreibung der Daēnā in einem soghdischen manichäischen Text," in *Religious Themes and Texts in Pre-Islamic Iran and Central Asia: Studies in Honour of Professor Gherardo Gnoli on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday on 6th December 2002*, ed. Carlo G. Cereti, et al. (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2003), 332.

right, and simply accepts that she is Nana seated on a wolf, as the focus of her article is the Manichaean Daēnā, so she only considers the figure on the left in detail. As Reck also accepts the Zoroastrian identification for the female deity on the right of P. 4518 (24), I did not pay sufficient attention to this important source when writing my book and simply listed this article as one of the available views.⁶⁴ Now, reconsidering the evidence presented by Reck, I think that her article is very important for understanding the background of this painting.

In this article, Reck publishes a fragment from the Ōtani collection, which lists attributes for Daēnā not known so far from Zoroastrian sources, but reminds us of the female deity on the left of P. 4518 (24).

The description of the Daēnā could be enhanced by adding the small fragment from the Ōtani collection. She is described as a wonderful and divine maiden, a virgin, and this corresponds to the image described in the Zoroastrian texts about Daēnā: as a beautiful virgin. While the *Haδōxt* describes her beauty in more detail, here, her attributes are listed: everlasting fruits (?) *myyty* or *mryty*, the drink (*cš'nt*), and a wreath of flowers around the head. The word for drink *cš'nt* can be read without a doubt.⁶⁵

As Reck points out, the lobed Sasanian type bowl in the right hand of the female on the left of P. 4518 (24) may contain a drink, maybe an elixir of life.⁶⁶ Because of the mention of eternal fruits, I would like to draw attention again to the banner from Kočo (previously in Berlin and now in the Yale University Art Gallery) (table 5.1 and figs. 5.16–17).⁶⁷ It shows a similar deity with four arms who holds the sun and the moon in her two upper arms and fruits on a tray in her two lower arms. Fruits play a central role in Manichaeism, because they are believed to contain light particles or *nous*. On the other side of the banner, there is another female deity with just two arms, who also holds fruits.⁶⁸

64 I also did not consider this interpretation in detail for the conference paper given at the workshop, but it was briefly mentioned by Peter Zieme in the discussion after my paper.

65 Translated from Reck, "Die Beschreibung der Daēnā," 332.

66 *Ibid.*, 332–333.

67 The banner is currently in the collection of the Yale University Art Gallery (Obj. No. 1937.5576) available online <https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/58860>, accessed May 22, 2020.

68 There are examples of female deities holding a tray of fruits from Buddhist contexts in Uyghur art: the presence of fruit in those instances indicates a close link between Uyghur Buddhist art and Manichaeism around the 10th century. This will be discussed in a future article.



FIGURES 5.16–17 Drawing of female deities after the two sides of a banner painting from Kočo
DRAWING BY GRÜNWEDEL (TA 6660 AND TA 6659). © MUSEUM FÜR ASIATISCHE
KUNST, STAATLICHE MUSEEN ZU BERLIN/JÜRGEN LIEPE

The two female deities fill the main area of the banner. The top of the banner has not survived. Nonetheless, the pronounced use of two large female figures not linked to standard Buddhist iconography makes it likely that this banner was made in the period when Uyghur rulers still supported Manichaeism and may document a transitional phase in early Uyghur Buddhist art. However, there are no specific stylistic details and motifs like the ones Gulácsi listed for identifying Manichaean art, which also makes a Buddhist context likely.⁶⁹ It is important to emphasise that this period was a time of interaction. Manichaeism in the Turfan area was increasingly influenced by Buddhist ideas in this late phase.⁷⁰

69 Zsuzsanna Gulácsi, *Medieval Manichaean Book Art: A Codicological Study of Iranian and Turkic Illuminated Book Fragments from 8th–11th Century East Central Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), especially 24–38. See also Zsuzsanna Gulácsi, *Mani's Pictures: The Didactic Images of the Manichaeans from Sasanian Mesopotamia to Uyghur Central Asia and Tang-Ming China* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 209–210. A more detailed discussion of this question is planned in a future article.

70 Reck, "Die Beschreibung der Daēnā," 324.

9 Astrology and Manichaeism

In view of the important new research being published on Manichaean art, following the sensational discoveries of the Song (960–1279, 宋) and Yuan (1279–1368, 元) paintings, which are now in Japanese collections, we are starting to have a much better idea of what Manichaean cosmology was like as a system and how it was shown in visual representations.⁷¹ The role of the sun and the moon was central for Manichaean cosmology—and this can clearly be seen in the so-called ‘Cosmology Painting’, a unique Chinese Manichaean painting, probably dating to the 13th–14th centuries, discovered in Japan.⁷² Astrology played an important part in Manichaeism. By the time of Augustine (late 4th–early 5th c.), the Manichaeans developed a considerable reputation, or even notoriety, as astrologers, according to Samuel N.C. Lieu.⁷³ In the Cosmology Painting, the zodiac (containing demonic representations) is directly above the snakes that symbolise eternal transmigration.⁷⁴ Interestingly, this is known from texts:

