

Buddhism in Central Asia II

Practices and Rituals, Visual and Material Transfer

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‘Khotanese Themes’ in Dunhuang: Visual and Ideological Transfer in the 9th–11th Centuries

Erika Forte

1 Introduction

In Cave 98 at Mogao, an imposing life-size figure of the Khotanese King Viśa’ Sambhava (r. 912–962/966, Chin. Li Shengtian 李聖天) dominates the southern stretch of the eastern wall—the one facing the central altar—of the main chamber. He is richly dressed in Chinese-style clothes and wears a high, elaborate crown. A large cartouche identifies him as ‘Great Sage, Great Radiant Son of Heaven, of the Great Dynasty of the Great Jewel Kingdom of Khotan, being the owner of the cave.’¹ His queen is next to him, also identified with an inscription, ‘Celestial Empress Lady Cao, [spouse of] the Great Righteous, Great Radiant, fully entitled by celestial edict, Immensely Pious Emperor of the Great Dynasty of the Great Kingdom of Khotan.’² Behind the two royals, a number of attendants and other unidentified figures are represented in smaller scale and fill the rest of the space (fig. 4.1).

Cave 98 was built after 918 to celebrate the official recognition of Cao Yijin (r. 914–935, 曹義金) as the military commissioner of the re-established Guiyijun (851–1036?, 歸義軍, Return-to-Allegiance Army) rule in Dunhuang (敦煌).³ The queen of Khotan was a daughter of Cao Yijin. As part of his policy

1 大朝大寶于闐國大聖大明天子即是窟主。

2 大朝大于闐國大政大明天冊全封至孝皇帝天皇后曹. *Dunhuang Mogaoku* 敦煌莫高窟. *The Mogao Grottos of Dunhuang*, comp. Dunhuang wenwu yanjiusuo 敦煌文物研究所 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1982), vol. 5, 208; *Dunhuang Mogaoku gongyangren tiji* 敦煌莫高窟供养人題記 [Donor Inscriptions from the Mogao Caves at Dunhuang], comp. Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 敦煌研究院 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1986), 32.

3 Xinjiang Rong, *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), 44–46. The date of the construction of the cave is between 923 and 925 in *Dunhuang Mogaoku*, vol. 5, 206. Although the inscription states that Viśa’ Sambhava is the owner of the cave, his portrait and the inscription seem to have been added later, in 940 (*Dunhuang Mogaoku*, vol. 5, 208). Historically, the name Great Jewel Kingdom of Khotan (Chin. *Dabao Yutianguo* 大寶于闐國) that appears in the inscription, or simply Great Jewel Kingdom (Chin. *Dabaoguo* 大寶國), was only in use between 938 and 982. See Zhang Guangda 張廣達 and Rong Xinjiang 榮新江, “Les noms du royaume de Khotan: les noms d’ère et la lignée royale de la



FIGURE 4.1 Portrait of Visā' Sambhava and of his wife, Lady Cao. East wall of Mogao Cave 98, Dunhuang, ca. 940. *Mogaoku*, vol. 5, 13

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of establishing fruitful connections with neighboring kingdoms, Cao Yijin secured alliances with the Ganzhou (甘州) Uyghurs and the Kingdom of Khotan through marriage.⁴ On the northern part of the eastern wall of Cave 98, the daughter of the Uyghur *kaghan*, who became the spouse of Cao Yijin, is represented, while Cao Yijin himself and his sons appear on the southern wall of the entrance corridor.⁵

The portrait of the Khotanese royal couple is not the only element in this cave that shows a connection with Khotan. A large tableau of Mt. Gośīrṣa in Khotan, also known as Mt. Gośṛṅga, dominates the corridor ceiling. On the slopes of the corridor ceiling, the Khotanese Eight Protectors and Auspicious Statues are depicted in rows. In short, Cave 98 represents the epitome of what we refer to here as 'Khotanese themes' in the caves of Dunhuang.

2 Background of the Khotanese Themes

2.1 *Auspicious Statues*

Auspicious Statues⁶ are statues that originated at different holy places of the Buddhist world that were venerated for their special miraculous powers. Their auspiciousness derives from the fact that they were said to have been carved from the true appearance (Chin. *zhengrong* 真容) of the buddhas or

fin des Tang au début des Song," in *Contributions aux études de Touen-houang III*, ed. Michel Soymié (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1984), 29–30.

4 Rong Xinjiang 荣新江 and Zhu Lishuang 朱丽双, *Yutian yu Dunhuang* 于阗与敦煌 [Khotan and Dunhuang] (Lanzhou: Gansu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2013), 153–181. See also Lilla Russell-Smith, *Uyghur Patronage in Dunhuang: Regional Art Centres on the Northern Silk Road in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 19–30, 58–68.

5 *Dunhuang Mogaoku*, vol. 5, fig. 12.

6 The term *ruixiang* is also rendered as "famous images", "auspicious images" (Alexander C. Soper, "Representations of Famous Images at Tun-Huang," *Artibus Asiae* 27.4 (1964/1965): 349–364; Roderick Whitfield, "Ruixiang at Dunhuang," in *Function and Meaning in Buddhist Art: Proceedings of a Seminar Held at Leiden University, 21–24 October 1991*, ed. Karel R. van Kooij and Henny van der Veere (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995), 149–156), "miraculous images" (Claudia Wenzel, "The Image of the Buddha: Buddha Icons and Aniconic Traditions in India and China," *Transcultural Studies* 1 (2011): 263–305), and "miraculous statues" (Michel Soymié, "Quelques représentations de statues miraculeuses dans les grottes de Touen-houang," in *Contributions aux études de Touen-houang III*, ed. Michel Soymié (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1984), 77–102). I use the term Auspicious Statues, following Christoph Anderl (Christoph Anderl, "Linking Khotan and Dūnhuáng: Buddhist Narratives in Text and Image," *Entangled Religions* 5 (2018): 250–311) and the idea suggested by Soymié, and also by Whitfield ("Ruixiang at Dunhuang," 149), that the *ruixiang* paintings depict the statues of the deities and not the deities *per se*.

bodhisattvas they represent. In other words, Auspicious Statues fully embody the represented deity.⁷

The backgrounds of Auspicious Statues are found in the narratives about Buddhist sacred sites that circulated in Central and East Asia, and were diffused, in large part, through the travelogues of Chinese pilgrims returning from India, particularly in the stories about miraculous statues recounted by Xuanzang (600/602–664, 玄奘). The practice of bringing back images from the holy land of the Buddha to use as models for image production in China⁸ likely also played a role in spreading a true appearance images cult.

In Dunhuang, Auspicious Statues are depicted on wall paintings dating from the late 8th/9th to the 10th centuries⁹ and on silk banners—the sole

7 Veneration of Auspicious Statues occurred in China around the 6th century, reaching its peak around the 7th–8th centuries. See Wenzel, “The Buddha Image,” 277–282. A famous case is that of the ‘Udāyana Buddha,’ the very first image of Buddha Śākyamuni commissioned by King Udāyana of Kauśāmbī. The statue was carved from sandalwood by artisans, while they looked at the real, still alive, Buddha. In the process of the localization of Buddhism, narratives about the Udāyana statue changed; the statue is said to have moved to different places and to have eventually settled in China. On the Udāyana Buddha, see Alexander C. Soper, “Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China,” *Artibus Asiae Supplementum* 19 (1959): 1–296; Hida Romi 肥田路美, “Shotō jidai ni okeru Udenō zō: Genjō no Shakazō shōrai to sono juyō no isshō 初唐時代における優填王像: 玄奘の釈迦像請来とその受容の一相 [The Udāyana Buddha Image in the Early Tang Period: An Aspect of Xuanzang’s Collection of Buddha Images and its Reception],” *Bijutsushi* 美術史 [Art History] 4 (1986): 81–94; Martha L. Carter, *The Mystery of the Udayana Buddha* (Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1990); Amy McNair, “Sandalwood Auspicious Image,” in *Latter Days of the Law: Images of Chinese Buddhism, 850–1850*, ed. Marsha Weidner (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1994), 221–225. On the topic of images performing miracles and their role in a religious context see Richard H. Davis, ed., *Images, Miracles, and Authority in Asian Religious Traditions* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998); Jan Assman and A.I. Baumgarten, ed. *Representation in Religion. Studies in Honor of Moshe Barasch* (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2001).

8 Soper, “Famous Images,” 351; Whitfield, “Ruixiang at Dunhuang,” 149.

9 Zhang Guangda 張廣達 and Rong Xinjiang 榮新江, “Dunhuang ‘Ruixiangji,’ ruixiangtu ji qi fanyingde Yutian 敦煌‘瑞象記’瑞象圖及其反映的于闐. The ‘Records of Famous Images,’ the Painting of Famous Images from Dunhuang and Khotan as Reflected in them,” in *Yutian shi congkao (zengding ben)* 于闐史叢考 (增訂本). *Collected Inquiries on the History of Khotan. New Edition* (Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin Daxue chubanshe, 2008), 167, 179–181 (the article was first published in *Dunhuang Tulufan wenxian yanjiu wenji* 敦煌吐魯番文獻研究文集 [Essays on Texts Concerning Dunhuang and Turfan] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1986), 69–147). The theme seems to also persist in the beginning of the 11th century, during the Tangut Empire’s (ca. 1038–1227, in Chinese sources known as Xixia 西夏) dominion over Dunhuang (ca. 1036–ca. 1225), as evidenced by the presence of an Auspicious Statue image depicted on the ceiling of the entrance corridor of Mogao Cave 313, a cave built during the Sui Dynasty period (581–618, 隋) and re-decorated during the Tangut period. *Dunhuang Mogaoku*, vol. 5, 90.

surviving example of which is the one from the Cave Library recovered by Aurel Stein, now split between the collections of the British Museum and the National Museum New Delhi (fig. 4.2).¹⁰ Many of these depictions have captions that, when legible, identify the individual statues and their related narratives. Moreover, the content of the captions are echoed, in different ways, in four Chinese manuscripts found in Dunhuang, composed between the end of the 9th century and the 10th century known as *Ruixiangji* 瑞像記 [Records on the Auspicious Statues], which basically consist of inventories of famous images from sacred places located in India, Central Asia, and China.¹¹

The topic of Auspicious Statues has received intermittent scholarly attention since the 1960s.¹² Already in 1965, in his analysis of the silk banner from

