Newsletter of The International Dunhuang Project

IDP NEWS

IDP — TO PROMOTE THE STUDY AND PRESERVATION OF THE DUNHUANG LEGACY THROUGH INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

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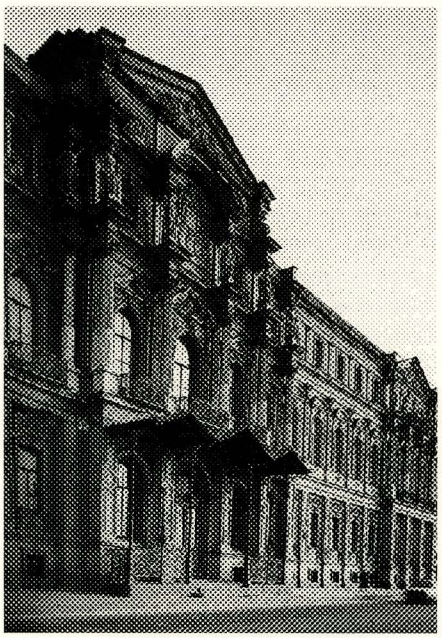
The Dunhuang Manuscripts in St. Petersburg



The Institute of Oriental Studies
St. Petersburg, Russia

In August 1914 the Academician Sergei Oldenburg made his way to Dunhuang. He had previously spent six months visiting sites on the Silk Road in 1909–1910, following in the footsteps of Colonel Pyotr Koslov who had discovered Khara-Khoto, the 'Black City', in 1908. Finds from these earlier expeditions had been sent back to St Petersburg, and the site at Dunhuang had already yielded thousands of manuscripts to Aurel Stein, Paul Pelliot and the Chinese government. Aurel Stein had made a second visit a few months before, but nevertheless Oldenberg came away in January 1915 with several hundred scrolls and fragments. There are now 365 scrolls and approximately 18,000 fragments in the Dunhuang collection at the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg.

No detailed report of this 'Second Russian Turkestan Expedition' was published but the paintings and sculptures were placed on public view in a special room in the State Hermitage Museum and Oldenburg wrote several articles including ones on the Thousand-Buddha Caves near Dunhuang.[1] His work was also reported in the Japanese press and S. E. Malov wrote on the Uighur manuscripts.[2]

In 1929 the collections from both expeditions were placed in the Asian Museum (now the Institute of Oriental Studies) in St. Petersburg and research was started by K. K. Flug assisted by A. S. Polyakov.[3] However, Flug died in the Leningrad Blockade and Polyakov not much later, interrupting the research. It did not resume again until 1957 when a special team was formed under the direction of Professor L. N. Menshikov to catalogue the collection and publish the results. Partial catalogues were published at this time.[4] Menshokov continues to work on the manuscripts and has published many articles.[5] In addition I. I Chuguyevsky published on the non-Buddhist fragments.[6] But until 1994 the majority of these documents had only been seen by those working on the collection at the Institute of Oriental Studies. With the publication in 1994 of the first two volumes of a multivolume facsimile edition of the entire collection the manuscripts are, for the first time, accessible to scholars.

The publishers are *Shanghai guji chubanshe* (Shanghai Ancient Works Publishing House) who are also bringing out a facsimile edition of the Paris Dunhuang collection. Photographs of all the manuscripts and fragments have already been taken and several volumes are available.

Conservation Plans

The 365 scrolls (<1m in length) are stored in tubes and are in a stable condition. The fragments (from 30cm to 1m) have been sorted into categories and are stored flat inside portfolios with about 100 fragments per portfolio. In addition there are about 2,000 smaller pieces which have not been studied.

There has been collaboration between the conservators of the St. Petersburg and British Library collections since the extended visit of Dr Nadezhda Brovenko in 1993. Mark Barnard, conservator at the British Library, visited the Institute in May 1994 funded by the Getty Grant Program with travel expenses provided by the British Council to set up a conservation programme for the Dunhuang manuscripts. Materials and equipment were supplied by the British Library and the Getty Grant Program. Conservation work has now started on the small uncatalogued fragments. At a later stage work will extend to the larger fragments and scrolls. It is hoped that the staffing levels will increase to enable the Institute of Oriental Studies to expand their conservation programmes.