According to the same manuscript (Henning, 1948, p. 315), below the ten Firmaments were fashioned a rolling wheel and the Zodiac (in Sogdian: Man. ʾ(n)xrwzn/Buddh. ʾnyrwzn; see Gharib, 2004, pp. 40, 47, 82). Within the Zodiac the demons of Darkness were fettered; here we find also a reference to the negative role of the planets and of the twelve Zodiacal constellations.⁷⁵

This is the basic difficulty: the planets and the zodiac acquired a negative, demonic aspect in Iran, which may be a reason why the astral possibility for P. 4518 (24) was not explored further by other authors. As Antonio Panaino writes:

71 For a discussion of the newly identified paintings, see Gulácsi, *Mani's Pictures*, 244–258.

72 *Ibid.*, 438–484.

73 Samuel N.C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985 (1999 reprint)), 141.

74 For a diagram (with no discussion of the zodiac), see Gulácsi, *Mani's Pictures*, 439. The zodiac is shown in the circle in the center of the lowest firmament of the sky, directly above the atmosphere with the snakes. There, Scorpio is painted in red, for some reason, as the only one of the zodiac signs. Gábor Kósa drew attention to the depiction of the zodiac in this painting in a paper given at the Max Planck Institute in 2018. The paper remains unpublished, but an abstract is available. Accessed May 20, 2020. https://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/sites/default/files/201804/abstracts_workshop_17.pdf.

75 Antonio Panaino, “Zodiac,” *Encyclopædia Iranica* (online), published July 20, 2009, accessed May 20, 2020. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/zodiac>.

[...] the Manichaeans demonized not only the planets, but also stars and constellations; only the two Luminaries, the Sun and the Moon, were exempted, although this radical process of demonization of the astral beings shows some contradictions. One, and among the most relevant ones, is exactly that of Sadwēs. It is probable that, particularly in the Parthian Manichaean framework, the positive role of Satauaaēsa was separated from that of a proper star, and that his association with Anāhīd determined his equation with the Maiden of Light whose astral function is in any case evident, although, in the Manichaean context, it was no longer properly that of a star as such.⁷⁶

Sadwēs or Satauaaēsa became associated with the Light Maiden, although not in her role as the seducer in the creation myth, as Panaino argues. A connection to the Light Maiden was already recognised by Mary Boyce, when referring to a Parthian Manichaean text from Berlin (M 741).

From the little that is said in the Avesta of Satavaēsa it is clear that this star was honoured as a divinity and regarded as the helper of Tištrya in the bringing of rain to earth [...] The Maiden of Light, in her turn, was a supporting divinity, an evocation not of Zarwān himself, but of the Third Messenger. She was, moreover, the rain-goddess in the Manichaean pantheon [...] [in the *Kephalaia*] it is said that the ‘form of the Maiden of Light’ evokes rain and hail, frost and snow, thunder and lightning from the demon-inhabited clouds.⁷⁷

This recalls the image from Yarkhoto where, behind the female deity’s halo, snake heads appear in swirling clouds (figs. 5,18–19).

Emphasising her role as ‘rain goddess’ the Light Maiden (or the Virgin of the Light) in the Dunhuang Hymn Scroll (9th c.) is referred to as Lightning or Lightning Flash (Chin. Dianming 電明 or Dianguangming 電光明) and Lightning Flash Buddha (Chin. Dianguangfo 電光佛) in Chinese.⁷⁸ Swirling

76 Antonio Panaino, “Sadwēs, Anāhīd and the Manichaean Maiden of Light,” in *Der östliche Manichäismus—Gattungs- und Werksgeschichte. Vorträge des Göttinger Symposiums vom 4.–5. März 2010*, ed. Zekine Özertural and Jens Wilkens (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2011), 125–126.

77 Mary Boyce, “Sadwēs and Pēsūs,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 13,4 (1951): 909.

78 Email communication with Gábor Kósa, May 21, 2020. I am extremely grateful to Gábor Kósa for sending me his unpublished article, “The Figure of the Virgin of Light in the New Chinese Manichaica,” just before I submitted this article. Kósa also lists the other



FIGURES 5.18–19 Female deities, wall paintings. Yarkhoto Cave 4
© TURFAN RESEARCH ACADEMY



FIGURES 5.20–21 Rāhu and Ketu. (Detail of figure 5.7)

clouds and snakes can refer to this association with rain and lightning. At the same time snakes can also be a reference to the demonic nature of the depicted figure, similar to representations of Rāhu and Ketu (symbolising the solar and lunar eclipses) in Tangut art (fig. 5.7 and details in figs. 5.20–21).

