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ABBREVIATIONS

MMA The Metropolitan Museum of Art
MMAB *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*
MMJ *Metropolitan Museum Journal*

Height precedes width and then depth in dimensions cited.

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Buddhism and Silk: Reassessing a Painted Banner from Medieval Central Asia in The Met

MICHELLE C. WANG, XIN WEN, SUSAN WHITFIELD

Among the Silk Road artifacts in The Metropolitan Museum of Art is a painted silk banner that depicts a Buddhist deity standing beneath a canopy (fig. 1). The relatively small size of the banner belies its significance as an object of transcultural exchange between the Silk Road oasis city of Dunhuang, located in present-day Gansu Province in northwestern China, and the neighboring kingdom of Khotan, along the southern branch of the silk routes in present-day Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Furthermore, the iconography and materiality of the banner demonstrate the intertwined resonance of Buddhism and silk and offer tantalizing insights into cross-cultural practices of artistic production and display.

Aided by recent conservation work by the Metropolitan Museum's Department of Textile Conservation, this



fig. 1 Banner with
Mahāmāyūrī (recto).
Guiyijun period (848–1036).
Ink and color on silk, 22½ ×
11 in. (57 × 28 cm). The
Metropolitan Museum of
Art, Purchase, The Vincent
Astor Foundation Gift, 2007
(2007.294a, b)

article examines the painted banner from multiple perspectives, including religious, geographic, and its provenance. First, the banner is placed in its religious and cultural context through comparisons made to silk banners recovered from the city of Dunhuang. Second, a careful examination of a hitherto undiscovered inscription points to the close ties cultivated between Dunhuang and Khotan, which played a critical role in the transmission of Buddhist material culture (see fig. 10). The third and last part of the article reconstructs the probable route taken by the banner from

Dunhuang to London during the early twentieth century, and the roles played by the archaeologist Marc Aurel Stein (1862–1943) and his assistant Frederick Henry Andrews (1866–1957). In doing so, the continued transcultural significance of the banner into the present day is foregrounded.

MAHĀMĀYŪRĪ: THE GREAT PEACOCK WISDOM KING

Standing atop a lotus pedestal, the central motif of the banner is a deity exquisitely bejeweled and sumptuously attired in colorful textiles. A flowered canopy is adorned with tassels that fall behind an arched halo, and this floral motif is echoed by small blossoms that descend from the sky and appear as if suspended in midair, lending an imagined fragrance to the scene. Bearing implements of religious significance in both hands—a single peacock feather in the right and a golden bowl in the left—together they identify the deity as Mahāmāyūrī, the Great Peacock Wisdom King. In the East Asian Buddhist canon, Mahāmāyūrī appears in the six translations of the *Sutra of the Great Golden Peacock King Mantra* completed between the fourth and eighth centuries.¹ Several of these texts were made by monk-translators from oasis kingdoms in the Tarim Basin, indicating the popularity of this deity along the silk routes.² A mantra or dharani (the terms are often used interchangeably) refers to a verbal incantation recited in order to harness the titular deity's efficacious powers.

In the framing narrative of this particular sutra, the protagonist is the young monk Svāti, who resides in the Jetavana Grove, a monastery located in Śrāvastī, India, where Śākyamuni Buddha spent the rainy seasons during the last twenty-five years of his life. One day, while gathering firewood for the monks' bath, Svāti is bitten on the right foot by a poisonous black snake.³ Witnessing Svāti's pain and suffering, the Buddha's disciple Ānanda pleads with the Buddha for help.⁴ The Buddha tells Ānanda that he should recite the Mahāmāyūrī Dharani Sutra, which has the power to save Svāti's life by neutralizing the snake's poison.⁵ For this reason, Mahāmāyūrī became widely known as the deity who protects against snakebites and is associated with medicine. This information is conveyed with Mahāmāyūrī holding a golden bowl that represents a bowl of medicine.⁶ The medical properties of the Mahāmāyūrī Dharani likely resulted in the sutra's incorporation into the Bower Manuscript, which dates to the Gupta period (ca. 320–550) in India. The manuscript was recovered in 1890 by the British Army officer Hamilton Bower from the underground crypt of a stupa

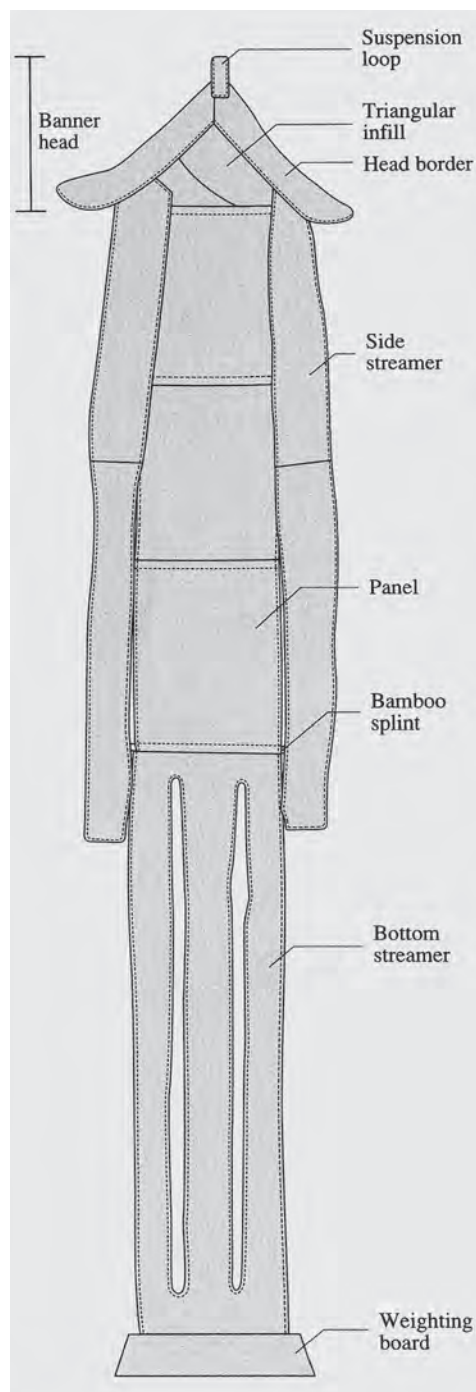


fig. 2 Diagram of a banner, after Wang Le 2007, p. 58, fig. 23



fig. 3 Bodhisattva Guide of Souls. Tang dynasty (618–907), second half of the 9th century. Ink and color on silk, 31 $\frac{1}{16}$ × 21 $\frac{1}{16}$ in. (80.5 × 53.8 cm) (without mounting). British Museum, London (1919,0101,0.47) (Ch. lvii.002)

fig. 4 Banner Head with Seated Buddha from Banner with Mahāmāyūrī (fig. 1)

(Buddhist reliquary mound) in Kumtura, a Buddhist cave site located in present-day Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.⁷ Composed in Sanskrit and written in the Brāhmī script on birch bark, the Bower Manuscript contained several additional Indian medical treatises.