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- 10 The banner is known by the inventory number Ch.xxii.0023 given by Aurel Stein. See M. Aurel Stein, *Serindia. Detailed Report of Explorations in Central Asia and Western-most China* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), vol. 2, 1024–1026 and plate LXX (left half); Arthur Waley, *A Catalogue of Paintings Recovered from Tun-Huang by Sir Aurel Stein* (London: Trustees of the British Museum and of the Government of India, 1931), 84, 95, 268–271. For studies of the banner, see Benjamin Rowland, “Indian Images in Chinese Sculpture,” *Artibus Asiae* 10.1 (1947): 5–20; Soper, “Famous Images”; Whitfield, “Ruixiang at Dunhuang”; Hida Romi 肥田路美, “Tonkō zōkyōdō shōrai ‘Kenpon saiki butsubo-satsu zuzōshū’ no shohoteki kōsatsu. New Delhi kokuritsu hakubutsukan shōzō danpen no ikutsukano zuzō wo chūshin ni 敦煌藏經洞将来‘絹本西域仏菩薩図像集’の初歩的考察—ニューデリー国立博物館所蔵断片のいくつかの図像を中心に. On the Silk Scroll of the Famous Buddhist Images from Dunhuang’s Grotto 17. Focusing on the Fragments of National Museum, New Delhi,” *Waseda daigaku daigakuin bungaku kenkyūka kiyō* 早稲田大学大学院文学研究科紀要 *Bulletin of the Graduate Division of Literature of Waseda University* 60.3 (2015): 31–51. For a digital reconstruction of the painting, see International Dunhuang Project Database, “British Museum: 1919,0101,0.51. Famous Images of the Buddha [digital reconstruction 2009]”, idp.bl.uk/database/large.a4d?recnum=84541&imageRecnum=65526 (accessed February 14, 2020).
- 11 Mss. P. 3352 (P. 3353 in Soymié, “Quelques représentations de statues miraculeuses,” and Whitfield, “Ruixiang at Dunhuang,” 149), S. 5659, S. 2113 (composed after 896), and P. 3033. The contents of the manuscripts are, in fact, derived from the captions in the caves. For a study of these manuscripts and of the captions, see Zhang and Rong, “Dunhuang ruixiangji”. Soymié (“Quelques représentations de statues miraculeuses,”) studied the text of ms. P. 3353 (3352) and compared it to the captions from Mogao Cave 231.
- 12 In addition to the references listed in the previous footnotes, see Ono Katsutoshi 小野勝年, “Tonkō no Shaka zuizōzu 敦煌の釈迦瑞像図 [Auspicious Statue of Śākyamuni at Dunhuang],” *Ryūkoku shidan* 龍谷史壇 *The Journal of History of Ryūkoku University* 63 (1970): 28–61; Sun Xiushen 孙修身, “Mogaoku de fojiao shiji gushi hua 莫高窟的佛教史迹故事画 [Depictions of Buddhist Ancient Sites and Stories at Mogao],” in *Dunhuang Mogaoku*, vol. 4, 204–213; Hida Romi 肥田路美, “Tōdai ni okeru Buddagaya kongōza shin’yō zō no ryūko ni tsuite 唐代における仏陀伽耶金剛座真容像の流行について [On the Spread of the True Countenance Image on the Diamond Throne at Bodhi Gaya During the Tang Period],” *Ronsō bukkyō bijutsushi* 論叢仏教美術史 [Collection of Papers on Buddhist Art History] 4 (1986): 156–186; Hida Romi 肥田路美, “Ryōshū Banka ken zuizō no setsuwa to zōkei 涼州番禾県瑞像の説話と造形 [The Narrative and the

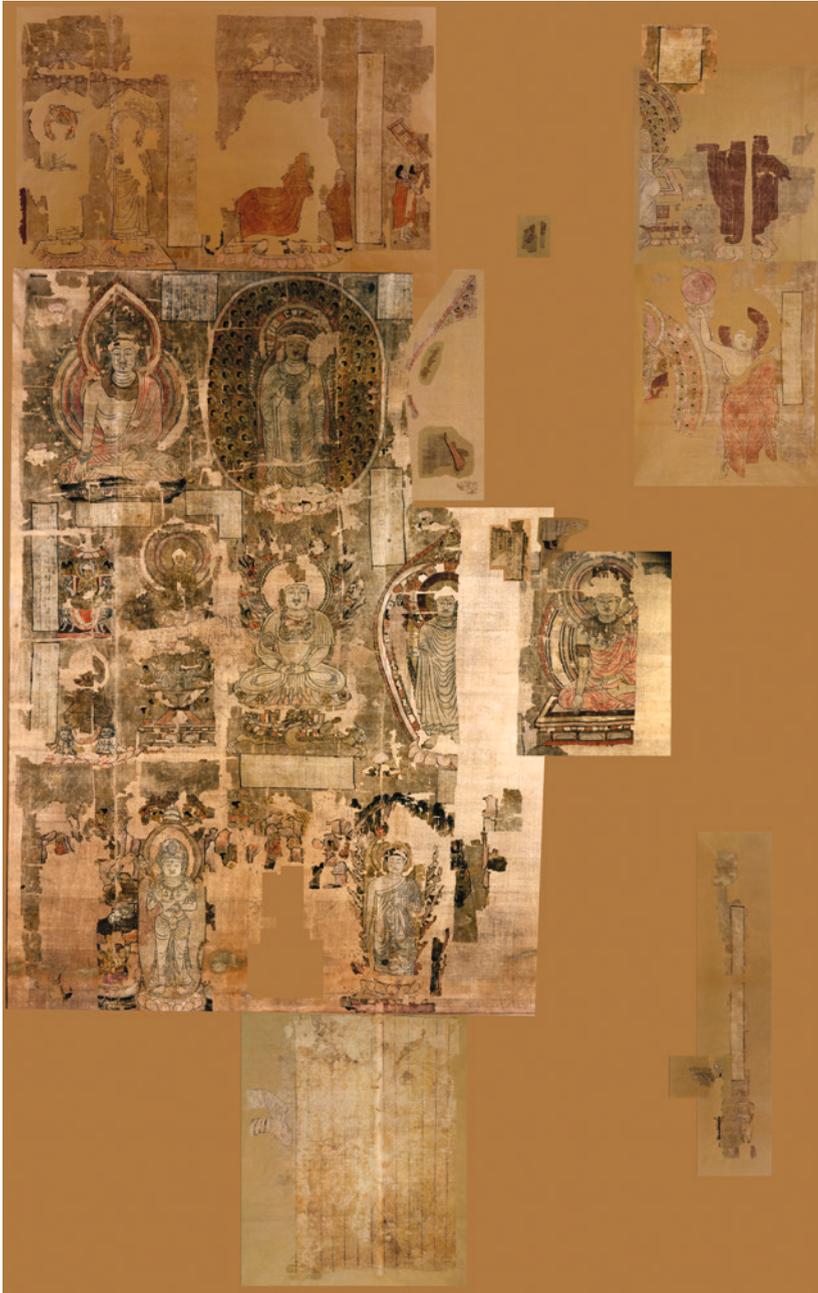


FIGURE 4.2 Silk banner with depictions of Auspicious Statues. Dunhuang, 9th–10th c. Ch.xxii.0023, British Museum and National Museum New Delhi
DIGITAL COMPOSITION PROVIDED BY THE INTERNATIONAL DUNHUANG PROJECT (IDP). IDP.BL.UK/DATABASE/LARGE.A4D?RECNUM=84541&IMA GERECCNUM=65526 © IDP

Dunhuang discovered by Stein, Alexander Soper noticed that a number of Auspicious Statues had a strong connection with Khotan, and pointed to the narrative backgrounds found in Tibetan texts and Chinese pilgrims' accounts.¹³ Khotan's importance as the place where many of these statues were located was highlighted again in the 1980s by Michel Soymié and by the Chinese scholars Zhang Guangda (張廣達), Rong Xinjiang (榮新江), and Sun Xiushen (孫修身).¹⁴ Recently, the theme of Khotanese Auspicious Statues in Dunhuang has been revived, mainly through publications by Zhang Xiaogang (張小剛), Chen Suyu (陳粟裕), Hida Romi (肥田路美), and Rong Xingjiang in collaboration with Zhu Lishuang (朱麗雙).¹⁵

Making of the Auspicious Statue of the Fanhe District of Liangzhou,” *Bukkyō geijutsu* 佛教藝術 *Ars Buddhica* 11 (1994): 33–54.

- 13 Soper, “Famous Images,” 353–353. Soper clarifies the link between the images represented in the silk banner—which, until then, were believed to be drawn copies of actual Indian images seen by the pilgrims in India and brought back to China to serve as models for Chinese artisans—and those appearing in the Dunhuang caves. He also notices that the captions of the images on the banner are similar, if not identical, to the Auspicious Statues' inscriptions in the caves at Dunhuang, for which he had documentation from the notes Paul Pelliot took.
- 14 Soymié, “Statues miraculeuses,” 102; Zhang and Rong, “Dunhuang ruixiangji”; Sun Xiushen 孫修身, “Dunhuang fojiao yishu he gudai Yutian 敦煌佛教藝術和古代于闐 [Buddhist Art at Dunhuang and Ancient Khotan],” *Xinjiang shehui kexue* 新疆社会科学 *Social Sciences in Xinjiang* 1 (1986): 52–59.
- 15 An overview with some new insights is given in Rong and Zhu, *Yutian yu Dunhuang*, 243–270. Zhang Xiaogang's study revolves around iconographic issues in Dunhuang's representations (Zhang Xiaogang 張小剛, *Dunhuang fojiao gantonghua yanjiu* 敦煌佛教藝術通畫研究 [Research on Buddhist Miracle Paintings in Dunhuang] (Shenzhen: Gansu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2015)). Chen Suyu studies the Auspicious Statues that appear in the caves built during Tibetan rule over Dunhuang and also analyses Khotanese elements seen in Dunhuang caves paintings (Chen Suyu 陳粟裕, *Cong Yutian dao Dunhuang: Yi Tang Song shiqi tuxiang de dongchuan wei zhongxin* 从于闐到敦煌：以唐宋时期图像的东传为中心. *From Khotan to Dunhuang: Based on the Images Spread [sic] to the East During Tang and Song Dynasties* (Beijing: Fangzhi chubanshe, 2014), 89–254). Hida Romi traces Khotanese and Gandharan iconographic elements found in the images of the Stein silk banner (Hida Romi 肥田路美, “Tonkō shōrai kenpon zuizōzu ni kakareta Gandāra, Kōtan yurai no butszō 敦煌将来絹本瑞像図に描かれたガンダーラ、コータン由来の仏像 [Gandharan and Khotanese Origins of the Images in the Silk Banner with Auspicious Statues from Dunhuang],” in *Ajia bukkyō bijutsu ronshū: Chūō Ajia I—Gandāra kara tōzai Torukisutan* アジア仏教美術論集：中央アジア I：ガンダーラ～東西トルキスタン [Collection of Papers on Buddhist Art: Central Asia (I). From Gandhāra to East Turkistan], ed. Miyaji Akira 宮治昭 (Tokyo: Chūō kōron bijutsu shuppan, 2017), 499–522). Christoph Anderl also brings up the theme of Khotanese Auspicious Statues, focusing on the narratives (Anderl, “Linking Khotan and Dunhuang”).

According to most recent surveys, the number of Auspicious Statues is around forty.¹⁶ Their appearance as a group has been registered in at least twenty-eight caves at Mogao and one at Yulin (tab. 4.1). Among the Auspicious Statues listed in the texts and captions, at least fifteen are clearly connected with Khotan and its Buddhist mythology: this accounts for more than one third of the number of Auspicious Statues. Table 4.2 is a list of Auspicious Statues identified as located in Khotan, according to the names provided by the inscriptions in the caves and the *Records on the Auspicious Statues*.¹⁷

Paintings of Auspicious Statues are found in two places, either on the slopes of the ceiling of the cave's main niche—typically the one facing the entrance and above the altar—or on the slopes of the ceiling of the entrance corridor. Further, there is some evidence that Auspicious Statues were depicted on a whole wall, together with other Khotanese themes and Buddhist legends, as in Mogao Caves 76 and 220, and Yulin Cave 33.¹⁸ According to Zhang Xiaogang, images positioned in the main niche's ceiling are found mostly in caves that were (re)decorated in the first half of the 9th century, while the instances of the corridor-ceiling position date from the second half of the 9th century

16 Zhang Guangda and Rong Xinjiang speak of around thirty statues (Zhang and Rong, "Dunhuang ruixiangji," 193). In Zhang Xiaogang's study, I counted some forty statues (Zhang Xiaogang, *Dunhuang gantonghua*, 7–71, 126–170, 212–246).

