



Locating Religions

Contact, Diversity and Translocality

EDITED BY

Reinhold F. Glei and Nikolas Jaspert

BRILL

Locating Religions

Dynamics in the History of Religions

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Contents

List of Illustrations VII

Terms, Turns and Traps: Some Introductory Remarks 1

Reinhold Glei and Nikolas Jaspert

1 Geography, History and Prophecy: Mechanisms of Integration in the Islamic Alexander Legend 16

Anna Akasoy

2 The Portuguese Discovery of Buddhism:
Locating Religion in Early Modern Asia 37

Stephen C. Berkwitz

3 From Geographical Migration to Transmigration of Souls:
Negotiating Religious Difference between Space among Jews in Early Modern Safed 64

Alexandra Cuffel

4 Translocating Religion in the Mediterranean Space:
Monastic Confrontation under Muslim Dominion 94

Ana Echevarría

5 The Mirror and the Palimpsest: The Myth of Buddhist Kingship in Imperial Tibet 123

Georgios T. Halkias

6 Prester John, the Ten Tribes, and the Raja Rum: Representing the Distant Ally in Three Pre-Modern Societies 151

Adam Knobler

7 Locating Religion, Controlling Territory: Conquest and Legitimation in Late Ninth-Century Vaspurakan and its Interreligious Context 173

Zaroui Pogossian

8 The Meeting of Daoist and Buddhist Spatial Imagination:
The Construction of the Netherworld in Medieval China 234

Henrik H. Sørensen

- 9 **Locating the Dialogue: On the Topology of the Setting in Medieval Religious Colloquies** 293
Knut Martin Stünkel
- 10 **Space, Entanglement and Decentralisation: On How to Narrate the Transcultural History of Christianity (550 to 1350 CE)** 315
Dorothea Weltecke
- 11 **Armlet of the Pinnacle of the Noble Victory Banner: Locating Traces of Imperial Tibet in a *Dhāraṇī* in the British Museum** 345
Michael Willis and Tsering Gonkatsang
- Index of Names and Places** 367

List of Illustrations

- 7.1 Map of Vaspurakan 224–225
- 8.1 Fan nuzi zaoxiang bei. After Zheng Wen and Zhang Fang 287
- 8.2 Wall-painting of Yāma's court. Mt. Maiji, Cave no. 127. After Maiji shan shiku 287
- 8.3 Qi Shiyuan zaoxiang bei. After Zheng Wen and Zhang Fang 288
- 8.4 Ransoming the spirits from hell. Illustrated Ten Kings Scripture, Mogao Caves, P. 2003R^o 288
- 8.5 Yāma as Daṇḍasa the Wrathful King 289
- 8.6 Magic Chart of Mt. Fengdu. *DZ* 508.9, 609 289
- 8.7 Group no. 84. Yuanjuedong, Anyue, Sichuan 290
- 8.8 Group no. 9. Kṣitigarbha and the Ten Kings. Mt. Shizhuan, Dazu 290
- 8.9 Group no. 20. Tableaux of the Netherworld. Mt. Baoding, Dazu, Sichuan. Photo 291
- 8.10 Detail of group no. 20, Mt. Baoding 291
- 8.11 Detail of group no. 18, Mt. Baoding 292
- 8.12 Detail of group no. 20, Mt. Baoding 292
- 10.1 Bamboo model 326
- 10.2 Circle model 329
- 10.3 Network model 332
- 11.1 Print from a wood-block with the text of the *Āryadhvajāgrakeyūranāma dhāraṇī* 361
- 11.2 Print from a wood-block with *mantras* and the 'Wind Horse' (RLUNG RTA) 362
- 11.3 Drawing of the design on a Chinese mirror, Tang dynasty, seventh century 363
- 11.4 Diagram showing a maṇḍala of Vairocana, with guardians and animals at the four gates, from Dunhuang, ninth century 363
- 11.5 Contemporary print made from an old wood block in the eastern Himālayas 364

Terms, Turns and Traps: Some Introductory Remarks

Reinhold Gleis and Nikolas Jaspert

“Locating Religions”: The title of this collection of essays is ambiguous, because the term “religions” can be both subject and object. Do the following articles deal with religions that locate – for example their places of worship, the graves of venerated men or women etc.? Or are the people dealing with religion (the scholars who have contributed articles to this volume) those who are locating them – within realms, within ecclesiastic, economic, political or intellectual frameworks, within cultural or semantic mindsets? The title thus simultaneously points at spacing religious traditions and at analysing how religions employ space to their needs. This ambiguity is intended, and in fact both aspects will be dealt with in the articles that follow. The volume’s subtitle – “Contact, Diversity and Translocality” – is similarly programmatic and seems no less enigmatic. The notion of translocality in particular demands some words of explanation. The editors would therefore like to lay out some general thoughts on the three terms that comprise the subtitle of this volume.

“Contact” is a notion of paramount importance to the research consortium (Käte-Hamburger-Kolleg) “Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe”. This long-term project financed by the German Ministry of Education and Research and located at the University of Bochum provided the logistics and intellectual framework for the conference (held in February 2012) which has given rise to this collection of essays. One of the Kolleg’s core assumptions is that from its very beginnings and throughout its history, any religious tradition has been marked by transfer processes which were the result of contacts with other belief systems.¹ The scholars working in this consortium or attached to it are united by their conviction that understanding religious traditions as dynamic and relational bodies which are constituted and constantly changed by multiple forms of interreligious contact helps de-essentialize our notions of religions.

More in need of explanation than the idea of religious contact and transfer are the concepts of diversity and translocality. In particular, the latter term may raise some questions. Therefore, we first concentrate on the meaning of

¹ Krech/Steinicke, *Dynamics in the History of Religion*, particularly Krech/Steinicke, “Preliminary Considerations,” 56–63.

translocality applied in this volume. The subject of religious translocality is set within a wider semantic framework heavily indebted to the so-called spatial turn within the humanities.² In fact, this volume is an attempt to apply questions and methods tied to notions of space and developed within recent cultural studies to the religious field. During the past two decades, scholarly attention has once again been drawn to space and its effect on the history of human societies and religions.³ Spatial terms have successfully been applied to religious studies: Michel Foucault's "heterotopias"⁴ or Arjun Appadurai's "religioscapes" are only cases in point.⁵ Modern cultural studies have understood space in a much wider sense of the word than previous research, transcending the purely physical or material understanding of the term in order to include a wide array of spaces – imagined, ascribed, mental, textual, corporeal, literary spaces and many more.⁶

Particular emphasis had recently been laid on understanding how such spaces are structured and held together. Network theory or even social network analysis is often considered one means of solving this question.⁷ Even though the dearth of sources might often impede social network analysis in the strict sense of the word, the network paradigm has in fact proven useful, not least because it helps us re-materialize religious studies and because it has drawn our attention to nodes and hubs of religious contact – that is both to simple linkages and to high density linkages within such networks.⁸ Transmission

2 The term has hitherto mostly been applied to phenomena related to migration, cf. Freitag/Oppen, "Introduction: 'Translocality'"; Hühn, *Transkulturalität, Transnationalität, Transstaatlichkeit, Translokalität*.

3 Seminal: Eliade, *Le sacré et le profane*; programmatic: Hervieu-Léger, "Space and Religion"; Knott, *The Location of Religion*; Corrigan, "Spatiality and Religion". See as an overview: Brockman, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Places*. More recent collections: *Parallelwelten*; Dharampal-Frick/Langer/Petersen, *Transfer and Spaces*, particularly section II: "Ritualized Space and Objects of Sacrosanctity", *ibidem* 301–390.

4 Foucault, "Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias"; on the reception of this concept see: Chlada, *Heterotopie und Erfahrung*; Tafazoli, *Außenraum – Mitraum – Innenraum*.

5 Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 33; on the reception of this concept see: Hayden, *Intersecting Religioscapes*.

6 *Construction de l'espace au Moyen Age*; Warf/Arias, *The Spatial Turn*; Csáky/Leitgeb, *Kommunikation – Gedächtnis – Raum*; Günzel/Kümmerling, *Raum: ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*; Rau, *Räume*.

7 General introductions: Barabási, *Linked*; Stegbauer, *Netzwerkanalyse und Netzwerktheorie*. Application to the study of religions: Collar, "Network Theory and Religious Innovation"; Vásquez, "Studying Religion in Motion".

8 Cowan, Nodes, "Networks and Hinterlands"; Höh/Jaspert/Oesterle, "Courts, Brokers and Brokerage", 15–18; Jaspert, "Contacts between the Major Religious Traditions".

and transformation processes, not least the spread of religions, are based on such nodes of interaction that are interconnected by capillary routes. These dynamic points of confluence where religious traditions meet, interact and mutually influence each other deserve our attention. Understood in a more general sense, such nodes and hubs might become detached from concrete places: Not only buildings and institutions, but also individuals and groups, as well as intellectual currents and literary genres can be termed nodes in such a wider understanding of the term. Both network theory in general and the concept of nodes and hubs in particular might prove useful when analysing the concrete dynamics of religious transfer. They not only help discern where such processes occurred, but also draw our attention to the way such processes were brought about and highlight the individuals, groups, texts or ideas that played an important role therein. Such nodes however need not be static, and this is where the notion of translocality comes to bear.

A comparative analysis of religions shows that many belief systems dis- or translocate a cultic epicentre upon transcending geographic borders. Religions might develop out of a particular cultural environment, but under certain circumstances – for example due to expansion, migration or diaspora – they can move beyond that original setting.⁹ In retrospect, changes of sacred place can sometimes be seen as triggers for internal leaps within the history of religious traditions. When spreading, religions – or better: their adherents – will meet and sometimes also clash, not only by crossing the boundaries of concurrent religions, but perhaps also by claiming, appropriating or adapting the latter's sacred spaces.¹⁰ Processes of religious diffusion are indeed closely tied to the translocation of spaces deemed sacred, thus creating new sites or sometimes usurping or occupying older ones. A famous example is the Hagia Sophia which was built as a Christian church, afterwards became a mosque, and which is today a witness of sacred space in a 'secular' religion, i.e. a museum. On the other hand, the erection of religious centres (temples, monasteries etc) in distant areas is often the visible, material manifestation of the spread of religions. To put it bluntly: Processes of spatial movement necessarily lead to religious centres being superseded, contested, transferred or multiplied. At the same time, such developments can also cause foreign sites to be adapted and incorporated, for example by including the worship of new deities or by introducing material facets of other cults or religions. Religious transfers due

9 Del Testa, *The Spread of Religions*; Krech/Steinicke, *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe*, 165–239. For current developments see Adogame/Shankar, *Religion on the Move*.

10 Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence*; Hassner, *War on Sacred Grounds*.

to expansion were therefore in no way spatially and culturally unidirectional, but rather reciprocal dynamic processes.

In the case of the major religious traditions often referred to as “world religions”, such processes ultimately led from regionalism to universalism. The notion of universality claimed by certain religions generally developed out of a regional context. In most cases, universal claims are the result of historical developments, for example of expansion, thus forming an inherent tension between local or regional roots and universal expectations or claims. The relationship between regionalism and universalism, for example between local churches and local cults as opposed to imperial power or other centralized macro-structures, merits our attention. Analyzing this correlation is without a doubt relevant for a proper understanding of the history of religions, but it is also a requirement in academic terms: An important aim of contemporary studies of religions is to supersede the traditional focus on so-called world religions.¹¹ On the contrary, re-localizing religious belief systems by bringing back to mind their spatial dimension and their regional or even local features, in sum: narrating religions without a centre (D. Weltecke) might be a further step toward this end.

Religious diffusion is not necessarily brought about by abandoning the former centre (or centres). In fact, many religious traditions are not only tied to or associated with the one area its respective adherents live in, but are in fact bilocal or even “multilocal” in character.¹² “Multilocality” is brought about by transgressing space, be it physically or mentally; this dynamic process is what we refer to when shifting from “multi-” to “translocality”. In this sense, most religions are geographically flexible and marked by multiple spatial settings or mixed embeddednesses. To provide some examples for the way “translocality” can lead to “multilocality”: *Foci* of a religious devotion are frequently concrete physical places, but these places are often geographically distanced from the believers, thus forming bipolar spatial structures. Jerusalem and the Holy Land or Mecca and the Hijaz are well-known cases in point. Diasporic communities are prominently distinguished by their “dwelling” (T. Tweed) on certain, often far off places, thus forming “bilocal” groups positioned between their actual living space and those places and spaces they yearn for or reflect on.¹³ Similarly, the distance between people’s physical environment and their centers of devotion and worship led and lead to practices of religious dwell-

11 Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*.

12 John Corrigan prefers the term “polylocal”: Corrigan, “Spatiality and Religion”.

13 Tweed, “On Moving Across”. Similarly: MacDonald, “Place and the Study of Religions,” 5–8.

ing that are the basis for pilgrimage and other forms of embodied mobility. Simultaneous religious embeddedness in multiple geographical settings is not only a hallmark of the modern age.¹⁴

The abovementioned examples also show that religious traditions could develop several such centers – often due to diffusion or expansion – which simultaneously exerted attraction and created differing and even competing imageries. Striking examples set within the wider Mediterranean area are Mecca, Medina and al-Quds (Jerusalem) in Islam, or Jerusalem, Rome and Constantinople in Latin and Greek Christendom, respectively, whereas in Asia, the spread of Stupas might be named. Then again, prominent spatial centres can themselves be translocated to other geographical areas. The many Jerusalems in Latin Christianity¹⁵ or the many Banarasses in Hinduism,¹⁶ but also miraculous relocations of places (Loreto etc.¹⁷) are cases in point that demonstrate how sacred place can be duplicated and translocated. Translocation may even include spiritual or fictional places like the inner self or several utopias, most prominent in early modern times.

Therefore, one should be wary in order not to presuppose a direct link between religious belief and geographical places: As the case of early Christianity shows, the notion of sacred space is not necessarily inherent to religions. In fact, in its beginnings a spiritual religion such as Christianity had no room for physical holy places. Only after several centuries was the notion excepted that places could be intrinsically sacred.¹⁸ Contextualising and historicising such developments is one of the objectives pursued in this volume. This necessarily implies taking economic and political agency and agents into account, simply because spatial-religious dynamics were heavily influenced by them.¹⁹ Then again, space evidently need not be sacred in order to bear importance for the history of religions. Distant lands, real or imaginary, could serve as negative counterparts or as places to which religious hopes and expectations were directed.²⁰

14 Vázquez, “Studying Religion in Motion,” 157–165.

15 Jaspert, “Vergegenwärtigungen Jerusalems”; Constable, “Dislocation”; Lidov, *Novye Ierusalimy*; *Visual Constructions of Jerusalem*.

16 Michaels, “Konstruktionen von Translokaltät”; Gengnagel, “Visualisierung religiöser Räume”.

17 Grimaldi, *La Santa Casa di Loreto*.

18 Markus, “How on Earth Could Places Become Holy”.

19 A point underlines by MacDonald, “Place and the Study of Religions,” 13–17.

20 See the paper by Adam Knobler in this volume.

Multi-local religions do not only unite distant places horizontally, but also tend to include a third spatial dimension, that of vertical order.²¹ Religious spatial concepts are in fact complex social constructions that combine notions of material space with notions of transcendental, i.e. mental space. Social groups were and often are ordered vertically, and a similar relational hierarchy is often established between worldly and other-worldly spheres. Translocality can therefore be understood both as the practice of merely crossing geographical borders and as the act of transgressing geographical into mental space. A specific feature of religions is precisely the interchange between these different spaces. Spatial stratifications of heaven and earth (and the underworld), religious utopias, even transcendental “nowheres”, are all variations of our wider field of research, i.e. of “locating” religions.²² A systematic reflection on the consequences that notions of translocality had on the shaping and imagining of space – both mental, social and physical – is a fruitful objective for comparative studies in the history of religions.

Let us turn from the notion of translocality to this volume’s second programmatic concept, that is diversity.²³ As this volume’s articles show, the notion of unity and homogeneity is a helpful tool for understanding the history of religions but has to be counterbalanced by that of diversity. Derived from Latin *diversitas*, it first of all means the feature of being diverse from one another. Thus, diversity is always a relational term with at least two different objects involved: Plato is diverse from Socrates, for example. This may sound trivial, but things get more complicated once one takes a closer look at them. For example, if we postulate that there is a certain diversity between Plato and a piece of stone, the sentence may be true but does not seem to bear very much information. On the other hand, the statement that Plato today is diverse from Plato tomorrow conveys the impression that this difference is maybe not a particularly significant one. Similar observations can be made regarding religious diversity. First of all, we have to keep in mind that diversity, being a relational term, depends on the prevailing point of view. To call two religions “diverse”, is a tautology, because two things are always different insofar they are two things and not one. So what exactly does “diverse” mean? One may suggest that it is useful to differentiate between intra- and interreligious diversity. But the problem is only moved to another level, not solved. Bypassing the question as to what a religion (or a sect or a heresy or a confession) is: One could hardly say, for example, whether the different Protestant confessions are more or less

21 As called to mind by Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*.

22 Hafner/Bauer, *Parallelwelten*.

23 Trigg, *Religious Diversity*.

“diverse” and distant to one another than the Catholic or Orthodox ones. On the contrary, these strongly interrelated groups were often more hostile to each another than to “exotic” ones. From a Christian perspective, for example, different confessions like Greek Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Syrian Christianity, Lutheranism and Calvinism are very diverse, while from an outside point of view, these differences may be considered marginal. But does it make sense to deem these confessions “less diverse” than, e.g., Christianity and Islam? It seems, therefore, that the term “diversity” becomes more and more vague or meaningless and that it is quite superfluous or even erroneous to use it.

But perhaps another consideration might be of help. Describing diversity, we are well-advised to recall Aristotle’s treatise on categories and his concepts of *genus proximum* and *differentia specifica*, i.e. the next generic term and the specific difference, respectively. “Specific” must here be taken in the literal sense of “making a species”. So, we have a certain number of species under the same genus, and it makes sense to call these items “different” or “diverse”. But at the same time, we see that the items are connected and, in a way, united by the generic concept. Therefore, diversity, as a relational concept, always depends on some kind of unity or conformity. Diversity, then, cannot be understood without its opposite. To put it paradoxically, the content of the term diversity is determined by the degree of equality or homogeneity of the items contained in it.

We suggest that these considerations may be also of some help to understand religious diversity. Being a relational term, diversity is only understandable before the background of some kind of conformity. Therefore, when analysing diversity and difference, we always have to take the underlying unity into account.²⁴ Religions, for example, are united by common notions of transcendence or outer-worldliness. Furthermore, it seems to be important that diversity is only an analytical tool (in the sense of the Aristotelian *organon*) to describe things, that is, for example, to deal with empirical data. Diversity is not an objective entity in itself existing in the realm of ideas. When people forget about that simple insight and consider diversity an ontological feature, serious conflicts arise. For example, “fundamentalism”, described by such principles, commits the mistake of treating diversity as a generic, not as a relational term. Consequently, diversity in the sense outlined above, may help de-ontologize or de-essentialize the very term itself.