The peacock feather held by Mahāmāyūrī refers to the deity's elevated status and the creature with which it is closely associated. According to textual sources, if the deity holds peacock feathers in one hand and is in a seated position, a golden peacock king is its vehicle.⁸ This relates to another framing narrative of the Mahāmāyūrī Dharani Sutra that concerns a golden peacock king (a bird), who daily recites



the sutra for self-protection, once in the morning and again at dusk.⁹

From the above examples, Mahāmāyūrī was closely associated with healing and protection, which were properties common to dharanis and mantras.¹⁰ In medieval China, dharanis and mantras were not only recited, as prescribed by the Mahāmāyūrī Dharani Sutra, but also copied and worn on the body as talismans so that their efficacy could be transferred via direct contact with the devotee.¹¹ However, painted banners with dharanis and mantras, which were placed on public display, had very different material properties from smaller talismans.

MATERIALITY OF BANNERS FROM THE SILK ROUTES

Banners from the silk routes are distinct from the more familiar hanging scrolls of East Asia. Unlike the conventional hanging scroll, painted banners were originally composed of multiple parts: the triangular banner head, which consisted of decorative silk or a painting typically depicting a seated Buddha; the rectangular body, on which the painting was executed (this could also consist of one or multiple pieces of fabric stitched together); side streamers, attached to the wide border of the banner head; and bottom streamers, attached to a wooden weighting board. A loop at the top of the banner head enabled it to be hung from poles or to be suspended from temple beams or stupas. The Mahāmāyūrī banner is preserved in two pieces, which include the triangular banner head painted with an image of a seated Buddha (fig. 4) and the rectangular painting bearing the Mahāmāyūrī motif (see fig. 1). The two pieces are no longer attached (fig. 5), and the border of the banner head and the streamers are also missing. Nevertheless, the similarity in style, painting technique, and color palette between the present painting and the banner head suggest they may have originated from the same object.

Silk Road painted banners were made from a variety of materials, although the vast majority of banners



fig. 5 Banner with Mahāmāyūrī, including Banner Head with Seated Buddha (recto) (see fig. 1)

fig. 6 Mural painting fragment from the Balawaste Buddha, showing banners hanging from a stupa. 7th–8th century. Painted on plaster, 18¼ × 13¾ in. (46 × 35 cm). British Museum, London (1925,0619,0.31)

fig. 7 Banner with Mahāmāyūrī (verso; see fig. 1 for recto)



from Dunhuang were made on a silk support. In the early twentieth century, Stein collected 230 banners from the Mogao Caves at Dunhuang: 179 were made of silk, 42 from hemp, and 9 from paper.¹² The lightweight and translucent quality of plain silk, in turn, was directly connected to the production of painted banners and their display (see the silk banner in fig. 3). As previously mentioned, the efficacy of dharanis and mantras was marshaled not only through oral recitation but also by wearing talismans bearing the syllables of the dharani or mantra. Yet there were other ways in which the efficacy was transmitted, such as the nonhuman agency of shadows and wind.¹³ In medieval China, dharanis and mantras were often carved on the sides of stone pillars, and it was believed that the shadows cast by a pillar or the dust lifted from its surface by wind had the capability to transfer the dharani's benefits onto devotees.¹⁴

There was a productive conflation of Buddhist texts with regard to the lexicon of stone pillars and banners. Both objects were known in premodern China by the same word, *chuang*.¹⁵ It is therefore intriguing that dharani pillars and painted banners were similarly constructed according to a tripartite structure of head, body, and base (or bottom streamers). But whereas stone pillars were static, silk banners, by the lightweight and flexible nature of the material, could sway in the wind (fig. 6). This implies that unless hung directly against a wall or pillar, banners could be viewed from both sides.

Dunhuang manuscripts contain references to the visual impact of vibrantly colored silk banners that swayed in the wind. For example, a passage in the manuscript Pelliot chinois 2044, in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, describes the

skillful division of colors in woven silk and artful stitches in vermilion; hanging from a tall pole against the clear blue sky, the end of a rainbow flutters and appears in the sky; the wind [blows] it distantly one revolution and in one hundred places, disasters dissipate; its shadow appears to one thousand households and ten thousand kinds of fortune accumulate. . . .¹⁶

When the Mahāmāyūrī banner was acquired by the Museum in 2007, it was mounted onto a textile-covered panel, allowing only one side to be seen. In spring 2019, the banner underwent detailed conservation by Minsun Hwang and her team in the Department of Textile Conservation. The banner was removed from the panel (fig. 7), revealing that the front (recto) and back (verso) of the painting were both painted with the same motif

fig. 8a Banner with Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Virūpākṣa (this side showing Dhṛtarāṣṭra). Toyuk, 9th century. Ramie, 18½ × 11 in. (47 × 28 cm). Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin (III 7305)

fig. 8b Banner with Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Virūpākṣa (this side showing Virūpākṣa)

fig. 9 Black and red ink outlines visible in the hands and arms of Mahāmāyūrī from Banner with Mahāmāyūrī (recto) (see fig. 1)