17 It must be stressed here that the final assessment of the identity of some of the images and the number of caves where these images appear is still in progress. Zhang and Rong counted 29 caves with depictions of Auspicious Statues (Zhang and Rong, *Yutianshi congkao*, 178–181, 216–223). They include: Mogao Cave 5; Mogao Cave 144, with a painting of Vaiśravaṇa and Śāriputra draining the lake; Mogao Cave 313, with a single image of the Gośrīṣa Auspicious Statue from the Tangut period; Mogao Cave 345; and Mogao Cave 453. The presence of Auspicious Statues in Mogao Caves 76 and 453 is documented by inscriptions. Zhang Xiaogang excludes Mogao Caves 5, 144, 313, 345, and 453, and adds the evidence of Cave 33 at Yulin (Zhang, *Dunhuang gantonghua*, 327, Table 2)—this brings his count to 24 caves with representations of Auspicious Statues at Mogao and one cave at Yulin. I tend to interpret the representation of the single Auspicious Statue in Mogao Cave 313 as a different case and count the depiction of Vaiśravaṇa and Śāriputra in Mogao Cave 144 among the depictions of the founding legend of Khotan. A factor to keep in mind is that, due to the state of conservation of the caves, especially the entrance corridors, paintings are often not clearly visible. The ongoing restoration work at Mogao and Yulin caves in the last decades revealed paintings that were previously unnoticed, and most likely, the number of caves known to display Khotanese auspicious statues will increase.

18 The paintings in Cave 220 at Mogao are only visible from old documentation recorded by Paul Pelliot. See Qiang Ning, "Diplomatic Icons: Social and Political Meanings of Khotanese Images in Dunhuang Cave 220," *Oriental Art* 44.4 (1998/1999): 2–15. For the evidence of Mogao Cave 76, see Zhang, *Dunhuang gantonghua*, 325–324. In Yulin Cave 33, the painting is still fully visible. See *Anxi Yulin ku* 安西榆林窟. *The Yulin Grottoes*, comp. Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 敦煌研究院 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1997), fig. 75.

TABLE 4.1 Presence of Khotanese themes at Mogao and Yulin Caves (comp. E. Forte)

Cave n.	Auspicious Statues	Mount Gošīrša	Founding Legend	Eight Protectors	Period
MG 5	○ Ca	–	–	–	3/4
MG 9	○ Ca	○ Cb	○ Cb	○ Ca	3
MG 25	○ Ca	○ Cb	?	○ Ca	4
MG 39	○ Ca	○ Cb	○ Cb	○ Ca	4a
MG 45	○ Ca	○ Cb	○ Cb	○ Ca	4a
MG 53	○ A	–	○ A	–	2, 4a
MG 72	○ B	–	–	–	3/4a
MG 76	○ B	○ B	–	–	4
MG 85	○ Ca	?	?	–	3
MG 98	○ Ca	○ Cb	?	○ Ca	4a
MG 100	○ Ca	–	–	○ Ca	4a
MG 108	○ Ca	○ Cb	–	○ Ca	4a
MG 126	○ Ca	○ Cb	–	○ Ca	4a
MG 144	–	–	○	–	2
MG 146	○ Ca	○ Cb	○ Cb	○ Ca	4a
MG 220	○ B	○ B	○ B	?	4
MG 231	○ A	–	○ A	–	2
MG 236	○ A	–	○ A	–	2
MG 237	○ A	–	○ A	–	2
MG 313	○ Cb	–	–	–	5
MG 334	○ Ca	○ Cb	○ Cb	○ Ca	4a
MG 340	○ Ca	○ Cb	○ Cb	○ Ca	3
MG 342	○ Ca	○ Cb	○ Cb	○ Ca	4b
MG 345	○ Cb	○ Cb	○ Cb	–	1, 2
MG 397	○ Ca	○ Cb	○ Cb	○ Ca	4a
MG 401	○ Ca	○ Cb	○ Cb	○ Ca	4a
MG 449	○ A	○	–	–	2, 4b
MG 453	○ A	–	–	–	?
MG 454	○ Ca	○ Cb	○ Cb	○ Ca	4
YL 32	–	○ B	○ B	?	4
YL 33	○ B	○ B	○ B	?	4

Notes: **Place:** MG = Mogao Caves; YL = Yulin Caves.

Presence: ○ = present; – = absent; ? = unknown/no data.

Position: A = main room, slopes of the main niche ceiling; B = main room, on one of the four walls; C = entrance corridor; Ca = slopes of the ceiling; Cb = corridor ceiling.

Chronology: 1 = 8th c.; 2 = Tibetan rule on Dunhuang, ca. 786–ca. 848; 3 = Zhang 張 family rule Guiyijun, ca. 848–910/914; 4 = Cao 曹 family rule Guiyijun, 914–1036; 4a = first part 914–976; 4b = second part: 976–1036; 5 = Tangut rule on Dunhuang, 1036–ca. 1225.



FIGURE 4.3 Auspicious Statues and the founding legend of Khotan. Western niche ceiling (detail) of Mogao Cave 237, Dunhuang, ca. late 8th–mid 9th c. *MOGAOKU*, VOL. 4, 108 (DETAIL) © DUNHUANG ACADEMY

through the end of the 10th century. The third type of location, on the wall, does not appear before the second half of the 10th century.¹⁹

When they appear on the ceiling of the cave's main niche, Khotanese Auspicious Statues are grouped with other Auspicious Statues located in India or China (fig. 4.3). Khotanese Auspicious Statues painted on the corridor ceilings are depicted with the array of Eight Protectors of Khotan (see below), and a similar scheme is followed in the caves where they are represented on one wall. It seems safe to conclude that starting from the second half of the 9th century and throughout the 10th century, Khotanese Auspicious Statues gained a major protective function.

A topos of Khotanese Auspicious Statues is that they moved from their place of origin to Khotan through the air (Chin. *tengkong* 騰空, literally: rising high into the air). The statues' origins were usually in well-known sacred places in India that were the stages for key episodes in the Buddha's life: Śrāvastī, Gṛdhrakūṭa (Vulture Peak), Kauśāmbī, and Rājagṛha. Other statues came from Kashmir, from oases of the Tarim Basin, and from China. For their new

19 Zhang, *Dunhuang gantonghua*, 304–329.

TABLE 4.2 Auspicious Statues residing in Khotan (comp. E. Forte)

Khotanese Auspicious Statues	Short name in Chin.	MS P. 3033	MS P. 3352 (3353)	MS S. 5659	MS S. 2113	Captions MG
a The statue of the Buddha that flew from the Kingdom of Kausāmbī to reside in the Kingdom of Khotan [in Pīmo (PHEMA)]	媯摩城瑞像	此像從媯賞彌國飛往于闐東媯摩城，今見在，殊靈瑞 (ll. 8-9)	媯賞彌國佛來住于闐國 (l. 9)	媯賞彌國佛來住于闐國 (l. 9)	此像從媯賞彌國飛往于闐東媯摩城，今見在，殊靈瑞。下，其像承雲 (r. ll. 11-12)	于闐媯摩城中瑞檀像
b The true appearance of the Buddha Śākyamuni that came from Rājagṛha through the air to reside at the Haiyan Monastery in Khotan	海眼寺釋迦牟尼佛真容	-	釋迦牟尼佛真容從王舍城騰空而來住于闐國海眼寺住 (l. 2)	釋迦牟尼佛真容從王舍城騰空而來住于闐國海眼寺住 (ll. 5-6)	釋迦牟尼佛真容白檀身從〔摩揭陀〕國王舍城騰空而來住于闐國海眼寺。其像手把袈裟。 (r. ll. 16-17)	于闐海眼寺釋迦聖容像 釋迦牟尼真容從王舍城勝空住海眼寺
c The statue of the Buddha Śākyamuni in white sandalwood that came from China through the air to reside in Kancheng (Kaṃḍva) in Khotan	坎城釋迦牟尼佛真容瑞像	-	-	-	釋迦牟尼佛真容白檀香為身，從漢國騰空而來住于闐坎城住。下，其像手把袈裟 (r. ll. 18-19)	于闐坎城瑞像
d The Buddha Krakucchanda that came from Śrāvastī to reside in Gucheng (Giūma)	固城結迦宋(拘留宋)佛	-	-	-	結迦宋佛亦從舍衛國來在固城住。其像手捻袈裟 (r. l. 21)	-
e The Buddha Vipaśyin that came from Śrāvastī through the air to reside in the Kingdom of Khotan [in Gucheng (Giūma)]	毗婆尸(微波施)瑞像	-	毗婆尸佛從舍衛國勝空而來住于闐國住 (l. 5)	毗婆尸佛〔從〕舍衛國騰空而來住于闐國住，有人欽仰，不可思議 (ll. 1-2)	微波施佛從舍衛國住，騰空而來住于闐國城住，城人欽敬，不可思議。其下像側 (r. ll. 32-34)	微波施佛從舍衛國勝空於國(固)城住

TABLE 4.2 Auspicious Statues residing in Khotan (comp. E. Forte)

Khotanese Auspicious Statues	Short name in Chin.	MS P. 3033	MS P. 3352 (3353)	MS S. 5659	MS S. 2113	Captions MG 231
f The Buddha Kāśyapa that came from Śrāvastī through the air to reside in the Kingdom of Khotan [in Gucheng (Gūma)]	迦葉佛瑞像	–	迦葉佛從舍衛勝空而來在于闐國住 (ll. 7-8)	迦葉佛從舍衛國騰空而來在于闐國住，國人虔敬，無不遂願 (ll. 10-11)	迦葉佛亦從舍衛國騰空而來住于闐國，人皆虔敬，不可思議。其像亦把袈裟 (r. ll. 36-37)	迦葉佛從舍衛 [勝空]於固城住瑞像
g The Buddha Śākyamuni that came from Śrāvastī through the air to reside in Gucheng (Gūma)	固城釋迦牟尼佛瑞像	–	–	–	釋迦牟尼佛從舍衛國騰空於固城住 (r. l. 20)	–
j The Buddha Kanakamuni that came from Śrāvastī through the air to reside in Gucheng (Gūma)	固城伽你迦牟尼佛瑞像	–	–	–	釋迦牟尼亦從舍衛國騰空而來在于闐固城住。手把袈裟 (r. ll. 31-32)	–
k The Auspicious Statue of the Buddha washed in the Jade River	于闐玉河浴佛瑞像	–	–	–	伽你迦牟尼佛從舍衛國騰空而來在固城住。其像手捻袈裟 (r. ll. 38-39)	–
l The Auspicious Statue of the Stone Buddha [of Khotan]	石佛瑞像	–	石佛瑞像記 (l. 7)	石佛瑞像記 (l. 11)	于闐玉河浴佛瑞像，身丈餘，杖錫持鉢，盡形而立。其像赤體立 (r. ll. 22-23)	于闐國石瑞像

TABLE 4.2 Auspicious Statues residing in Khotan (comp. E. Forte)

	Khotanese Auspicious Statues	Short name in Chin.	MS P. 3033	MS P. 3352 (3353)	MS S. 5659	MS S. 2113	Captions MG 231
m	The Buddha Śākyamuni who came from the Mount Gṛdhrakūṭa (Vulture Peak) to the Mount Gośīrṣa to expound the Dharma	釋迦牟尼從靈鷲山至牛頭山說法	—	—	—	釋迦牟尼佛從靈鷲山向牛頭山說法來 (r. ll. 1-2)	此牛頭山像從者山履空而來
n	The Buddha Śākyamuni residing at the Mount Gośīrṣa (? same as 'Śākyamuni who came from the Mount Gṛdhrakūṭa (Vulture Peak) to the Mount Gośīrṣa'?)	牛頭山釋迦牟尼佛瑞像	—	—	本師釋迦牟尼佛令住牛頭山 (ll. 13-14)	—	—
o	The bodhisattva Akāśagarbha residing at the Sāyexian (Sakāyagīra) monastery [on the West Jade River]	薩迦耶憊(薩迦那倦)寺虛空藏菩薩瑞像	—	—	虛空藏菩薩(於西玉河薩迦耶憊寺住) (ll. 2-3)	虛空藏菩薩如來於薩迦耶憊寺住 (r. l. 55)	虛空藏菩薩於西玉河薩迦那倦寺住瑞像
p	The Buddha statue of Bojayi (Bhagya) city	于闐勃伽夷城瑞像	—	—	—	虛空藏菩薩於西玉河薩迦耶憊寺住 (r. ll. 56-57)	—
q	The Auspicious Statue of the Old City	古城(故城)瑞像	—	—	—	[...]其像便住于闐勃伽夷城 (v. ll. 1-3)	于闐古城瑞像

residences, they chose those places in Khotan that were considered the most holy and were connected with narratives of the establishment and diffusion of Buddhism in Khotan. Most of these places were located around the capital of the kingdom.²⁰ A whole group of Auspicious Statues of the buddhas of the past (Vipaśyin, Krakucchaṃḍa, Kanakamuni, Kāśyapa) gathered, for example, together with the statue of Śākyamuni, at Mount Gośīrṣa (see below). Others settled in spots around the Jade Rivers (Chin. Yuhe 玉河), the Yurungkash and the Karakash,²¹ thereby framing the ancient capital's territory (map 4.1).