In the same year an application from Professor Ken Seddon from Queen's University, Belfast, Northern Ireland, with the British Library to the European Union body, INTAS (a fund to support scientists from the former Soviet Union) was successful. The money will be used to appoint a scientific archivist (half-time) to carry out a conservation survey of the pre-tenth century manuscripts, and a full-time scientific conservator. The latter, with the help of Professor Seddon, will establish a modern scientific research unit in St. Petersburg to carry out spectroscopic analysis of documents identified by the survey as most in need of future conser-

vation. This project will link with ongoing research identifying early Chinese paper dyes being carried out at Queen's University by Professor Seddon and Peter Gibbs. It is hoped that this one-year grant will act as seed-funding for a long-term co-operative conservation project. During another visit to the Institute in September 1994, Mark Barnard discussed the terms of the agreement and future work programmes.

The information from the conservation survey will be added to the database in London. A database will then be set up in St Petersburg.

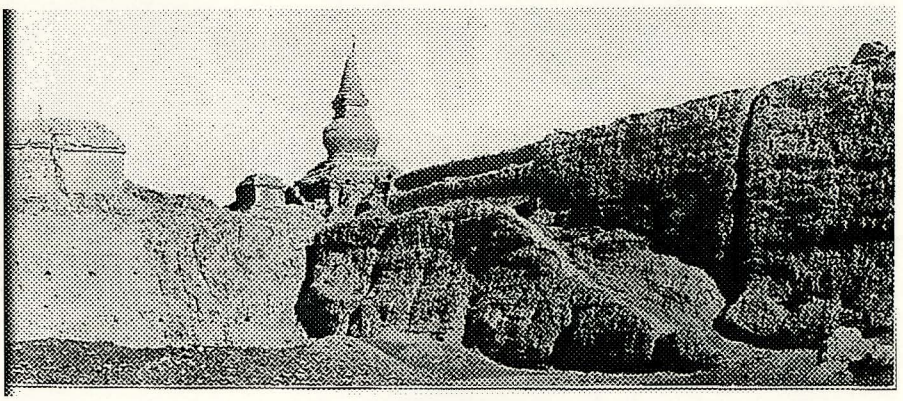
Dr Nadezhda Brovenko at work in her studio in St. Petersburg. She is using the polyester welder, equipment supplied by the British Library out of funds from the Getty Grant Programme. One of the uncatalogued fragments is being encapsulated between two sheets of Melinex (a stable plastic).

Bibliography and notes

Information for this article was obtained from L. I. Tchuguevskogo, *Kitaiskie Dokumenti iz Dun'khuna, Vipusk I*, (Chinese Documents from Dunhuang, Part 1, Facsimile text, translation from the Chinese with notes and commentary by L. I. Tchuguevskogo), Moscow 1983. The following numbers refer to the bibliography in this work (pp.275–299).

1. 34-40
2. Malov 27, Japanese articles 337, 372
3. Part of the material was included in Flug's work on the Song printed book (46-8). Polyakov had previously published on Chinese Tang dynasty documents found in Tadjikistan in 1933. (43)
4. 12,13
5. 7, 8, 29, 32
6. 49–57

Kharo-Khoto — The Black City



Khara-Khoto, ruined stupas built above the north-west corner of circumvallation (photograph by Stein)

Khara-Khoto lies north-east of Dunhuang in the Gobi Desert, just inside the present-day Chinese border with Mongolia. For Colonel Pyotr Kuzmich Koslov, leader of the 1907–1909 Russian Expediion to Mongolia and Sichuan, it was the city of his dreams: 'ever since reading about the ruins in the explorer Potanin's book Khara-Khoto has been constantly on my mind'. His discovery of the site in March 1908 was undoubtedly the triumph of Russian activity in Central Asia and heralded the start of Tangut studies.

Khara-Khoto was a major city of the thriving Tangut state of Xia (known in China as Western Xia: Xixia) and many documents written in Tangut were found by Kozlov. The city was one of the first to be overthrown by the Mongols when they invaded in 1226. They later established a Tangut province within their empire and the city continued to be known by its Tangut name, Edzina, as Marco Polo attests:

> When the traveller leaves this city of Ganzhou, he rides for twelve days until he reaches a city called Edzina, which lies on the northern edge of the desert of sand. This is still in the province of Tangut. The inhabitants are idolators. They have camels and cattle in plenty. The country breeds lanner and saker falcons, and very good ones. The people live by agriculture and stock-rearing; they are not traders.

The inhabitants were later forced to convert to Islam and were conquered in 1372 by troops of the Chinese Ming dynasty when, the official history records, 'the town's defender Buyan'temur, surrended.' Documents found at the site date no later than 1380 and it seems as if this defeat, possibly with climate changes which lowered the water table, forced the city's inhabitants to move away.