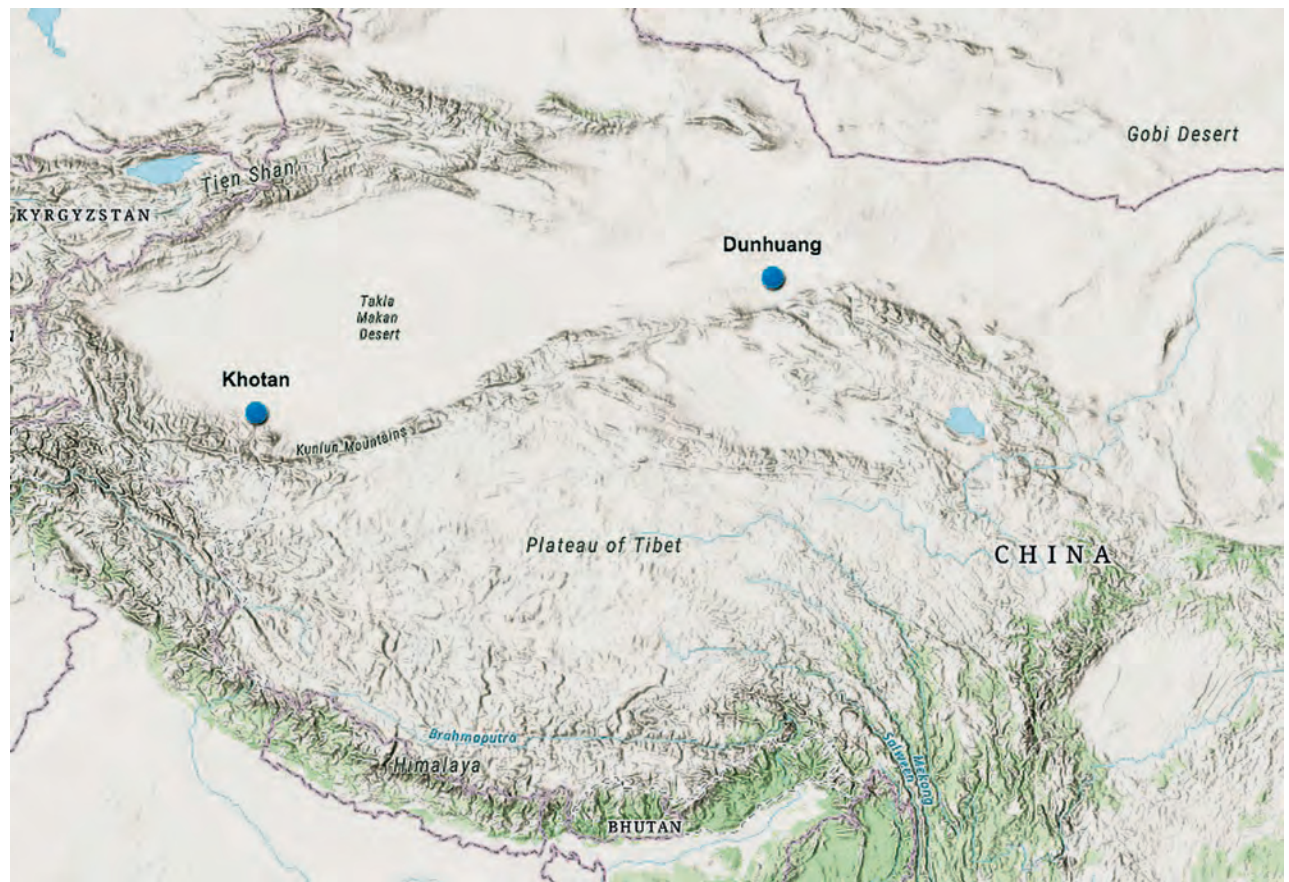


of Mahāmāyūrī, albeit with minor variations. In addition, the verso of the painting bore an inscription written in black ink that was faintly visible on the recto.

Extant double-sided banners from the silk routes were made from hemp, ramie, or silk, but the double-sided imagery was produced in different ways. Because hemp and ramie offer a more opaque painting ground than silk, the images on the verso and recto were drawn or transferred separately, either by freehand or through

the use of stencils. By comparison, paintings from the Turfan Collection in the former Museum für Indische Kunst (now Museum für Asiatische Kunst), Berlin, show variations of double-sided painting, including some paintings with the same image painted on both sides of a banner. Another ramie banner in the collection displays different though related motifs on each side: Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Virūpākṣa, the guardian kings of the East and West, respectively (fig. 8a, b). They are

fig. 10 Map showing locations of Khotan and Dunhuang



identified by their attributes of a bow and arrow (Dhṛtarāṣṭra) and a flaming jewel (Virūpākṣa).¹⁷

In contrast, the translucent quality of silk enabled underpaintings made on one side to be visible from the other side. In the case of the Mahāmāyūrī banner, black underpainting appears only on one side, therefore designating that side as the recto (see fig. 1). This effect is most visible in areas of bare skin and particularly in the deity's arms and upturned hand (fig. 9).¹⁸ From visual observation, the contours of the underpainting were carefully filled in with colored pigments, after which a deep red outline was painted over the black underpainting, partially obscuring it. The other side of the painting bears no trace of black underpainting, only red outlines, which demonstrates that the silk was sufficiently sheer so as to render the black outlines visible on the verso (see fig. 7). On the verso, the same painting process was followed with the colored pigments applied first, then the tracing of red outlines. The inscription referred to earlier was written on the verso. With the exception of minor motifs, such as the rendering of flowers and the treatment of drapery around the deity's waist, the two paintings of Mahāmāyūrī are mirror images of each other.

Another noteworthy element in this painting is the unusual attention paid to textiles. The deity is clad in an

Indian-style skirtlike garment called a dhoti, which is composed of a pale orange textile decorated with a regular pattern of blue and red quatrefoil-shaped flowers. This resembles clamp-resist dyed silk textiles recovered from oasis cities of the Silk Road. The clamp-resist dyeing technique resulted in symmetrical patterns of the sort seen in the dhoti worn by Mahāmāyūrī. Wooden blocks carved with symmetrical patterns created through a juxtaposition of convex and concave shapes were affixed on either side of a piece of cloth or a folded piece of cloth and clamped together, after which the cloth was placed in dye. The convex areas resisted dye, while the concave areas created space for the dye to soak through the cloth. Multicolored patterns could be produced through a combination of repeated clamp-resist dyeing and hand painting by brush.¹⁹

The garment is fastened around the waist with green, red, and purple cloth, and a double-faced blue-and-red scarf billows artfully along the length of the deity's body.²⁰ As important Silk Road commodities, the representation of silk textiles in this painted banner merits attention. The detailed representation is also evident in a separate group of painted banners, which attests to the vibrancy of banner-painting traditions along the southern silk route, and in particular, the artistic impact of the Buddhist kingdom of Khotan (fig. 10).



fig. 11 Banner with Vajrapāṇi. From Dunhuang, Guiyijun period (848–1036). Ink and color on silk, 21% × 5% in. (55 × 14.5 cm). British Museum, London (1919,0101,0.103) (Ch.Ivi.002)



fig. 12 Mural-painting fragment showing deity holding a peacock feather. Probably from Khotan, dates uncertain. Painting on plaster, 11 × 10 in. (28 × 25.5 cm). British Museum, London (1925,0619,0.27)



fig. 13 Plate with a hunting scene from the tale of Bahram Gur (r. 420–438) and Azadeh. Sasanian, ca. 5th century. Silver with mercury gilding, H. 1% in. (4.1 cm); Diam. 7% in. (20.1 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 1994 (1994.402)

SILK BANNERS ON THE SILK ROAD

Of the silk banners recovered by Stein from Mogao Cave 17, a group of ten that were gathered during his second expedition serves as a particularly instructive point of comparison for the Mahāmāyūrī banner. The group is now divided between the British Museum in London (three paintings) and the National Museum of India in New Delhi (seven paintings).²¹ The works display stylistic traits of Khotanese and Himalayan artistic traditions, the latter of which reflects on the Tibetan occupation of Khotan between the seventh and ninth centuries. Like the Mahāmāyūrī banner, one from this latter group is inscribed on the verso. The Tibetan inscription identifies the deity represented on the recto as Vajrapāṇi (fig. 11).²² The writing of inscriptions on the verso rather than on the recto is more commonly seen among Himalayan *thangkas*, portable Buddhist paintings that are usually painted on a heavier canvas ground. The Mahāmāyūrī banner and the ten banners from the British Museum and National Museum of India do not have cartouches, further distinguishing them from banners that were inscribed in Chinese.