Another cluster of holy places where the Auspicious Statues took up residence is the area north of Domoko (Chin. Damagou 大瑪溝) and Chira (Chin. Cele 策勒), in the eastern part of the oasis (map 4.1). These include the famous statue of the Buddha at Pimo (媲摩)²² described by both Song Yun (fl. 6th c., 宋雲)²³ and Xuanzang. According to Xuanzang's narrative, it was a colossal buddha in sandalwood that was none other than the famous statue commissioned by King Udāyana of Kauśāmbī—the very first image of the Buddha Śākyamuni, modelled after life.²⁴ The statue flew from Kauśāmbī to Khotan

20 This has been identified as the site of Yotkan, about 20 km west of the modern Khotan City. See M. Aurel Stein, *Ancient Khotan. Detailed Report of Archaeological Explorations in Chinese Turkestan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 190.

21 The Karakash River was also known in ancient sources as the Western Jade River (Chin. Xi Yuhe 西玉河), while the Yurungkash was called the Eastern Jade River (Chin. Dong Yuhe 東玉河) (Rong and Zhu, *Yutian yu Dunhuang*, 251–252). On the location of the Jade Rivers, see also Xinjiang Rong, "Reality or Tale? Marco Polo's Description of Khotan," *Journal of Asian History* 49.1–2 (2015): 165, n. 122.

22 Pimo (or Hanmo 捍麼) is the name of both a region and an ancient city located near the Keriya River, about 170 km east of the modern city of Khotan (Rong and Zhu, *Yutian yu Dunhuang*, 256). The name appears in Khotanese documents as Phema or Bhīma, and as Phye ma in Tibetan. Marco Polo passed through the city, naming it Pein. Its original location should correspond to the site of Uzun-tati (Stein, *Ancient Khotan*, 454–457, 462–463). Kancheng (坎城, Kh. Kaṃḍa, Tib. Kham sheng or Kam sheng), a prefecture (Chin. *zhen* 鎮) during the Tang rule over Khotan and an administrative division under the Tibetan dominion, was also part of the region of Pimo (Zhu Lishuang 朱丽双, "Tangdai Yutian de jimi zhou yu dili quhua yangjiu 唐代于阗的羈縻州与地理区划研究. A Preliminary Survey of Administrative Divisions of Tang-ruled Khotan," *Zhongguoshi yanjiu* 中国史研究 *Journal of Chinese Historical Studies* 2 (2012): 78–80). On Phema and Kancheng see also Rong, "Reality or Tale?," 168–172.

23 Song Yun travelled with the monk Huisheng (fl. 6th c., 慧生 or also 惠生) and arrived in Khotan in 519 (Edouard Chavannes, "Voyage de Song Yun dans l'Udyāna et le Gandhāra," *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême Orient* 3.3 (1903): 379–441). Xuanzang stopped by Khotan in 644, on his way back to China from India.

24 Chavannes, "Voyage de Song Yun," 392–393; *Da Tang Xiyuji* 大唐西域記 [Great Tang Records of the Western regions], T. 51.2087, 945b (English translation: Rongxi Li, *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions* (Berkeley, California: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1996), 386–387); *Da Tang Da Ciensi sanzang fashi*

after the *nirvāṇa* of the Buddha and never moved again. Pimo became an important center of pilgrimage, especially for Chinese Buddhists. Song Yun observes the presence of many canopies and banners donated by pilgrims and bearing inscriptions in Chinese, with dates and era names going back to the Northern Wei Dynasty (386–535, 北魏) and the Later Qin Dynasty (384–417, 後秦).²⁵ It is no surprise that the region of Pimo became known as one of the holiest places in Khotan, especially considering the development of the Udāyana image cult in East Asia.

2.2 Mt. Gośīrṣa

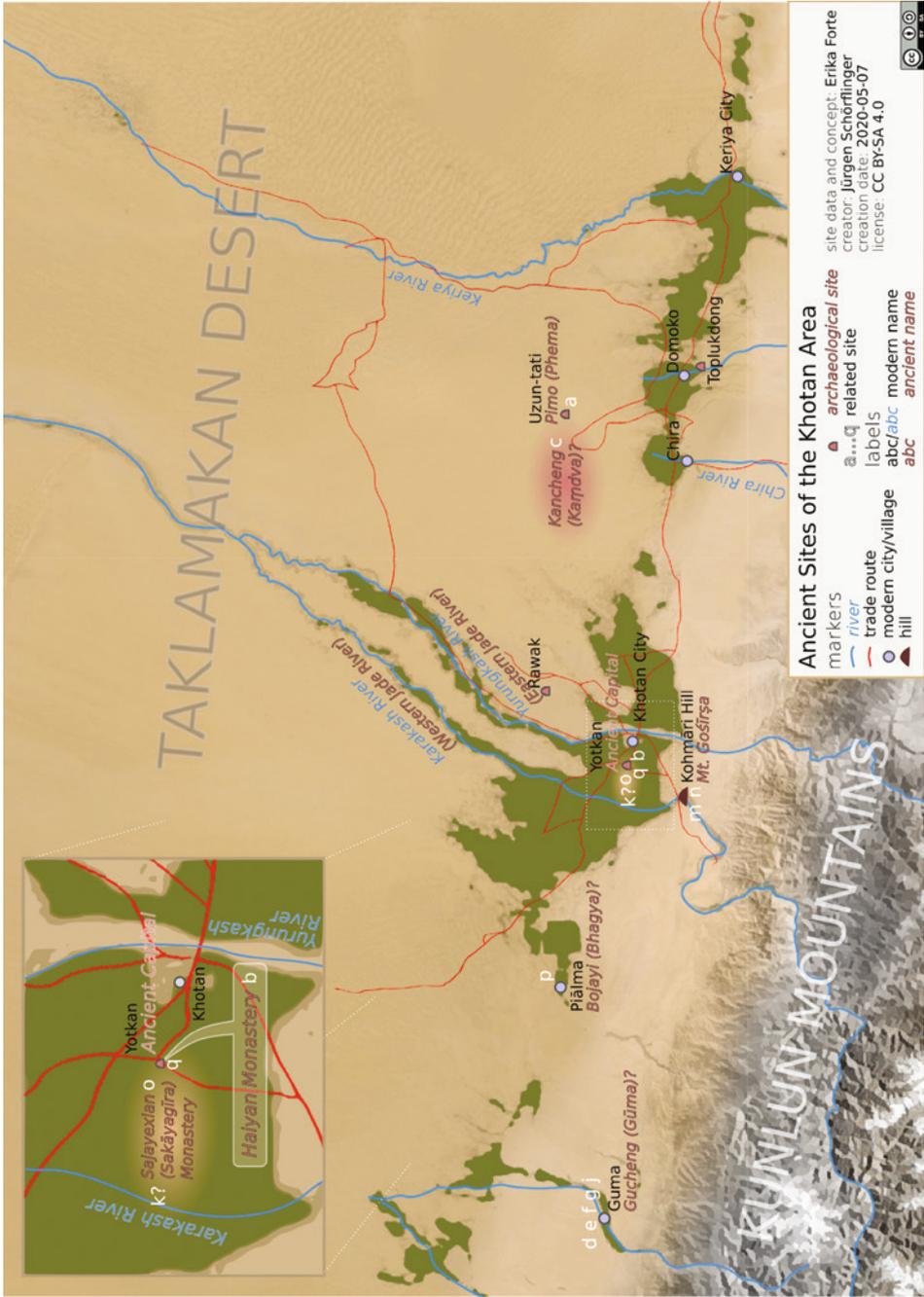
Mt. Gośīrṣa was, perhaps, one of the most sacred places in ancient Khotan. It recurs in many of the narratives preserved in ancient sources, in Tibetan and Chinese. The name Gośīrṣa in Sanskrit means ox head. It is rendered into Chinese as *niutou* (牛頭) and into Tibetan as *glang mgo*. Another name is Gośīrṅga, (ox horn, Chin. *niujiao* 牛角, Tib. *glang ru*).²⁶ The earliest mention of the name Mount Ox-head in Chinese Buddhist literature dates back to the beginning of the 5th century, but it is only from the mid-6th century on that the place became clearly associated with Khotan.²⁷

zhuan 大唐大慈恩寺三藏法師傳 [Biography of the Tripiṭaka Master of the Great Cī'en Monastery of the Great Tang], T. 50.2053, 252a (English translation: Rongxi Li, *A Biography of the Tripiṭaka Master of the Great Cī'en Monastery of the Great Tang Dynasty* (Berkeley, California: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1995) 169–170). On the Udāyana statue narratives, see Soper, "Literary Evidence," 259–265.

25 Chavannes, "Voyage de Song Yun," 393.

26 On the different names of this locality, see Frederick W. Thomas, *Tibetan Literary Texts and Documents Concerning Chinese Turkestan. Part I: Literary Texts* (London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1935), vol. 1, 5–6. Regarding the identity between Gośīrṅga and Gośīrṣa, see M. Sylvain Lévi, "Notes chinoises sur l'Inde: IV. Le pays de Kharoṣṭra et l'écriture kharoṣṭrī," *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 4.3 (juillet-septembre 1904): 555–556. The name Ox-head (Chin. *Niutou* 牛頭) recurs more frequently in Chinese sources from the 9th century on, whereas the name Ox-horn (Chin. *Niujiao* 牛角) appears in earlier sources (Rong and Zhu, *Yutian yu Dunhuang*, 246). Other names in Tibetan include *Gau to shan* or 'Ge'u ton shan. See Zhu Lishuang 朱麗雙, "Youguan Yutian de zangwen wenxian: fanyi yu yanjiu 有關於闐的藏文文獻：翻譯與研究. Tibetan Texts Concerning Khotan: Translations and Annotations," (Post-Doctoral diss., Peking University, 2011), 136–137.

27 The earliest occurrence of the name is found in the Chinese *Avatamsakasūtra* (Chin. *Huayanjing* 華嚴經) (T. 278.9, 590a) translated by Buddhahadra (358–429, Chin. Fotuobatuoluo 佛陀跋陀羅). The clear statement that the mountain is located in Khotan is in the *Sūryagarbha* section (Chin. *Rizangfen* 日藏分) of the *Mahāsaṃnipatasūtra* (Chin. *Dajijing* 大集經) (T. 397.13, 294b), translated by Narendrayaśas ca. 566. See M. Sylvain Lévi, "Notes chinoises sur l'Inde V. Quelques documents sur le bouddhisme indien dans l'Asie



MAP 4.1 Places of residence of Auspicious Statues in ancient Khotan. Letters a–q refer to Table 4.2

A Tibetan text preserved in the Kangyur (Tib. *bka' gyur*), the *Ri glang ru lung bstan pa* [Prophecy of Gośīrṣa, also known as *Gośīrṣaḥavyākaraṇa*] (composed probably before the mid-9th century²⁸), is entirely dedicated to the narration of events that took place on Mt. Gośīrṣa.²⁹ This is the site where the Buddha Śākyamuni came to dwell for a while and predicted that the Buddhist Kingdom of Khotan would come into existence one hundred years after his *nirvāṇa*. At this location, the Buddha expounded the *dharma* to an assembly of deities and then sat in meditation before going back to India. The text states that a monastery, the Gomasālagandha, and an image of the Buddha stand in the very spot of these events. The mountain was populated by other important monasteries, and buddhas of the past and bodhisattvas also dwelled here, in addition to a number of Auspicious Statues (see tab. 4.2).³⁰ In particular, Mt. Gośīrṣa was also known as the abode of the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, which made it a kind of Khotanese counterpart of Mt. Wutai (Chin. Wutai shan 五臺山).³¹

centrale (première partie),” *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient* 5,3–4 (juillet-décembre 1905): 257–258.