Let us shortly consider another point. A term that seems to be very near, if not synonymous to “diversity”, is “plurality”. There is, however, a difference

24 Jaspert, “Communicating Vessels”; Schmidt-Leukel, *Buddhism and Religious Diversity*; Ridgeon, *Islam and Religious Diversity*.

between these two concepts that is not negligible. While “diversity” is, or should be, a merely logical concept which does not include any notions of a value system, “plurality”, on the other hand, seems to introduce an evaluation of diversity due to its proximity to “pluralism”.²⁵ Because the latter term denominates the active engagement with diversity in order to seek understanding across lines of difference, it might easily be confused with plurality. For the purpose of scientific description, therefore, the more neutral term “diversity” seems more suitable than “plurality”. It does call up notions of disjunction and hence a priori tends to lay an emphasis on difference. But as we have seen, the underlying concept of a common framework or a common ground is an equally fundamental quality that recommends using diversity as an analytical tool.

In the papers that follow, the term “diversity” not only denominates the plurality of religions in the same space, be it a religious centre or a contact zone between religions, but also the plurality of the same religion that has been located (or translocated) in diverse places. Once distributed or disseminated, a religion cannot remain the same, precisely because it is located in different environments. In this sense, both synchronic and diachronic differences must be taken into account. It is obvious, for example, that early Christian communities differed greatly from Christianity as a state religion. But diversity is even found during the religions’ formation periods, as can be seen from Paul’s letters to different communities of early Christians. Diversity obviously results from the multiple environments religions are located in, but also from the different aims and purposes of people that belong to the same religion.

These and other facets of religious diversity are brought to bear in the articles that follow. These papers’ chronological and geographical range is wide. There is a marked focus on the period between the fifth and the fifteenth century of the common era, the millennium known in Europe as the Middle Ages. But the chronological spectrum stretches much further: from ancient Rome to the early modern period, while the geographical range reaches from Imperial China in the east to the furthest borders of south-western Europe. The following papers connect concrete empirical data to some of the general thoughts just expressed. Take for example the ambiguity inherent in this volume’s title, that is the difference between religions that locate and scholars who locate religions: Dorothea Weltecke’s paper provides a wonderful example for the latter by analyzing how historians often all too superficially apply very dubious spatial hierarchies to religions by not only constructing centers and peripheries, but by attaching greater importance to the former and less relevance to hypothetically liminal zones. Ana Echevarría’s paper in turn shows how

25 Giordan and Pace, *Religious Pluralism*.

research – contrary to the factual evidence – has attempted to locate religions exclusively in the West. And Stephen Berkwitz provides a fascinating study on how Portuguese missionaries located Buddhism both spatially and theologically within geographical and mental maps. In turn, religions that locate places of worship in certain spaces are presented in many guises, for example in the form of the mountainous location of monastic practice on the Iberian Peninsula (Ana Echevarría) and in China (Henrik Sørensen), as the dichotomy between centre and periphery via the example of early modern Tibet (Georgios Halkias), or as the places in which Christian authors set religious dialogues (Knut Martin Stünkel).

Translocality is dealt with amply, and diversely. Some authors present cases of translocation of the sacred in a physical sense of the word. For example, the translocation of monastic practices across the Mediterranean (Ana Echevarría) and the transfer of notions of kingship from India to Tibet (Georgios Halkias). Bi-local mental frameworks and dwelling are called to mind by Anna Akasoy's rendering of Abbasid Muslims' yearning for the Hijaz or by Ana Echevarría's remarks on inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula reflecting on Palestinian monasticism. Finally, the transfer or translocation of tropes over boundaries of ethnos and religion is an important issue in Adam Knobler's paper on distant kings, in Stephen Berkwitz's study on Christian understandings of Buddhism and in Georgios Halkias's contribution on kingship in Tibet. Turning to wider understandings of the notion of translocality: Alexandra Cuffel prominently studies corporeal translocation, a point also touched upon by Georgios Halkias. Cuffel also includes recent notions of embodiment by underlining the relationship between body and psyche. Other authors refer to translocation over time, which might appear a contradiction in terms, but which opens fascinating insights, for example Abbasid identifications of their realm with that of Alexander the Great (Anna Akasoy) or the transmission of a 9th-century text on a modern printing block (Michael Willis and Tsering Gonkatsang).

As for network metaphors and the notion of nodes and hubs: Several of the following pick up this heuristic tool, even when the authors do not explicitly dwell on it: Trastevere as a hub of migrant groups, monasteries, courts and mountains as physical nodes, or semantic hubs such as the Alexander legend or the notion of heaven etc. are all treated as dynamic points of confluence. This dichotomy between material and semantic hubs is also discernible when dealing with space, for in many cases, material places stand beside heterotopias – not in Foucault's meaning of the word, which applies to physical spaces between defined areas, but rather in the way the term has been interpreted in later research, as a imagined intra-space. Chinese netherworlds as analyzed by Henrik Sørensen, the settings of some religious colloquies presented by Knut

Martin Stümel or Zaroui Pogossian's apocalyptic spaces introduce us to these heterotopias.

Let us close this introduction with some more general points and perspectives. The papers assembled here not only inform the reader, but also remind us of some very basic pre-requisites when dealing with religious space and religious diversity. First, several papers, most prominently those by Anna Akasoy, Stephen Berkwitz and Georgios Halkias, underline the importance of observing the relation between traditional geographical knowledge and its religious rereading. Second, most articles show how essential it is to contextualize the political, economic and social frameworks of religious transfer processes – for example imperial frameworks, as the cases of the Byzantine world (Dorothea Weltecke) and early Islam (Ana Echevarría) demonstrate. Our interest in diversity should not lead us to overlook the frameworks of power. This also includes processes of expansion. Alexandra Cuffel draws our attention to the very concrete reasons for Jewish migration to the town of Safed. Dorothea Weltecke picks up a term introduced in recent Mediterranean studies, “connectivity”, in order to describe the communicative preconditions for transfer processes, and quite rightfully demands a wider understanding and analysis beyond the field of political contacts.

Third, regionalism and universality is a recurrent pair of opposites. To our way of thinking, the relation between regionalism and universalism holds potential for further research, as the discussion of several papers during the congress that gave rise to this volume showed. The dichotomy between the diffusion of overarching, common cults like that of Isis and the heterogeneity of empires is a case in point, and Dorothea Weltecke's quite rightfully calls for intensified research on local religions. Indeed, the local embeddedness of the religious field needs to be taken into account more seriously.

In the same line of thought, several studies show how important it is to analyze places in the material sense of the word and on a comparative level. Both Henrik Sørensen's and Ana Echevarría's papers call to mind the importance of mountainous cult-sites that housed both anchorites and cenobites, while Safed is presented as religious microcosm (by Alexandra Cuffel). Several papers remind us not to limit our attention to push-factors alone when dealing with the diffusion of religious ideas. The incorporation of foreign cults underlines the relevance of both push-factors and pull-factors when dealing with the diffusion of religious beliefs: Push-factors such as the usurpation of local deities by those of expanding powers stand beside pull-factors such as the inclusion of Indian ideals in Tibet.

The readers of this volume will notice that several articles appear to communicate with each other. Dorothea Weltecke's paper on the medieval

Christianities ties up well with Ana Echevarría's on trans-Mediterranean monastic mobility. Echevarría's thoughts on monasteries in mediaeval Iberia in turn show parallelisms to the spacing of monastic institutions in Tibet as presented by Georgios Halkias. And Henrik Sørensen's netherworlds show certain similarities to the undetermined places for religious colloquies studied by Knut Martin Stünkel. This list could be continued. Such cross sectional communication is exactly what organizers of conferences and editors of volumes hope for; and, thanks to our contributors, our hopes have been very amply fulfilled. We therefore trust that a comprehensive reading of the papers collected here will lead to a broader and more nuanced understanding of the relationship between space and religion, both in Europe and in Asia.

Finally, some words of thanks. As indicated, this volume is the outcome of an international conference held at the University of Bochum in 2012. The speakers had all been fellows of the Käte-Hamburger-Kolleg "Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe" during the academic year 2011/2012. During their stay, these scholars created an atmosphere of learning and intense intellectual dialogue that became legendary within the Kolleg. Their enthusiasm and commitment has since been a model for other fellows and the entire consortium. Their contributions to the annual fellow conference and to this volume is only one of many inputs they have provided.²⁶ The conference itself greatly profited from the logistics support provided by Gwendolin Arnold and Marion Steinicke as well as from the intellectual backing on behalf of Volkhard Krech and the other board members in the Kolleg. Vital editorial assistance has been furnished by Concetta Finiello (Bochum) and by Matthias Bley (Heidelberg). Our anonymous reviewers provided us with many helpful remarks and suggestions. And thanks to Licia Di Giacinto's commitment and gentle jostling, this volume has finally been printed. To all of you our heartfelt thanks!

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26 Cf. the proceedings of other fellow conferences: Eggert/Hölscher, *Religion and Secularity*; Wick/Rabens, *Religions and Trade*.

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Geography, History and Prophecy: Mechanisms of Integration in the Islamic Alexander Legend

Anna Akasoy

In an article on Muhammad and the origins of Islam, published in 1851, the French scholar Ernest Renan famously declared that Islam “was born in the full light of history”.¹ About a century later, a group of ‘revisionist’ historians had thoroughly demolished this idea, dismissing the ‘full light’ as constructions of eighth- and ninth-century Iraq.² While the radical fringe of these scholars argued that given the lack of contemporary evidence, Muhammad may have never even existed, others challenged more convincingly the landscape in which the Islamic prophet lived. If he was the author of the Qur’an, a text with an obvious Biblical heritage, the Hijaz must have been a ‘sectarian milieu’ much more populated by Christians than the Islamic tradition would have it. Alternatively, Islam may have emerged in a region north of the Hijaz such as Palestine or Mesopotamia.

Outside of the circle of experts, however, the well-known story as presented in those ninth-century Arabic sources is still repeated. Muhammad, born in about 570, is the illiterate prophet of monotheism who defended worship of the one God against the idolatry and polytheism of Mecca. Facing opposition, he left in 622 for Medina, only to return later with an army of supporters who conquered large parts of the Middle East after his death. With the following events, we are indeed on safer ground: After a first bloom of the Islamic empire under the Umayyad dynasty in Syria, the ‘Abbāsids moved the political centre in the mid-eighth century to Iraq where they founded their cosmopolitan capital Baghdad and began a long tradition of reviving Persian kingship within the evolving political language of the Islamic caliphate.

The expression of an Islamisation of Africa and an Africanisation of Islam coined by historians of sub-Saharan Africa captures the dynamics of the early Islamic conquests equally well. While Arabic and Islam spread into new territories, this culturally, religiously and ethnically diverse space also had a crucial

1 Renan, “Mahomet,” 1065.

2 For these debates and the following brief account of the formative period of Islamic history see Robinson, *The Formation of the Islamic World*.

impact on what we now know as classical Islam. To mention but a few consequences of the conquests: Ruling an empire required more advanced political structures than the small polity Muhammad had set up in Medina. Disagreements about leadership, the distribution of material goods acquired during the conquests, and the relationship between religious and political authority triggered sectarian divisions. The growing number of converts to Islam transformed a tribal Arabian sect into a universal religion. The presence of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian learning in Syria and Iraq inspired developments in Islamic theology, philosophy and law. Historians often refer to the first two centuries of 'Abbāsīd rule as the formative period of Islam, since it was during those years that all its major intellectual and religious traditions originated.

The urban and courtly culture of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate became a model elsewhere in the Muslim world. Arabic literature from Iraq was held in high regard in the Muslim West where schools formed for example in Cordoba, Seville, Palermo and Mazara to imitate the Iraqi poet al-Mutanabbī (915/917–965).³ In the religious sphere too, the centre of the 'Abbāsīd empire was paradigmatic for the Western part of the Dār al-Islām. Thus, the Andalusī geographer al-Bakrī (1014–1094) for instance explained that the city of Nafta in modern-day Tunisia was called 'little Kufa' since all its inhabitants were Shiites.⁴

At the same time, from the formative period onwards, Muslims upheld the Hijazi ideal of the religion's historical origins. Arabic literary culture, notably poetry, provides again examples. In the 'Abbāsīd period, poets went from Baghdad into the Arabian desert in order to experience the environment in which the pre-Islamic poets, the great pride of Arab culture, had lived. (Rina Drory suggested that the 'Abbāsīds constructed this pre-Islamic culture in order to celebrate their historical identity and contrast it with the legacy of the Persians.)⁵ As Thierry Zarcone has recently shown, Central Asia especially witnessed the rise of a number of pilgrimage sites which replicated the Hijazi destinations of Mecca and, albeit to a considerably lesser extent, Medina.⁶ More important for our purposes, Muhammad's biography remained inextricably tied to the Hijazi milieu. Reports of his deeds and sayings (i.e., *sunna* as

3 Rizzitano, "La Sicilia musulmana," 562.

4 Al-Bakrī, *Description de l'Afrique septentrionale*, 74–75.

5 Drory, "The Abbasid Construction of the Jahiliyya," 33–49.

6 Zarcone, "Pilgrimage to the 'Second Meccas'". For an example from the Mughal Motī Masjīd in the Agra Fort see Begley, "The Symbolic Role of Calligraphy". In an inscription in the mosque, the building is described as replicating the heavenly prototype as well as its terrestrial manifestation in Mecca (12).

preserved in ḥadīth) developed into a cornerstone of Islamic law and because of this, the Hijazi cultural and religious landscape, whether authentic or imaginary, became not only paradigmatic, but normative. The diet of the Hijaz was a yardstick for later Islamic scholars to decide which foodstuffs were recommended and which ones should be avoided. Likewise, the sects of the early seventh-century Hijaz (Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians and ‘pagans’) determined the classification of religious communities Muslims encountered in subsequent centuries. This had the rather curious consequence, for instance, that medieval Muslim authors categorized followers of local religious traditions in sub-Saharan West Africa as Majūs, the term which originally denoted Zoroastrians.⁷

The normative implications of Muhammad’s biography correlate to one model of what happens to the geographical framework of religious narratives if the religious community expands: it is transposed. The Islamic legends⁸ of Alexander the Great, more conqueror and less prophet than Muhammad, represent another model: the imaginary geography expands with the religious community. Although the geography of Alexander’s actions in these stories contained some fixed points (such as Macedonia, Persia, Alexandria or India), it was also remarkably malleable. This flexibility is already obvious in the earliest Arabic version of the Alexander story, in sura 18 of the Qur’an, and constitutes a hallmark of its subsequent legacy.

In sura 18, Alexander appears as Dhū ’l-Qarnayn, the ‘man with the two horns’, but the parallels to the Alexander legend leave no doubt about the connection.⁹ The episode is introduced with the following words, which are directed at Muhammad: “They ask you about Dhū ’l-Qarnayn. Say: ‘I will relate to you something of it.’ We made him powerful (*makkannā*) in the earth and gave him a way (*sabab*) to all things.” {18:83–84} Right from the manner in which he is introduced in the Qur’an, Alexander – in his appearance as Dhū ’l-Qarnayn – has a religious function in two respects. God mentions the two

7 See Friedmann, “Classification of Unbelievers” as well as his *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam*; Akasoy, “Paganism and Islam”.

8 Scholars concerned with the transmission of Alexander narratives have developed a precise vocabulary to refer to distinct parts of this body of texts. Since my concern in this article is with the general phenomenon of this tradition and its religious functions rather than with a specific narrative, the terminology used in this article does not refer to any specific text or set of texts, unless otherwise indicated.

9 For the precise relationship see van Bladel, “The Alexander Legend”. Doufekar-Aerts has recently presented the most detailed study of the Arabic Alexander tradition in her *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*.

distinctive features of the conqueror: he is powerful and can go anywhere.¹⁰ With these features, Alexander represents two important attributes of God, although he embodies them in an entirely this-worldly manner. Furthermore, Alexander appears to be part of a divine plan for humankind – why else would God have distinguished him in such a way? The second function of Alexander in this Qur’anic passage is that if we follow the traditional identification of the personnel of the verse, Alexander serves as a test of the Jews for Muhammad. They challenge the latest prophet of the monotheistic tradition to produce the kind of knowledge only a man on a divine mission would have, and Muhammad promptly obliges.

In what follows, Dhū ’l-Qarnayn embarks on three journeys, which provide an internal structure to the section. The first journey {18:85–88} leads Dhū ’l-Qarnayn to people who live where the sun sets. Together with God, he declares that those who do wrong will be punished and those who are good and believe will be rewarded. Dhū ’l-Qarnayn is thus connected to several Qur’anic features which classical Muslim hermeneutics and exegesis has identified: the scholar Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 767), for example, distinguished five ‘faces’ (*awjuh*) of the Qur’an: command, prohibition, promise, threat, and the stories of the prophets.¹¹ Dhū ’l-Qarnayn, in addition to being either one of those prophets or at least very similar in type, is used here to present promise and threat. The religious nature of his mission is obvious not only from the text in which he appears and the way he is introduced in this text, but also because he serves as a mouthpiece for the divine. At the same time, however, it is significant that Dhū ’l-Qarnayn does not have any specific instructions for command and prohibition. He does not explain what it means to ‘do wrong’ (*ḡalama*) and what it means to ‘believe and do righteousness’ (*amana wa-’amila*). While the reader of the Qur’an can easily discern parallels in the stories of other prophets, notably Muhammad, Alexander’s mission also remains somewhat unspecific.

This does not change with the second journey {18:89–91}, which leads Dhū ’l-Qarnayn to people who live where the sun rises, but the Qur’an does not describe his visit in any detail. The third journey {18:92–97}, finally, leads Dhū ’l-Qarnayn to the place well-known in the apocalyptic tradition where people live between two mountains and ask him to build a wall to shield them against Gog and Magog. Dhū ’l-Qarnayn fulfills their wish and announces that when the world comes to an end, Gog and Magog will be set loose again {18:98}. In the final part of the sura, God addresses the reader with direct speech and

10 For the meaning of the crucial word *sabab* see below and van Bladel, “Heavenly Cords and Prophetic Authority”.

11 For Muqātil and his division see McAuliffe, “Exegetical Sciences,” 414.

describes the last day in more detail {18:99–108} and Muhammad is asked to reiterate his message of monotheism {18:109–110}.

The context in which the story of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn appears in the Qur'an is important for its interpretation.¹² As we have just seen, the divine address which concludes the sura emphasizes a topic which has already surfaced in the episode of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn: promise and threat. It also touches on the way these are conveyed to humankind through prophecy. Possibly even more important than the section which follows Dhū 'l-Qarnayn's journeys is the preceding passage. In verses 65 to 82 of sura 18, Moses embarks on a journey with a mysterious companion who is often identified with Khidr, the timeless traveller and green man.¹³ (These verses too are related to the Alexander legend, but for so far unknown reasons replace Moses for Alexander.) In the story, the companion challenges Moses to join him on a journey during which he will see incomprehensible things, but he is not allowed to ask for an explanation. The companion commits acts of seemingly unwarranted cruelty. Moses cannot help himself and enquires what his reasons were. The companion concludes that Moses has not risen up to the challenge, but he supplies an explanation nevertheless. The reason why he killed an outwardly innocent boy for example is that he knew the son would bring grief to his parents, who should have a better child instead. Dhū 'l-Qarnayn's story thus takes up a theme which has already been developed: the wondrous journeys.