The paintings in this group reveal a number of consistencies, despite subtle variations in the color and quality of the silk ground.²³ Similar to the Mahāmāyūrī banner, they feature a single bodhisattva standing in contrapposto under a round canopy atop a lotus pedestal, wearing a dhoti and scarves and holding a ritual implement, while adorned with gold jewelry and peaked crowns. The use of bright colors and the lavish attention paid to the linear, ikat-like patterned effects of the textiles are particularly striking.²⁴

Does the Mahāmāyūrī banner belong to this group? It shares the motif of a standing deity on a lotus pedestal, and the borders have similarly been sewn rather than painted. However, there are important differences. Although roughly the same height, the Mahāmāyūrī banner is nearly twice as wide as the ten banners in London and New Delhi. Its painting style also displays a greater sense of refinement, and the floral textile pattern is distinct from the striped ikat textiles of the other banners. Nevertheless, the Khotanese stylistic elements of the Mahāmāyūrī banner are corroborated by visual and epigraphic evidence stemming from the painting itself. Several features in the painting suggest that it was made in Khotan, or in Dunhuang by a Khotanese artist or one familiar with Khotanese stylistic idioms. A mural-painting fragment probably from a site in Khotan shows a peacock feather wielded in the hand of a deity (fig. 12). The three-dimensional modeling in the face and body of the deity and in the petals of the lotus pedestal are also

characteristic of the Khotanese painting style, as are the broad facial features, high arched eyebrows, heavily lidded eyes, and long nose bridge of Mahāmāyūrī and the seated Buddha in the banner head (see fig. 5).²⁵ The painting further displays visual evidence of the cross-cultural exchanges that typically characterize Khotanese painting by the dramatically billowing ribbons attached to either side of the crown, for example, which originate from those worn by Sasanian kings (fig. 13) and demonstrate the afterlife of earlier Iranian motifs.²⁶

The lightweight nature and portability of painted banners offer a glimpse into how Central Asian iconography and painting styles were transmitted along the silk routes. Importantly, as our knowledge of Khotanese painting is largely informed by mural-painting fragments and paintings executed on wooden panels, the Mahāmāyūrī banner provides valuable insight into Khotanese visual culture and Buddhist practice. Equally of value, the association of the Mahāmāyūrī banner with a Khotanese donor is demonstrated by a close reading of the painting's hitherto unexamined inscription.

A KHOTANESE OFFICIAL'S DONATION

*Yaraiṣā nāmai āmācā haṣṭe tcahauryām paṣāṃ
ba'ysuṣṭe brrī[ye. . .*

(The *āmāca*-official named *Yaraiṣa* donated, in love
of bodhi of the Four Assemblies. . .)

This inscription on the Mahāmāyūrī banner was written on the left edge of the verso side of the painting (fig. 14) in Khotanese, a middle-Iranian language, and in the Brāhmī script. After the painting was completed, the writer must have turned the painting sideways and inscribed the text from left to right.²⁷ The text begins below the canopy and above the image of Mahāmāyūrī. The first syllable is unclear, but there is space for only one syllable in front of the second and third syllables, which are clearly *rai* and *ṣā*. The first syllable may be tentatively read as *ya*. Thus, the first three syllables, which constitute the name of the donor, may be reconstructed as **Yaraiṣa*.²⁸ Due to damage, it is impossible to know how much text is missing at the end of the inscription. The last, partially visible syllable is that of *brrī*, no doubt the beginning of the word *brrīya*, meaning “love.” The space of the torn section of the banner would have allowed for several more words. One would assume, based on similar inscriptions, that the intentions of the donor might have been expressed. The missing part might have also included the date when

the painting was made, but this scenario is less likely because the date is usually given at the beginning of a dedicatory inscription.²⁹

The meaning of the extant part of the inscription is otherwise clear: an official with the title of *āmāca*, possibly named *Yaraiṣa*, donated something “in love of bodhi of the Four Assemblies.” The verb used here, *haṭiṣ-*, has the general meaning “to give.”³⁰ But in religious contexts, it often means more specifically “to donate,” which better fits the context of this inscription.³¹ The inscription does not specify what this *āmāca* official donated, but it is very likely that it was the painting on which this inscription was written. The phrase “in love of bodhi” is commonly found in Khotanese donation texts. For instance, when commissioning a text about the Buddha's former births, titled *Jātakastava*, the donor “ordered it to be written in love of bodhi.”³² The phrase “Four Assemblies” refers to the four groups of Buddhists: monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. The genitive plural construction “of the Four Assemblies” shows that the donation was not merely for the personal benefit of the donor but that of all Buddhist devotees.

The title *āmāca* held by the donor of this painting derives from the Sanskrit term *āmātya*, meaning “minister.”³³ In eighth-century secular documents from Khotan, the term was often used in combination with other titles to denote an official of the highest status in the government of Khotan.³⁴ Because of the centrality of this title in the Khotanese bureaucracy, it also appeared in Chinese (*amozhi*) and Tibetan (*a-ma-cha*), the languages of the two empires that ruled Khotan between the seventh and ninth centuries. In Khotanese documents from Dunhuang, most of which date to the tenth century, *āmāca* remained an important title.³⁵ For instance, in the preface to the *Jātakastava*, the author of the text prays for the people of Khotan: after mentioning the king, the queen, and the princes, the author continues to list “the great prime minister (Khotanese: *tsai-syāṃ*; Chinese: *zaixiang*), *āmāca* the servant of the god,” as well as “the good, the bad, and the middle, all the people in the country.”³⁶ From the hierarchical sequencing of the prayer it is clear that in the tenth century, *āmāca*, while a lower title than prime minister, was still one of the most important titles in Khotan. It is therefore fitting that an *āmāca* should have had the means to commission such a lavish silk painting. But how did a painting commissioned by a Khotanese official end up in the library cave in Dunhuang? To answer this question, we need to place the life of this painting in the context of the political history of Central Asia in the ninth to the tenth century.



fig. 14 Inscription from Banner with Mahāmāyūrī (verso; see fig. 1 for recto)

DUNHUANG AND KHOTAN: SILK ROAD ENVOYS AND BUDDHIST PATRONAGE

There was an era of political fragmentation across Asia during the ninth and tenth centuries. The three ruling empires—the Tibetan Empire (618–842), the Uyghur Empire (744–840), and the Tang dynasty (618–907)—that dominated Central Asia in the previous centuries were defeated in the mid- to late ninth century.³⁷ Both Khotan and Dunhuang were under the rule of the Tibetan Empire until the mid-ninth century, when they each acquired political independence. While it is very likely that Khotan and Dunhuang exchanged envoys in the ninth century, the earliest documentation about such an event dates to 901.³⁸ The diplomatic relations between the two states were further solidified during the tenth century by intermarriage of the Khotanese royal

family and the Cao family that ruled Dunhuang.³⁹ As a result, there was no major warfare between these two states for at least a century, and images of the kings and queens of Khotan appeared next to images of the lords of Dunhuang in the Dunhuang caves.⁴⁰ Although Dunhuang and Khotan were separated by about a thousand miles (or 1,564 kilometers on the closest modern highway), they had a uniquely close relationship in the ninth and tenth centuries.