- 28 Zhu Lishuang 朱丽双, “*Yutianguo shouji de chengli niandai yanjiu* “于阗国授记”的成立年代研究 [A Study on the Composition Date of the *Li yul lung bstan pa*],” *Xiyu wenshi* 西域文史 *Literature and History of the Western Regions* 9 (2014): 112.
- 29 An English translation is in Thomas, *Tibetan Literary Texts*, vol. 1, 3–38. According to a recent assessment, the text was probably composed around the first half of the 9th century and is a translation from an original in Khotanese (Rong Xinjiang and Zhu Lishuang, “The Eight Great Protectors of Khotan Reconsidered: From Khotan to Dunhuang,” *Buddhist Road Paper* 6.1. *Special Issue: Ancient Central Asian Networks. Rethinking the Interplay of Religions, Art and Politics across the Tarim Basin (5th–10th C.)*, ed. Erika Forte (2019): 51.
- 30 Thomas, *Tibetan Literary Texts*, vol. 1, 11–17. The story is also found in other Tibetan texts. See *Li yul lung bstan pa* [Prophecy of the Li Country] (English translation of the passage in Ronald Eric Emmerick, *Tibetan Texts Concerning Khotan* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 2–5); *Li yul chos kyi lo rgyus* [Religious Annals of the Li Country] (P. T. 960), translation of the passage in Thomas, *Tibetan Literary Texts*, 305.
- 31 On the connection between Mt. Wutai, the Mañjuśrī cult, and Khotan, see Rong Xinjiang 荣新江, “Cong Dunhuang de Wutaishan huihua he wenxian kan Wudai Song chu Zhongyuan yu Hexi Yutian jian de wenhua jiaowang 从敦煌的五台山绘画和文献看五代宋初中原与河西于阗间的文化交往 [Cultural Exchanges between China, Hexi, and Khotan During Five Dynasties and Early Song Dynasty Periods, as Seen in the Representations of Mount Wutai and in Documents from Dunhuang],” *Wenbo* 文博 [Culture and Museum] 4 (1987): 68–75; Imre Hamar, “Khotan and Mount Wutai: The Significance of Central Asian Actors in the Making of the Mountain Cult,” in *The Transnational Cult of Mount Wutai. Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Susan Andrews, Jinhua Chen, and Kuan Guang (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 350–364; Imre Hamar, “The Mañjuśrī Cult in Khotan,” *Studies in Chinese Religions* 5,3/4 (2019): 343–352. This connection seems to be reflected, at the iconographic level, in the so-called New Mañjuśrī Type (Chin. *xinyang Wenshu* 新样文殊) image that appears, for example, in Cave 220, where

The site of Mt. Gośīrṣa is associated with Kohmāri Hill, 26 km southwest of the modern-day Khotan City, on the eastern bank of the Karakash River, in the vicinity of the site of Yotkan, the ancient capital of the kingdom (map 4.1).³² The name ox head or ox horn hints at the shape of the mountain; it has two summits separated by a valley, and thus it resembles the head of a cow. Xuanzang describes both the mountain and its sanctuaries, which are also mentioned in later Tibetan texts.³³ The hill retains its sacred aura even today, as it is the place of two Muslim sanctuaries, albeit with no archaeological traces left from the Buddhist temples visited by Xuanzang.³⁴

Depictions of Mt. Gośīrṣa are present in Dunhuang as both the identifier of a number of Khotanese Auspicious Statues—those of the past buddhas who gathered there—and the main subject of large tableaux.

Mt. Gośīrṣa tableaux are found in at least twenty caves at Mogao and two at Yulin (tab. 4.1). With the exceptions of Caves 76 and 220 at Mogao and Cave 33 at Yulin—where the depictions of Mt. Gośīrṣa are displayed on one wall of the main chamber³⁵—Mt. Gośīrṣa tableaux are located on the ceiling of the entrance corridor. The first appearance of this theme could date to the 8th century,³⁶ but the majority of the extant evidence falls into a period stretching from the first half of the 9th century (namely, in the period of Tibetan rule over Dunhuang) to the first quarter of the 11th century (until the end of the Guiyijun period).

the king of Khotan is represented as the groom of Mañjuśrī's lion. See Rong Xinjiang 荣新江, "Xinyang Wenshu xiang de laili 新样文殊像的来历 [On the Origin of the 'New Mañjuśrī Type' Image]," in *Guiyijun shi yanjiu* 归义军史研究 [Studies on the History of the Guiyijun] (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1996), 252–256; Chen Suyu 陈粟裕, "Xinyang Wenshu zhong de Yutian wang xingxiang yanjiu 新样文殊中的于阗王形象研究. Khotan King in the Figures of Mañjuśrī," in *Cong Yutian dao Dunhuang*, 215–233; Sha Wutian 沙武田 published different articles around the theme of the 'New Mañjuśrī Type', especially on the painters' sketches found in Dunhuang. For an overview, see Sha Wutian 沙武田, *Dunhuang huagao yanjiu* 敦煌画稿研究 [Studies on the Painter's Sketches from Dunhuang] (Beijing: Zhongyang bianyi chubanshe, 2006), 155–172.

32 Fernand Grenard and Jules-Léon Dutreuil de Rhins, *Mission scientifique dans la haute Asie, sous la direction de J.L. Dutreuil de Rhins, 1890–1895*, vol. 3 (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1898), 142–144; Stein, *Ancient Khotan*, 185–190.

33 *Da Tang Xiyuji* 大唐西域记. T. 2987.51, 943c (English translation in Li, *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions*, 378).

34 Stein, *Ancient Khotan*, 185–190.

35 In Yulin Cave 32, Mt. Gośīrṣa is embedded in the scene of *Samantabhadra's* assembly, on the east wall, while in Yulin Cave 33, Mt. Gośīrṣa occupies the center of the composition, covering the entire south wall. See *Anxi Yulinku*, Figs. 73, 75.

36 According to Zhang Xiaogang, the earliest extant depiction is from Mogao Cave 345, which he dates to the 8th century (Zhang, *Dunhuang gantonghua*, 199–200).

The arrangement and proportions of the Mt. Gośīrṣa tableaux follow a similar scheme (fig. 4.4). The mountain is the largest element at the center of the composition and is rendered literally, in the shape of a cow head. A staircase leads from the bottom of the mountain, through the mouth of the cow, and to the top of its head, where a large image of a buddha sits in *dhyānāsana* on a lotus and performs the gesture of *vitarkamudrā*. In some depictions, the buddha is inside a pavilion—could this be the Gomasālagandha Monastery?—as in Mogao Caves 25, 342, and 454, and in Yulin Cave 33. An additional standing buddha is depicted in the space immediately over the mountain. While the sitting buddha represents Śākyamuni, when he stayed for seven days on the mountain, the standing image likely represents the Auspicious Statue of Śākyamuni, when it arrived through the air from Vulture Peak.³⁷ Smaller figures of monks, *devarājas*, guardian deities, bodhisattvas, and other buddhas are depicted in the vicinity of the mountain; this is the audience to which the Buddha expounds the *dharma*, as described in textual accounts. The number of figures and the way they are displayed within the composition vary in the extant examples.³⁸

The rest of the space around the mountain in the tableau is occupied by visual narratives related to sacred places in India, Central Asia, and China. Among them, the founding legend of Khotan (see next paragraph) is depicted in the upper left corner, on the margin of the composition (fig. 4.4). This arrangement seems to be constant across Mt. Gośīrṣa tableaux located on the entrance corridor ceiling.

2.3 *The Founding of Khotan*

The legend of the founding of Khotan is recorded in various Chinese and Tibetan sources. It is basically composed of two main narratives, with some variations. One part tells of the prophecy spoken by the Buddha Śākyamuni on Mt. Gośīrṣa. At that time, the territory of Khotan was covered by a lake. The Buddha predicts that the Kingdom of Khotan will arise on this very place. To ease the process, he calls his disciple Śāriputra and the god Vaiśravaṇa, and

37 This explanation is put forward by Zhang Xiaogang 张小刚, “Dunhuang suojian Yutian Niutoushang shengji ji ruixiang 敦煌所见于阗牛头山圣迹瑞像. The Sainly Appearance of Ox-Headed Mount in Khotan and the Auspicious Image of Buddha Reflected in Dunhuang Grottoes,” *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 [Dunhuang research] 110.4 (2008): 6–11, 115.

38 For a typological study of Mount Gośīrṣa depictions in Dunhuang, see Sun Xiushen 孙修身, *Fojiao dongchuan gushihua juan* 佛教东传故事画卷 [Buddhist Narrative Paintings on the Transmission of Buddhism to the East] (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 2000), 83–100; Zhang, *Dunhuang qantonghua*, 207–208.



FIGURE 4.4 Mount Gośiṛṣa tableau, with Auspicious Statues and Eight Protectors. Corridor ceiling of Mogao Cave 9, late 9th c.

DUNHUANG GANTONGHUA, 314, 5-3-10 © DUNHUANG ACADEMY

orders them to dry the lake. The second part of the legend narrates how the Dynasty of Khotan came into existence, with Vaiśravaṇa playing the role of granting an heir to the first king and establishing a continuous royal lineage.³⁹

Depictions of the founding legend of Khotan in Dunhuang relate to the prophecy only: Vaiśravaṇa and Śāriputra are depicted in the act of draining the lake (figs. 4.3 and 4.4). On the lake, small buddhas sit on floating lotuses. A building in the shape of a castle or fortress stands in the back. The scene is identified by an inscription. The one from Mogao Cave 237 says, “Kingdom of Khotan: the moment when Śāriputra and the celestial king Vaiśravaṇa pierce the lake” (Chin. *Yutianguo Shelifu Bishamen tianwang juehai shi* 于闐國舍利弗毗沙門天王決海時). Similar text appears in other inscriptions and in the *Records on the Auspicious Statues*.⁴⁰

Depictions of the founding of Khotan mainly appear in two forms: as individually framed pictures decorating the ceiling slopes of the large buddha niche in the main chamber of the caves, in a line with other individually framed depictions of Auspicious Statues (fig. 4.3) or embedded in large Mt. Gośīrṣa tableaux (fig. 4.4). The latter case is the most recurrent and seems to be the standard in caves that were built or decorated during the Guiyijun period. One exception to this scheme is found in Yulin Cave 32, where the scene with Vaiśravaṇa and Śāriputra is included in the tableau of Samantabhadra’s assembly, occupying the eastern wall of the main room.⁴¹

The combination of the two scenes—the Buddha on Mt. Gośīrṣa and the founding of Khotan—into one pictorial space is meaningful, as it rather faithfully reflects the narratives contained in the Tibetan texts *Li yul lung bstan pa* [Prophecy of the Li Country] and *Li yul chos kyi lo rgyus* [Religious Annals of the Li Country] (P. T. 960).

39 For a synopsis, see Stein, *Ancient Khotan*, 156–166. For a comparative study on the foundation legends of Khotan, see Gen’ichi Yamazaki, “The Legend of the Foundation of Khotan,” *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 48 (1990): 55–80; Max Deeg, *Miscellanea Nepalicae: Early Chinese Reports on Nepal; The Foundation Legend of Nepal in Its Trans-Himalayan Context* (Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2016), 119–133.