As we have seen above, a snake also appears in a cloud behind the female deity from the entrance of Bezeklik Cave 18. This deity had a caption with three Chinese characters in it when Grünwedel copied the wall painting more than one hundred years ago. Today, only part of the wolf can be seen on the wall, even though Grünwedel left the wall painting *in situ*. Due to the bad preservation of the wall painting, the characters were probably already hard to see, and Grünwedel could not read Chinese. The top was damaged, according to Grünwedel's drawing. Grünwedel could be quite reliable when copying Chinese characters, if the iconography could be identified, as in the case of the *nakṣatras* in Sengim. But in this case, without any context, it was difficult for Grünwedel to guess what the worn characters may have referred to (fig. 5.11).⁷⁹

In the Cosmological Painting, which was, of course, influenced by the Buddhist iconography of the Song Dynasty, we see a multi-armed depiction of the Light Maiden. The circular motifs she holds are actually small faces, which, according to Gábor Kósa, symbolise the liberated light particles (because they

known names for the Light Maiden: Syriac: btūlat nūhrā; Coptic: tparcenos Mpouaine; Latin: Virgo lucis; Greek: παρθένος τοῦ φωτός; Middle Persian and Parthian: knygrwšn or qnyg; Sogdian: qnygrwšn; and Uyghur: yašin t(ä)ηri kny rwšn t(ä)ηri.

79 For the *nakṣatra* illustrations, see Albert Grünwedel, *Bericht über archäologische Arbeiten in Idikutschari und Umgebung im Winter 1902–1903* (Munich: Verlag der Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1906), pls. 24–27.

have halos and cloud-like tails).⁸⁰ It is possible that the popular female Uyghur deity we examine here also incorporates aspects of the Light Maiden in a new Buddhist context and that the female deity on the right of P. 4518 (24) also refers to an astral aspect of the Light Maiden.⁸¹ The most important example universally accepted as depicting the Light Maiden is an embroidery in the collection of the Museum für Asiatische Kunst (III 6251) (fig. 5.22).

Here the Light Maiden is accompanied by two *electae* (Manichaean female clergy or nuns, who dedicate their lives to liberating the trapped Light in the world, for example, through rituals and eating fruits, which were believed to contain light particles.) Gulácsi identifies further possible representations of the Light Maiden.⁸² She writes:

The primary function of the Light Maiden concerns the early stages of personal salvation. She appears to the righteous elect and catechumen at the start of their afterlife with the task of ferrying their souls to the Realm of Light.⁸³

This means that the Light Maiden has similarities with Daēnā, and as a major female deity in the Manichaean pantheon, the Light Maiden would be a suitable partner to accompany the Manichaean Daēnā, but so far, no representations showing both of them together are known. More research is needed in this area.⁸⁴

10 Sirius the Dog Star or Heavenly Wolf

Considering these clues and that the symbols in the hands of the female on the right P. 4518 (24) may have an astral aspect, we must once again return to the identity of the animal that the female on the right is seated on. It is different

80 Gábor Kósa, "The Iconographical Affiliation and the Religious Message of the Judgment Scene in the Chinese Cosmology Painting," in *San yi jiao yanjiu—Lin Wushu jiaoshou guxi jinian wenji* 三夷教研究—林悟殊教授古稀纪念文集 [Research on the Three Foreign Religions—Papers in Honour of Prof. Lin Wushu on His 70th Birthday], ed. Zhang Xiaogui 张小贵, Wang Yuanyuan 王媛媛, and Yin Xiaoping 殷小平 (Lanzhou: Lanzhou daxue chubanshe, 2014), 142–144.

81 The star Sadwēs was associated with the Light Maiden as we see above in fn. 74.

82 Gulácsi, *Mani's Pictures*, 317 and 400–405.

83 *Ibid.*, 400–401.

84 Gulácsi writes that a comprehensive study on the Light Maiden has yet to be written. *Ibid.*, 400. See also Panaino, "Two Beautiful Maidens," on the astral aspects of the Light Maiden.



FIGURE 5.22 The Light Maiden accompanied by two *electae*, embroidery, found in Kocho, Ruin K, 9th–10th c.

OBJ. NR. III 6251 © MUSEUM FÜR ASIATISCHE KUNST, STAATLICHE MUSEEN ZU BERLIN/JÜRGEN LIEPE



FIGURE 5.23 Astrological scroll (Detail), ink and colour washes on paper. Turfan region
OBJ. NR. III 520 © MUSEUM FÜR ASIATISCHE KUNST, STAATLICHE
MUSEEN ZU BERLIN/BIRGIT SCHMIDT

from the dog seated on the tray in the hand of the deity on the left. The way this more ferocious animal is shown is unusual: not only is the female deity riding on it, but also the animal is looking back at her, thereby establishing an important link between the two of them.