The locals, however, tell a more romantic story which Koslov reproduced in the preliminary account of his journey (*Geographical Journal*, October 1909, pp. 387ff.) The city was too well fortified for the Chinese army to attack but they cut off the water supply from the Edzin River forcing the city's troops to breach the wall and attack. The troops were wiped out, including their ruler, and the city subsequently destroyed by the Chinese army. However, it is said that the ruler sunk his treasury — eighty carts of it — into a large hole in the northern corner of the city. The treasure has yet to be found but

Display of manuscripts at the first exhibition of the Khara-Khoto artefacts held at the Imperial Russian Geographic Society in 1910.

Koslov reported evidence of a dam.

Koslov sent ten chests of manuscripts and Buddhist objects back to St. Petersburg after this initial visit in 1908 and carried more objects back, including Buddhist paintings, on his return journey in May 1909. The artefacts he discovered reflect the cultural richness of the Tangut Xia State. The paintings and other pieces (3,500 items) are in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg while the manuscripts and printed documents (8,000 items) are with those from Dunhuang at the Institute of Oriental Studies.

Koslov was leading an exploratory rather than an archaeological expedition and the site was too large for a complete excavation. Several years later when Sir Aurel Stein arrived he found many objects and manuscripts. (See *Innermost Asia, Text, vol. 1*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1928, pp. 463–506 for a list). Stein recorded his first view of the city:

> It was a striking site, the most impressive perhaps that I had seen on true desert ground, this dead town, with massive walls and bastions for the most part still in fair preservation, rising above the bare gravel flat which stretches towards it from the river bank... There was nothing in the surroundings of the dead town to impair the imposing effect created by the massive strength of the town walls and the utter desolation which reigned within.

Langdon Warner, who visited in 1925 under the sponsorship of the Fogg Museum of Art at Harvard University, was also struck by the site's isolation:

> No city guard turned out to scan my credentials now, no bowman leaned from a balcony above the big gate in idle curiosity, and no inn welcomed me with tea and kindly bustle of sweeping out my room or fetching fodder for my beasts. One little grey hawk darted from her nest high in the grey wall, her set wings rigid, and sailed low over the pebbles and sparse thorn bushes of the plain. No other life seemed there, not even the motion of a cloud in the speckless heaven nor the stir of a beetle at my feet. It was high afternoon, when no ghosts walk. But, as sure as these solid walls were built up by the labour of men, just so sure was I that the little empty town had spirits in it. And the consciousness never left me by day or night while we were there. [*The Long Old Road in China*, Arrowsmith, London 1927. p. 141.]

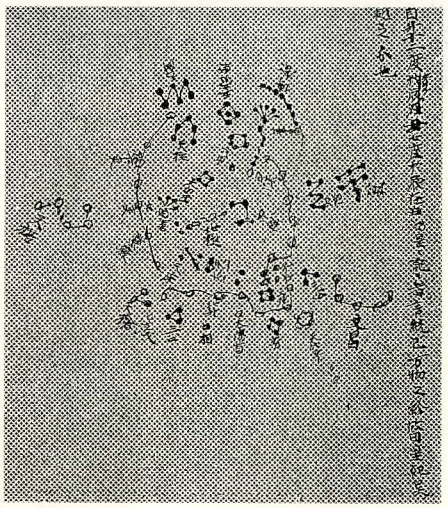
Colonel Pyotr Kuzmich Kozlov

Sven Hedin and Xu Bingchang led the Sino-Swedish Expedition on archaeological excavations of the site between 1927–31 and between 1963 and 1984 the site was again excavated by the Li Yiyou of the Mongolian Autonomous Region Cultural Relics Team.

Two exhibitions of the artefacts from Khara-Khoto have been held recently. The first was in Tokyo in 1989 and the second in Lugano, Switzerland (Fondzione Thyssen-Bornemisza, Villa Favorita, Lugano, 25 June–21 October 1993).

For an introduction to the city, its history and its culture, and for photographs of many artefacts see the catalogue to this second exhibition: Mikhail Piotrovsky (ed.), Lost Empire of the Silk Road: Buddhist Art from Khara Khoto (X-XIIIth century), *Electra, Milan 1993.*

The Star Chart



Part of the Star Chart showing a polar projection depicting the Purple Palace and Great Bear constellations.