40 See the texts transcribed in Zhang and Rong, *Yutian shi congkao*, 169–178.

41 *Anxi Yulinku*, fig. 73. Here, the scene is placed at the upper-right corner of the tableau. The tableau of Samantabhadra faces the one with Mañjuśrī, which is on the adjacent wall of the cave. On these paintings and their connection with Khotan, see Chen Suyu 陈粟裕, “Wutai shan yu Niutou shan: Yulin 32 ku ‘Wenshu, Puxian bing shicong tu’ yu pusa zhuti de daolun 五台山与牛头山：榆林 32 窟‘文殊、普贤并侍从图’与菩萨住地的讨论 [Mt. Wutai and Mt. Ox-head: A Discussion of the ‘Painting of Mañjuśrī and Samantabhadra with Attendants’ in Yulin Cave 32],” *Meishu yanjiu 美术研究 Art Research* 3 (2013): 24–41.

Then the Lord (*bhagavant*) Śākyamuni, having filled with his rays (*raśmi*) the Li country that had become a lake, from those rays there arose in the water three hundred and sixty-three lotuses. On the several lotuses appeared several lamps (*pradīpa*). Those rays, coming together, circling three times toward the right above the water, will sink into the midst of the water. Then the Lord (*bhagavant*) ordered Ārya Śāriputra and Vaiśravaṇa: ‘Do break up this lake (*saras*) that resembles the colour of ink at the mountain called Māṃsa-varṇa-parvata (flesh-coloured mountain).’ So he ordered. And the lake was broken up by the end of Ārya Śāriputra’s mendicant’s staff and by Vaiśravaṇa’s spear-point (*kunta-palaka*). And the Lord (*bhagavant*) for the sake of working the purpose (*artha*) of the beings (*sattva*) remained there a week on the Gośirṣa hill, at a place where there is now a small *stūpa*, inside a shrine to the left of where stands a great image (*pratimā*) [...].

Then the Lord (*bhagavant*) said to Ānanda: ‘The lake being broken up by the end of Śāriputra’s mendicant’s staff and by Vaiśravaṇa’s spear-point (*kunta-palaka*), on the lake’s subsequently drying up, after my *nirvāṇa*, this country called the Li country will exist. In the place where the rays circled three times, afterwards, in a circle, the fortress of Hu-then, the great city of Līa-ldan, will be built. In the place where the rays sank into the midst of the water, taking control over (*adhiṣṭhāna*) and guarding the country, an image of the Buddha of Rājagrāma, made with my controlling that bodily defilement should not sink into the sandal, will come through the air (*ākāśa*) from the country of India and remain. In the places where rose the lotuses and the lamps (*pradīpa*) on the water, afterwards three hundred and sixty-three *vihāras*, inhabited by monks and nuns practising the Mahāyāna, will be built by kings and other faithful donors (*dānapati*).⁴²

2.4 *The Eight Protectors*

In 1942, Harold Bailey published a selection of texts in Khotanese to “illustrate the religion of Khotan”, where he noticed the recurrence of “a definite group of eight” deities, “*devas*, *nāga*, and *devīs*”, and noted that “the group is found in Khotan, Tibetan, and Chinese” texts.⁴³ The group is also referred to in Khotanese by the collective name of Eight Protectors (Kh. *haṣṭā parvālā*). These are deities that have been specifically nominated by the Buddha Śākyamuni to protect Khotan and ensure Khotanese sovereignty (tab. 4.3).

42 Emmerick, *Tibetan Texts*, 11, 13. “Li country” is Khotan.

43 Harold W. Bailey, “Hvatanica IV,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 4 (1942): 912.

TABLE 4.3 The Eight Protectors of Khotan (comp. E. Forte, adapted from “Eight Protectors,” tab. 1)

Sanskrit	Khotanese	Chinese
Aparājita	Aparājai[ja]tta (P. 2893) Aparājai jasta	Nansheng tianzi 難勝天子 (<i>Candragarbhasūtra</i>) Apoluozhiduo shen 阿婆羅質多神 (S. 2113, P. 3352, S. 5659, MG 126, MG 454) Nansheng tianshen 難勝天神
Sanjaya	Samñī (P. 2893)	Sanzhi yecha dajiang 散脂夜叉大將 (<i>Candragarbhasūtra</i>)
Sañjaya, Saṃjñāya	Samññāyaś, Saṃjayaś, Saṃjñāyasva	Shayemoli Shen 莎耶摩利神 (S. 2113)
Gaganasvara	Gaganasvarā (P. 2893)	Guyangjue/Guyianjiao da yecha 殺羊脚 大夜叉 (<i>Candragarbhasūtra</i>) Jiajianashali shen 迦迦那莎利神 (S. 2113)
Suvarṇamāla, Svarṇamāla	Svarṇamāla (P. 2893)	Jinhuaman yecha 金華鬘夜叉 (<i>Candragarbhasūtra</i>) Shanamoli shen 莎那末利神 (S. 2113, MG 126)
Grahavadatta	Grrahavadatti (P. 2893)	Reshe longwang 熱舍龍王 (<i>Candragarbhasūtra</i>)
Gṛhāvātaptā	Grahaṣ' vidatta, Grrahavadatta, Grahavada nātām re, Grrahadatta	Mohejialuo shen 摩訶迦羅神 (S. 2113, MG 108)
Aṃkuśa, Añkuśavati	Aṃgūśa' (P. 2893) Añkuśa, Agūśa'	Anajinshou tiannü 阿那緊首天女 (<i>Candragarbhasūtra</i>) Ayushe tiannü 阿隅闍天女 (S. 2113, MG 146)
Sthānava[ti]	Sthānāvā (P. 2893) Sthāṇava, Sthānāva	Tanansheli tiannü 他難闍梨天女 (<i>Candragarbhasūtra</i>) Xitana tiannü 悉他那天女 (S. 2113, MG 98, MG 126, MG 146) Gongtuona tiannü 恭陀那天女 (S. 5659)
Vaiśravaṇa	Vrīśamaṃ (P. 2893) Vrīśamā, Vrīśama, Vrraiśama	Pishamen wangshen 毘沙門王神 (<i>Candragarbhasūtra</i>) Pishamen tianwang shen 毗沙門天 王神 (S. 2113, MG 45, MG 146) Pishamen tianwang 毗沙門天王 (MG 108)

In their study of the *Records on the Auspicious Statues*, Zhang Guangda and Rong Xinjiang highlight the occurrence of the names of the Eight Protectors of Khotan. In particular, in document S. 2113, they are listed one after another, and each name is followed by the formula “[...] protects the Kingdom of Khotan” (Chin. *hu Yutian guo* 護于闐國).⁴⁴ In 2010, following a hint in the study by Sun Xiushen,⁴⁵ Rong Xinjiang and Zhu Lishuang collected further material on the Eight Protectors of Khotan and drew attention to the fact that in Dunhuang the deities are depicted as a group in several caves. Their research stimulated Chinese academic interest in the theme of the Eight Protectors of Khotan in Dunhuang. Now, we have a significantly richer set of data on this theme in Dunhuang and its textual background.⁴⁶

The cult of the Eight Protectors probably emerged at the end of the 6th century. The oldest extant textual evidence containing a list of the Eight Protectors of Khotan is the Chinese *Candragarbhasūtra* (Chin. *Yuezangjing* 月藏經) (T. 397.13, 374–380), translated by Narendrayaśas (517–589, Chin. Naliantiyeshe 那連提耶舍) in the second half of the 6th century. Later, their names appear as a group in the Tibetan texts *Prophecy of Gośrīga*, *Prophecy of the Li Country*, and *Religious Annals of the Li Country* (ca. 9th century); in the Chinese manuscript S. 2113 (completed after 896); and in the Khotanese manuscript P. 2893⁴⁷ (10th century). Besides being part of a systematic list, the Eight Protectors’ names are found in other texts in Khotanese, especially the *Suvarṇaprabhāsottamasūtra* [*Sūtra* of Golden Light], a scripture that was

44 S. 2113 recto, lines 48–52. See Zhang and Rong, “Dunhuang ruixiangji,” 175, 207–216, in particular 209, table 3.

45 Sun, *Fojiao dongchuan gushihua juan*.

46 Rong Xinjiang 荣新江 and Zhu Lishuang 朱丽双, “Tuwen huzheng: Yutian ba da shouhushen xin tan 图文互证：于闐八大守护神新探 [Mutual Evidence of Image and Text: New Investigation on the Eight Guardians of Khotan],” in *Dunhuang wenxian, kaogu, yishu zonghe yanjiu. Jinian Xiang Da xiansheng danchen 110 zhounian guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 敦煌文献, 考古, 艺术综合研究. 纪念向达先生诞辰 110 周年国际学术研讨会论文集 [Comprehensive Studies on Texts, Archeology, and Art of Dunhuang: Essays Presented at the International Conference in Memory of Prof. Xiang Da on the 110th Anniversary of His Birthday], ed. Fan Jinshi 樊锦诗, Rong Xinjiang 荣新江, and Lin Shetian 林世田 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 190–218. For a recent article published in English that includes an overview of previous studies on the Eight Protectors of Khotan, see Rong and Zhu, “The Eight Great Protectors.”

47 Mauro Maggi, “A Khotanese Medical Text on Poultices: Manuscripts P 2893 and 101 Khot S9,” in *Traditional South Asian Medicine*, ed. Rahul Peter Das (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2008), 77–85.

particularly popular in Khotan, which puts specific emphasis on the divine protection of the state.⁴⁸

At present, we know that at least fifteen caves at Mogao and one at Yulin contain depictions of the Eight Protectors that belong to the period between the end of the 9th century and the last quarter of the 10th century (tab. 4.1).⁴⁹ Representations of the Eight Protectors of Khotan at the Mogao Caves follow a rather standardized scheme in terms of placement (position within the caves), style, and iconography. The Eight Protectors are consistently depicted as a group and are typically displayed paratactically on the slopes of the ceiling in the entrance corridor, four on each side, above the donors, who are usually depicted on the walls of the corridor. The ensemble is often completed with images of Auspicious Statues, including the Khotanese ones (fig. 4.4).

Each deity is depicted within a frame, often identified by captions in Chinese. The style and iconography of the deities are rather consistent in terms of attributes and stance. In some cases, it is possible that stencils or sketch models (Chin. *huagao* 畫稿) were used.⁵⁰ The sequence in which they are depicted appears to reflect the order in which they are listed in the different texts.⁵¹ However, this is not always the case; at times, major or minor popularity of individual deities within the group may have led to slight deviations from the order given by the texts. Toward the end of the period when this imagery was produced, the position and iconography of the deities became increasingly less accurate, which might reflect a decline in the cult of the Eight Protectors.⁵² Thus, at this stage, their display in the caves' entrances remained a purely conventional decorative element.

48 Prods Oktor Skjærvø, *This Most Excellent Shine of Gold, King of Kings of Sutras: The Khotanese Suvarṇabhāṣottamasūtra* (Cambridge: Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization, Harvard University, 2004); Lokesh Chandra, "Suvarṇa-Bhasottama and the Security of Khotan," in *Buddhism: Art and Values; A Collection of Research Papers and Keynote Addresses on the Evolution of Buddhist Art and Thought across the Lands of Asia*, ed. Lokesh Chandra (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 2007), 175–185.

49 The latest survey is by Chen Suyu (Chen, *Cong Yutian dao Dunhuang*, 129–131, table 7–1). The earliest appearance seems to be in Mogao Cave 9, built in ca. 892 (Rong and Zhu, "The Eight Protectors", 79).

50 Rong and Zhu, "The Eight Protectors," 63–64.

51 Rong and Zhu, "Tuwen huzheng." See the tables provided in Rong and Zhu, "The Eight Protectors," 77–78, tables 4.1, 4.2.