This relationship was sustained by a frequent exchange of personnel. Scholars have noticed that a large number of the Khotanese-language documents found in the library cave in Dunhuang are reports by Khotanese envoys.⁴¹ The Dunhuang government and monasteries often provided accommodations for Khotanese envoys and monks.⁴² Similarly, many Dunhuang residents also traveled to Khotan, evidenced by the several contracts made by these travelers.⁴³ As a result, there was likely a constant presence of Khotanese elites, including princes, princesses, government officials, and Buddhist monks in Dunhuang during the ninth and tenth centuries.⁴⁴ At the same time, these Khotanese luminaries engaged with the local society of Dunhuang as Buddhist patrons. Dunhuang was known as a particularly important place for Buddhist activities, and in Khotanese texts, Dunhuang is sometimes described as a “land of god” (Khotanese: *gyasta/jasta-kṣīra*).⁴⁵ Many Khotanese travelers who visited Dunhuang were monks. According to an envoy’s report, for instance, a diplomatic mission to China from Khotan, led by a certain Ana Saṃgaa, had eleven *ācārya* (Buddhist teachers) and six *gr̥hastha* (householders).⁴⁶ But even laypeople like these householders were probably Buddhists. Khotanese monks and laypeople were engaged in Buddhist devotional activities, such as the lighting of lamps, the organization of vegetarian feasts at Buddhist monasteries, the building of stupas, and the construction of Buddhist caves. For instance, a Khotanese envoy named Ṣaṃdū “went around the city to 121 shrines” and “sent 502 litres of oil for use in all the temples situated throughout the city” when he was in Dunhuang.⁴⁷

One of the most important and visible ways Khotanese people engaged with the Buddhist communities in Dunhuang was through the making of paintings. A prime minister from Khotan commissioned paintings in the Dunhuang caves to pray for good relations between Dunhuang and Khotan and the health of both sovereigns. In this prayer, he described the painting process as “Yielding the precious treasure of exotic nature, I summoned crafty artisans of the red and black colors. [The

artisans] drew the ornamentations of *tathāgata*, and painted the true image of bodhisattvas.”⁴⁸ Among the nearly five hundred caves in the Mogao Buddhist Cave Complex, several have been identified as having been either repaired or constructed by Khotanese donors.⁴⁹

On the topic of the sponsorship of paintings by Khotanese donors, one letter is particularly relevant to the painted banner under discussion. In 964, a female Khotanese servant residing in Dunhuang wrote a letter to Khotan, in which she asked the princess and prime minister to send support for the construction of a cave shrine. Among the things she asked for were “colors for painting” (Chinese, *huacaise*) and “colored thread for making an embroidered image for the Sanjie Monastery” (Chinese, *Sanjiesi xiuxiang xianse*).⁵⁰ The “embroidered image for the Sanjie Monastery” likely refers to items that were donated to the monastery. As historian Rong Xinjiang has shown, the Sanjie Monastery was the original repository of many manuscripts and artifacts that were later deposited in the Dunhuang library cave.⁵¹ The letter from 964 provides a firm example of Khotanese officials donating religious images to the monastery, and in a similar way, the Mahāmāyūrī banner may also have been donated to the Sanjie Monastery, after which it was deposited in the library cave. The *āmāca* official *Yaraiṣa could have had this painted banner made in Khotan and brought to Dunhuang, or he could have traveled to Dunhuang himself and commissioned the banner there. In either scenario, the distinctive Khotanese style reflects the impact of Khotanese visual culture upon artistic production in Dunhuang.

The Mahāmāyūrī banner is not the only painting bearing Khotanese inscriptions that was found in the Dunhuang library cave. There are about half a dozen known examples of paintings on paper and silk with Khotanese inscriptions, and this recent acquisition by the Metropolitan Museum is a significant addition to this small but important group of materials.⁵² A few common features unite the Mahāmāyūrī banner and the other pieces. First, they were commissioned by Khotanese donors, probably officials and other social elites. Second, either the objects were made in Khotan, then brought to Dunhuang, or they were made in Dunhuang at the request of Khotanese donors. Thirdly, these items were likely donated to monasteries in Dunhuang, particularly the Sanjie Monastery, as offerings. Because of their similarities, the paintings merit further scholarly attention as a coherent set of materials, which will allow a better understanding of the presence and the role in Dunhuang of Khotanese art and Khotanese people.

THE MAHĀMĀYŪRĪ BANNER SINCE ITS DISCOVERY

In 2007, the Mahāmāyūrī banner was auctioned at Christie’s, London, as part of a sale by the Andrews family, who were stated as owners of the painting through their descent from Frederick Henry Andrews.⁵³ Frederick Andrews had been a friend and sometime assistant to Stein from their meeting in Lahore in the late 1880s until Stein’s death in 1943. During four expeditions to Central Asia between 1900 and 1930 (Andrews did not participate), Stein acquired numerous artifacts, and Andrews assisted with their cataloguing and study. If we begin with a reasonable assumption that this painting came from the library cave, then how did Andrews acquire it?⁵⁴ Did he buy the painting himself or could it have been given to him by Stein?

The former seems implausible. Andrews’s financial situation was not robust.⁵⁵ It is unlikely he could have afforded the painting were it offered for sale. Second, the piece was in a fragmentary and unconserved condition when it came to Christie’s. If Andrews had bought the banner either for his own pleasure or for resale, it would be a reasonable assumption that he would have had it mounted and framed—or that it would have been mounted before sale to him—to increase its worth. So, while we cannot state with certainty that Andrews did not buy this piece, it is not a well-supported hypothesis. Is it possible that it was gifted to him by Stein? It was a condition of Stein’s grants that all finds were to join museum collections in Britain and India, and he was meticulous in recording his finds in situ, making such gifts unlikely.⁵⁶

If Andrews did not purchase the painting or receive it as a gift, and it was originally part of Stein’s collection, then how might it have found its way to Andrews? As argued below, it is plausible that he acquired it accidentally because of the nature of this particular collection. In order to understand the situation, some background on the relationship between Stein and Andrews and on the acquisition and documentation of material from Dunhuang is necessary.

Andrews, a graduate of Saint Martin’s School of Art in London, arrived in Lahore in 1890 to become vice principal of Mayo School of Arts. In Lahore, he met Stein, with whom he remained lifelong friends. Stein was meticulous about recordkeeping and gave most of the artifacts that he excavated a unique site mark when in the field, writing on the artifact itself. He kept lists of the site marks so that, when unpacked, the material could be cross-checked. These lists were also published in his expedition reports, so that all the material was deposited in public collections.

In 1907, Stein visited Dunhuang on his second expedition (1906–8) and acquired thousands of manuscripts and hundreds of textiles and portable paintings on silk, paper, and hemp from the library cave. This material was not acquired through excavation but in rushed and clandestine circumstances in which Stein and his expedition assistant and interpreter, Jiang Xiaowan (d. 1922), were given bundles of material by the unofficial guardian of the cave, Wang Yuanlu (ca. 1849–1931), to examine secretly.⁵⁷ These items were inscribed with a site mark, such as Ch.i.001, “Ch.” indicating Dunhuang (Ch’ien-fo tung), “i” as the bundle number, and “001” as the serial number (although it is probable that the serial number was added later).⁵⁸

When preparing for their departure from the field in July 1908, Jiang started to unpack, number, list, and repack all regular bundles, making index slips as he went along.⁵⁹ He only had time to record about one-third of the material and although his index slips were used during the unpacking at the British Museum, the authors of this article have been unable to locate them. Consequently, unlike other material, there was no complete master list to use for checking when unpacking the Dunhuang material in London, nor did all of the material contain a site mark.⁶⁰

When Stein’s finds arrived in England in 1909, Andrews was employed by the India Office Library, London, to unpack, sort, and list them. Stein notes in July 1910 that seventy to eighty banners had been flattened.⁶¹ Most of the paintings required some basic conservation before they could be identified and catalogued. In many cases, pieces of paper or silk were discovered in crumpled balls or stuck together with other pieces, either deliberately—old textiles and paper being used for patching—or accidentally, as a result of being squashed together in storage.