This strongly reminds me of the way the dog looks up to one of the deities on the astrological scroll from the Turfan area (fig. 5.23), and in that case, it is clearly a dog of the same type as the one that sits on the tray of the deity on the left in P. 4518 (24). This is, unfortunately, one of the scenes that Grenet and Pinault could not identify with certainty, and in his latest article, Grenet puts a question mark below it.⁸⁵

Previously, Grenet tentatively identified the figure with *Tištrya*, who is *Sirius* in Iran.⁸⁶ We see above that the star *Sadwēs* was originally also linked

85 Grenet, "The Circulation of Astrological Lore," fig. 16.8.

86 Antonio Panaino, *Tištrya, Part II, The Iranian Myth of the Star Sirius* (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il medio ed estremo oriente, 1995). Panaino, "Two Beautiful Maidens," will expand on *Tištrya*. Further aspects of *Tištrya* have been discussed in Matteo Compareti, *The Elusive Persian Phoenix. Simurgh and Pseudo-Simurgh in Iranian Arts* (Persiani: Bologna, 2021), 106–107: "In ancient Mesopotamian religion, the patron of scribes Nabu formed a divine couple with Nana and continued to be represented with his wife in

to Tištrya-Sirius. Sirius is one of the most visible stars in the sky, and as such, it may have been important to the nomadic Turks, who did not name many stars and constellations.⁸⁷ The traditional name may have been *ak aygır*, which means White Stallion.

The animal that the female deity on the right of P. 4518 (24) is sitting on, in fact, most probably symbolises Sirius, the dog star, referred to as heavenly wolf (Chin. *tianlang* 天狼) in Chinese. Therefore, the fierce character and blending of dog and wolf may be quite deliberate. In China, this star was not considered part of a constellation, as in Europe, “Lang (Wolf) is equivalent to the brilliant Sirius, the Dog Star. Whereas Sirius is a member of the constellation Canis Major, however, Lang was regarded as an isolated star.”⁸⁸

Central Asian arts [...] Sogdian artists superimposed the image of local Tish (the Avestan rain god Tishtrya) to Nabu and transformed his stylus (a symbol of the scribes) into an arrow while the mushhushshu became similar to a dog that was another symbol of Tish [...] For some unclear reason, Tishtrya/Tish has been depicted as Greek Artemis on second century Kushan coins and, possibly, his feminine attire continued to persist in Sogdian and Chorasmian art until the Islamization of Central Asia. Feminine Tish and Nana appeared also in a ninth-tenth century paper icon from Dunhuang at present in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Pelliot Chinois 4518.24) where, however, the canine mushhushshu was omitted.” Multiple processes of assimilation and syncretism of this kind are possible, but as the similarities and differences between Western and Eastern Iran and Eastern Central Asia could not be discussed in detail by Compareti, more detailed research will be needed. A painting in the collection of the Museum für Asiatische Kunst (Inv. Nr. III 7243 and discussed in Chhaya Bhattacharya-Haesner, *Central Asian Temple Banners in the Turfan Collection of the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2003), 35–38 and 124–126), was part of my discussion in an earlier version of this article, but as it displays different iconography, as also mentioned by Compareti in his footnote 532 on p. 22, it would have been difficult to discuss it briefly in this context and will consider it at a future opportunity. I am grateful that the anonymous reviewer drew my attention to these important references. For a new important discussion of Tištrya and his links to Sirius see Antonio Panaino, *Old Iranian Cosmography: Debates and Perspectives* (Milan: Mimesis Edizioni, 2019), 29–32. I would like to thank the author for sending me this publication.

- 87 Imre Gyarmati, “Die Gestirnnamen des Zodiakus in den türkischen Sprachen,” *Acta Orientalia Hungaricae* 40.1 (1986): 54. I would like to thank Peter Zieme for sending me this article. See also Gerard Clauson, *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 47. I would like to thank Simone-Christiane Raschmann for this additional reference.
- 88 Francis R. Stephenson, “Chinese and Korean Star Maps and Catalogs. History of Cartography,” in *The History of Cartography, vol. 2—Cartography in the Traditional East and Southeast Asian Societies*, ed. John Brian Harley and David Woodward (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 528.

11 Isis-Sothis and Sirius

Interestingly, there is a female deity in Rome in the 2nd–3rd centuries and in Hellenistic Egypt known from coins and small portable objects, shown riding on a rather fierce dog representing Sirius, who looks at her very much like in P. 4518 (24), the painting under consideration here. This is Sothis, a form of Isis: Originally linked to the time in the summer when the Nile brought the long-awaited floods to the land of Egypt. As Silvia Prell writes:

Isis can also be equated with Sothis (Sirius). After a period when the dog star is not visible for about 70 days, it rises in the morning, appearing together with the sun on the horizon, between, between the 17th and 19th of July. The rise of Sothis took place from around 4500 BCE to Roman times, around the beginning of the flood period. [...] A connection between Isis and Sothis is securely proven since the pyramid texts [...]. Because of the connection to Sothis / Sirius, from the 1st Century CE, Isis is also depicted accompanied by a dog on lamps and coins.⁸⁹

On a plate found in Cyprus belonging to this group, Isis-Sothis is seated on a large dog, the “symbol of the dog star Sirius” (fig. 5.24).⁹⁰

The zodiac appears around the edge of another steatite dish, held today in the Getty Museum (fig. 5.25). Here, Isis-Sothis is also seated on a dog, and according to the database, she holds a torch and a cornucopia.⁹¹ Isis-Sothis is, however, most often shown with a musical instrument called the *sistrum*, which was used in the Isis cult, and with a cornucopia in her other hand.