Word choice too connects the episode of Moses and that of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn. In verse 68, for instance, the companion challenges Moses, "And how can you have patience for what you do not encompass in knowledge?" (*mā lam tuḥiṭ bihi khubran*). This anticipates the phrase in verse 91, which refers to Dhū 'l-Qarnayn: "... and we had encompassed (all) that he had in knowledge" (*wa-qad aḥaṭnā bimā ladayhi khubran*). While Moses is said to lack knowledge of the deeper truth, God appears to state in the Dhū 'l-Qarnayn episode that He has whatever knowledge the powerful conqueror has. The subtext of the Moses story suggests that the knowledge in question is an understanding of the true nature of human realities.

There are further parallels between the passages. The geography of the adventures of Moses and his companion is equally vague and locates them in the place "where the two oceans meet" (*majma' al-baḥrayn*). The parallel to Dhū 'l-Qarnayn's visit to the place "between the two mountains" (*bayna 'l-saddayn*) connects the mythical geographies. The space in sura 18 cannot be fixed on a map, but rather suggests ubiquity. The Alexander legend thus

12 For the matter of coherence within a sura see, for example, Mir, "The Sura as a Unity".

13 For this sura see Wheeler, *Moses in the Quran*. For Khidr see Franke, *Begegnung mit Khidr*.

lent itself easily to the manifold transformations it underwent in Islamic adaptations, which tried to fix the conqueror's exploits on maps which reflect changing political geographies. Another stock character of the apocalypse, the already mentioned Gog and Magog, illustrate this historicizing of myth well.¹⁴ In classical Islamic texts, Gog and Magog are often identified either as Turks or close to them and the wall which holds them back is believed to be located somewhere in the Caucasus. As is often the case, such identifications were 'updated' several times in accordance with political change. The Mamluk historian Ibn Iyās (1448–1522), for example, identified Europeans in the Persian Gulf with Gog and Magog who had dug a tunnel underneath the wall.¹⁵ Such changes in the historical identity of Gog and Magog had repercussions for the Alexander stories. In Alexander's legend, history and apocalyptic expectation are intertwined. The location of events expected to take place in the future determined the geography of past events and vice versa. Independent of Gog and Magog, the geography of Alexander's explorations expanded with the spread of Islam. If the Qur'anic Alexander went to the place where the sun rises, he must have been to Tibet and China and if he went to the place where the sun sets, he must have seen the Atlantic Ocean. These developments culminated in fanciful legends such as Alexander introducing Islam in China.¹⁶

Unlike some of the other characters in these narratives though, Alexander, a man of flesh and blood, had contributed himself to the spread of his legend. The expansion of Alexander's exploits in the Islamic tradition conveys an impression of what may have been if the Macedonian conqueror had not died at the age of 32. When he returned after his Asian campaigns to Babylon in the autumn of 324, embassies from all over the old world honoured him, among them a delegation from Iberia, who may indeed have expected his arrival in the West.¹⁷

The many facets of the historical Alexander and the flexibility of his legend allowed him to become an exceptional instrument of integration in the medieval Islamic world. Paradoxically, this becomes particularly obvious in challenges to the ethnic identity of the Qur'anic Dhū 'l-Qarnayn. Medieval Muslim

14 For the legacy of these tribes in different traditions see Seyed-Gohrab/Doufkar-Aerts/McGlenn, *Gog and Magog*.

15 Zadeh, *Mapping Frontiers across Medieval Islam*, 146. Zadeh discusses the 'Abbāsīd mission to find the wall of Gog and Magog. For this enterprise see also van Donzel/Schmidt, *Gog and Magog*.

16 Akasoy, "Alexander in the Himalayas". For Alexander in the West see Hernández Juberías, *La Península imaginaria*.

17 Arrianus, *The Landmark Arrian*, 295 (7.15.4).

scholars discussed controversially which historical person corresponds to the man with the two horns. (This is another parallel with the Qur'anic story about Moses since, just like Dhū 'l-Qarnayn, his mysterious unnamed companion required identification.) Most exegetes agreed that he was Alexander the Great, the Macedonian conqueror known in Arabic texts as Iskandar, a view which coincides with the research of modern scholars who compared the Qur'an and Alexander legends. Challenges to this identification came mostly from two sides: Iranians and southern Arabs.

For Iranians in particular, Alexander has long been an ambiguous or even outright evil figure who brought the mighty Achaemenid empire to its knees.¹⁸ While Zoroastrians preserved such a negative view of Alexander, for Muslim Persians under the influence of various literary traditions, the Macedonian conqueror evolved into a Persian hero from at least the ninth century onwards. Although his antagonist, the Persian emperor Darius, became a cruel tyrant in these narratives, Alexander even wept over his body. An example of such a transformation of Alexander is Ferdowsī's *Shāhnāme* ("Book of Kings"), which dates to 1010 and which served as an important source for Niẓāmī's (1141–1209) *Iskandarnāme* ("Alexander Book"). In some Islamic, especially Persian legends, Alexander's parentage anticipated his historical achievement of bringing East and West together. He is the son of the Persian ruler and a Greek princess and thus the half-brother of Darius. Another tradition claims that Dhū 'l-Qarnayn was Cyrus.¹⁹

18 For this see, among numerous other publications on Alexander in Persian literature, Southgate, "Portrait of Alexander"; Yamanaka, "From Evil Destroyer to Islamic Hero". See also Shreve Simpson, "From Tourist to Pilgrim". An impressive record of Alexander's enduring negative reputation in Iran can be found in the BBC documentary *In the Footsteps of Alexander the Great* by Michael Wood which contains footage of a traditional storyteller. In the accompanying book, the filmmaker records an interesting conversation with a young Shiite scholar about the reference to the two-horned Alexander in the Qur'an: "It's a strange passage and, of course, Muslim scholars have argued over it for centuries, but many say it's him. Iranians never accepted Greek rule, but Greek thought was always important to Islam – especially for us Shiites. We still teach the Greek philosophers and doctors in our university courses. For us Plato is still divine! He smiled as we parted: 'Iskandar. Ah, yes, when we were children, my mother used to frighten us. If you don't do your homework, go to bed early, Iskandar will get you!'" Wood, *In the Footsteps of Alexander the Great*, 110.

19 For Cyrus see, for example, ter Haar, "Gog and Magog", at 116. The explanation is that those who pose the question about Dhū al-Qarnayn to Muhammad are often identified as the Jews. Daniel in the Old Testament has a vision of a ram with two horns, one higher than the other. The ram is often identified with Cyrus. "I saw the ram pushing westwards, and northwards, and southward; so that no beasts might stand before him, neither was there

An alternative interpretation came from southern Arabs who argued that ‘Dhū’ was typical of the Himyarite onomasticon. In medieval historiography sympathetic to the Yemeni cause, feats commonly ascribed to Alexander were attributed to local kings.²⁰ The most extensive southern Arabian version of the Alexander legend can be found in the *Kitāb al-tījān* (“Book of Crowns”), composed by Ibn Hishām (d. 828 or 833), who is mostly known as the editor of Ibn Ishāq’s (d. c. 767) biography of Muhammad, the *Sīra*. “The Book of Crowns”, a history of ancient Yemen, describes in some detail the adventures of the Yemeni ruler al-Ṣa’b Dhū ’l-Qarnayn who travels in the company of a certain Mūsā al-Khiḍr, a prophetic figure, back and forth across the known world. The story picks up Qur’anic terminology and speaks of the *sabab* which is nowadays frequently translated as ‘way’. As Kevin van Bladel has established, if the Qur’an is read against the backdrop of late antique cosmology, the term should be understood as heavenly cords. In the “Book of Crowns” though, *sabab* seems to refer to a divine vision. It is these spiritual encounters with the divine which allow Dhū ’l-Qarnayn to continue with his path. One of these visions is described as follows:

Dhū ’l-Qarnayn was sleeping when he saw a *sabab*. It was as if night had covered the whole world until the sun rose white and clear from the West. Dhū ’l-Qarnayn continued to approach the sun and follow its light until he reached a land decorated with the stars of the sky and he walked over them. Then he awoke and told al-Khiḍr about this *sabab*. Al-Khiḍr told him: ‘You have been ordered to go to the West and reach the Valley of Diamonds.’ Al-Khiḍr received a revelation (*wahy*) and he informed Dhū ’l-Qarnayn about this. The true *sababs* came to Dhū ’l-Qarnayn who told al-Khiḍr about them.²¹

Western scholars have only started to explore this curious appropriation of the Alexander legend. Tilman Nagel, most notably, has located its origins among members of the ‘Southerners’, one of the two factions who vied for power in the Umayyad empire and ultimately contributed with their rivalries to its downfall. Nagel also challenged Ibn Hishām’s claim that much of his material had come from Wahb ibn Munabbih (654–732), an authority in the *Isrā’īliyyāt*,

any that could deliver out of his hand; but he did according to his will, and became great.” Daniel 8:1–5 for the relevant vision.

20 For the following see Akasoy, “Alexander in the Himalayas”, and Nagel, *Alexander der Große*.

21 *Kitāb al-tījān*, 96–97.

stories of Jewish origin. Although, according to Nagel, some material about Dhū 'l-Qarnayn may have come from Wahb, the Yemeni 'nationalism' suggests at least a later redaction.

Whether their primary point of reference was the Qur'anic man with the two horns or a tradition less closely connected with scripture, both Iranian and southern Arabian authors claimed Alexander the Great as a hero and prophetic or semi-prophetic figure of their own. As a consequence of these and many other transformations, the geography of Alexander's journeys, whether historical or imaginary, held a vast area together marked by considerable diversity. Medieval Muslim writers had already appreciated this and made Alexander or his companion an 'omniglot'. Those who lived outside the central Middle Eastern region between Nile and Oxus extended Alexander's footsteps into their lands such as al-Andalus or China and thus integrated themselves into the imaginary historical geography of Islam. One may wonder whether transforming the Alexander legend in such a way increased their marginality, but remaining beyond Alexander's limits would have put them on the level of savages like Gog and Magog. In addition to these examples of a horizontal extension we find cases in which Alexander's journey are extended vertically. He travels into the heavens and to the bottom of the ocean.²²

The function of Alexander as an integrating myth in the Islamic world becomes more obvious if we consider his biography in a religious context and compare it to that of Muhammad. The geographical framework of Alexander's legend was open in ways that Muhammad's biography was not. In the Islamic tradition, the landscape of the Hijazi past is fixed and corresponds more or less to what most modern scholars consider plausible. The furthest Muhammad ventured was Tabuk, about halfway between Medina and Damascus. To be sure, the tradition includes geographical anachronisms and later biographers put predictions in the prophet's mouth that announced the conquest of al-Andalus, for example, but that is different from saying that he had actually been there.

Muslims of the formative period sometimes displayed a surprisingly casual attitude to the details of Muhammad's biography. It seems to have been generally acknowledged that he did not actually make many of the reported statements, although it was also assumed he could have made them. Manipulation of Muhammad's biography was possible, but within the relatively narrow limits of what scholars considered theologically and historically plausible. As one of the main sources of Islamic law, the prophet's life had to remain

22 Abdullaeva, "Kingly Flight".

protected from inappropriate uncertainty and manipulation. It had to have taken place ‘in the full light of history’. The rather small number of fantastical elements in Muhammad’s biography such as his night journey to Jerusalem did not concern his actions among men in ways that were relevant for law.

Alexander’s medieval Islamic biographies by contrast contain a great deal of fantastical elements and substantial variation. The man with the two horns was a man of history, but he was also a man of legend and myth. He reflects an Islamic understanding of the relationship between the true religion and human history. Present among humankind since the time of the first prophet, Adam, the true religion became much more tangible with figures like Alexander. Accordingly, integrating Alexander into salvation history was not hard to realize. The religiosity of the Qur’anic Dhū ’l-Qarnayn already betrays this potential.

Alexander’s greater openness also becomes obvious when he appears not merely as the conqueror who set foot on all of the civilised world, but when he acts in his capacity as a prophet. This religious transformation had precedents in Jewish and Christian traditions where Alexander the Great turned into a champion of monotheism.

The religious career of the conqueror began with the historical person. Most notably with his pilgrimage to the Egyptian oasis of Siwa, Alexander had already started a campaign to present himself as a descendant of a god. Although this strategy left traces in the Islamic tradition, Muslim writers did not pick up on Alexander’s self-divination, but attributed a different kind of religious authority to him. Instead of relying on divine descent, he was sometimes presented along the lines of the Biblical prophets. Dhū ’l-Qarnayn’s appearance in the Qur’an indeed predisposed him towards prophethood, but Muslim exegetes did not at all agree on his exact status. While some believed him to be a prophet, others argued that he was simply a wise man.²³ A tradition attributes to both the second caliph, ‘Umar, and to the fourth caliph, ‘Alī, the following response to a man who said ‘Dhū al-Qarnayn’: “Oh God, forgive this. What favour do you have that you would call out the names of prophets, and eventually the names of angels?”²⁴

The Qur’an commentary of the thirteenth-century Andalusī scholar al-Qurṭubī (1214–1273) also connects Dhū ’l-Qarnayn with the sphere of the angels:

23 See also Zadeh, *Mapping Frontiers*, 224 n. 38.

24 Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*, 228 for ‘Umar, according to Ibn Ishāq.

Al-Dāraqutnī says an angel named Rabāqīl used to reveal things to Dhū al-Qarnayn. This angel is the one who will traverse the earth on the Day of Resurrection, and fasten the feet of all creatures by night . . . Al-Suhaylī says the angel was the one who watched over Dhū al-Qarnayn who traversed the earth from the east to the west . . . Others say that the angel was ruling over all the other angels together . . . he was guardian over the other angels, ruling over the treasury of Hell . . . He used to come out and devour people and they were not able to escape from him.²⁵

The religious function of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn was not limited to those traditions which identified him with Alexander the Great. In the *Kitāb al-tījān*, he is blessed with *sababs*, but requires al-Khidr's *wahy* to understand them.²⁶

These disagreements about the status of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn reflect more general debates about Islamic prophetology, which reveal two opposed trends. On the one hand there is an inflationary tendency – the Islamic tradition speaks of 1000, 8000 or even 124,000 prophets before Muhammad.²⁷ Inclusive prophecy may have been a strategy for proselytizing.²⁸ On the other hand, 'orthodox' Sunni Islam also had a restrictive attitude to prophecy. The vast majority of those thousands of prophets were merely warners and had not preached a religious law. (Likewise, as we have seen above, the Qur'anic Dhū 'l-Qarnayn can be associated with promise and threat, but not with command and prohibition.) More importantly, prophecy had ended with Muhammad. The Qur'an was a miracle that could not be surpassed or imitated. Holy men were not exactly few and far between in Late Antiquity. Muhammad was one of them and to many it seemed natural to continue with another prophet after his death. Alternative seventh-century Arabian prophets such as Musaylima were defeated by the early Muslims and became known to history as 'pseudo-prophets'. According to the 'orthodox' Sunni concept of religious authority, scholars interpreted the sacred texts, but no human being after Muhammad could boast of a relationship to God that provided direct inspiration. This was a rejection of Shiite concepts of religious authority as well as of certain Sufi attitudes.

Throughout Islamic history, however, individuals claimed prophetic features in one way or another, often as messianic leaders. A curious example is precisely connected to Alexander the Great. In the year 235 of the hijra

25 Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*, 228.

26 For a more detailed assessment of this interpretation see my "Iskandar the Prophet".

27 Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 10; Krawulsky, *Einführung in die Koranwissenschaften*, 102. Wensinck, "Muhammad und die Propheten".

28 Bashear, *Arabs and Others in Early Islam*, 72.

(850 CE), the inhabitants of the temporary ‘Abbāsīd capital Samarra had the chance to witness a rare event indeed in Islamic history. Accompanied by 27 followers, a man by the name of Maḥmūd ibn al-Faraj al-Naysābūrī appeared at the Khashabat Bābak, one of the ‘principal places in Samarra for the public display of executed opponents and other criminals’.²⁹ Two other followers turned up at the second such place, the Bāb al-‘Āmma. According to the historian al-Ṭabarī (838–923), the only contemporary source to mention this event, Maḥmūd claimed to be ‘Dhū ’l-Qarnayn’, the man with the two horns. The author continues:

In Baghdad, in the mosque of its administrative center (*fī masjid madīnatihā*), there were two others who claimed that Maḥmūd was a prophet (*nabī*) and that he was Dhū ’l-Qarnayn. He and his companions were remanded to al-Mutawakkil [the ‘Abbāsīd caliph; reg. 847–861], who ordered that Maḥmūd be beaten with scourges. He was flogged severely and died thereafter from this beating. Maḥmūd’s companions were imprisoned. They had come from Nishapur and had with them something that they recited (*yaqra’ūna*). They brought their families with them. Among them was a shaykh who bore witness to Maḥmūd’s prophecy (*nubuwwa*), claiming that the latter had received a revelation (*waḥy*) from Gabriel.³⁰

Unfortunately, this seems to be all we know about this curious little rebellion. What did Maḥmūd want? Why did he come all the way from Nishapur in northeastern Iran to Samarra, the capital the ‘Abbāsīds had built about 100 kilometres north of Baghdad to alleviate the problems caused by the numerous Turkish soldiers in their service? Who were Maḥmūd’s followers? Why did he claim to be Dhū ’l-Qarnayn, and who – apart from himself – did he believe Dhū ’l-Qarnayn was?

29 Northedge, *The Historical Topography of Samarra*, 114. Northedge appears to be the only modern scholar who pays attention to this event, which seems to have been ignored by the scholarship on Alexander the Great in the Islamic tradition. Friedmann mentions the event only briefly in his *Prophecy Continuous*, 67.

30 Al-Ṭabarī, *Incipient Decline*, 95. Strangely, al-Ṭabarī continues: “Maḥmūd was flogged one hundred strokes, but did not disclaim his prophecy under the beating. The shaykh who had vouched for him was flogged forty times, whereupon he disavowed Maḥmūd’s prophecy under the whipping. Maḥmūd was brought to the Public Gate (Bāb al-‘Āmma), where he recanted.” The historian is known for juxtaposing mutually exclusive versions of the same event. For Nishapur at the time see also Daniel, “The Islamic East”, 456–457.

At first glance, Maḥmūd from Nishapur may conform to a more general pattern of political unrest. In the eighth and ninth centuries a number of messianic movements vied for power in the Islamic empire, notably the ‘Abbāsids and, among their opponents, the Fāṭimids. Yet, even among this crowd, Maḥmūd is an outlier. While ninth-century messianic leaders typically based their authority on genealogical pretensions (as descendants of Muhammad or ‘Ali), Maḥmūd claimed to be a historical prophet, or at least to be identical with a person unconnected to Muhammad’s family tree.³¹ In later centuries, military leaders in the Muslim East sometimes either named themselves after Alexander or tried to imitate the conqueror in other ways (for example by carrying a copy of the Alexander Romance during wars).³² These strategies, however, do not seem to include Alexander’s quasi-prophetic qualities as Dhū ’l-Qarnayn.