The scholar Raphaël Petrucci compiled two sections of a catalogue on the paintings, which were published as Appendix E to Stein’s expedition report.⁶² Laurence Binyon, assistant keeper in charge of the Sub-Department of Oriental Prints and Manuscripts at the British Museum, and his assistant, Arthur Waley, took over this work after Petrucci’s early death. A list of all the identified paintings was prepared for the end of the chapter on Dunhuang, but the banner is mentioned neither here nor in the Appendix.

Stein’s second expedition was funded jointly by the India Office and the British Museum, with the agreement that the finds would be divided: three-fifths to India and two-fifths to the British Museum. In 1918–19, the selection for India, still in London, was packed into

sixty-seven crates and sent to the India Store Depot in Lambeth, London, for safekeeping during World War I.⁶³ Those destined for the British Museum were also packed for safeguarding, and in 1919 they were acquisitioned into the British Museum collections,⁶⁴ and the others were shipped to India.⁶⁵ Again, the banner was not listed among any of these records.

However, this does not mean it was not from Stein’s second expedition. By no means had all the material been conserved at this time and some remained in a state that conservators at the time did not feel able to tackle. In these early years, many of the original bundles are marked as having been returned from conservation as untreatable.⁶⁶ So, it is possible that the painting was among the second expedition material kept at the British Museum in an unidentified state. Furthermore, material from Stein’s third expedition (1916–18) was sent to British India to be conserved, listed, and prepared for acquisition. Stein had acquired more material from Dunhuang on this expedition, and while there is no evidence of paintings or banners among them, it is not impossible that some of the material included unconserved fragments, such as the banner.⁶⁷

It is certain that the painting is not described in Stein’s published reports, nor in any of the unpublished lists and correspondence, strongly suggesting that it was not recognized at this time. The reason could be that the work was either pasted onto the back of another painting or hidden between outer wrappers or remained lost in a bundle. It is also possible that the painting was mixed in with material that Andrews had at home. For a scholar to work from home was quite common at this time, and items from the Stein collections were often sent to specialists in London and farther afield. Andrews undoubtedly worked in this manner, as is evidenced by later correspondence from Stein asking Andrews to look for certain items.

Could such an item have remained with Andrews and only later been unfolded to be revealed as an important painting? It is not far-fetched to suggest that Andrews, with his background, familiarity with the material, and knowledge of the conservation work, did this himself. But then if he discovered the piece in such a way some time after the expeditions, why did he not inform Stein about it and ensure that it was returned to the collection? Or was it discovered only after Stein’s death? But then Andrews might have been expected to return it to the museum.⁶⁸

We cannot at present, and might never, be able to answer these questions. But it remains most probable that the banner was from the library cave at Dunhuang,

acquired by Stein either in 1907 or from 1913 to 1916, but then in a condition unrecognizable as a fine painting. It is possible that—still unrecognized—it accidentally remained in Andrews’s possession and only came to light after Stein’s death in 1943, and that Andrews either forgot about it or died before it could be unfolded. The subsequent arrival of the banner at the Metropolitan Museum thus closes the circle on the intriguing journey of this important painted silk banner, from its initial production, its circulation within the cultural milieu of medieval Silk Road oasis cities, and finally, its acquisition in the early twentieth century to the present day.

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NOTES

- 1 The six translations are the Taishō Tripiṭaka texts T19.982, T19.984, T19.985, T19.986, T19.987, and T19.988. The various recensions bear slightly different titles but share in common a focus on Mahāmāyūri and the healing or apotropaic properties of the incantation (dharani or mantra). While these two terms are often used interchangeably, one difference between them is that mantras are usually only a few syllables and dharanis are often longer.
- 2 These are the translations by Śrīmitra (T19.986, T19.987) and Kumārajīva (T19.988). For studies of the Mahāmāyūri Dharani Sutra, see Sørensen 2006, Des Jardins 2011, and Overbey 2016.
- 3 T19.987.479a29–b3.
- 4 T19.987.479b3–9.
- 5 T19.987.479b9–11; T19.988.483a27–29. This narrative framework appears in T19.987 and in the Kumārajīva translation (T19.988).
- 6 For example, a medicine bowl is one of the objects commonly wielded by Bhaiṣajyaguru (the “Medicine Buddha”) in paintings and sculptures.
- 7 Pandey and Pandey 1988, pp. 9–10.
- 8 According to the ritual manual attributed to Amoghavajra, *Ritual Commentary Spoken by the Buddha on the Altar of the Great Peacock Wisdom King’s Image*, the four-armed Mahāmāyūri is seated on a “golden peacock king” and holds peacock feathers in his second left hand; see T19.983A.440a4–10. Although Mahāmāyūri is represented in the Metropolitan Museum banner as a standing deity with two arms, the association with the peacock and peacock feathers remains consistent.
- 9 T19.986.477c7–8.
- 10 Mahāmāyūri was also associated with rainmaking rituals and with Buddhist kingship. For images of Mahāmāyūri in Dunhuang and Sichuan, see Wang Huimin 1996, Hashimura 2011, and M. Wang n.d. (forthcoming).
- 11 See Copp 2014.
- 12 Wang Le 2007, pp. 58–59. For hemp banners from Dunhuang, see R. Whitfield 1998.
- 13 On nonhuman agency in Buddhist rituals, see E. Wang 2011 and Kim 2017.
- 14 For a relevant passage from the *Sūtra of the Revered and Victorious Dhāraṇī of the Buddha’s Uṣṇīṣa*, see Copp 2014, p. 146.
- 15 Based on her reinterpretation of the mural painting on the south wall of Mogao Cave 217, Shimono Akiko argues that visual evidence exists for the practice of inscribing dharanis upon a cloth banner, and then hanging the banner from a tall structure; see Shimono 2004. For an important recent treatment of dharani pillars, see Liu 2008, in which the author argues for the multi-valent associations of dharani pillars, stating that they functioned not only as vehicles for dharanis but also as stupas.
- 16 Pelliot chinois 2044, Département des Manuscrits, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris (hereafter BnF), <https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc118669x>. See Huang and Wu 1995, p. 159. We thank Allan Ding for this reference.
- 17 The double-sided Turfan banners are also discussed in Zaleski 2016, p. 83. We thank Mélodie Doumy for this reference. The Turfan banners are analyzed extensively in Bhattacharya-Haesner 2003.
- 18 The technique is discussed in Zaleski 2016, p. 85.
- 19 See Zhao 2007b, pp. 192–95.
- 20 Double-faced weave silk fabrics are known from the silk routes, resulting in different colors and even different patterns on each side of the fabric. For an example, see Zhao 2007a, pl. 124.
- 21 For the archaeological report, consult Stein 1921, vol. 2, pp. 1073–75.
- 22 There are two Tibetan inscriptions on the verso, one of which is a rough transliteration of the deity’s name (*ba ca ra pang ne*).