89 Translated from Silvia Prell, “Der Nil, seine Überschwemmung und sein Kult in Ägypten,” *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 38 (2009): 226. See also Merkelbach, Reinhold, *Isis regina—Zeus Sarapis. Die griechisch-ägyptische Religion nach den Quellen dargestellt* (Stuttgart, Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1995), 110–111, figs. 112–113.

90 According to the description in the database, “The figures in relief represent the goddess Isis-Sothis sitting astride a large dog, symbol of the dog star Sirius. Similar votive dishes are found in Egypt, but this is the only example known from Cyprus. Other contemporary stone dishes carved with deities were produced in ancient Gandhāra (modern Pakistan).” Available on the MMA database, Asc No. 74.51.5027/<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/243907?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&ft=74.51.5027&offset=0&rpp=20&pos=1>, accessed July 9, 2020.

91 <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/10592/unknown-maker-cup-with-zodiacal-signs-romano-egyptian-about-ad-150/?dz=0.4368,0.4734,1.92>, accessed May 16, 2020.



FIGURE 5.24 Steatite dish from Kourion, Cyprus, ca. 1st c. BCE–1st c. Egypt, Ptolemaic or Roman period
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, ASC NO. 74.51.5027 PUBLIC
DOMAIN CCO

It is interesting that plates like this one may have triggered the manufacturing of similar plates in Gandhāra, which is a clue that transmission to Central Asia was possible.⁹² As we know, coins are even more suitable for transferring iconographical motifs. On Roman medallions, we can observe both the *sistrum* and the cornucopia. One of these is, today, in the British Museum, and also shows a female seated on a fierce dog symbolising Sirius looking at her (fig. 5.27).⁹³

92 Endreffy, Kata, “Gods on the Lotus Flower: Two Stone Dishes with Relief Decoration from Graeco-Roman Egypt,” *Bulletin du Musée Hongrois des Beaux-Arts* 119 (2014): 46.

93 According to the database entry, “Copper alloy medallion. Isis Sothis seated sideways on a dog (Sirius?), running right, holding sistrum in right hand and sceptre in left hand. (reverse) Bust of Faustina II, draped, right, her hair plaited in a bun. (Production date 145–161),” https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_1872-0709-399.



FIGURE 5.25 Romano-Egyptian steatite cup with zodiacal signs, dated ca. 150
OBJECT NUMBER: 83.AA.327, J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM, DIGITAL IMAGE
COURTESY OF THE GETTY'S OPEN CONTENT PROGRAM



FIGURE 5.26
Romano-Egyptian steatite cup with zodiacal signs,
dated ca. 150. Detail of fig. 5.25
OBJECT NUMBER: 83.AA.327, J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM,
DIGITAL IMAGE COURTESY OF THE GETTY'S OPEN
CONTENT PROGRAM



FIGURE 5.27 Roman medallion with Isis-Sothis seated on Sirius
OA 1872,0709.399 © TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

There are two ways this motif could have influenced iconography as far away as the northern Silk Road. Since small objects can be transported, it is possible that actual examples were brought to the Turfan region or Dunhuang, perhaps from Gandhāra. We can imagine how easily the *sistrum*, which was not known in this area, could be misunderstood as a zodiacal sign, perhaps Cancer, and the cornucopia as a snake, especially as both were already linked in astrological depictions, as we see above. This way, only the sun and moon had to be added in the upper hands to emphasise the astral meaning and to comply with the way deities were frequently shown in Central Asia (especially in Khotan).⁹⁴

Perhaps the time in the year that this deity was associated with could also be a clue to identifying the attribute that the female deity holds in her right hand in P. 4518 (24):

In Greco-Roman times, the sacred date—the beginning of the flood of the Nile—was represented by images of Isis riding on a dog [...]. The ancient Egyptians set this as their New Year's Day, the 19th of July, according to our calendar.⁹⁵

As the animal has no tail, it resembles the zodiacal sign of Cancer more (although occasionally the Scorpio sign is also shown without a tail). The Sun enters Cancer on June 20, and that is the beginning of the summer solstice, which was regarded in several religions in the Hellenistic era as a

94 Links to Khotan will be explored in Russell-Smith, “Gods, Goddesses, Demons, Demonesses.”

95 Translated from Merkelbach, *Isis regina*, 110–111.

very important point in the year, when movement between worlds became possible.⁹⁶ In the new cultural context an association with rebirth would be possible. Perhaps this important summer period (June 20–July 22) remained associated with a female deity, originally Isis-Sothis, whose attributes lost their original meaning and were replaced with similar ones that made sense: with Cancer, also associated with this time period in the summer and the snake, one of the most important attributes of some forms of Isis in the Hellenistic period.