It may be significant that Maḥmūd started his rebellion at the Khashabat Bābak. Literally, the ‘Post of Bābak’ was the place where in 838 the Azerbaijani rebel Bābak’s dead body was gibbeted. Bābak was the most notorious of a whole group of ‘nativist Iranian prophets’ active between 750 and 850 who have been studied by Patricia Crone in a recent monograph. In the words of the historian, “The architects of the [‘Abbāsīd] revolution had recruited a large number of Iranians whose native religious language was a mishmash of Zoroastrian, Manichean, and Buddhist idioms and who, once they became Muslims were prone to casting their imams as divine saviour figures”.³³ Bābak’s followers had become disillusioned with Islam and disgruntled with the Arab Muslim tyrants. Their movement was an offshoot of Zoroastrianism and included doctrines such as the transmigration of souls, vegetarianism and wife-sharing. Eventually, this as well as other Iranian nativist movements were suppressed.

We know too little about Maḥmūd and his revelation to be able to tell whether he fits into this category of rebels. As far as we can tell from al-Ṭabarī’s account, there is no anti-Arab element in the movement and we don’t even know in what language the revelation was composed which Maḥmūd had received and which was recited by his followers. The fact that a shaykh came

31 The only similar case I have been able to identify so far is that of Iranians in mid-eighth-century Baghdad who ‘publicly proclaimed al-Manṣūr to be divine, identified two Khurasānī generals as incarnations of Adam and Gabriel, and proceeded to circumambulate al-Manṣūr’s palace’. (Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 95.)

32 Bridges/Bürgel, *The Problematics of Power*. In this volume, see Sawyer, “Sword of Conquest, Dove of the Soul”. See also Ng, “Global Renaissance” and Fuess, “Sultans with Horns”.

33 Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 94. See her *The Nativist Prophets* and “Babak’s Revolt”.

from Nishapur and attested to the revelation suggests that Maḥmūd, unlike many nativist rebels, did not challenge Islam, but rather attempted to continue the Islamic tradition. Thus, Muhammad too had received his text, the Qur'an, from Gabriel, and it was a text for recitation. According to Muslim theologians, consensus was a sign of prophecy, and it may have come here from the shaykh.³⁴ Furthermore, it seems even more unlikely that such a 'nativist' rebel would identify himself with Dhū 'l-Qarnayn, the person so frequently identified with Alexander the Great. It would thus be surprising that a second Dhū 'l-Qarnayn should have arisen in the Persian cultural area of all places and as early as 850, unless this is evidence of an early wide-spread positive transformation of Alexander. Are there any other ideas related to Maḥmūd's little movement which may have been 'in the air' in mid-ninth-century Nishapur? Crone mentions a curious case of continuous prophecy which appears to have been present at the time. "In Nishāpūr in the time of Faḍl b. Shādhān (d. 260/874) there were Shī'ites who held that there had to be a person who knew the languages of all human beings, animals, and birds, who knew what was in people's minds, what they were doing in every land and home of theirs, whether a child was a believer or an infidel, and also who was a supporter of his and who an opponent; if he lacked the requisite knowledge God would supply it by revelation."³⁵ In Islamic Alexander legends, Dhū 'l-Qarnayn is also enabled to communicate with all people and the Qur'anic texts ascribes exceptional knowledge to him. Furthermore, Maḥmūd as well as the Muslim quasi-prophetic Alexander received revelations. Such qualities may have recommended Dhū 'l-Qarnayn to Maḥmūd, but it is a matter of speculation that such an image of the conqueror and Qur'anic figure had any significance in mid-ninth-century Nishapur.

In his study on the historical topography of Samarra, the British archaeologist Alastair Northedge argued that the execution of Bābak instilled the site with an apocalyptic spirit.³⁶ This connects the location of Maḥmūd's rebellion to the Alexander of Christianity and Islam where he is a stock character of the apocalypse. Independent of the wall which Alexander built to keep Gog and Magog at bay, the Islamic tradition associates him with the end of the world. Rabāqīl, the angel in al-Qurṭubī's above-cited passage about Dhū 'l-Qarnayn, is none other than Raphael, usually identified with Isrāfīl in the Islamic tradition, the angel who blows the trumpet when the world comes to an end. Was Maḥmūd perhaps an Alexander redivivus, announcing the end of time? This too does not seem very likely. As we have seen from the Qur'anic passage,

34 Stroumsa, "The Signs of Prophecy", at 107.

35 Crone, *Nativist Prophets*, 231–232.

36 Northedge, *The Historical Topography of Samarra*, 114.

Alexander's apocalyptic role lies in the past. Gog and Magog may break through their wall, but Alexander – or Dhū 'l-Qarnayn for that matter – does not return to join the apocalyptic battle. If anything, he defined the yardstick for rulers of the last day who had to match Alexander with their conquests.³⁷

In religious contexts, Gog and Magog are of paramount significance as people Alexander interacts with, but, as we have already seen, in the Islamic tradition he is also associated with Khidr who represents the greatest flexibility in time and space a living creature can enjoy.³⁸ The immortal green saint travels in the company of Moses in the Qur'anic verses preceding those about Dhū 'l-Qarnayn. In the Islamic Alexander tradition too, Khidr regularly makes an appearance. In the earliest Arabic version of the Alexander legend, 'Umāra ibn Zayd (767–815) said that Alexander was the son of Philip and a woman versed in astrology.³⁹ Khidr was his cousin. As we have seen above, Ibn Hishām's Yemeni Dhū 'l-Qarnayn travels in the company of Khidr who appears to be conflated with Moses. In what is probably the best-known story about Khidr and Alexander, included among others by Ferdowsī, the two men look for the water of life, but it is Khidr who bathes in the source and becomes immortal, whereas Alexander fails to find the place. Ibn Kathīr (1301–1373) claimed that Dhū 'l-Qarnayn was not identical with Alexander the Great, the Macedonian conqueror, but rather that Dhū 'l-Qarnayn Alexander was the son of the first emperor of Rūm, “a God-fearing and righteous king, whose minister (*wazīr*) was the prophet Khidr”.⁴⁰ This Alexander circumambulated the Kaaba with Abraham, and he and Khidr were “the first to believe in Abraham and follow him”.⁴¹ Taking up Ibn Hishām's narrative, al-Maqrīzī (1364–1442) writes that Dhū al-Qarnayn was a cruel Himyarite ruler who changed his ways. “In Jerusalem he met with Khidr and together they made long journeys to the East and the West.”⁴² An isolated prophetic tradition even claims that Khidr was a prophet with a Persian father and a Byzantine mother.⁴³ In the Islamic tradition, such a mixed parentage is frequently attributed to Alexander.

37 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* 171 and 247. For the source, which was not available to me at the time of writing, see al-Sulamī, *Iqd al-durar fī akhbār al-muntaẓar*, ed. Al-Awini (al-Zarqa, 1989), 77 n. 19. For Christian parallels see Reinink, “Heraclius, the New Alexander”.

38 Franke, *Begegnung mit Khidr*, in particular 46–52.

39 Doufikar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, 37.

40 Ter Haar, “Gog and Magog in Contemporary Shiite Quran-Commentaries”, 113.

41 Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*, 229.

42 Ter Haar, “Gog and Magog in Contemporary Shiite Quran-Commentaries”, 113.

43 Bashear, *Arabs and Others*, 72. For the source, which was not available to me at the time of writing, see Daylamī, *Al-Firdaws bi-ma'thūr al-khitāb*, ed. Sa'īd Zaghlūl (Beirut, 1986), 1/427.

While it may not have been Khidr who appeared in 850 in Samarra, the frequent and early association and occasional conflation with Alexander or Dhū 'l-Qarnayn may explain why the latter was able to travel through time and turn up centuries after having built the wall of Gog and Magog.

That it was Alexander of all prophets, semi- and quasi-prophets who made an appearance long after his death should not surprise us too much. Ambiguity pervades Alexander's global afterlife and a lot of this ambiguity is projected onto his mortality and death. In an article on Alexander in the Persian epic, Olga Davidson traces the motif of the great conqueror's struggle with his own mortality to ancient Greek literature.⁴⁴ In Persian reworkings, however, the theme of the melancholic conqueror anxiously listening to the voices of the dead gained greater importance. Vincent Barletta, who explored the use of the Alexander legend in the Portuguese expansion, suggests that the conqueror was more than a 'trope for empire'. Examining Iberian literature, he analyses historiographical strategies to immortalize empire and conquests, as Arrian had done it for Alexander. In Barletta's analysis, Alexander's "death, like the life that it finally confronts, darkens the rise and development of empire in what would come to be the Latin West. It presents itself as a framework to theorize the perceived glories and all-too-real dangers of empire, the mortal angst that underlies and shapes colonial expansion."⁴⁵

From a Muslim perspective, Alexander died at the centre of what was going to become the 'Abbāsīd empire. In fact, many features of his biography may have made him an appealing figure for the 'Abbāsīds to emulate in their imperial vision: great conquests with a global ambition, a political centre in Babylon, an adaptation of Persian kingship, a mixed response among the Iranians – Alexander's experience may very well have resonated with the 'Abbāsīds who patronised translations of Greek philosophy, among them letters between Alexander and Aristotle.⁴⁶ While the geography of Alexander's conquests coincided much more with the growing Dār al-Islām, he also attracted projections of religious, ethnic, geographical and historical ambiguity.

The legacy of Alexander the Great in the literatures of the Islamic world fascinates because of its complex and multi-layered nature. To date, scholars have mostly dealt with stemmatological questions and literary features as well as certain issues of ethnic and political appropriation. The religious function of Alexander has received less attention. Just how important this function was for medieval Islamic Alexander legend though becomes obvious if we compare

44 Davidson, "The Burden of Mortality".

45 For such an interest already in the Umayyad period see Barletta, *Death in Babylon*, 32.

46 Gutas, "On Graeco-Arabic Epistolary 'Novels'".

the biographies of Alexander and Muhammad as well as the nature of their prophecies.

The discrepancy between the ways the stories of Muhammad and of Alexander were treated confirms that they fulfilled very different functions. It is sometimes assumed that medieval people had such a radically different sense of historical truth that they did not distinguish between 'legend' and 'what really happened', but the different degrees to which these two sets of narratives allowed changes suggest that medieval people did make such distinctions and had different measures of historical plausibility.

At the same time, both stories had an integrating effect. Muhammad was a model for every Muslim. His biography had normative implications and held all believers to a common set of rules and the religion's essence as captured in its historical origins. While it privileges certain Muslims, notably the Arabs, it also has an equalising effect. The vast majority of Muslims have not lived in the prophet's time and face the same challenge of a gap between the world where Muhammad was present and the world where one has to resort to reports. Alexander's much more dynamic biography takes this equalising of believers a step further. He did not only allow for cultural diversity, his legend rather celebrated it. Alexander's great historical feat would have been much less impressive, had he conquered culturally homogeneous territories. While Muhammad represents the tribal, Arabian origins of Islam, Alexander can be said to represent the universal and cosmopolitan side. Encapsulating the late antique, Graeco-Persian heritage of Islam and anticipating its spread into new territories, his legendary representation beginning with the Qur'an also showed that one only had to worship the one God in order to join the community of believers.

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The Portuguese Discovery of Buddhism: Locating Religion in Early Modern Asia*

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For the kingdom of Portugal, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were a period of discovery of new lands and new religions. After Vasco da Gama successfully sailed to India from Europe between 1497 and 1499, the Portuguese Crown pursued the development of commercial markets within a maritime empire in Africa and Asia that it had been granted by the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494. This treaty settled the disputes between Portugal and Castile, the two major navigational powers at that time, by ceding all lands not governed by Christian princes to either the Portuguese or Spanish crowns. In effect, the treaty divided the world in two along a line of longitude running 370 leagues west of Cape Verde in Africa, with Portugal receiving sovereignty over the eastern side and Castile receiving the western side.¹ Papal Bulls tended to confirm this divided Iberian sovereignty over the non-Christian world by assigning the revenues and patronage of the overseas church to the kings of Portugal and Castile, respectively. The results of these diplomatic efforts included granting Portugal the rights and responsibilities to explore Asia for both commercial profit and evangelization. While discovering new markets for trade in spices and other Asian commodities, the Portuguese also discovered the Buddhist religion across Asia outside of the Indian subcontinent.

This history of the encounters between Portuguese missionaries and soldiers on the one hand and Buddhist monks and lay devotees on the other, marks a significant but often overlooked chapter in the story of the western discovery of Buddhism. The contemporary study of Buddhism often traces its roots back to the textual studies of nineteenth-century Orientalist scholars from France, Germany, and England. For many, the flood of research and publications on the subject beginning in the nineteenth century offers a convenient *terminus a quo* for dating the western discovery of Buddhism as a world

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1 Newitt, *Portugal*, 62–63.

religion. Over twenty years ago, Philip Almond argued that Buddhism had been ‘discovered’ by the West in the early nineteenth century, whereas earlier reports by Europeans amounted to not much more than ‘disparate accounts’ of ‘indistinct aspects of the Orient’ that had little impact on the understanding of the religion by Europeans.² Tomoko Masuzawa then argued in 2005 that westerners only recognized Buddhism as a single religious tradition across different regions of Asia in the nineteenth century, and that this discovery was primarily a textual construction.³ Likewise, Thomas Tweed has recently asserted that western interpreters until the middle of the nineteenth century “could not imagine that the Buddhist traditions in, for example, Burma, Japan, and Tibet, claimed the same founder and a common history.”⁴ The conventional wisdom on this subject has been so definitive that some scholars have even gone as far as to suggest that nineteenth-century scholars actually ‘invented’ Asian religions, supplying its adherents with the conceptual basis to see their beliefs and practices as unified into a distinct religious tradition.⁵

These views are in fact misleading and incorrect, as there is much evidence of earlier writings and perceptions of Buddhism as a discrete, coherent, pan-Asian entity.⁶ This is true not only of Buddhists themselves, who traveled or heard accounts of their co-religionists in other lands, but also of early modern European observers. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, missionaries, soldiers, and chroniclers from Portugal or at least sponsored by the Portuguese Crown traveled across Asia to further the imperial ambitions of their king, the universal ambitions of their Church, and sometimes individual ambitions for gaining wealth and status. In these contexts, the Portuguese (by which term I also mean Europeans who worked in Asia under Portuguese patronage, or the *Padroado*) actually began the process of discovering Buddhism by locating it in various Asian lands and in various theoretical spaces vis-à-vis Christianity. By the late seventeenth century the existence of a religion across Asia that worshiped images of the Buddha, known and referred to by many different names, was a well-known fact among European scholars.⁷ The use of the term ‘discovery’ here should not be taken to imply that Europeans were the first to ascertain the existence of a coherent religious tradition devoted to the Buddha, as if Asian Buddhists themselves were somehow ignorant of this fact. Instead, the term ‘discovery’ should be taken to refer to the different methods that the

2 Almond, *British Discovery of Buddhism*, 7–9.

3 Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 122–126.

4 Tweed, “Theory and Method,” 22.

5 For a critique of this assumption, see Lorenzen, “Gentile Religion,” 204.

6 A similar observation has been made in Županov, “Jesuit Orientalism,” 68–69.

7 Lopez, Jr., *From Stone to Flesh*, 137–138.

Portuguese and their agents used to locate the Buddhist religion in geographical and conceptual spaces. Unlike the nineteenth-century Orientalists, who used texts to discover Buddhism as a textual object with its own doctrines and ethics, the Portuguese located the religion of the Buddha some two to three centuries earlier through ethnographic observations and discussions with local informants across Asia.⁸ The picture of Buddhism at which they arrived was typically quite negative, often distorted, but still occasionally informed and certainly significant for understanding the history of the knowledge of Buddhism in the West.

In recent years, scholars of Buddhism and Asian Studies have begun to research the role that missionaries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries played in relating Buddhist practices and ideas to western audiences.⁹ This work adds a novel perspective to longstanding research on the interactions between Western missionaries and Buddhists in Asian cultures.¹⁰ This history of the early encounters between Western and Asian cultures is a vast subject. Since the Portuguese had at least some sort of presence in much of Buddhist Asia, and were often among the first Europeans to establish sustained contacts with Buddhists, the amount of material that could be considered for such an inquiry is substantial. This essay will necessarily restrict itself to providing an overview of early Portuguese views of Buddhism by discussing how several Portuguese authors located Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Japan, China, and Tibet in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Some of these authors like Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606) and Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) are towering figures familiar to many historians and scholars of Buddhism. Others like Luís Fróis (1532–1597), Álvaro Semedo (1585/86?–1658), and Fernão de Queirós (1617–1688) are important but relatively obscure authors to anyone outside of Portuguese imperial history. Collectively, the writings of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century missionaries, soldiers, and chroniclers comprise the earlier ‘discovery’ of Buddhism that took place during the expansion of the Portuguese empire and its patronage of the Catholic Church in early modern Asia. This history of the western discovery of Buddhism precedes even that of Simon de La Loubère’s written account of Thai Buddhism in 1691, which has attracted some scholarly interest for its fair degree of accuracy.¹¹ The process by which Portuguese and

8 Almond, *British Discovery of Buddhism*, 24–25. See also Chapter 4 “The Victorians and Buddhist Doctrine” in the same work for an extensive analysis of British interpretations of Buddhist teachings in that era.

9 See, for example, App, *Cult of Emptiness* and Lopez, Jr., *From Stone to Flesh*.

10 Some notable recent examples of this scholarship include Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City* and Pomplun, *Jesuit on the Roof of the World*.

11 Cf. Bechert, “Earliest Reliable Information,” 57–64.

Portuguese-sponsored authors began making concerted efforts to discover and convey information about Buddhism involved the related activities of mapping the locations of Buddhism, mapping religious identity in Asia, and mapping religious truths and falsehoods within the conceptual space of early modern European thought. In these ways, the Portuguese began identifying and representing Buddhism as a distinct, coherent religion that they encountered across Asia and frequently sought to uproot and replace with Christianity.

1 Mapping Buddhist Places

With the discovery of the sea route to Asia at the end of the fifteenth century, the Portuguese Crown used its growing knowledge of the East to promote trade and religious missions under its *Padroado*. Portuguese interests in re-directing the spice trade between Asia and Europe away from the overland route to the sea route around the Cape of Good Hope promised wealth for the kingdom, and a possible manoeuver to outflank Muslim armies by opening up an eastern front.¹² In this way, commercial and diplomatic interests came to overlap. The Portuguese sought to weaken the Muslim armies across the middle East and in North Africa by finding and allying itself with the kingdom of the legendary Prester John, a Christian king rumored to have descended from one of the three Magi who paid homage to the baby Jesus.¹³ Early in the sixteenth century, the Crown took steps to develop its maritime empire by establishing the *Estado da Índia* based in Goa, from where the Portuguese administered its military, mercantile, and missionary endeavors throughout Asia. In the decades that followed, Portuguese agents pushed further into Asian lands. Maps were increasingly drawn and information about local places and people was increasingly assembled. The missionaries, soldiers, and chroniclers who encountered Buddhists in Asia often recorded their impressions in letters and in books, which were circulated and occasionally printed for a wider European audience. Indeed, by the end of the sixteenth century, Portuguese authors began to acknowledge that Buddhas like 'Xaca' (Shakyamuni) and 'Omitose' (Amitābha/Amida) were being worshipped in the form of idols in disparate Asian lands.¹⁴ The mapping of Buddhist sites and communities in these textual accounts was crucial for giving a sense of the religion as a pan-Asian phenomenon, something comparable to the imagined universality of Christianity. The location of Buddhism in various Asian lands attracted the attention and

12 Disney, *A History of Portugal*, 126.

13 Lopez, Jr., *From Stone to Flesh*, 66.

14 Lopez, Jr., *From Stone to Flesh*, 116–118.

interest of the Portuguese-sponsored missionaries, who recognized that some knowledge of this ‘pagan’ religion would be useful for their imperial and evangelical activities.