- For the inscription, see S. Whitfield and Williams 2004, p. 210, pl. 131.
- 23 For the British Museum paintings, see R. Whitfield 1982–85, vol. 1, pp. 333–34. For the National Museum of India paintings, see Chandra and Sharma 2012, pp. 221–23.
- 24 Compare, for example, to the solid-colored textiles in “Banner with Avalokiteśvara,” Tang dynasty (618–907) or Guiyijun period (848–1036), ink and color on silk (56.5 × 16.5 cm), British Museum, 1919,0101,0.124 (Ch.00113). Because of the striped textiles of the garments and the ill-defined musculature of the bodhisattvas, which are also present in mural paintings from Balawaste, located in the eastern part of the Khotan oasis in present-day Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, archaeologist Gerd Gropp has argued that they are Khotanese in origin; see Gropp 1974, p. 94.
- 25 In the premodern connoisseurial literature, Khotanese painters such as Yuchi (Weichi) Yiseng (act. second half of the 7th century) were known for their technique of chiaroscuro. For a synthesis of the relevant primary sources on Khotanese painters, see Nagahiro 1955, p. 73.
- 26 Khotanese painting is said to reflect South Asian, Chinese, Sasanian, and Sogdian elements. See Williams 1973, pp. 110–11. It is worth noting that the unusual standing position of Mahāmāyūri, who is usually shown seated on a peacock mount, echoes sixth-century Mahāmāyūri sculptures at the Ellora Caves in western India; see Malandra 1993, pp. 96–97. Geri Malandra indicates that Mahāmāyūri is paired with Bhṛkuṭi in Ellora Caves 6 and 8, which is unique to the site, and there are no textual precedents for Mahāmāyūri’s appearance. Nevertheless, the standing posture is very common in representations of deities in painted banners, so this does not imply a direct connection but rather points toward two distinct treatments of the standing Mahāmāyūri.
- 27 This way of writing Khotanese inscriptions on paintings is more common than when the author writes the inscriptions vertically along the vertical direction of the painting, which is found in Pelliot tibétain 2222, BnF, <https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc123610h>. See Filigenzi and Maggi 2008.
- 28 This name is not otherwise attested in Khotanese texts.
- 29 For a similar inscription that begins with the date, see Stein 1921, vol. 2, p. 1012.
- 30 Emmerick 1968, p. 145.
- 31 See examples in Bailey 1979, pp. 448–49.
- 32 Skjærvø 2002, p. 299.
- 33 Olivelle 2013, p. 40. This is the title of the famous minister Yaśa for King Aśoka in the Khotanese legend of Aśoka. See Bailey 1951a, pp. 40–44.
- 34 Wen 2008, p. 124.
- 35 For this dating of the Khotanese documents, see Zhang and Rong 2008, pp. 70–105.
- 36 Translation adapted from Dresden 1955, p. 422.
- 37 For this history, see Chavannes 1942, Maeda 1964, Beckwith 1993, and Drompp 2005.
- 38 Rong and Zhu 2013, p. 110.
- 39 Ibid., pp. 151–70.
- 40 This is particularly true in Cave 98, which contains the largest donor image in all the Dunhuang caves: the Khotanese king.
- 41 Kumamoto 1982. These envoys also left records in Chinese and Tibetan in official letters, royal edicts, and notebooks. See Zhang and Rong 2008, pp. 1–14. For the Tibetan documents in particular, see Rong and Zhu 2013, pp. 375–412.
- 42 For example, for the Dunhuang government’s provision of food to Khotanese envoys, see the British Library manuscript Stein 1366 in Tang and Lu 1986–90, vol. 3, p. 285; for a Dunhuang monastery’s provision of food to Khotanese envoys, see Pelliot chinois 2642, BnF (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8303278d/f1.image>); Tang and Lu 1986–90, vol. 3, p. 209.
- 43 In a tantalizing piece of evidence, of the forty-six people living in Suo Liuzhu Lane in Dunhuang who were late in their payment of taxation in firewood, twelve were recorded as having traveled to Khotan. See the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg, Δ x2149, in Tang and Lu 1986–90, vol. 2, p. 446.
- 44 Kumamoto 1996.
- 45 IOL Khot S. 21, British Library, in Skjærvø 2002, pp. 522–24.
- 46 Pelliot chinois 2958, BnF (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8302289w.r-Pelliot%20chinois%202958?rk=21459;2>); Bailey 1967, pp. 96–97.
- 47 Bailey 1951b, p. 44.
- 48 Pelliot chinois 2812, BnF (<https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc119447n>). The Chinese text reads: *She yilei zhi zhencai. Zhao danqing zhi qiaojiang. Hui lulai zhi puxi, tu pusa zhi zhenyi*. See Zhang and Rong 2008, pp. 91–92.
- 49 Chen 2014, pp. 244–47.
- 50 Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg, Δ x.2148(2)+, Δ x.6069(1). See Zhang and Rong 2008, p. 293.
- 51 Rong 1999–2000.
- 52 For these inscribed paintings, see Stein 1921, vol. 2, p. 1012, Emmerick and Dudbridge 1978, Emmerick 1984, and Filigenzi and Maggi 2008.
- 53 Sale, Christie’s, London, May 15, 2007, lot 171; <https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/lot/an-extremely-rare-and-important-tang-dynasty-4905708-details.aspx?from=salesummary&intObjectID=4905708>. See also S. Whitfield 2017.
- 54 Although forgeries were produced later of such material, the fragmentary state of this piece, its distinctive subject matter, and its sophistication all strongly suggest that this is not a forgery. See Cohen 2002, pp. 24–30, and R. Whitfield 2002 for discussions.
- 55 At least this is the impression from reading Stein on Andrews, along with Andrews’s dissatisfaction with most of his positions, although Andrews left a reasonable legacy.
- 56 The British Museum Act of 1767 allowed the Trustees “to exchange, sell or dispose of any Duplicates of Printed Books. . . .” This was most probably behind the decision to exchange a Dunhuang blockprint from the Stein Dunhuang collection, 1919,0101,0.241 (Ch.00185.a), with an item from the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, in 1924 (927.24).
- 57 Stein 1921, vol. 2, pp. 801ff.
- 58 In the expedition report, Stein says, “I may note here that when the marking with serial numbers was made at the British Museum . . .” (1921, vol. 2, p. 814n2).
- 59 While it seems that most of the paintings were listed at this time, some of the lists for the paintings have not been found.
- 60 It is regrettable that the site mark, when given, was not always recorded in catalogues and databases of the material. International Dunhuang Project (IDP) started recording this information in its database at the British Library, but the work is still to be completed. However, from the work done, we can see that the site mark carries important information about the original storage of the manuscripts in the bundles in the cave, as suggested previously by Rong Xinjiang and others. These

results will be published in a forthcoming article by Paschalia Terzi and Susan Whitfield.

61 Stein to Percy Allen, July 17, 1910, “Papers of Sir Marc Aurel Stein (1862–1943),” MSS Stein 7/81–2, Bodleian Library, Oxford. Note that the material was not yet acquisitioned into any collection.

62 Stein 1921, vol. 3, pp. 1392–1428, followed by a short essay by Binyon (ibid., pp. 1428–31).

63 An exception was made for the Kharoṣṭhī tablets because many were due for India but still being catalogued. Permission was made for the Kharoṣṭhī tablets to be kept unpacked at the British Museum so that the cataloguing could be completed. The list of the material removed and details of its move on February 12, 1919, are given in “Papers Relating to Sir Marc Aurel Stein,” CE32/23 and CE32/24, Central Archives, British Museum, London.