The second way of possible transmission is that the astral meaning was familiar to Manichaeans in Egypt in the 3rd century when Isis-Sothis was still well known there. Recent publications on Medinet Madi and the small but excellent exhibition in Dublin on Māni (*The Mystery of Mani, Rediscover the Manichaean Religion through the Words of Its Followers*) make it abundantly clear how close the connections between the Coptic Christian and Coptic Manichaean communities were.⁹⁷ It is also known that Egyptian ideas of astrology, such as the decans, influenced the development of iconography, spreading in all directions, as we see in the case of the astrological scroll, this tradition was also known in the Turfan area.⁹⁸ Furthermore, Isis was still well-known in the 6th century in Egypt, as Christian Coptic talismanic *ostraca* prove, according to a very recent study.⁹⁹ It is clear that these interconnecting links need further research.

In the cultural milieu of the Manichaean Uyghurs on the northern Silk Road, a depiction of Sothis linked to the stars could be adapted to local beliefs.

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- 96 For example, in Mithraism, Robert Hannah cites Porphyry (234–305), a Neoplatonic philosopher who also writes about the cult of Mithras. He describes Capricorn and Cancer as two gates, “[...] Plato called them openings [as of a cave] [...] the gate through which souls descend is Cancer, but they ascend through Capricorn. [...]” (Porphyry, *de Antro*, 22–23). [...] [A]ccording to Porphyry, in Mithraic belief, the midsummer solstice was regarded as the point of entry for souls from heaven into this world and represented *genesis*. Here the sun was in Cancer in June and at its most northerly, and suited for descent into this world. At the midwinter solstice, on the other hand, there lay the point of re-entry to heaven, which was called *apogenesis*, the return from *genesis*. The sun was in Capricorn in December at its most southerly and suited to ascent into the upper world. [...] But this reference to Mithraism is just a particular instance of a general belief, that the solstitial points represent gateways for entry into this world and exit from it.” Robert Hannah, “From Here to the Hereafter: *Genesis* and *Apogenesis* in Ancient Philosophy and Architecture,” *Insights* (University of Durham, E-Journal) 6 (2013): 5–6, accessed July 10, 2020. <https://www.dur.ac.uk/ias/insights/volume6/article4/>.
- 97 See the webpage, which includes a link to a virtual tour, accessed May 16, 2020. <https://chesterbeatty.ie/exhibitions/the-mystery-of-mani/>.
- 98 The decan with the snake linked to Scorpio is depicted in Turfan and also in renaissance painting in the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara, as we see above in fn. 59.
- 99 Lincoln Blumell and Korshi Dosoo, “Horus, Isis, and the Dark-Eyed Beauty. A Series of Magical Ostraca in the Brigham Young University Collection,” *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 64 (2018): 199–259.

The links between the female deity in the Dunhuang painting and Isis-Sothis is a hypothesis that I first investigated over twenty years ago. Then I discarded the idea, as it seemed impossible to prove the connection from 1st–3rd-century Rome and Egypt to 10th-century Dunhuang and Turfan. New research becoming available now makes it easier to look for further evidence.¹⁰⁰ Tentatively, I would now identify the figure on the left of P. 4518 (24) as the Manichaean Daēnā, holding a bowl, possibly containing the elixir of life, and a small dog on a tray. On her right, we see an astral deity holding the Sun and the Moon in her upper hands. Aspects of Isis-Sothis seated on Sirius are possibly merging here with aspects of the Light Maiden, who was connected to Sadwēs and so to Tištrya (also Sirius). The pronounced role of the Light Maiden, accompanied by female attendants, may have contributed to the continuing popularity of this female deity, who almost always appears together with another female.¹⁰¹

The Sun is connected to the zodiac: it is, therefore, fitting that the female deity on the right of P. 4518 (24) holds the sign that most probably depicts the zodiacal sign for Cancer. On the side of the Moon, the snake might represent the lunar *nakṣatra āśleṣā* (Chin. *liu* 柳, Skt. *āśleṣā*), which was linked to Cancer.¹⁰² This connection was well-known in the Turfan area too.¹⁰³ We see evidence for this in the arrangements of the wall paintings in Sengim Cave 6, also from the Turfan area. We recently prepared a preliminary reconstruction of the now mostly destroyed wall paintings of this cave temple.¹⁰⁴

100 I discussed this idea briefly around 1996, during my PhD at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, with Madhuvanti Ghose (then a fellow PhD candidate, since 2007 to the present the Alsdorf Associate Curator of Indian, Southeast Asian, Himalayan, and Islamic Art at the Art Institute of Chicago), who first drew my attention to Isis-Sothis, and with Professor A.D.H. Bivar, who urged me to prove the missing links.

101 These aspects will be explored further in Russell-Smith “Gods, Goddesses, Demons, Demonesses” and Panaino, “Two Beautiful Maidens.”