Beginning from the latter part of the sixteenth century, authors connected to the Church and the Portuguese Crown began to realize that *bonzos* (monks) and *fotoqués* (Buddhas or ‘idols’) were present throughout most of the lands east of Goa. For example, around 1583, Alessandro Valignano wrote that the *fotoqués* worshipped in Japan – particularly Xaca and Amida – were the same divinities that were worshipped in China and Siam.¹⁵ Around the same time, Luís Fróis connected the ‘false gods’ Xaca and Amida of Japan with the same ones worshipped in greater ‘India,’ meaning South and Southeast Asia.¹⁶ The attribution of Buddhas in Japan with those found elsewhere in Asia suggests that these Jesuit authors recognized important similarities in the communities that they either visited personally or read about in the reports of others. Jesuits like Valignano and Fróis were never very complimentary about Buddhism, but they at least had to acknowledge that it was influential and widespread. For these reasons, the Portuguese learned about this religion of the Buddha through questioning native informants, disputing with Buddhist monks, and less frequently by reading Buddhist texts. Buddhist converts to Christianity such as Anjirō and Paulo Chōzen, a former Tendai priest, supplied valuable information about the religion to Jesuit authors.¹⁷ One such Jesuit, Fróis, studied the *Lotus Sutra* with another colleague for two hours a day over the course of an entire year under the guidance of a former Buddhist abbot.¹⁸

Portuguese writers on Ceilão (Sri Lanka) in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries likewise affirmed that the local religion was not restricted to the island but was also found in distant lands. The chronicler Diogo do Couto (1543–1616), writing at the end of the sixteenth century, noted that the worship of the footprint of ‘Budão’ at what is called ‘Adam’s Peak’ in Ceilão is connected with that found in magnificent pagodes, or shrines, to him all across Eastern lands.¹⁹ Other Portuguese writers in the seventeenth century made special note of the relations between the *bonzos* of Ceilão and those across the Bay of Bengal in the kingdoms of Pegu and Arakan, in present-day Burma. This observation was in some ways astute, given that Buddhist monks from Southeast Asian kingdoms had made frequent voyages to Sri Lanka to receive a more

15 Valignano, *Historia del Principio y Progreso*, 154–155.

16 Luís Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol. 1, 139.

17 App, *Cult of Emptiness*, 11–13, 33–34, 39.

18 App, *Cult of Emptiness*, 61.

19 Barros and Couto, *History of Ceylon*, 113, 178.

authoritative ordination within the Theravāda monastic lineage. However, Portuguese authors interpreted the monastic relations between Sri Lanka and other lands in terms of the spiritual hierarchy of the Catholic Church. The soldier Constantino de Sá de Miranda asserted that the senior monks, or *theras*, among the Sinhalese are like ‘bishops’ (*os bispos*) that have been commissioned by their Supreme Pontiff in Arakan.²⁰ Likewise, near the end of the seventeenth century, the Jesuit chronicler Fernão de Queirós stated in nearly identical terms that the *theras* of Ceilão must be confirmed by the Mahāthera (*Maturanse*), who is the Supreme Pontiff or at least Patriarch, of Arakan.²¹ Queirós’ apparent hesitation in comparing this image of an Arakanese cleric with the Pope is explained by his remarks that others hold the Lamas of Tibet to be the head of this ‘Sect’ that is “received in the whole of further India as far as Japan, and in all Asiatic Tartary which has not accepted Mahometanism.”²² Although correct about the spread of Buddhism, Queirós was mistaken here about the relations between Buddhist monks from different lands. Nevertheless, the description of a leading patriarch across the Bay of Bengal in Arakan that oversees and controls the actions of Buddhist monks in Ceilão was consistent with the efforts of Queirós and other Portuguese writers to portray the Buddhist religion as a diabolical imitation of the True Faith of Christianity.²³

Over time, Portuguese agents were able to compare the written accounts of their predecessors and deduce that there were so-called ‘heathens’ or ‘gentiles’ worshipping this Buddum or Budão in diverse Asian lands. A steady accumulation of oral accounts and written reports in Portuguese Asia gained wide circulation among missionaries and agents of the Crown. As early as 1558, Nunes Barreto (c.1520–1571) affirmed that the Buddhism found in Japan could also be found in China and the Southeast Asian kingdom of Pegu, which was where he guessed it had originated.²⁴ A work that he had redacted in Japan, *Sumario de los errores*, would become a critical work for later missionary writings on Zen Buddhism in Japan and the doctrine of ‘nothingness’ that was believed to lie at the heart of that religion. Over a century later, Queirós cited and summarized the account of the Buddha’s life as recorded by a Portuguese missionary in China named Tomás Pereira (1646–1708). It mentions some of the Buddha’s previous lives helping others before his ‘incarnation’ and miraculous birth as a prince, followed by his quitting the world and performance of penance for

20 Flores, *Os Olhos do Rei*, 183.

21 Queyroz, *Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, 114.

22 Queyroz, *Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, 114.

23 Strathern, “Re-Reading Queirós,” 15–16.

24 App, *Cult of Emptiness*, 41–42.

several years, his 'Redemption' under a tree despite the efforts of demons to prevent it, the distribution of relics of hair and nails to devotees and his gathering of disciples, the transfiguration of his body to promote the veneration of his image, and finally his death and funeral rites.²⁵ Queirós then concludes that the practices of the Chinese are similar to those of the ganezes or monks in Ceilão and elsewhere, "And as it has been observed that the Ganezes of Ceylon, the Talpoys of Arracan, Pegu, Siam and other neighbouring Realms, as well as the Lamazes of Tartary agree with the Bonzes of China and Japan in the essentials of their sect and profession, it is easy to understand that Buddum of Ceylon, the Fo of China, the Xaka of Japan is the same as the Xekia of India, for the word Buddum is only an adapted name, and in Ceylon it means Saint by antonomasia."²⁶ In this passage, the different names for Buddhist monks mirrors the different names for the Buddha, suggesting that early readers and writers were originally mistaken to deduce that terms gleaned from different languages in fact referred to different figures. In time, European observers rightly concluded that Asians in different countries were adherents of the same basic religion.

The recognition of diverse peoples worshipping the Buddha across diverse lands had a significant impact on early Portuguese representations of Buddhism. Its pervasive and contemporary presence meant that it could not be easily dismissed like other paganisms from the ancient world or in coastal Africa.²⁷ The fact that it was associated with the writing of numerous texts also made Buddhism into a formidable rival to the Christian religion. Indeed, some missionaries like Matteo Ricci in China came to associate Buddhism as the primary obstacle to the propagation of the True Faith. However false and diabolical it was often said to be, it still was influential and presented a serious challenge to the Portuguese objective of establishing the Universal Church in Asian lands. It did not take long for the Portuguese to make efforts to identify this Asian religion in order to combat it with more skill and success.

25 Queyroz, *Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, 122–139. A Portuguese version of this text made from a manuscript from before 1688 at the Biblioteca Nacional do Rio de Janeiro appears in Gomes/Pina/Correia, *Tomás Pereira*, 41–61.

26 Queyroz, *Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, 140–141. Lopez intimates that Queirós may have been the first European to figure out that the various names of idols worshipped across Asia were simply regional variants for the one Buddha. See Lopez, Jr., *From Stone to Flesh*, 117–118. This attribution, however, overlooks earlier and similar conclusions drawn by writers such as Nunes Barreto in the sixteenth century.

27 Some Portuguese authors in the sixteenth century showed a tendency to interpret Buddhist and Hindu holy men in terms of Druids, Egyptians, and Romans. See Strathern, "Representations of Eastern Religion," 46.

2 Mapping Religious Identity

The discovery of a religion that rivaled Christianity in its scope both intrigued and dismayed Portuguese missionaries and other agents of the Crown. Being a literate tradition with a well-developed ecclesiastical structure, Buddhism contained various features that struck the Portuguese of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as quite similar to their own religion. In fact, in the latter part of the sixteenth century, the Jesuit Fróis described Buddhism as a ‘*religião*,’ affording it, perhaps unintentionally, with a categorical status comparable to Christianity, although still clearly inferior due to its errors, ignorance, and idolatry.²⁸ The discovery of Buddhism across Asia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries created the need for the Portuguese to account for the existence of a religion that appeared to deviate from those originating from divine revelation. The antiquity and development of Buddhism raised serious questions among those churchmen who possessed a worldview based on Biblical accounts of the creation of the world and the history of humanity after the great flood. Some among the Portuguese, accordingly, began to account for this other religion by following the lead of previous European visitors to Asia like the thirteenth-century Wilhelm of Ruybroek, who argued after visiting a Mongol court that the Far East had previously been evangelized and still contained vestiges of an earlier form of Christianity. Its present, allegedly corrupt state could be attributed to its contamination by Islam and various idolatries over the centuries.²⁹ Others argued that there were vestiges of a pre-revelation original Christianity preserved by natural reason down through the patrimony of Adam.³⁰ Combined with the myth of Prester John – the legendary Christian king in the East who, it was hoped, would combine forces with the rulers of Christian Europe to conquer the Muslims – the idea of an older Gospel spread in Asia by the Apostle Thomas seemed to confirm the distinctive status of Christianity as a universal religion.

28 Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol. I, 168. It should be noted that the term ‘religion’ did not yet carry the same broad designation of an overarching worldview or system of belief and practice, but rather usually referred to the state of life bound by monastic views. Cf. Josephson, *Invention of Religion in Japan*, 16. Nevertheless, Fróis’ use of the term with reference to Buddhist practice does indicate the granting of Buddhism with a measure of parity with Christianity as a conceptual and linguistic category. Cf. Lorenzen, “Gentile Religion,” 206–207.

29 Didier, *Os Portugueses no Tibete*, 30–31.

30 Strathern, “Representations of Eastern Religion,” 56.

Thus, many Portuguese writers handled the problem of religious diversity by identifying Buddhism as a corrupted form of Christianity. A common belief held that heathen religions were obviously the work of the devil, but since the devil could not create anything new but only corrupt what God created, Buddhism could only be a corruption of the true religion.³¹ Whether intentional or not, many of the first 'discoverers' of Buddhism represented the religion in clearly Christian terms. For example, in a 1548 letter attributed to Francis Xavier but likely composed by Nicolò Lancilotto (d. 1558), the author asserts that the Buddha gave a Law, taught people to worship the one Creator God, and ordered his followers to keep five commandments.³² Further, the *religiosos* among them were said to live in monasteries, wear robes, eat in refectories, pray, and preach of only one God, while saying there is heaven and hell.³³ Later, in Tibet during the 1620s, António de Andrade (1580–1634) noted numerous similarities between his faith and those of the native Tibetans. He described Buddhist lamas as being like priests who live in communities like Christian orders, who hold a baptismal rite, and who worship golden images including the female Buddhist deity Tārā that he mistook for Mary, the mother of Christ.³⁴ Around the same time in Bhutan, the Jesuit Estêvão Cacela (1585–1630) remarked that the people there worshipped a God who has three aspects, was born to a virgin, and who taught of heavenly bliss and torments in hell.³⁵ Meanwhile, in early seventeenth-century Sri Lanka, the Portuguese soldier Constano de Sá de Mirando claimed that 'Budão' was a disciple of Moses and taught the same Law as the Jews – despite the erroneous additions made to it by the Sinhallas.³⁶

There are in fact numerous instances where Portuguese writers noted what appeared to them as striking similarities between Buddhism and Catholicism in the form of their religious monastics. Such observations could reinforce the notion that the Asian religion was a corrupted, diabolical imitator of the true Christian religion. Although one may often note between the lines a sense of real tension between the author's wonderment at these likenesses and repulsion at their divergences. Writing on Chinese 'sects' (*seitas*) in the mid-seventeenth century, Álvaro Semedo noted how Xaca's disciples spread his doctrine across most of China and maintain practices such as celibacy,

31 Strathern, "Representations of Eastern Religion," 56.

32 Loureiro, *Os Portugueses e o Japão*, 30.

33 Loureiro, *Os Portugueses e o Japão*, 28.

34 Didier, *Os Portugueses no Tibete*, 45, 98–99.

35 Didier, *Os Portugueses no Tibete*, 233–235.

36 Flores, *Os Olhos do Rei*, 153, 181.

living in monasteries, reciting prayers, and wearing robes like Christian religious orders.³⁷ At the same time, Semedo was still quick to note important differences such as the worship of idols and the refusal to eat meat, fish, and eggs, or to drink wine, which could negate any possibility of mistaking Buddhist priests from Christian ones. Again, in the 1630s, the Franciscan author Paulo da Trindade relayed reports from Sri Lanka, as well as other parts of Portuguese Asia, that juxtaposed the conduct of Buddhist monks with Christian friars. After describing how the '*jangantares*,' or Theras of the Sangha, adorn themselves in yellow tunics, Trindade writes that although they are gentiles, they "give blessings like our monastics, for they must as people of our same profession, in principle, request alms like us at doors with great silence each day."³⁸ Evidently, the author of this report felt a measurable anxiety of influence by these resemblances, as he also notes how the Theras "placate God, or better to say, the demons with sacrifices and prayers," and as proof of their "blindness and ignorance" the wretched (*miseráveis*) gentiles believe that taking home a piece of earth from the island of Ceilão will bestow blessings upon them.³⁹ Portuguese authors seem to swing back and forth between noting points of similarity between Buddhists and Christians, and then disavowing these affinities by attributing them to erroneous superstition or diabolical influences.

Portuguese authors often noted the places where the Christian religion and the religion of the Buddha seemed to overlap, perhaps due to a tendency for seeing themselves in the "Other" and to their expectations for what a religion should be like. And yet the need to distinguish their faith as superior to that of the Sinhales, Japanese, Chinese, and Tibetans, led the Portuguese ultimately to reject the notion that Buddhism and Christianity were at root one in the same. Indeed, similarity could pose just as many problems as diversity when it came to mapping religious identity in early modern Asia. Despite the proclivity that some people had to deduce that Buddhism was simply a corrupted form of Christianity introduced much earlier to Asian lands, numerous Portuguese authors contested the idea that Buddhism shares any meaningful relation to the true Christian faith as taught by the Church. Thus, in 1631, Francisco de Azevedo could write that the Tibetans are neither Gentiles nor Christians, but they follow a Law based on the Christian one but distorted by falsehoods that have been added over the centuries.⁴⁰ Azevedo accentuated the differences between religions by, among other things, highlighting the Tibetans' 'barbaric'

37 Semedo, *Relação da Grande Monarquia da China*, 168–169.

38 Trindade, *Conquista Espiritual do Oriente*, III, 33.

39 Trindade, *Conquista Espiritual do Oriente*, III, 33.

40 Didier, *Os Portugueses no Tibete*, 189–190.

devotion to their lamas' excreta and their customs including eating out of human skulls and playing instruments made from human bones.⁴¹ Buddhist rites, too, could be seen as having diverged from a once sanctified source. On the subject of the Buddha's Footprint allegedly found on Adam's Peak, Couto would suggest that it belonged instead to the apostle St. Thomas, as he would have been the only one capable of performing miracles in the region of India.⁴² In this way, Buddhist claims to the presence of miraculous powers in Sri Lanka are instead assumed to be the effects of the acts of a holy disciple of Jesus. The possibility of miracles is affirmed, but it is restricted to Christian sources. Ricci, for his part, would argue in China that it was the Confucians rather than the Buddhists whose traditions stemmed from an ancient awareness of the one True God, and that Buddhism as introduced from India simply served to corrupt and subvert the original monotheism once shared by the Chinese.⁴³ Such an argument sought to delegitimize Buddhism and reject any notion that it once was party to the True Faith. Efforts to identify Buddhism as akin to Christianity, yet ultimately deviant from its truths, are typified in an account by Valignano, who basically claims that any similarities seen in the Buddhist monks in Japan should be disregarded, since they are "so different from us like a lie is to the truth, and darkness is to light."⁴⁴ In this way, familiarity could easily breed contempt if Buddhist practices and doctrines could be taken as equivalent to Christian ones.

3 Mapping Religious Falsehoods

Having located a 'gentile' religion across Asia that shared some features of religion with Catholic Christianity, the Portuguese proceeded to map out the places where Buddhism deviated from the True Faith. Identifying the alleged errors and falsehoods of the religion of the Buddha became a preoccupation for those missionaries, chroniclers, and soldiers who wrote about Buddhism in different Asian lands. The apparent resemblances between the religions were intriguing but were typically dismissed as superficial as the era of Portuguese imperialism in Asia continued into the seventeenth century. Portuguese authors repeatedly made assertions about the inferiority of Buddhism compared to Christianity. The more similar Buddhism appeared to the so-called

41 Didier, *Os Portugueses no Tibete*, 190–191.

42 Barros and Couto, *History of Ceylon*, 114–116.

43 Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 224.

44 Valignano, *Historia del Principio y Progreso*, 162.

‘True Religion,’ the more necessary it became to locate its falsehoods and shortcomings. Many Portuguese authors did precisely that, commenting on the seemingly far-fetched nature of some Buddhist doctrines, the immoral and irrational practices of the monks, and the allegedly diabolical hand behind its development. Some denunciations of the Buddhist religion appear in accounts of disputes held between Catholic missionaries and Buddhist monks, while others appear in treatises designed to assist the churchmen in the work of conversion, and still others surface in letters and reports composed for European audiences to generate more support for the Asia mission. This adversarial stance was an outgrowth of a change in missionary technique following the Counter-Reformation in the mid-sixteenth century, whereupon religious orders replaced the older method of gaining converts from the natural consequences of contact with Christians with a newer, more confrontational method of preaching the Gospel to gentiles in a more organized fashion.⁴⁵ Such a method called for locating the errors in Buddhism in order to convince its proponents to abandon their faith and to give confidence to Christians that they were following the correct one.

One of the clearest examples of a text attempting to contrast the characteristics of Christianity and Buddhism is a work written by Fróis in 1585 called *o Tratado* (‘The Treatise’) for short, as its lengthy title goes on to explain how it relates the “contradictions and differences of customs between the people of Europe and this province of Japan.” Its focused attention is balanced between aspects of Japanese and European civilization, and thus it departs from the typical Eurocentric view of this cultural encounter.⁴⁶ In this short work, the Jesuit author contrasts aspects of Japanese culture with his own culture, including a section on the differences between the religious of each civilization. For example, on the subject of coveting wealth, Fróis writes, “We give to our neighbors holy beads and souvenir relics of saints for free; the *bonzos* [give] a large number and variety of amulets written on paper for a good deal of money.”⁴⁷ The implication in this particular contrast clearly suggests that the Jesuits in Japan are more virtuous than the ‘*bonzos*,’ their Buddhist counterparts. Whereas many parts of this text simply point out cultural differences in a neutral manner – such as differences in clothing and the designs of places of worship, the contrasts made between priests highlight the superiority of the Portuguese missionaries. This distinction is clearly noted when Fróis writes, “The men among us enter the religious life to do penance and become saved;

45 Costa, “A colonização portuguesa na Ásia,” 175.

46 Costa, “O Japão visto pelos Portugueses,” 25–26.

47 Fróis, *EuropaJapão*, 93.

the *bonzos* enter into religion to live in pleasure and relaxation to avoid labor.”⁴⁸ By revealing what he takes to be the suspect motives and deceptive behaviors of Japanese Buddhist priests, Fróis effectively casts aspersions on the entire Buddhist system. One is led to conclude from his account that the religion of the *bonzos* is based on falsehoods and vices.