64 Hence the prefix to their museum reg. number, 1919.

65 Now in the National Museum, New Delhi.

66 For an example of the state of much of the material before conservation and the time-consuming work in flattening folded material, see the British Library’s time-lapse video *Tangut Fragments Conserved by Vania Assis*, filmed by E. Hunter and C. Norman: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FIP3jMfZkY4>.

67 They included manuscript scrolls and clay relief plaques acquired directly from Wang Yuanlu at the caves, as well as other rolls offered by sellers to Stein in the town and in other places en route. See Stein 1928, pp. 354–62, for a review of this material, which he notes was in good condition—indeed, the Dunhuang manuscripts scholar Fujieda Akira suggested much of it consisted of forgeries (Fujieda 2002). But, more pertinent to the discussion here, it was not in a form that suggests a painting on silk could be hidden among it.

68 It is, of course, also possible that the banner was discovered and unfolded by his family after Andrews’s death in 1957. Apart from small bequests, his estate passed to his nephew, Richard Cuthbert Andrews, and Richard’s wife, Barbara.

REFERENCES

ABBREVIATION

T Taishō Tripiṭaka texts (volume and number)

Primary Sources

T19.982
Amoghavajra (Bukong Jin’gang 不空金剛, 705–774), trans.
Fomu da kongque mingwang jing 佛母大孔雀明王經 (Sūtra on the Buddha’s Mother, the Great Peacock Wisdom King).

T19.983A
Amoghavajra (Bukong Jin’gang 不空金剛, 705–774), attr. to
Foshuo da kongque mingwang huaxiang tanchang yigui 佛說大孔雀明王畫像壇場儀軌 (The Ritual Commentary Spoken by the Buddha on the Altar of the Great Peacock Wisdom King’s Image).

T19.984
Saṅghabhara (460–524), trans.
Kongquewang zhou jing 孔雀王呪經 (Sūtra of the Peacock King Mantra).

T19.985
Yijing 義淨 (635–713), trans.
Foshuo da kongque zhou wang jing 佛說大孔雀呪王經 (Sūtra Preached by the Buddha on the Great Peacock, the King of Mantras).

T19.986
Śrimitra (Boshilimiduoluo 帛尸梨蜜多羅, d. mid-fourth century), trans.
Da jinse kongquewang zhou jing 大金色孔雀王呪經 (Sūtra of the Great Golden Peacock King Mantra).

T19.987
Śrimitra (Boshilimiduoluo 帛尸梨蜜多羅, d. mid-fourth century), trans.
Foshuo da jinse kongquewang zhou jing 佛說大金色孔雀王呪經 (Sūtra Preached by the Buddha on the Great Golden Peacock King Mantra).

T19.988
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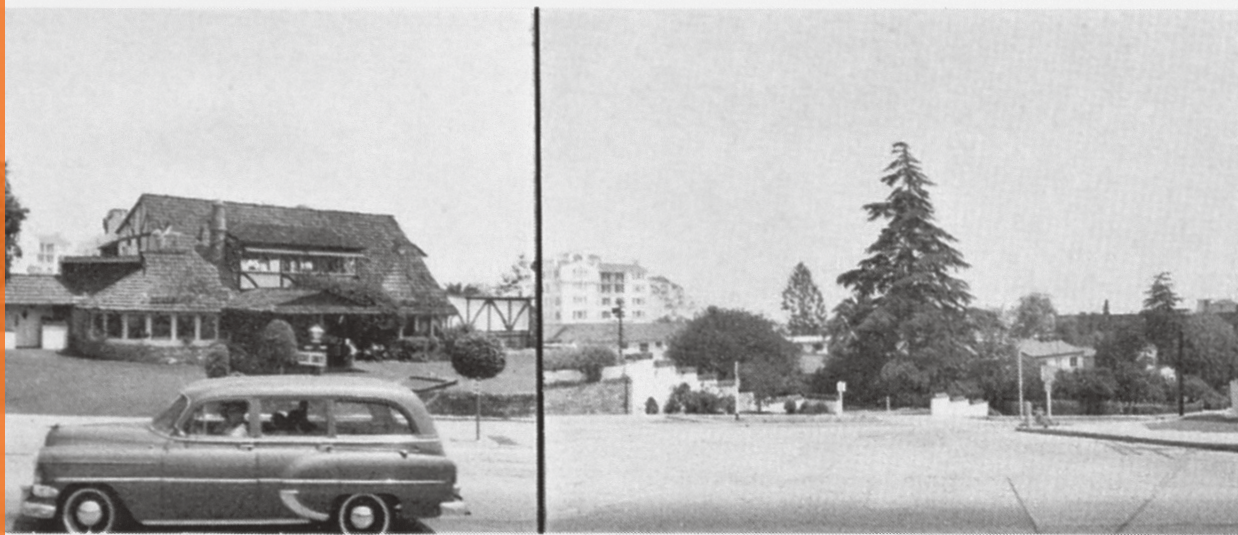
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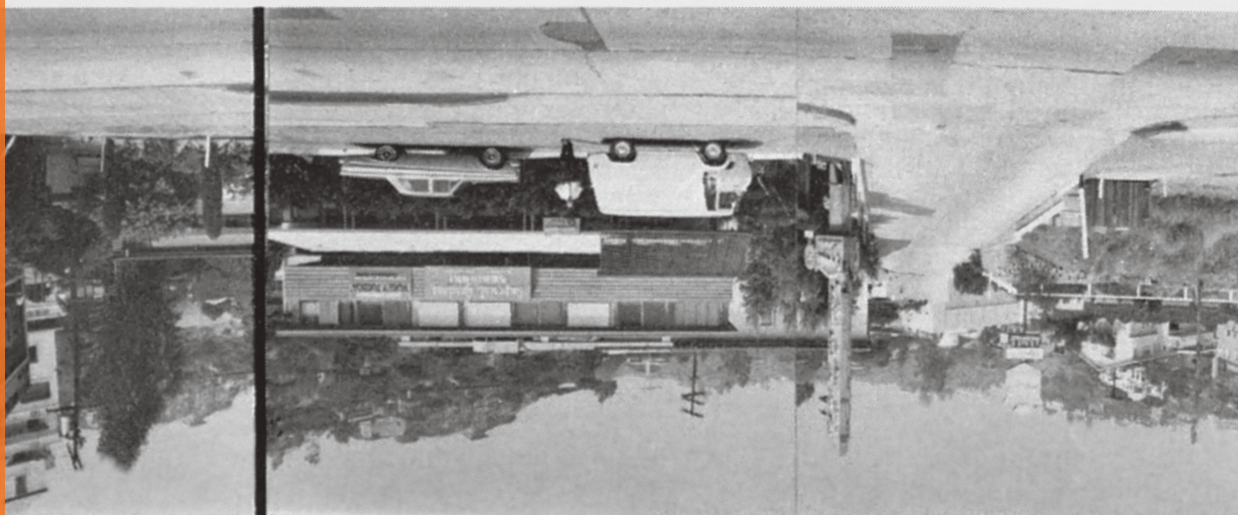
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