102 This could even refer to a specific time in the year, like in horoscopes. The research of texts that can be identified as horoscopes in Dunhuang is a completely new area of research. Participants in a workshop at the Max Planck Institute in Berlin in July 2019, described these as typically also written on paper and linked to the most important donors, such as the Cao family. Examples were also discussed during the opening workshop https://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/sites/default/files/2019-06/for_admin_flyer.pdf and the closing workshop on July 31, 2019.

103 I would like to thank Bill Mak for some of this information, which he conveyed by email after I presented an earlier version of this paper at Cambridge in February 2020, at Imre Galambos’s invitation. At that time, we discussed Scorpio. He writes, “The scorpion and the snake may represent the Ascendent sign (Skt. *vr̥ścika* being lagna) and the lunar *nakṣatra* (being the natal lodge) of someone, respectively. This would correspond to the Sun (being solar, connected to zodiac signs) and the Moon (being lunar, connected to the *nakṣatras*).”

104 Copies by Grünwedel show *nakṣatras* with star formations and names in Chinese and Uyghur, where they were still legible. Grünwedel subsequently identified each *nakṣatra*

12 Conclusion

Checking all literature available to me in preparation for this article, several issues became clear: there is no consensus to date about the meaning of P. 4518 (24), not even among those who argue for a Zoroastrian background. We also saw that the beautiful and young appearance and elegant clothes of the female deity on the right makes a negative interpretation problematic. Equally problematic is the identification as Nana, based on the negative attributes she holds and since she is not seated on a lion. It is also important that most authors investigated P. 4518 (24) only in a Dunhuang context, and even if they acknowledge links to the Turfan area, the very closely related examples from Bezeklik are rarely mentioned. The examples from Yarkhoto and from Toyok are added here, for the first time in a systematic study.

It is important to emphasise again that, although this iconographic type seems very popular in the Turfan area, as the many examples found in the rather badly preserved caves prove (tab. 5.1), there are no other examples known from Dunhuang, even though the wall paintings in the Dunhuang Caves and paintings on silk from Dunhuang are far better preserved than almost everything known from the Turfan area. Because of this, we can conclude that the deity is associated with the Uyghurs. At the same time, of course, Dunhuang in the 10th century was ruled by the Cao family, who may have had a Sogdian origin and intermarried with Uyghur and Khotanese princesses. The many layers of cultural interaction we observe can be supported with historical sources.¹⁰⁵ Multiple identities for the elite in Dunhuang was probably the norm rather than the exception, and P. 4518 (24) is an example of this, forcing us to think across the embedded categories of standard religious iconography. Multiple identities, however, did not mean that belonging to groups was meaningless or interchangeable.¹⁰⁶ With the help of clothing, preferred identities could be emphasised: this small painting was made for somebody for

in Chinese and in Sanskrit. Grünwedel, *Bericht*, pls. 24–27. I would like to thank Caren Dreyer for researching the cave and preparing the reconstruction. See Lilla Russell-Smith, “Reconstruction of the Naksatra Cave Temple (Turfan, Sengim): Indian Astrology on the Silk Road,” in *Connecting the Art, Literature, and Religion in South and Central Asia: Festschrift für Monika Zin (60. Geburtstag)*, ed. Ines Konczak-Nagel, Satomi Hiyama, and Astrid Klein (New Delhi: Dev Publishers, 2022).

105 Russell-Smith, *Uyghur Patronage*, 58–68.

106 We know from historical sources that wives could dress in Chinese or Uyghur attire, and that this had great significance to them. For example, the Tang Chinese Imperial Princess Taihe (fl. 9th c., 太和) was sent to marry a ruler of the Uyghurs at the time of the Uyghur Empire in 822. She was expected to remove her Tang clothing and put on ‘barbarian clothes,’ “She removed what she had previously been wearing and put on the clothes of a khatun, a single-coloured robe and a large mantle, both crimson, and a golden decorated



FIGURES 5.28–29 (Detail of figure 5.1) Fragment of a Manichaean scroll, ink and colour washes on paper. Kočo
 OBJ. NR. III 4614 © STAATLICHE MUSEEN ZU BERLIN, MUSEUM FÜR ASIATISCHE KUNST/JÜRGEN LIEPE

whom it was important that an elegant lady—as appropriate for an important Uyghur goddess—was wearing a specifically Uyghur headdress, as opposed to a Chinese, Khotanese, or even a local hybrid Dunhuang one. It is important to notice these details in our research, to understand the exact position of a donor in the local hierarchy, and compare the evidence provided by the clothing to written sources, if possible.¹⁰⁷

In 10th-century Dunhuang, P. 4518 (24) may have been commissioned by a Buddhist Uyghur donor who was still very much influenced by Manichaean

head-dress, pointed in front and straight behind" (*Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 [Old Book of the Tang Dynasty] 195, 12a). See Russell-Smith, *Uyghur Patronage*, 37–38.