Another method of distinguishing the truth of Christianity from the lies of Buddhism was to analyze certain beliefs that appeared to confirm the errors of the latter. Among Buddhist doctrines that were singled out for refutation, many European writers seized upon the notions of the transmigration and mortality of the soul. To the degree that these critics understood the Buddhist theory of rebirth, they connected this teaching to the Pythagoreans, and in turn used transmigration to flag its differences from the Christian faith.⁴⁹ The teachings of Pythagoras on transmigration were known to Portuguese-sponsored missionaries, and they offered a persuasive account as to how Asian Buddhists developed this doctrine. It was argued that the Buddha borrowed Pythagorean teachings in propagating his false teachings.⁵⁰ An anonymous account written from late sixteenth-century Sri Lanka reveals one attempt to understand and explain Buddhist ideas of rebirth to a Portuguese Catholic audience. The author asserts that “[People] say moreover that the souls of the most wretched sinners pass over to the bodies of vile and dirty animals, and of the biggest sinner of all in a dog, and that it conforms to the merits of each one, so that his luck and condition of being rich or poor, tall or short, healthy or sick is appropriate to him, and they travel from body to body, purging their sins until when their efforts are satisfied and they merit passing on to glory.”⁵¹ Such a view of the transmigration of souls is, for this author, evidence of the Sinhalese ‘brutish’ belief that denies free will and measures virtue in how much good fortune one currently enjoys.⁵² In China, Semedo also remarked dismissingly about the Buddhist belief in rebirth. He claimed that the ‘sect of the *bonzos*’ believes in transmigration, in which those with better luck are reborn as humans, those with mediocre luck are reborn as animals that are like humans, and those with the worst fortune are reborn as birds that cannot hope to return to a human state until first taking the form of another animal.⁵³ For this Jesuit, such a belief was proof of the errors found among both common and elite persons in China.

48 Fróis, *EuropaJapão*, 88.

49 Queyroz, *Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, 22, 142.

50 App, *Cult of Emptiness*, 94. See also Ricci, *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, 241.

51 Rego, *Documentação Ultramarina Portuguesa* 1, 251.

52 Rego, *Documentação Ultramarina Portuguesa* 1, 251–252.

53 Semedo, *Relação da Grande Monarquia da China*, 171.

The Buddhist belief in transmigration could at times also be rejected on philosophical grounds by Portuguese authors. Writing about Tibetans in 1626, Andrade laid out an argument in a letter to demonstrate how the idea of transmigration violated reason and thus could not be something created by God. Recounting a discourse that he had with some lamas, Andrade outlined their belief that ‘souls’ (*almas*) transmigrate according to one’s sins and good works, with rebirth as an animal or even in Hell (*Inferno*) possible for sinners, and rebirth as a human or going to Heaven for those who do good.⁵⁴ These rebirths, however, are not permanent states, and it also follows that we have been reborn other times before. Andrade then argues, successfully in his own mind, that such a doctrine is nonsensical since repeated rebirth could only lead to the accumulation of more sin, inhibiting one from going to Heaven, or that because memory is a power of the soul, one should be able to remember one’s previous lives, which is not possible.⁵⁵ A similar rejection of the transmigration of souls is found in Ricci’s treatise *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, in which he attempts to show how illogical and deceptive Buddhist teachings are. The primary reason that Ricci gives for refuting transmigration is that the human soul is different from that of animals, and thus is cannot be made to harmonize with someone else’s body, let alone the body of a bird or a beast.⁵⁶ Based on the assumption that the human soul is permanent and of a different type than that of other living beings, the notion that it could somehow be reincarnated into a lesser animal was incomprehensible for the Jesuit. Related to this objection was the inference that Buddhists denied the immortality of the soul, and thus they also failed to recognize the future glory or suffering the soul was held to experience for eternity.⁵⁷ Ippolito Desideri (1684–1733), whose career in Tibet came near the end of Portuguese patronage for missions in Asia, likewise investigated the doctrines of rebirth and no-self or emptiness in order to undermine the Buddhist teachings that challenged Christian ideas of a creator God who is transcendent and the fundamental ground of all existence.⁵⁸ Clearly, the difficulties authors had in reconciling Buddhist notions of rebirth

54 Didier, *Os Portugueses no Tibete*, 127.

55 Didier, *Os Portugueses no Tibete*, 128–129. Later in Tibet, the Portuguese Jesuit Manoel Freyre signaled his difficulty with the idea of transmigration by arguing in a letter written in 1717 that it could not expiate the body of sin, and further that the killing, cooking, and eating of living beings meant that one could never be without sin. See Sweet, “Desperately Seeking Capuchins,” 20.

56 Ricci, *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, 249–251.

57 Fróis, *EuropaJapão*, 91.

58 Lopez, Jr., *From Stone to Flesh*, 111–112.

with the Christian soteriology served to focus attention on these teachings, as they made convenient targets for disparaging the religious other.

Some of the missionaries given patronage by the Portuguese in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries also explored the core philosophical principles of Buddhism, particularly those that relate to the religion's ideas of a first principle and an ultimate goal. These subjects were of interest to Catholic missionaries since they facilitated inquiries into what Buddhists believed regarding God and salvation in Heaven. Once the Portuguese determined that Buddhists did not belong to the True Faith, the need to identify the nature of their false beliefs became more pressing in order to facilitate their conversion. Figuring out what Buddhists believed concerning the creation of the world and the destination of humankind was thought to be germane for disabusing them of their errors and directing them to the Truth. Portuguese missionaries in general were consistently more interested in pursuing and isolating what was false in Buddhism than searching for what could be true in a pagan faith that was bereft of divine grace.⁵⁹ Jesuit authors in Japan were particularly dedicated to mapping the falsehoods of Buddhism, as Urs App has shown in his study of the genealogy of 'Oriental Philosophy' in European thought. App details how a 1556 text called *Sumario de los errores*, composed in Spanish and based on the account of a convert who was formerly a Tendai priest paved the way for later Jesuits to characterize Buddhism in terms of 'outer' and 'inner' teachings about the nature of existence and religious goals.⁶⁰ The work itself explains how wise ones (*sabios*) understand the inner sense of the texts and are in theory able to attain the first cause (*primeira causa*), which is the end of all created things.⁶¹ Those who are not learned in the scriptures are said to perform rites to Amida or Xaca and seek rebirth in heaven, while remaining subject to birth and death.

Valignano sought to learn about Buddhist doctrines in Japan in order to assist his fellow Jesuits in their activities to refute the monks and convert the Japanese. Having embraced the idea of two different kinds of teachings, he also noted how Buddhist '*bonzos*' generally preach that the good people who follow the Buddha are reborn in Heaven, while the wicked are reborn in Hell, despite the fact that their inner laws speak of attaining a state of 'satori,' which is akin to the perfection and glory of a Buddha (*fotoquè*).⁶² Valignano went on to connect this state with the idea of returning to a kind of first principle that differs from the Creator God recognized by Christians. Based upon the reports

59 Županov, "Jesuit Orientalism," 59, 64–65.

60 App, *Cult of Emptiness*, 36–37.

61 Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos del Japon*, 666–667.

62 Valignano, *Historia del Principio y Progreso*, 158–159.

of others and his own inquiries while in Japan, Valignano concluded that Buddhism lacked an omniscient creator God and instead embraced a “clearly ridiculous” first principle that is thoughtless, idle, and aloof.⁶³ For missionaries like Valignano, the notion that the created world was not created and governed by a divine hand struck them as absurd and even immoral.

What made matters worse, in the views of many Portuguese, was the apparent fact that Buddhists across Asia worshipped ‘idols’ while still denying the existence of the Christian God. From the perspectives of the Portuguese, the worship of images of the Buddha, depicted in various forms and manners, was a sign of depravity if not diabolical influence. For instance, the Dominican friar Gaspar da Cruz (1520–1570) wrote disparagingly about the worship of idols by the Chinese. Having argued that the Chinese (*os chinas*) have no knowledge of the one God, Cruz goes on to note how they worship a female image that might be a remnant of an earlier evangelization by St. Thomas the Apostle that has since been forgotten, images of various local dignitaries, any stones erected on their altars, and idols of gods he calls *Omitoffois* (i.e. “O Mi T’o Fo” or Amitābha Buddha), to which they offer diverse items such as incense, tea, and perfumes in temples of idols found in many towns.⁶⁴ What Cruz took to be Mary was actually the female bodhisattva Kuan Yin, but his other observations about the Chinese worship of images on altars in temples appears to have been reasonably accurate. Later, a Jesuit writing about Kuan Yin identified her correctly and disparaged the Chinese ‘idolaters’ belief that praying to her will spare their children of small pox and other illnesses.⁶⁵ From a Portuguese perspective, the worship of any idol deserved ridicule or condemnation.

Other Portuguese authors asserted that Buddhists were essentially atheists who denied the ‘First Cause’ altogether. This critique was more commonly made by Portuguese authors outside of the China and Japanese missions, and it targeted the failure of Buddhists to recognize and worship the Christian notion of divinity. Although some writers, like Andrade in Tibet, mistook certain concepts related to the Buddha as evidence for the belief in a single Creator God, most other authors realized that Buddhists did not recognize such a deity.⁶⁶ Writers like Sá de Miranda and Queirós on Ceilão critiqued the Sinhalese denial of a First Cause behind existence as an example of their ‘savagery’ and ‘ingratitude,’ by which they are said to attribute everything to

63 App, *Cult of Emptiness*, 80.

64 Cruz, *Tratado das coisas da China*, 250–252.

65 Gouvea, *Asia Extrema*, 332–333.

66 Didier, *Os Portugueses no Tibete*, 56.

chance rather than a divine plan.⁶⁷ For these authors, the notion that events would occur only randomly was a disturbing and, in their minds, vulgar one that failed to recognize God's power and authority in the world. The failure to grasp the true nature of the Christian God meant that Buddhists across Asia maintained supposedly erroneous ideas about salvation. For Couto in Ceilão, this included the naïve belief that people can purify themselves by performing simple ceremonies like bathing in a river and ringing a bell.⁶⁸ Even Andrade, who believed the Tibetans possessed some vague notion of God, still claimed they were wrong to think that one could remove sin and go to heaven simply by fasting, wearing certain clothes, and removing one's boots.⁶⁹ Whether their observations and interpretations were accurate or not (and in many cases they were not), Portuguese authors frequently condemned Asian Buddhists for failing to acknowledge God's role in creation and salvation.

To be sure, there is not much evidence to show that early modern Portuguese writers acquired a clear sense of Buddhist soteriological goals, which are said to culminate in the attainment of nirvana. Their denial of the Christian God and their alienation from the Catholic Church meant that Buddhists were given no chance to obtain the glory of salvation. Portuguese attention to Buddhist soteriology thus became another way to map the falsehoods of the religion. Early on, however, there was some recognition that Buddhists were aware of the prospect of reward in heaven and punishment in hell after this life. In a work on the Chinese, Duarte de Sande (1547–1599) and Valignano affirmed that the Buddhists have some notion of the life to come with its rewards for the good and punishments for the wicked, although their assertions on the matter were said to be fraught with errors.⁷⁰ Ricci, in one of the few neutral comments that he made about Buddhism, stated that even Buddhists in China “believe in the rewards of Heaven and Hell” like his more favored Confucians.⁷¹ And yet the Buddhist recognition of an afterlife with moral consequences was deemed to fall short of the understanding of God's grace and its role in salvation. For some, the worship of the Buddha was sufficient to conclude the error of the Buddhists' ways. In the late sixteenth century, for example, Couto acknowledges that the idol called Budaõ was sent by God from Ceilão to Pegu to “give them light,” which appears to reflect his faulty understanding of what a Buddha

67 Flores, *Os Olhos do Rei*, 153; Queyroz, *Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, 120.

68 Barros and Couto, *History of Ceylon*, 109–110.

69 Didier, *Os Portugueses no Tibete*, 130–131.

70 Loureiro, *Um Tratado Sobre o Reino da China*, 106.

71 Ricci, *True Meaning of Lord of Heaven*, 337.

is and does as a result of his 'enlightenment.'⁷² A somewhat more accurate assessment of nirvana, however, appears in the 1627 work of João Rodrigues Tçuzzu (ca.1560–1633/34), who in writing on Japanese Buddhism, affirmed that the ultimate end is the peace of the soul, which is obtained by contemplation of impermanent things and the mortification of the body's passions.⁷³ Aside from his mischaracterization of a 'soul' that is at peace, Rodrigues came closer to understanding the Buddhist conception of Nirvana than many others did by that point in the history of the Portuguese encounter with Buddhism. In any event, the Portuguese were in general agreement that the Buddhists of Asia strove toward a religious goal that appeared invalid and markedly different from their own.

In addition to criticizing Buddhist doctrines, several early modern Portuguese writers also disparaged the behavior and motivation of the monks in the religion. As noted above, many authors referenced the similarities of dress and conduct between Christian and Buddhist religious orders. The resemblances between these groups gave additional impetus to locate where the Buddhists fell short compared to Christian monks and priests. Buddhist monks and lamas are consistently portrayed as being greedy, lazy, and ignorant, which served to reinforce the picture of Buddhism as a religion of falsehoods. In his treatise comparing European and Japanese customs, Fróis lists a litany of shortcomings to be found among the *bonzos*. He argues that the *bonzos* are obsessed with wealth, looking for different ways to fleece their donors and tolerating their donors' sins so as to maintain their incomes.⁷⁴ He also asserts that they falsely claim to have renounced meat and fish, and often appear drunk.⁷⁵ Later, in Tibet, Andrade concluded that the lamas who claimed to heal sickness by breathing on the bodies of the infirm, as well as those who claimed to know events that occurred far away were only deceiving people to obtain their respect and alms.⁷⁶ Further, Sinhalese monks are disparaged by Queróis for entering the order to maintain an easy living without labor and for renting out their monasteries to travelers for payment.⁷⁷ Buddhist monks were frequently

72 Barros and Couto, *History of Ceylon*, 108.

73 Rodrigues Tçuzzu, *Historia da Igreja do Japão*, 408–409. It is worth noting here that Rodrigues's 1627 account is comparable to that of the French envoy to Siam, Simon de La Loubère, whose 1691 report has been praised by the late Buddhologist Heinz Bechert for being the 'earliest' reliable account on Buddhist soteriology. See Bechert, "Earliest Reliable Information," 58.

74 Fróis, *EuropaJapão*, 88–89.

75 Fróis, *EuropaJapão*, 89–91.

76 Didier, *Os Portugueses no Tibete*, 116–117.

77 Queyroz, *Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, 140.

cast in the roles of adversaries to the Portuguese missionaries in Asia. António de Gouvea (1592–1677), a Jesuit in the China Mission, referred to the *bonzos* as teaching a diabolical doctrine and working to impede the spread of Christianity. In one of his annual letters, Gouvea recalls a haughty monk who persuaded a widow to perform superstitious rites in place of Christian ones, and after impudently insulting the Christian images on the altar of the deceased husband, he suddenly fell down to the ground, having been smacked by a cross wielded by God, according to the Jesuit.⁷⁸ Similarly, in another account, Gouvea describes how a prideful monk dared God to punish him, and then three months later, an altar of idols fell on him, taking his life after his last words acknowledged the falsity of his idols.⁷⁹ In Japan, Fróis wrote of the shameless and impolite monks who challenged the Jesuits to disputations but were defeated and left speechless.⁸⁰ By comparison, in Tibet, Andrade faulted the lamas for not knowing the meaning of the *mantra* they recite, accusing them of “praying like parrots without knowing what they say.”⁸¹ In most Portuguese accounts from this era, Buddhist monks are depicted in unflattering ways as immoral obstacles to the work of missionaries.

The most serious charge leveled at Asian Buddhists by Portuguese authors, however, was that they were in league with the Devil, who directed their teachings and practice away from the true God and his Law. Numerous authors invoked an older doctrine of ‘demonic plagiarism,’ in which it was assumed that false copies of the true religion were produced by the Devil to mislead people away from the Faith.⁸² The Portuguese discovery of a religion with scriptures, images, and a priesthood unrelated to Christianity could be easily explained by diabolical interference, as could the resistance of most Buddhists to embracing the faith of the missionaries. Thus, for instance, the Buddha’s Tooth Relic that was worshipped in Ceilão and Pegu was dismissed by Couto as being actually a “relic of the devil.”⁸³ The diversity of gods appearing as repugnant images in Ceilão, coupled with the so-called ridiculous ceremonies that their followers perform, are likewise said to be the work of the Devil.⁸⁴ Meanwhile, the Devil was said to have flourished in Japan, where he was worshipped by the

78 Gouvea, *Cartas Ânua da China*, 82–83.

79 Gouvea, *Asia Extrema*, 378.

80 Fróis, *História de Japan*, vol. 1, 158.

81 Didier, *Os Portugueses no Tibete*, 132.

82 Lopez, Jr., *From Stone to Flesh*, 114.

83 Barros and Couto, *History of Ceylon*, 212.

84 Flores, *Os Olhos do Rei*, 53.

many different sects and idolatries found there.⁸⁵ Fróis blamed the Devil for using the monks to interrupt the sermons of the Jesuits in Japan, as well as for bearing false witness against them.⁸⁶ The efforts of Buddhist monks to impede evangelization efforts was easily attributed to the Devil's influence. Rodrigues went even further by accusing Buddhist monks as being part of the army of the Devil involved in a struggle to conquer humankind.⁸⁷ Similarly, the images being worshipped in Buddhist temples were typically associated with devils, as noted by Cacela in Bhutan.⁸⁸ Indeed, the images of Buddhas and Buddhist deities struck many Portuguese as idolatrous and disturbing, since they appeared so different from those of Jesus Christ and Christian saints. Later, in the period after the collapse of Portugal's maritime empire in Asia, Manoel Freyre (b.1679) even accused the Devil as being behind the possession of Tibetan lamas who were falsely believed to be the reincarnated leaders of monasteries, through a ruse of locating objects that once belonged to the deceased lama.⁸⁹ The links made between Buddhists and the Devil actually served several purposes for the Portuguese in Asia. They underlined the falsity of a religion that on the surface, at least, seemed to rival Christianity in its organization and geographical reach. They could be used to account for why an earlier evangelization of the Gospel in Asia had gone astray in the past. And they also offered a convenient explanation as to why more people did not convert to the True Faith in the present.

4 Mapping Religious Encounters in Early Modern Asia

The Portuguese 'discovery' of Buddhism across Asia occurred in stages with variable degrees of accuracy and hostility. The missionaries, soldiers, and chroniclers who worked for the Portuguese Crown engaged in similar procedures of accumulating, comparing, and refuting reports of a '*religião*' of the Buddha found across most of Asia.⁹⁰ Such reports circulated orally and in written accounts, with hundreds of books about Asia, along with travel accounts,

85 Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol. 1, 137.