52 *Ibid.*, 80–81.



FIGURE 4.5 Detail of Fig. 4.4a

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3 Evidence from Khotan

The silk banner of the Auspicious Statues that Aurel Stein discovered includes an image that was, from the very beginning of the study of the banner, unmistakably connected with actual sculptures brought to light by Stein himself at



FIGURE 4.6 Relief sculpture of a standing Buddha. Inner wall of Rawak *stūpa* court, Khotan, 6th–8th c.

STEIN PHOTO 5/3(19), IDP.BL.UK/DATABASE/LARGE.A4D?RECNUM=54375&IMAGERECNUM=92020 © LIBRARY OF THE HUNGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

the site of Rawak in Khotan (figs. 4.2 and 4.5–4.6).⁵³ Both the Rawak sculptures and the image on the banner show a standing buddha whose body halo is filled with small buddha figures.

At first, scholars interpreted the banner's contents as drawings derived from sculptures worshipped at various sacred sites in India.⁵⁴ Later, Alexander Soper noticed that in the captions of the images, in addition to the well-known Indian places, “[...] there is an interesting sprinkling of Chinese holy sites closer to hand in the Kansu area [...]”, and “[...] a third region, Khotan, was of still greater importance [...]” as the source of such images. For the image resembling the sculptures at Rawak, Soper suggests “[...] this icon was intended to represent one of the several specifically Khotanese buddhas named in the texts.” Soper goes as far as suggesting that this particular image was actually intended as a reproduction of the Buddha of Pimo, described in the records of Song Yun and Xuanzang.⁵⁵

53 Stein, *Ancient Khotan*, 488–499, Figs. 61, 63, 64, 69.

54 Rowland, “Indian Images in Chinese Sculpture.”

55 Soper, “Famous Images”, 352, 361–362. The first suggestion that this image represents a Khotanese type is found in Rowland.

Hida Romi reanalysed the iconography of some of the images in the banner. The similarities between the image of the standing buddha with the halo filled with small buddhas and the statues from Rawak seem irrefutable, although the hypothesis that this depiction might represent the Pimo statue, in light of subsequent research on the Auspicious Statues, should be dismissed. Hida identifies the way the small buddhas are depicted as a distinctive feature of Khotanese iconography. Khotanese features are seen in another statue depicted in the banner of a buddha seated with pendent legs on a square throne. Further, Hida presents iconographical and textual evidence that one more image on the banner could have originated in the Khotan area.⁵⁶

While the Khotanese origin of many of the Auspicious Statues is by now a fact, it nevertheless remains difficult—if not impossible—to attribute any of these images to known sculptural or painted remains from Khotan, aside from the case of the Rawak sculptures. This is not surprising, at least not more than the apparent absence of clear evidence of figurative representations of Khotanese themes in the Khotan area.

Joanna Williams suggests tentatively that some buddha images on wooden panels found in Khotan represent Auspicious Statues. However, she concludes that “[...] the assumption that these (= the paintings from Khotan) are in fact representations of ‘famous images’ is somewhat tenuous.” Williams points out that the imagery, as it appears in Dunhuang, finds no real parallels in the Khotanese paintings. This might be due, among other factors, to the chronological gap between the two productions.⁵⁷ The Auspicious Statues paintings appear in Dunhuang in the 9th century, while the chronology of Khotanese paintings suggested by Williams, “[...] belonged primarily to the 8th century AD, and no new material has appeared to change this estimate.”⁵⁸

So far, this remains the scenario: a substantial lack of evidence of local Khotanese artistic production of the themes found in Dunhuang and in the texts. A few local legends—preserved in the Tibetan and Chinese sources—have been identified as the subjects of some paintings.⁵⁹ However, the founding legend is absent; the famous Mt. Gośīrṣa is not represented either, and the

56 See the figures indicated as “Q”, “F”, and “G” in the fragment from the National Museum, New Delhi, in Hida, “Tonkō shōrai kenpon,” 499–522.

57 Joanna Williams, “The Iconography of Khotanese Paintings,” *East and West* 23.1/2 (1973): 127–129, figs. 23–26.

58 Williams, “Khotanese Paintings,” 109.

59 Erika Forte, “Images of Patronage in Khotan,” in *Buddhism in Central Asia I. Patronage, Legitimation, Sacred Space, and Pilgrimage*, ed. Carmen Meinert and Henrik Sørensen (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2020), 40–60.

Eight Protectors as a group seems to be a subject that is equally ignored by the Khotanese painters.⁶⁰

It is indeed likely that this state of affairs may change, because new material has appeared in the last decade. Newly discovered mural paintings from the site of Toplukdong (Chin. Tuopulukedun 托普鲁克墩) near Domoko reveal a closeness to the Khotanese themes of Dunhuang that has not been noticed so far in other extant material.

60 To my knowledge, there is only an epigraphic evidence which mentions a group of eight deities—an inscription in Khotanese found on the temple CD4 at Dandān-öliq. The inscription reads: “The donor [(Skr. *dānapati*)] Budai has commissioned these eight *devas* to be painted, wishing for their blessing” (my translation from the Chinese provided by Wen Xin 文欣 and Duan Qing 段晴). See Wen Xin 文欣, and Duan Qing 段晴, “Dandan wulike fosi bihua shang de yutianwen tiji kaoshi 丹丹乌里克佛寺壁画上的于阗文题记考释 [Philological Analysis of the Khotanese Inscription on the Mural of the Buddhist Temple in Dandān-öliq],” in *Dandan wulike yizhi. Zhong-Ri gongtong kaocha yanjiu baogao* 丹丹乌里克遗址. 中日共同考察研究报告. *Dandan Oilik Site. Report of the Sino-Japanese Joint Expedition*, ed. Zhongguo Xinjiang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 中国新疆文物考古研究所 Xinjiang Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology China and Riben Fojiao daxue Niya yizhi xueshu yanjiu jigou 日本佛教大学尼雅遗址学术研究机构 The Academic Research Organization for the Niya Ruins of Bukkyo University Japan (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2009), 261–265, pl. 40. The inscription appears by a figure with a halo riding a horse and holding a shallow bowl, above which flies a black bird—a theme that often appears in Khotanese painting and is still not completely understood; see Williams, “Khotanese Paintings,” 150–152; Marcus Mode, “Sogdian Gods in Exile: Some Iconographic Evidence from Khotan in the Light of Recently Excavated Material from Sogdiana,” *Silk Road Art and Archaeology* 2 (1991/1992): 179–214; Matteo Compareti, “The ‘Eight Divinities’ in Khotanese Paintings: Local Deities or Sogdian Importation?” in *Proceedings of the Eighth European Conference of Iranian Studies (State Hermitage Museum and Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, St Petersburg, 14–19 September 2015). Volume I: Studies on Pre-Islamic Iran and on Historical Linguistics*, ed. Pavel B. Lurje (Saint Petersburg: The State Hermitage Publishers, 2019), 123–127. Unfortunately, the rest of the painting did not survive, therefore we have no clue on whether the eight *devas* referred to by the inscription were painted on another, now lost, section of the mural, or if the divine rider was part of such a group. I question the assumption put forward by Wen and Duan that the inscription refers to the rider, who originally would have been accompanied by seven other mounted deities (Wen and Duan, “Dandan wulike fosi bihua,” 263). In fact, in other pictorial evidence from Khotan, the number of the haloed riders appears to vary, ranging from one to several (Compareti, “The ‘Eight Divinities,’” 126–127). As fragmentary as the mural is, the question this evidence raises is whether by calling them *hašte gyastä* (eight *devas*) the donor Budai intended to have the *haštä parvālā* (Eight Protectors) of Khotan represented in the painting he commissioned, or if he referred to a different group of eight deities. Wen and Duan do not connect the *hašte gyastä*, “eight *devas*” of the inscription to the *haštä parvālā* of the Khotanese texts. Compareti considers instead the possible identity of the eight deities of the painting from the Sogdian and Iranian perspectives.

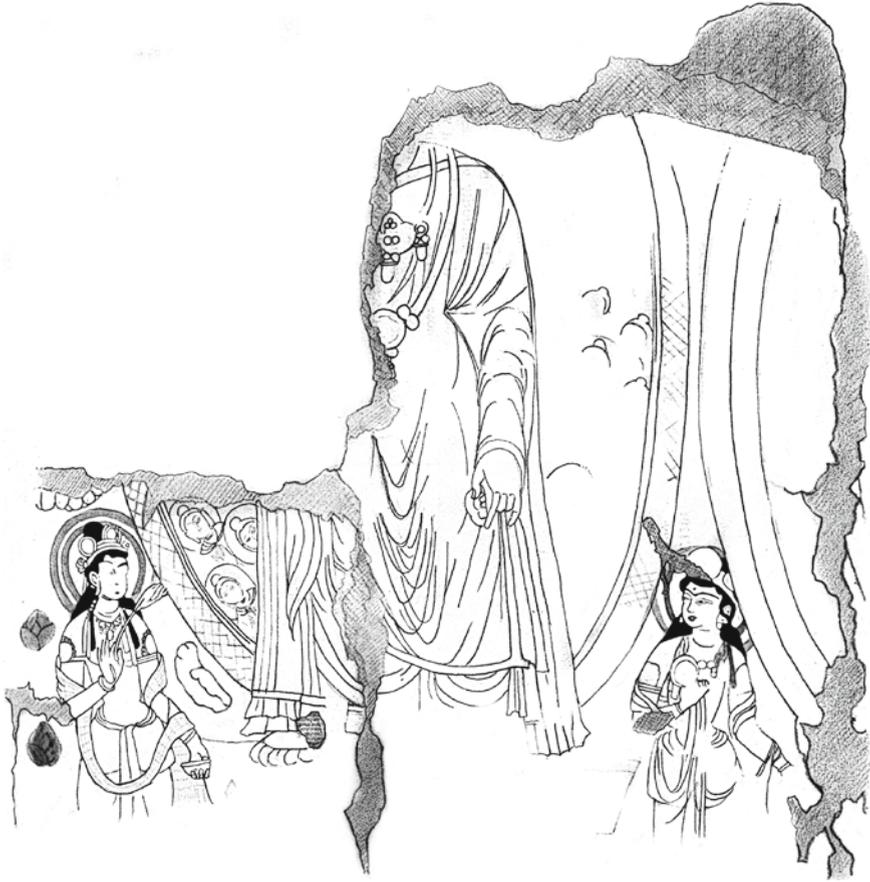


FIGURE 4.7 Mural with a standing Buddha. Inner west wall of Toplukdong site n. 1, Domoko, Khotan, 7th–8th c.

LINE DRAWING BY E. FORTE

On the inner walls of site no. 1 of Toplukdong, there is an image of a standing buddha with a large halo filled with smaller buddhas, very much recalling the image of the silk banner (fig. 4.7). Two other murals from the same structure appear to display two (?) of the Eight Protectors (fig. 4.8).⁶¹

61 Erika Forte, "On a Wall Painting from Toplukdong Site No. 1 in Domoko: New Evidence of Vaiśravaṇa in Khotan?" in *Changing Forms and Cultural Identity: Religious and Secular Iconographies. Papers from the 20th Conference of the European Association for South Asian Archaeology and Art Held in Vienna from 4th to 9th of July 2010, Vol. 1, South Asian Archaeology and Art*, ed. Deborah Klimburg-Salter and Linda Lojda (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 215–224; Erika Forte, "Khotan chiku Domoko hakken Toplukdong 1-gō butsuji to Gomati-dera densetsu コータン地区ドモコ発見トブルクトン1號佛寺と瞿摩帝寺傳説.