The British Library Research and Development Department has awarded the Queen's University of Belfast an initial one-year grant of £10,000 to look at the star chart from Dunhuang with the aim of carrying out scientific research on dyes, the possible degredation of alum and pH values.

The Star chart [S.3326] is one of the most important manuscripts in the British Library Dunhuang collection. Dated about A.D. 940 it is an example of the coloured star-map of Qian Lezhi and almost certainly the oldest extant manuscript star-chart from any civilisation. The works of three 4th century B.C. Chinese astronomers —Shi Shen, Gan De and Wu Xian—are long lost but in the fourth century A.D. Qian Lezhi made a planisphere showing in different colours the stars they had determined. This is recorded in the Sui dynasty (589-618) history:

> In the Liu-Song dynasty in the Yuanjia reign period (424-453) the Astronomer-Royal Qian Lezhi cast a bronze astronomical instrument using marks of red, black and white to distinguish the three schools of astronomers.' [*Suishu, juan* 19, 2a-b]

The star chart is a manuscript example of Qian Lezhi's work. As Needham notes:

> its great astronomical interest has not been brought out. Each *hsiu* is depicted by itself, in a cylindrical orthomorphic projection like Mercator's centring on the equator, with columns of text inbetween, while at the end of the scroll there is a planisphere centred on the north celestial pole.

[Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. 3, *Mathematics and the Sciences of the Heavens and the Earth*, Cambridge University Press 1959, p. 264 n.c. See pp. 263ff. for further discussion.]

News in Brief

Visit of Chiang Ching-Kuo President

The British Library was extremely pleased to welcome Professor Li Yih-yuan, President of the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation, his wife and the Foundation's secretary Ms. Yu Shufen to the British Library in December 1994.

They were shown manuscripts and printed materials from the Stein collection, the computerised catalogue and conservation work. Afterwards, Graham Shaw, Deputy-Director of Special Collections and Frances Wood, Head of the Chinese Section, accompanied them to meet the British Library Chief Executive, Brian Lang (see photograph left).

Start of conservation survey

Work started in January 1995 on the first comprehensive preservation survey of material from the British Library's Stein collection (first expedition) using a formatted computer database. A physical description of each manuscript along with its current preservation status is being input in such a way that detailed statistic analyses can be carried out on the ensuing data. This will enable the British Library to prioritise long-term conservation programmes.

Current Research at Belfast

Development work has started on the design of a microelectrode which will be capable of measuring a meaningful pH value for paper. The target is to measure acidity and aluminium content of a broad range of pre-tenth century Chinese paper (including the Star Chart). This will establish for the first time whether there is any correlation between the aluminium content of paper and its acidity.

The Diamond Sutra

The Diamond Sutra, which has been on display in the permanent cases in the King's Library in the British Museum building is being replaced by another Chinese printed Buddhist sutra to allow vital conservation work.

IDP Patrons

Lord Geddes, Dr Jessica Rawson and Lady Youde have kindly agreed to be patrons of the Project.

Forthcoming conference

Monuments of Spiritual, Material and Written Culture of the Ancient and Mediaeval Orient: Problems of Database Creation

30 May to 4 June 1995

Moscow, Russia

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People

The British Library was very sorry to say goodbye to an old friend, **Professor Sha Zhi**, who left in November 1994 having spent 9 months at the British Library working on the Stein manuscripts and helping with the Project. It is hoped that he will be back in early 1996.

Wang Jiqing, will be visiting the British Library on a British Academy K. C. Wong Fellowship for 6 months from April 1995. He will be working on Stein's Third Expedition and helping with the Project.

Du Weisheng, Manager of the Conservation Studio, National Library of China, visited the western conservation studio of the British Library in late 1994 in preparation for the binding of Jesuit books in the National Library's collection.

Dr Harmut-Ortwin Feistel, Deputy Director of the Oriental Department, Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, in charge of oriental manuscripts, visited the British Library in December 1994 to look at Dunhuang manuscripts and the computer database.

Publications

The Getty Conservation Institute and the J. Paul Getty Museum are working with the Dunhuang Academy on a book they hope to publish in 1997. The book will present the different facets of the heritage of the Mogao site—its history, art, conservation projects and conservation techniques. It will unite the site itself and the artworks that are now scattered in various institutions. It will primarily be a visual work intended to make the site better known to the educated reading public in America and Europe, but will also contain text of about 30,000 words contributed by leading Dunhuang specialists.

Second IDP Conference

The Second Conference will be held in Paris in February 1996 and further details will be sent out shortly. Please let us know if there is anyone you think would be interested in attending.

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