86 Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol. 1, 166. Ironically, Fróis also notes in places that Buddhist monks occasionally accused Jesuits in Japan as being the "instruments of the devil" (*instrument do diabo*) themselves. For instance, see Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol. 1, 169.

87 Feldmann, "As disputas de São Francisco," 284–285.

88 Didier, *Os Portugueses no Tibete*, 238.

89 Sweet, "Desperately Seeking Capuchins," 22.

90 Županov, "Jesuit Orientalism," 45.

pamphlets and other publications, appearing in the seventeenth century alone.⁹¹ This widespread circulation of information about Buddhists and their religion was facilitated by the formal and informal ties shared by Europeans in Portugal's Asian empire. We know, for instance, that Queróis made use of materials written by Tomás Pereira in China and Constantino de Sá de Miranda in Sri Lanka, among others in his voluminous work written from Goa.⁹² Moreover, the influences of *Sumario de los errores* and Valignano's Catechism on subsequent accounts of Buddhist thought composed in Asia and Europe has been convincingly shown.⁹³ It must also be remembered that some of these works were sent back to Lisbon and Rome, where they were printed and reproduced for European audiences, further shaping early understandings of Buddhist cultures. Additional research on the networks of information used by Portuguese and other authors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is still needed. However, the patterns of the representations of Buddhism outlined here suggest that Portuguese opinions and accounts of the Buddhist religion tended to be shared and replicated in the works of others, and these were gradually built up to fashion a loosely coherent portrayal of the Buddhist religion in Portuguese Asia and Catholic Europe.

Broadly speaking, this European view of Buddhism was constructed in religious and cultural encounters structured along Portuguese imperial and missionary activity in early modern Asia. They relied mainly on native informants and their own ethnographic observations for their knowledge of Buddhism, and they rarely strived to be objective and dispassionate in writing their accounts. Their reports and treatises served the purposes of conveying some basic information about the practices and beliefs of Buddhists in order to expose their weaknesses and facilitate conversions and, at times, the spread of imperial power. Modern scholars of Buddhism have largely ignored or dismissed these Portuguese accounts of the religion, lacking access to Portuguese sources and judging them to be incomplete or woefully misinformed about Buddhist traditions in Asia. When one can read Sanskrit, Pāli, Chinese, Japanese, or Tibetan texts written by Buddhists, it may seem rather pointless to pick up works written in Portuguese, Spanish, and Italian in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by missionaries who were suspicious, if not downright hostile to Buddhism. However, these latter works reveal important insights about the early period of intercultural and interreligious encounters between Asian Buddhists and European Christians. They illustrate how Buddhism was first located on the

91 Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. III, 1890.

92 Županov, "Jesuit Orientalism," 53.

93 See App, *Cult of Emptiness*.

geographical and mental maps of Europeans. Even if the impact of their accounts on shaping western conceptions about Buddhism were limited and largely displaced by the Orientalist discourses of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these earlier accounts remain significant for understanding the history of religious encounters and for conditioning the ways that Buddhists and Christians viewed each other in the long era of European colonialism that followed the Portuguese expansion into Asia.⁹⁴

At the height of its power, the Portuguese maritime empire in Asia had a presence that spread along coastal cities from western India to southern Japan. Missionaries and soldiers made their presence felt in territories under Portuguese rule or where the Portuguese were present in small numbers as guests of local rulers. This paper has focused on Portuguese representations of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Japan, China, and Tibet in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when the Portuguese empire was still intact. There were Portuguese visitors elsewhere in Buddhist Asia too, including Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam, and there are some extant reports of what they saw and thought about Buddhism in those lands.⁹⁵ Furthermore, a number of authors who wrote accounts of varying lengths about Buddhism also traveled to different lands and would have had the chance to learn about the different kinds of the religion. Valignano spent time in both Japan and Macau, and was able to recognize by the end of the sixteenth century that there were different sects of the *bonzos* that interpreted their doctrine differently.⁹⁶ That the Jesuit viewed this sectarianism as a flaw and a sign of confusion among Buddhists is almost beside the point, since his writings demonstrate that early modern authors in Portuguese Asia knew Buddhism was not only spread across much of Asia but that it also could take distinctly different forms. The early development of European knowledge about Buddhism was directly supported by the expansion of Portuguese imperialism and trade throughout maritime Asia. The political and commercial networks that resulted from this activity also

94 For an analysis of how British missionaries viewed Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the nineteenth century, in ways that resemble the accounts of earlier Portuguese missionaries, see Harris, *Theravāda Buddhism and the British Encounter*. For a study of how Portuguese colonialism affected Buddhist conceptions of religion and culture, see Berkwitz, *Buddhist Poetry and Colonialism*.

95 For examples of accounts of Buddhism in Southeast Asia, see Manrique, *Breve Relação dos Reinos*, Pinto, *Peregrinação*, Rhodes, *Rhodes of Viet Nam*, and Teixeira, *Portugal no Camboja*. The work of Vincenzo Sangermano (1758–1819), while significant for the study of Buddhism in Burma, was undertaken outside of Portuguese patronage and subsequent to the period considered here.

96 Valignano, *Historia del Principio y Progreso*, 157–158.

facilitated the expansion of Catholic missions in lands both under and outside of Portuguese control. However, by the middle of the seventeenth century, the Portuguese *Estado da Índia* began to decline in power. While giving greater attention to Brazil, Portugal began to shift its already sparse resources away from Asia, and its overstretched maritime empire began to lose control over cities and factories to local rulers and to the growing naval power of the Dutch.⁹⁷

The disintegration of Portugal's empire in the East in the latter part of the seventeenth century interrupted the flow of western reports about *bonzos*, their idols, and beliefs in various Asian lands. Then, in the eighteenth century, the growth in the number of adversaries to the Jesuits throughout Portuguese society and Europe as a whole undermined the influence of the society and their written works. Opposition within the Church to Jesuit accommodationist methods of permitting converts to retain some of their traditional rituals grew into full-scale controversies, leading to censure for the missionary techniques pioneered earlier by Valignano in Japan, Ricci in China, and Roberto de Nobili (1577–1656) in South India. Alternatively blamed for undue political influence, poor military advice, and extravagant landholdings and financial demands, the Jesuits became increasingly unpopular and marginalized in Asia and Europe.⁹⁸ The antipathy towards the order and the rise of Dutch, French, and British power in Asia effectively combined to conceal for years the early accounts of Buddhism written mainly by Jesuits and other Catholic religious orders. This essay, however, has sought to turn attention back to the role of the Portuguese in the western 'discovery' of Buddhism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The broad overview taken intentionally here is suggestive of the need to supplement our knowledge of the history of the study of Buddhism. Almond's contention that 'Buddhism' was only discovered in the nineteenth century and constructed as a textualized object of study in western libraries is no longer tenable.⁹⁹ One should instead look to the ethnographic accounts of Portuguese-sponsored missionaries and soldiers from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for locating the initial discovery of Buddhism by the West.

Portuguese writers located Buddhism in at least three different spheres while introducing the religion to western audiences. First, they located Buddhism in specific places across Asia, in cities and countries for which a geographical knowledge was still emerging but rapidly taking shape in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This accumulation of reports was significant since it effectively made Buddhism into a problematic candidate for universality,

97 Costa, "Colonização Portuguesa na Ásia," 177–178.

98 Alden, *Making of an Enterprise*, 657–660.

99 Almond, *British Discovery of Buddhism*, 11–13.

a feature that in theory should have been reserved for Christianity alone. Second, they located Buddhism within the category of a religion, or at least a 'sect,' with features of doctrines, rites, and a priesthood that made it broadly comparable to non-pagan religions like Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. This recognition effectively required more attention be paid to Buddhism and generated numerous comparisons between religions to identify their differences and preserve the superiority of the Christian faith. Third, the Portuguese located Buddhism outside of the Christian History of Divine Revelation, which meant that its doctrines and practices, however similar to those of the Church, ultimately had to be taken as false and even diabolical. Missionaries and other Portuguese authors refuted the beliefs and rites that they discovered in Buddhism, pointing out their alleged falsehoods and unreliable foundations. Even if the contemporary scholar does not learn much about Buddhism from early modern Portuguese accounts, one still learns a great deal about how early religious encounters generated and conditioned European knowledge about religious others in Asia.

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From Geographical Migration to Transmigration of Souls: Negotiating Religious Difference between Space among Jews in Early Modern Safed

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The sixteenth century involved religious “translocation” on a number of levels for Jews: across physical geographies, boundaries of communal affiliation, and, in the spiritual realms, across the divides of life and death, male and female, human and animal, demonic and angelic. At the center of all of these were also Jews’ relations with the religious other. I suggest that “translocation”, that is movement in a transformative sense, in all of these realms, whether literal travel from one place to another, the accompanying disorientation and reorientation tied to emigration from one cultural milieu or even one religion to another, and finally the transfer from spirit to body, from male to female, human to animal to mineral, were all linked in the early modern period. Lurianic tales of *gilgul*, the transmigration of spirits, served as a way of symbolically and rhetorically working through the complex changes of place, roles, and identities that early modern Jews faced.¹ The word, “translocation” encapsulates these processes well, for it implies movement with transformation, but also a sense being in a new place(s) or state(s) of being without having entirely abandoned the old one(s). Stories centering on encounters with the religious other, including “bad” Jews may be seen as an attempt by Jews, often having come from Europe to the Middle East, or from one part of the Islamicate world to another, to “relocate” themselves religiously and ontologically in the face of flux.

For the purposes of this article, I will focus on the ways in which encounters between Jews, non-Jews, and sinful Jews both in this world, and in the spiritual realms are presented in *Shivhei ha-Ari* (“Ari” being a nickname for the sixteenth century Jewish mystic, Isaac b. Solomon Luria Ashkenazi), the spiritual autobiography, *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*, of one sixteenth-century Jewish mystic, Ḥayyim Vital, Ḥayyim Vital’s treatise on *gilgul* (the transmigration of souls), and the chronicle, *Divrei Josef*, by Joseph b. Isaac Sambari, a Jewish chronicler writing in seventeenth-century Ottoman Egypt, but focusing on personalities and

¹ “Lurianic” refers to Lurianic Kabbalah, a form of mysticism based on the teachings of Isaac Luria that developed in Safed, Palestine. See Fine, *Physician of the Soul*.

events in the sixteenth-century. The first part of the article will explore encounters between “holy men” across the boundaries of religious communities. The second will analyze the ways in which religious difference was polemicized in descriptions of possession and reincarnation. Encounters in both “realms” very much reflect types of religious translocation, whether across geographical space, communal boundaries, or from the world of spirits to the physical world, often hopping from body to body, crossing genders, religious affiliations, and even species in the process. All of these imagined “translocations” reflect efforts to come to terms with the consequences of real-life migration and life involving daily contact with those of different religious views, both those ostensibly part of the Jewish community, and those outside of it.

The period between the last decade of the fourteenth century and the sixteenth century was an unsettling time for Jews in Europe and in Muslim ruled-lands, both figuratively and literally. Unsettling in Europe because of attacks on Jewish communities, such as those in Spain in 1391; because of disputations, often forced, but always highly pressured, between representatives of the Jewish communities and mendicants and Jewish converts to Christianity; and because of expulsions of Jews from Christian lands, 1396 from France, 1492 from Spain, and 1496 from Portugal, to name but a few of the most important.² Such events certainly placed psychological and religious stress on Jews affected by them, but they also prompted a substantial reshuffling of European Jewish populations, as those displaced sought new homes elsewhere in Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, Byzantium and then, eventually, the Ottoman Empire as it expanded to encompass many of these regions.³ While not as distressing as losing one’s home, proximity to friends and family, or right to choose religious affiliation without threat of harm, as displaced Jews had, having a sudden influx of impoverished co-religionists, with different customs, liturgies, and languages, was also “unsettling” to those more fortunate Jews who attempted to assist the newcomers.⁴ Nor did this movement of Jewish populations only affect other Jews. Cities and kingdoms, both Christian and Muslim, were changed as they incorporated new peoples within their boundaries. With the influx of Jews from multiple areas to new regions came the opportunity to exchange ideas, both across regional traditions of Jewish religious and

2 Soyer, *Persecution*, 182–240; Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*; Baer, *Jews in Christian Spain*; Jordan, *French Monarch and the Jews*; Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry*, 14, 23–41.

3 Einbinder, *No Place of Rest*; Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry*, 14–18, 26, 32–33, 37–42.

4 Einbinder, *No Place of Rest*, 41, 63–68, 70, 72, 76–77; Jordan, “Home Again”; Latham, “Contribution”; Davidson, “Communal Pride”.

philosophical learning, but also across confessional boundaries.⁵ Italy, especially Venice and Venetian-ruled Crete, and Cyprus, was one region of such intensified exchange during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁶ Ottoman-ruled Palestine, in particular the sixteenth-century town of Safed, if anything, was a site of even greater interchange and contact than Crete or Italy, though some of the mystical trends among the Jewish settlers there owed much to slightly earlier or concurrent intellectual foment among Jewish and Christian natives and settlers in Crete, Venice and parts of Tuscany.⁷ Safed and towns to which it was closely connected, such as Jerusalem, not only had Jews from Northern Europe, the Iberian Peninsula, Italy, Greece and the Balkans, but also from Morocco, Baghdad, Egypt, and Ethiopia in addition to those who were native to the region.⁸ The mixture was not always a harmonious one. Tension between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews was not uncommon, and it seems that local Jews resented pressures from the newcomers to change their ways to conform more closely to the practices and moral outlook of the emigrant Jewish communities, in addition to finding the economic burden of caring for the newcomers troublesome. Communities from each region attempted to maintain their own synagogues and schools when possible, though small numbers, curiosity, and respect for individual teachers, regardless of origin, often pushed individuals or groups of Jews to attend the places of worship and learning circles of Jews from other regions.⁹ Many Jews, depending on their individual histories, were very familiar with various strains of Christian or Muslim practice and thought, and were consciously or unconsciously influenced by them. Indeed, a number of Jewish settlers in Ottoman Palestine were or had been Christians, born of converted parents or themselves converts to Christianity by dint of persuasion or force. Some of these came to the Ottoman empire in order to safely convert or “re-convert” to Judaism, although the “re- Judaization”

5 Bernard Lewis, *Jews in Muslim Lands*; other material on intellectual exchange. Einbinder, *No Place of Rest*, 43, 64, 78–79, 87, 114–115; Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry*, 41–55, 99–132, 159–189.

6 Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth*, 1–40; idem, “Circularity”; Idel, *Kabbalah in Italy*, 212–226; idem, “Jewish Mysticism among the Jews of Arab/Moslem Lands”; Grivau, “Minorités orientales à Chypre”.

7 Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth*, 21–29, 32, 34–39, 139–146; Idel, *Kabbalah in Italy*, 192–218.

8 Idel, “Jewish Mysticism among the Jews of Arab/Moslem Lands”; David, *To Come to the Land*, 7, 15–23, 62–72, 100–114.

9 David, *To Come to the Land*, 6–8, 62–72, 101, 111–114, 116, 134–137.

of such individuals was not always permanent – which was another source of consternation among Jews in Safed, Jerusalem and surrounding areas.¹⁰

All of which is to say, that in sixteenth-century Safed and nearby regions, “Judaism” was far from monolithic. Most Jews were rabbinic, so that their differences were often, relatively speaking, small divergences in custom, liturgy, exegetical traditions, and legal interpretation, but non-rabbinite Jews were also part of the mixture. Karaites – Jews who rejected the authority of the Talmud – and Ethiopian Jews were also a presence, though their numbers were small.¹¹ All of these Jews had to come to terms, not only with living side by side with one another but also with Muslims. Furthermore, even within the Ottoman empire, Jews found themselves in conflict with European Christian communities.¹² Many of them also had to come to terms with their own Christian past or that of family members, friends and neighbors.¹³ Such cross-religious spiritual encounters and tensions infused both the daily life and the most esoteric speculations of Jewish existence in Safed. Yet whether describing casual exchanges of remedies between Muslims and Jews, dreams, or conjectures about the nature and reincarnation of souls, Jews reformulated encounters with the religious other, or with co-religionists of whom they disapproved, in ways to assert the ultimate superiority either of Judaism as a whole, or of individual Jewish holy men over their Muslim or Christian counterparts. Despite the highly polemicized tone of real or imagined encounters with Muslims, Christians, and Jewish “sinners”, however, the details of Jews’ actions and attitudes which are embedded in the narratives of these events also reveal how profoundly Jewish mystical thought, religious practices, and quotidian activities were becoming intertwined with those of Muslims.

We know from both Muslim and Jewish sources that Jews sometimes sought the advice or help of Muslim shaykhs. Evidence from the Cairo Geniza indicates that individual Jews did occasionally visit Muslim shaykhs in order to

10 Zsom, “Return of the Conversos to Judaism”; Meyuhas, “Returning to Judaism”; Melammed, *Question of Identity*, 30, 118–125; Zeldes, “Incident in Messina”. The question of *converso* identity and desire to return to Judaism, wherever they happened to settle has come under considerable scrutiny. Some did wish to return to Judaism, others were sincere converts to Catholicism, and many retained characteristics or customs of both communities or maintained a hybrid identity. Melammed, *Question of Identity*, 77–111; idem, “Identities in Flux”; Graizbord, *Souls in Dispute*; Roth, *Conversos*. Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry*, 160–163.

11 David, *To Come to the Land*, 71–72.

12 David, *To Come to the Land*, 12–13, 32, 50–51.

13 See above, note 8.

study Sufism.¹⁴ In Muslim sources, visits by non-Muslims to a Muslim holy person were imaginatively construed as instances in which the Muslim holy person's charisma, wonder-working abilities, and prescience could be demonstrated. According to the common pattern for such encounters in Muslim narratives throughout the Middle Ages, Jewish visitors were often so impressed by the prescience, kindness, or power of the Muslim shaykh or shaykhah, that they converted to Islam.¹⁵ While such patterns in Muslim texts are clearly literary and polemical tropes, their recurrence suggests that Muslims expected and accepted such behavior from members of the religious minorities. The same kind of encounter is depicted rather differently when told by a Jewish author. Hayyim Vital, afflicted with poor eyesight after a lengthy illness and a bout of visions, decided to visit one Shaykh Ibn Ayyub, known for his remedies against demon-induced ailments.

I (Ḥayyim Vital) wanted to examine his wisdom and also to ask about the matter of the dimness of my eyes. I arrived outside the door to his courtyard, and he was in his house surrounded by many important men and women. A small boy came out and I said to him: Go, tell the Shaykh that a Jew wishes to enter. Give him permission. The boy went in. Behold the Shaykh himself came out hurriedly, and he said to me: Enter, Wise One of the Jews. Why did such an important person as you bother to come here? If you had sent your boy (servant), I would have run to your house. He honored me greatly and seated me in his place while he sat opposite me. I was very amazed by this, because he had never met me in his life. All the gentiles who were there were also amazed. He said to them: Leave, for as long as this distinguished person (or: "lion") remains here, I do not know how to respond to you.¹⁶

14 Goitein, "Jewish Addict to Sufism".

15 Al-Mawṣūlī, *Manāqib*, 1:207; Al-Qusharī, *Risalah*, 2:599–600, 686–687; idem, *Das Sendschreiben*, 46:15, 428, 52:37, 502; al-Sakhawī, *Tuḥfat*, 130; al-Yāfi'ī, *Rawḍ al-rayāḥīn*, 101, 130, Sometimes it was miraculous enough for a holy person to simply recognize that a person was not Muslim. For example see: al-Labidī, *Manāqib*, 74 (Arabic), 261 (French trans.).