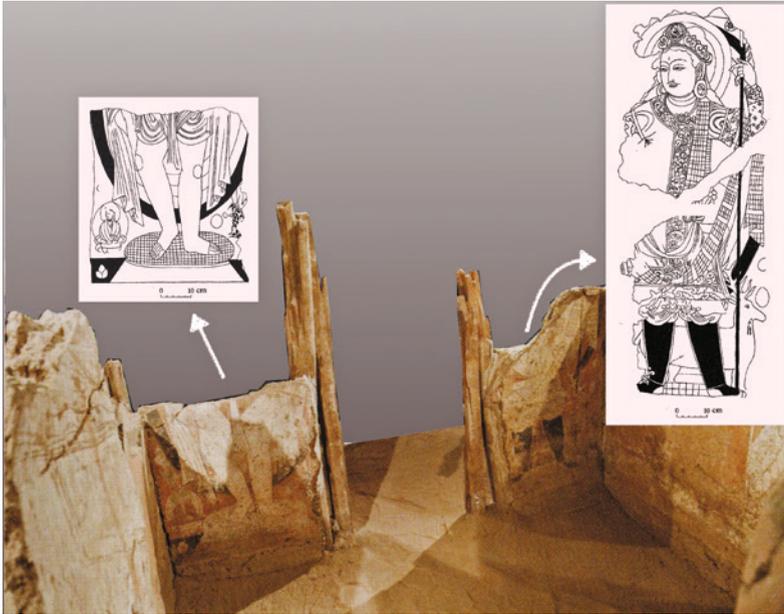


FIGURE 4.8 Murals with two protector deities. Inner south wall of Toplukdong site n. 1, Domoko, Khotan (*in situ*), 7th–8th c.

MODIFIED AFTER DOMOKO, 6 © DOMOKO MUSEUM

A group of fragments recovered from the larger structure at site no. 3 of Toplukdong shows a series of deities encircled by large oval haloes and floating in the air (fig. 4.9). They wear caftans with short sleeves over loose trousers tucked into high boots (male deities) or over long skirts in a light material (female deities). The deities have fierce expressions, with animal-like teeth. Their attributes are barely distinguishable, with some exceptions. There is no doubt that some kind of protector deities are depicted as a group here, although important elements are lacking to prove with certainty that these fragments represent the Eight Protectors. Ascertaining the exact identity of the individual figures (with one or two exceptions) needs further study. Their iconography does not tally with that of the Eight Protectors at Mogao, and the

Toplukdong Temple No. 1 in Domoko (Khotan) and the Legend of Gomati Monastery," in *Takata Tokio kyōju taishoku kinen tōhōgaku kenkyū ronshū* 高田時雄教授退職記念東方學研究論集. *East Asian Studies. Festschrift in Honor of the Retirement of Professor Takata Tokio*, ed. Tōhōgaku kenkyū ronshū kankōkai 東方學研究論集刊行會 [East Asian Studies Editorial Committee] (Kyoto: Rinsen Book Co., 2014), 210–227.



FIGURE 4.9 Mural fragment with protector deities, 62 × 83 cm. Recovered from Toplukdong site n. 3, Domoko, Khotan, 7th–8th c.
BUDDHIST VESTIGES, 111 © DOMOKO MUSEUM

original number of the deities within the composition is unknown, due to the state of the remains.⁶²

4 Conclusions

In summing up, Khotanese themes in Dunhuang are seen in caves at Mogao and Yulin that were built or redecorated in the 9th and 10th centuries. The earliest representations belong to the last quarter of the 9th century, which basically falls into the period of the Tibetan presence in Dunhuang (ca. 786–848). The bulk of the depictions are found in caves from the Guiyijun period,

62 The paintings from Toplukdong were exhibited in Shanghai in 2014. See the exhibition catalogue, Chen Xiejun 陈燮君 and Chen Kelun 陈克伦, ed., *Silu fanxiang. Xinjiang Hetian Damagou fojiao yizhi chutu bihua yishu 丝路梵相. 新疆和田达玛沟遗址出土壁画艺术. Buddhist Vestiges Along the Silk Road. Mural Art from the Damago Site, Hotan, Xinjiang* (Shanghai: Shanghai Museum and Shanghai shuhua Publishing House, 2014).

A description and preliminary study of these painting are among the topics of a forthcoming article: Erika Forte, "The Eight Great Protectors Reunited? Patterns of Patronage and Legitimation in Khotan" (paper presented at the 24th Conference of the European Association for South Asian Archaeology and Art in Naples, Italy, July 2018).

especially those that were sponsored during the rule of the Cao family (914–1036, 曹). In those caves in particular, a common pattern recurs: the Khotanese themes are concentrated in the entrance corridor; the Mt. Gośirṣa tableau, with the foundation of Khotan, occupies the space of the ceiling; the Eight Protectors and the Khotanese Auspicious Statues are depicted in rows on the two slopes of the corridor ceiling; life-sized donors are depicted on the walls of the corridor—these mostly represent ruling people of the Guiyijun, especially members of the Cao family and members of the Khotanese royal family.

This situation clearly reflects close connections between Dunhuang and the Kingdom of Khotan, strengthened and secured through marriage alliances, which led to the formation of a semi-permanent Khotanese (aristocratic) community in Dunhuang.⁶³ The diffusion of Khotanese themes was fostered by such a community, which had the means to sponsor the decoration—or even the construction—of caves and monasteries in Dunhuang, with the support of the kindred Cao rulers. This provides a possible explanation for why the appearance of Khotanese themes is not always combined with Khotanese donors' portraits.

The establishment of a close alliance between Khotan and Dunhuang appears to be something of a natural consequence derived from the political situation in eastern Central Asia in the 9th and 10th centuries. The instability created by continuous conflict nurtured the diffusion of end-of-the-*dharma* (Chin. *mofa* 末法) beliefs, which echoed in the texts that circulated (and probably matured) in Khotan, such as the *Religious Annals of the Li Country*, the *Li yul gyi dgra bcom pas lung bstan pa* [Prophecy of the Arhat from the Li Country], the *Sūryagarbhasūtra*, and the *Candragarbhasūtra*.⁶⁴ It is, in fact, in these texts, among others, that the literary background of the Khotanese themes is found. The earliest mention of Buddha Śākyamuni at the Mt. Gośirṣa of Khotan appears in the second half of the 6th century in the Chinese *Sūryagarbhasūtra*. However, it is only later that the story of the prophecy became prominent, probably from the 7th or 8th century on and in association with the narratives that constituted the basis for the Khotanese themes in Dunhuang.

Khotanese legends are not found in the extant literature in Khotanese; rather, they are echoed in Chinese pilgrims' accounts and in the Tibetan texts. Xuanzang reports the legends of Khotan at length, and many of the legends find

63 Rong, *Eighteen lectures*, 327–328.

64 Rong and Zhu, *Yutian yu Dunhuang*, 268–269. On the likely Central Asian (if not Khotanese) origin of the *Sūryagarbhasūtra* and *Candragarbhasūtra*, see Lévi, “Notes chinoises sur l’Inde V.”

a parallel in the Tibetan texts and are recognisable in some of the Auspicious Statues' narratives synthesised in the captions in the paintings at Mogao.

As Max Deeg underlines, the foundation legend Xuanzang reports does not include the story of draining the lake. It could be that the story was added at a later time, or at least after Xuanzang's stay in Khotan.⁶⁵ On the other hand, the drainage story appears in the Tibetan texts, the compilation of which likely occurred in the course of the 9th century, when Khotan and other territories of the Tarim Basin (and the region of Dunhuang) were under the control of the Tibetan Empire (Tib. Bod chen po, ca. 7th c. to 842).⁶⁶ Depictions of the founding of Khotan in Dunhuang are rather similar to the narratives preserved in the Tibetan texts (for example, in Mogao Caves 231 and 237, typically ascribed to the Tibetan period),⁶⁷ and seem to have been directly inspired by them.

On the whole, it is safe to assume that the narratives that constituted the basis of the Khotanese themes in Dunhuang acquired special popularity around the 8th or 9th century and found their way to a visual expression at the caves in Mogao. One may wonder about the agency of the Tibetans in this process—a question that I have to leave open for the time being.

The Khotanese themes in Dunhuang received a boost during the Guiyijun period in the 10th century, because of the direct connection between Khotan and the Guiyijun rulers, as explained above. Liberated from Tibetan dominion and left in peace by a considerably weakened Chinese presence in the Tarim area, Khotan regained its role in the political scene as an independent kingdom. A document from Dunhuang in 901 registers an official embassy from Khotan to the Guiyijun headquarters in Shazhou (沙州), and many others followed in the course of the 10th century, until the Buddhist Kingdom of Khotan disintegrated under the conquering pressure of the Kharakhanids in 1006.⁶⁸

Rong Xinjiang points out another factor in the centrality of Khotan in Dunhuang imagery: with Islamic expansion, Dunhuang and Khotan remained the last strongholds of Buddhism in eastern Central Asia. This is clearly reflected in the words of the *Prophecy of the Arhat from the Li Country*:

65 The 7th or 8th century seems to be a plausible *terminus post quem* for the circulation of the drainage of the lake story. See Max Deeg, *Miscellanea Nepalicae*, 115, 141.

66 The Tibetans had occupied Khotan earlier in the 7th century, ca. 670 to 692, in a situation of continuous fighting with the Chinese Tang Empire (618–907, 唐). The Tibetans regained control of Khotan around 791, which lasted until 842. Dunhuang was under Tibetan control roughly in the same years (662–692 and 786–848).

67 Zhang Xiaogang, *Dunhuang gangtonghua*, 305–306.

68 Rong and Zhu, *Yutian yu Dunhuang*, 109–149. The official date set for the end of the Kingdom of Khotan is 1006. See Hiroshi Kumamoto, "Khotan. History in the Pre-Islamic Period," *Encyclopedia Iranica Online*, last modified April 20, 2009, accessed February 14, 2020. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/khotan-i-pre-islamic-history>.

[...] after the *nirvāṇa* of the Buddha Śākya-muni the image(s?) of the religion and the *stūpas* will last two thousand years and then perish [...]. 'An-se and Śu-ling, being disturbed by many enemies, not followers of the religion, will be for the most part wasted with fire and havoc, and will become desolate. The Saṃghas of the monasteries thereof will come mostly into the Li country. The monasteries, *stūpas* and so forth, of the Li country are protected by five hundred Bodhi-sattvas [...]. The monastery Hgeḥu-to-śan, having been trodden by the feet of one thousand and five Buddhas of the Good Aeon, will be a continuously and enduring mansion. Through the excellence and compassionate blessing of the Āryas the *stūpas* of the Li country and the practice of the Good Religion will flourish beyond those of other countries and will long endure.⁶⁹

The Khotanese imagery at Dunhuang speaks of the need for communicating the legitimacy of the kingdom highlighting its prestige as both a political and a religious stronghold.

All things considered, the scenario in Dunhuang is rather linear. It is more puzzling to combine this scenario with the material from Khotan. The difficulty originates, basically, from the lack of clear evidence and from the chronological gaps between the appearance of the Khotanese themes in Dunhuang and the uncertain chronology of the Khotanese sites. The establishment of a firmer chronology of the Buddhist material culture in Khotan is an open issue, which likely will remain unsolvable without a systematic comparative, multidisciplinary, and cross-cultural effort. The revival of research on Khotanese themes in Dunhuang, together with new material brought to light in Khotan, opens up a path of interpretation that remained relatively unnoticed. The murals from Toplukdong in Domoko provide, in my view, the missing link between the cultural *milieu* at the origin of a specific ideology and imagery, and its visual manifestation at Dunhuang. It represents, most of all, a chance and a challenge to rethink old material from a new perspective.

69 Rong and Zhu, *Yütian yu Dunhuang*, 268–269. The passage in English of the *Prophecy of the Arhat of the Li Country* is quoted from Thomas, *Tibetan Literary Texts*, 78–79. “Hgehutosan” corresponds to Mt. Gośirṣa.