107 Further research is needed here. See also Russell-Smith, "Gods, Goddesses, Demons, Demonesses."

thought. It is less likely, but also possible, that he or she was a Manichaean Uyghur who was already deeply influenced by Buddhist ideas of rebirth. The clothing of the female deity on the left is similar to the clothing of the two figures in a Manichaean monochrome painting in the Berlin Collection. The bodies especially, with armour-like decoration under the breast line and on the arms, is comparable (fig. 5.29).

Alternatively, in view of the paintings on paper from the Turfan area, the possibility that P. 4518 (24) was made in Turfan and then brought to Dunhuang cannot be completely excluded. In any case, if our reasoning is right, the small painting is further proof of a thriving Uyghur community in Dunhuang, one with links to Manichaeism and Buddhism. Most importantly P. 4518 (24) cannot simply be taken as proof for the existence of a Sogdian Zoroastrian community in Dunhuang in the 10th century.

Although the figure on the left of P. 4518 (24) may be the Manichaean Daēnā, it does not match with the exact descriptions known so far. The female on the right also cannot be identified with certainty as either the Light Maiden or a specific astral deity like Isis-Sothis, but the astral meaning is worth exploring, since none of the other theories explain the otherwise-negative aspects of the attributes in the hands of a young female with rosy cheeks, elegant dress, and a halo behind her head.¹⁰⁸ Cancer, as a zodiacal sign, is linked with the Sun; the snake, as a lunar lodge, is linked with the Moon; the dog, looking up to the female figure, probably symbolises Sirius, the dog star. These are our clues. If we accept that these attributes are astral symbols, then they are positive rather than negative and helpful when used in ritual or worship. It is also worth considering that astral images often did not have a clear association with any religion. Therefore, it is imaginable that a popular deity with astral symbolism could be incorporated as a guardian of Buddhist spaces in Bezeklik, like other popular deities. By the time this deity was depicted in Toyok, she probably completely lost its original meaning but kept the animal attribute—depicted as a grey wolf. In Buddhist art, there are many examples of incorporating local deities in a guardian function.

I have raised more questions than I can solve here. Ideally, a document that confirms my tentative interpretation might be identified from Dunhuang or the Turfan area. However, it is also possible that no such written sources exist. In any case, it is good to exercise caution when the evidence is not conclusive and revisit identifications that have become embedded, and it is a good idea to work in teams across scholarly traditions, as syncretic art presents so many possibilities.

108 This is further investigated in Panaino, "Two Beautiful Maidens."

Appendix

TABLE 5.1 Deities with similar iconography from the Turfan area and Dunhuang





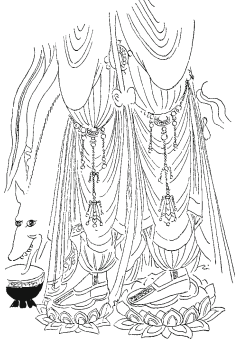
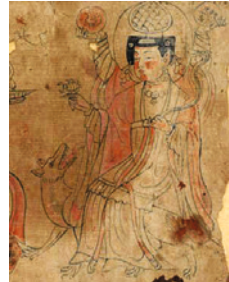
Female deity under investigation (left)	Attributes	Female deity under investigation (right)
<p>1</p> 	<p>Halo</p> <p>Uyghur water-drop-shaped headdress</p> <p>Uyghur hairstyle</p> <p>Elegant robes, typical of a high-ranking lady</p> <p>Upper two hands holding a sun and a moon</p> <p>Lower two hands holding fruits</p>	 <p>Verso side, cf. fig. 5.17 above</p>
<p>2</p>  <p>Yarkhoto Cave 4, cf. fig. 5.18 above</p>	<p>Halo</p> <p>Uyghur hairstyle</p> <p>Snakes in a cloud</p> <p>Only two hands visible and remaining, those hold fruits</p> <p>Elegant robes, typical of a high-ranking lady</p>	 <p>Yarkhoto Cave 4 Opposite, cf. fig. 5.19 above</p>

TABLE 5.1 Deities with similar iconography from the Turfan area and Dunhuang (*cont.*)

Female deity under investigation (left)	Attributes	Female deity under investigation (right)	
3	<p>Left: Uyghur hairstyle</p> <p>Four hands, in upper two hands probably holding sun and moon.</p> <p>Right: Only lower part was visible 100 years ago, today only the shoes survive</p> <p>Wolf or fierce dog behind a female deity</p> <p>Elegant robes, typical of a high-ranking lady</p>	 <p>Bezeklik Cave 16 opposite After Grünwedel, cf. fig. 5.14 above</p>	
 <p>Bezeklik Cave 16 After Grünwedel, cf. fig. 5.13 above</p>	4	<p>Halo</p> <p>Uyghur waterdrop shaped headdress</p> <p>Uyghur hairstyle</p> <p>Elegant robes typical of a high-ranking lady</p> <p>Sun and moon in upper two hands</p> <p>Lower two hands Cancer and snake</p> <p>Seated on a wolf or fierce dog, possibly Sirius</p>	 <p>Female deity, ink and colours on paper, recto, P. 4518 (24) right side. Detail of fig. 5.1a</p>