16 רצייתי לחקור חכמו וגם לשאול על ענין כהות עיני. והנה נער קטן יוצא, ואומר לו: לך אמור אל השיך כי איש יהודי רוצה ליכנס, תן לו רשות. ויכנס הנער. והנה השיך עצמו יוצא בחפזו, ויאמר לי: הכנס, חכם היהודים, למה אדם גדול כמודך טורח לבא פה? ואם שלחת נער שלך, היית[י] רץ לביתך. ויכבדני כבוד גדול וישיבני במקומו, והוא ישב לנגדי. ותמהתי מאד מזה, עומד כאל איני יודע להשיב יען לא הכיר אותי מימיו. גם כל הגוים אשר שם תמהו. ויאמר להם: לכו כי כל זמן שזה האריה אתכם.

Vital, *Sefer ha-Ḥezyonot*, 54; idem, *Book of Visions*, 51. My translation differs slightly from Faierstein's.

Ultimately, however the shaykh's incantations remain ineffective, because all the demons who normally assist the shaykh had to flee because "a superior and holy Jewish man" had entered the house.¹⁷

As a number of scholars have noted, Ḥayyim Vital thought very highly of himself.¹⁸ Ego aside, however, this story is both strategic and revealing about Jewish-Muslim interactions in Ottoman Palestine. Vital's portrayal of himself humbly waiting outside the courtyard of a Muslim spiritual leader, and having to ask permission, as a Jew, to visit him, evokes the subservient status of Jews and other *dhimmis* in relation to the ruling Muslims.¹⁹ His motivations for visiting the shaykh point to a shared Jewish and Muslim belief in the demonic, or in the case of Muslims, *djinn*-origin of certain kinds of illnesses, and in the need for specially gifted shaykhs to expel or redirect external supernatural influences afflicting an individual. Despite the potentially humiliating situation of having to ask a Muslim holy man for help – an action that in itself suggested that the Muslim shaykh's spiritual powers were greater than Vital's own – Vital transforms the tale so that the Muslim man, along with all of his demonic assistants, pay deference to a Jewish man's, specifically Ḥayyim Vital's greater spiritual importance. The passage's emphasis on the shaykh's high social and religious status – "he was . . . surrounded by many important men and women" – ultimately serves to indicate Vital's even greater standing, for the shaykh dismisses all of these important (Muslim) people in favor of Vital, and further abases himself by saying that he would have run to Vital's home, had Vital sent a servant to summon him. Vital thus reverses the religious and social hierarchy of Muslim over Jew dictated by Muslim law, so that Ḥayyim Vital, not Ibn Ayyub, is the true holy man. Lest there be any doubt, Vital repeatedly indicates that Ibn Ayyub's powers and wisdom come from demons, rather than from God. All the Muslim sage's knowledge and ability disappears in the face of Vital, whose presence chases away the demons, so much so that not only is the shaykh unable to assist Vital, he also "does not know how to respond" to his other visitors, presumably because all his wisdom left with the demons.

Vital walks away from the shaykh, religiously superior, yet still suffering from poor eyesight. The encounter's practical failure, while rhetorically useful, points to the ambivalence of the author, and perhaps, of many other Jews who found themselves drawn to Muslim spiritual practices involving divination and healing. The language of the passage points to the commonality of

17 "אדם עליון וקדוש יהודי" Vital, *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*, 54; idem, *Book of Visions*, 52.

18 Faierstein, "Charisma and Anticharisma"; Lenowitz, "Spirit Possession Tale"; Tamar, "The Ari and R. Hayyim Vital".

19 Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*, 52–75.

such consultations. Once the shaykh's other guests have departed, Vital writes: "I asked him for an incantation, as is the custom."²⁰ The phrase "as is the custom" implies that Vital knew well the protocol for such visits, and that they were not unusual. This impression is strengthened by another instance in which R. Joseph Segura goes to the house of a judge, "*palil*," who is an expert in geomancy, literally "prediction with sand" and seeing demons. While the religious affiliation of this "judge" is not clearly indicated, the choice of the word "*palil*," which Faierstein suggests is intended to be the equivalent of the Muslim term "*qadi*," is the same term used for Shaykh Ibn Ayyub.²¹ The implication, therefore, is that this individual is meant to be understood as being Muslim. As with Ḥayyim Vital's encounter with Ibn Ayyub, R. Joseph Segura is depicted as being familiar with a specific protocol for inquiring of a (Muslim) seer, since he too, followed custom: "In the beginning he asked for a fate in sand, with an incantation, as is the custom."²² The result is a lengthy vision in favor of Ḥayyim Vital, (on behalf of whom R. Joseph Segura was inquiring) as is true for most of the visions and prognostications in *Sefer ha-Ḥezyonot*. Nevertheless, the descriptions of such easy exchanges across religious affiliations sprang from an atmosphere in which Jews from many parts of the world mingled on a daily basis with Muslims and shared a common culture of divination and beliefs in other-worldly spirits.²³ Ḥayyim Vital's posturing in his description of his encounters with Shaykh Ibn Ayyub, therefore, is not merely an attempt to establish Vital's own superior sanctity, but an effort to erect or rather reconstruct boundaries between holy men of differing religious communities in an atmosphere in which most of them had already substantially disintegrated. The initial decision of Ḥayyim Vital, a member of the religious elite theoretically responsible for patrolling such borders, to seek the shaykh's assistance already points to the porousness between Muslim and Jewish communities, which in turn seems to have fueled the need to develop rhetorical strategies which simultaneously included Muslims while placing them firmly

20 אז שאלתי ממנו בלחש, כמנהג. Vital, *Sefer ha-Ḥezyonot*, 54; idem, *Book of Visions*, 51.

21 *Jewish Mystical Autobiographies*, note 32, 309. Compare with Vital, *Sefer ha-Ḥezyonot*, 701, idem, *Book of Visions*, 74, where "*palil*," meaning judge, very clearly refers to a Muslim religious authority.

22 ובתחלה שאל בלורל החול, בלחש כמנהג, Vital, *Sefer ha-Ḥezyonot*, 55; idem, *Book of Visions*, 52. The use of sand as a tool for divination was common in the Islamic world. Savage-Smith and Smith, *Islamic Geomancy*; Smith, "Nature of Islamic Geomancy"; Fahd, *Divination arabe*, 25, 35, 41–49, 105, 176, 196–204.

23 Jews in the region also practiced various forms of divination, including those involving demons. See for example: Vital, *Sefer ha-Ḥezyonot*, 48–49, 54–58, 70, 125, idem, *Book of Visions*, 44–45, 52–57, 73–74, 143.

below Jews in an imagined religious hierarchy. Christians, as we shall see, were not even accorded this ambiguous status.

According to Jewish texts describing the religious lives of those living in Egypt, Safed and other areas of Palestine, Muslims also revered and sought the advice of Jewish holy men. Joseph Sambari, in *Sefer Divrei Josef* notes of one R. Jacob Goiozo, who wandered from place to place to comfort the sages and visit the sick: “And the Muslims of the people of the villages blessed him, saying that he was a pure man and from his blessing they were blessed.”²⁴ The point of this remark seems to be to demonstrate how widely R. Jacob’s sanctity was recognized, namely to the point that Muslims as well as Jews revered him. Yet even this relatively neutral to positive observation regarding Muslim views of a *Jewish* holy man is tinged with implied polemic through association. Directly after his description of Muslims’ praise of R. Jacob, Sambari tells of how thieves (their religious affiliation unspecified) attacked and captured the rabbi, and then asked him to bless them.²⁵ Thus R. Jacob is *everyone’s* holy man; Muslims are included with thieves because both are outside the circle of expected devotees within a Jewish context, and therefore, are comparable examples of the breadth of devotion that R. Jacob inspired. The blessing that the rabbi says over the thieves, that they should never harm any Jewish person, bodily or monetarily, signals that R. Jacob remains very much a Jewish holy person, for while outsiders may revere him, his blessing serves to protect Jews. By contrast, the thieves may rob and injure Muslims and Christians with impunity. The thieves’ own welfare, outside avoiding the sin of harming a Jew, is not touched upon in the blessing.

Depictions of Jewish-Christian encounters are rarer in these narratives, and also more harshly polemical, although common themes exist in both. For example, the polemical designation of a non-Jewish wonder-worker or seer as a “magician” (*mekashef*) was not confined to Muslims. Joseph Sambari describes what is in essence a supernatural competition between a rabbi and a Christian. The Christian, Girgis, is described as a magician and impure, indeed the word chosen to designate the Christian is “*arel*”, meaning “uncircumcised.”²⁶ This term emphasizes that the Christian, in contradistinction to Jews (and,

24 והישמעאלים של אנשי הכפרים מתברכים בו לאמר שהוא איש תם ומברכתו היו מתברכים Sambari, *Sefer Divrei Josef*, 363.

25 Sambari, *Sefer Divrei Josef*, 363.

26 Sambari, *Sefer Divrei Josef*, 371–373. Some Christians in the region, such as the Copts, did practice circumcision, however, many Christian groups did not.

potentially, Muslims), had no mark of a covenant with God, and was thus outside the category of God's people.²⁷ Whereas in Vital and Sambari's accounts of Muslims, it is enough that the Muslims in question demonstrate their respect for the Jewish holy person, in this tale of the Christian magician, the conclusion is rather more violent – he ends by being buried alive, unable to extricate himself. Sambari notes, “Thus may all of your enemies perish, God.”²⁸ Sambari's observation directly following this invocation, that Christians use the place where Girgis died as a church “to this day,” ultimately denigrates Christianity, for it emphasizes that the Christians venerate a failed, dead wonder-worker who is to be counted among the enemies of God.

While at times, these interchanges sometimes seem to point to a harmonious mingling of religious customs between immigrants and locals, Jews and Muslims or Christians, the manner in which Vital and Sambari cast Muslims and Christians' powers was far from neutral, as we have seen. By having Muslims leaders and holy men revere him and predict his spiritual ascendance, Vital sought to co-opt or, better, trump, the power automatically associated with them as wielders of political authority in the region. Sambari's description of Muslim reverence for R. Jacob functions much the same way. His narrative of R. Ḥazirah and the Christian magician, by contrast, seems to be as much about denigrating the Christian as glorifying the rabbi in question.

Ḥayyim Vital's primary goal in incorporating the predictions of Muslims into his collection of visions may have been to demonstrate his own spiritual status, yet he also included visions which polemicized more broadly against Islam and Christianity and in favor of Judaism. An elaborate vision/dream sequence which concludes the first section of *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*, begins: “The judge Sa'ad al-Din, the deceiver of the impurity of all the people of the Muslims, had a dream.”²⁹ Already the first sentence is hardly complementary toward this specific Muslim dreamer, or even Muslims as a whole, if “impurity” is meant to refer to all Muslims, however, the choice of wording hints at the eschatological significance of the vision. Vital calls Sa'ad al-Din “*dagal*”, which Faienstein equates with the Arabic word “*dajjāl*” which he quite rightly translates as “liar”. Yet in addition to meaning “liar”, “deceiver”, “trickster”, etc. the word is also the term for the false messiah who will battle Jesus and the Mahdi at the end of time. Thus, this individual is presented, potentially, as not merely a liar among many, but the quintessential liar destined to deceive many

27 Genesis 17:10–14, 23–27, 21:4.

28 "כל אויבך ה' כן יאבדו כל אויבך ה'". Sambari, *Sefer Divrei Josef*, 373.

29 חלם הפליל סעד אל דין דגל טומאת אומת כל הישמעאליים Vital, *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*, 70; idem, *Book of Visions*, 74. This admittedly awkward translation is more literal than Faienstein's.

Muslims and other peoples into following his false religious dictates. The presence of the *dajjāl* would also imply that the end of the current world was near. The text itself remains ambiguous as to which meaning of *dajjāl* is intended, probably intentionally so. However the dream and visions which follow are both highly polemical and laden with messianic portent.

First Sa'ad al-Din sees a ragged and dirty man who explains that he is Muhammad, the prophet of the Muslims. He is in this condition because he misled a great with a religion that is empty and foolish. Then both Muhammad and the dreamer were forced by six men to walk to an outhouse. From this place they extracted a man covered in excrement and forced him to speak to the judge. The man from the outhouse explains that he Isa b. Mariam and he is in this condition because he misled the people of the Christians with an empty and foolish religion. Then many thousands of Muslims come before Isa (Jesus), Muhammad, and the judge asking in whom they should believe, and whose religion they should adopt. The men tell them to look to the many thousands of Jews, headed by a white haired man, Akiva. They are told to enter his religion which is the true one. Judge Sa'ad al-Din has this dream repeatedly until he brings seers and magicians to him, who conjure the ragged Muhammad and the feces-besmeared Jesus to confirm the vision. Finally they conjure a Jew on a chair in a sweet-smelling garden, who confirms that the dream is heaven-sent.³⁰

In Islamic cosmology, visions of the Prophet Muhammad were potentially possible for any believer, although there was concern to make sure that the vision was a true one. The Prophet could appear in many forms; the difference in his appearance, theologians explained as symbolic, relative to the communication the Prophet wished to make with the believer, whereas philosophers focused on the ways in which the imaginative faculty could be sufficiently perfected to such an extent where dreams could become prophetic.³¹ Appearing in humble clothing, in particular that of the Sufis, was not unusual, for example, in his dreams, Samaw'al al-Maghribi, a twelfth-century Jewish convert to Islam, after having visions of the Prophet Samuel then encounters Muhammad dressed in Sufi robes.³² By casting Muhammad as not merely in humble clothing, but ragged and dirty, Vital plays upon themes already extant within the Muslim tradition regarding visions of the Prophet Muhammad, but

30 Vital, *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*, 70–71; idem, *Book of Visions*, 74–75.

31 Katz, *Dreams, Sufism and Sainthood*, 205–216. Also see: Fahd, *Divination arabe*, 255, 286–287.

32 Moshe Perlmann, "Samaw'al ha-Maghribi". For evidence of continued Jewish interest in this story see Chiesa and Schmidke, "Jewish Reception of Samaw'al ha-Maghribi".

turns them to negative effect. Muhammad's poor dress and blackened face is indicative of his spiritually false and conquered state.³³ Such a depiction may also have drawn upon Christian anti-biographies of the Prophet Muhammad, in which he is depicted as dying filthy, drunk, amid garbage. Jews were aware of these Christian polemical tales and were not averse to building their own anti-Muslim polemic based upon them.³⁴ The polemic against Jesus, on the other hand, was founded upon a long-standing *topos* in Jewish anti-Christian polemic, based on the passage in the Babylonian Talmud, BT Gittin 56b–57a, in which Jesus is punished in the afterlife by sitting in boiling excrement for having mocked the sages.³⁵ Thus, this passage in *Sefer ha-Hezyonot* utilized and was intended as polemic against both founders of Islam and Christianity. However, the text goes further than most mere polemical texts, for here in this vision, the Muslims seek the correct religion and are in the end, told to follow the religion of R. Akiva. As with most visions in *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*, this one serves to hint at the exalted status of Ḥayyim Vital himself, for elsewhere in his autobiography, he indicates that his soul and that of R. Akiva are bound together, and also that R. Akiva is linked to the coming of the Messiah, which Vital hints his himself, at least the Messiah b. Joseph – the messiah who would do battle before the coming of the Davidic one during the last days.³⁶ Thus, the Muslims are to turn to Akiva/Vital/the Messiah and convert to Judaism, even as a modern Muslim “deceiver”/ *dajjāl* is forced in his dreams and conjurations to recognize the truth of this Jewish messiah. On the visionary plane the last battle between the *Dajjāl* and the Messiah as imagined in Muslim cosmology, is recast into a Jewish context, with the Jews the ultimate spiritual victors.

All of these tales and visions, including this last one, involve one or more forms of religious translocation. Some are basic geographic translocation: Vital goes to the house of Shaykh Ayyub; R. Jacob's spiritual ministrations are conducted as he wanders from one village to the next. Both involve moving from Jewish to Muslim or mixed space. R. Jacob's blessing of robbers addresses the dangers of other Jews as they sought to travel. Many of these encounters or

33 On the visionary value of pure, white clothing in Islamic divination: Fahd, *Divination arabe*, 274–275.

34 Tolan, *Saracens*, 61–63, 85–95; idem, “Un cadavre mutilé”; Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 134–136.

35 Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 13, 84–94, 113; Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 136–137; Jordan, “Marian Devotion”.

36 Vital, *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*, 49–50, 144, 151, 153–155, 157–158, 173, 176; idem, *Book of Visions*, 46, 169, 179, 182–184, 187–188, 210, 214–215. For the messianic portent of R. Akiva and Vital's connection with this Talmudic rabbi and Vital's identity as the Messiah b. Joseph, see *Jewish Mystical Autobiographies*, 14–19, 31.

divinatory visions involve passing between the world of spirits to the world of the living, and conversations between the demonic or the dead and the living. Such encounters are very much spatially and religiously conceived, for demons cannot withstand the physical presence of a holy man, and must literally leave the house or presence of their Muslim host, in the case of Vital and Shaykh Ayyub. The last vision, on the other hand, does not merely posit voyaging between the world of the dead and that of the living, but predicts a movement of religious affiliation: conversion from Islam to Judaism. Each type of “translocation” involving interactions between Jews and non-Jews is heavily polemized. I now wish to turn to another, more radical translocation, namely *gilgul*, the transmigration of a soul from one body to another. Like more literal movement over geographical space or traditional visionary encounters, in which the dead or some spiritual being merely visits and communicates with the living, accounts of *gilgul* were a rhetorical tool by which Jewish writers could imagine and polemize about their relationship with non-Jews, or those of their own community who did not conform to their ideals of pious behavior.

Gilgul was very much part of the spiritual cosmology of early modern Jews. Many Jews believed that souls “transmigrated” i.e. were “reincarnated” that they might do penance and purify themselves from sin, however, this theory was hotly debated among late medieval and early modern Jews. Some, such as R. Moses ha-Cohen Ashkenazi, who was active in both Venice and Candia, opposed the idea entirely.³⁷ Others such as Isaac Abravanel, (d. 1508), supported it, but was clearly familiar with the philosophical problems posed, for example, by the question of whether two souls may occupy a single body, one of the issues which caused the Muslim philosopher and medical thinker, Ibn Sina, to reject the doctrine of metempsychosis four centuries earlier.³⁸ The question of the legitimacy or possibility of the transmigration of the soul remained a topic of debate in the Islamic world throughout the Middle Ages and into the early modern one, even as such speculations were becoming the subject of intense debate among Christians as well as Jews.³⁹ Other Kabbalists, i.e. Jewish mystics, embraced the concept, however, there was no unified “doctrine” of *gilgul*.⁴⁰

37 Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth*, 41–42, 48–50, 56–70.

38 Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth*, 102–138; Ogren, “Circularity”; Wan, “Ibn Sina and Abu al-Barakat al-Baghdadi”; Mitsuhashi, “Hachiōji,” 586d.

39 Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth*; Wan, “Ibn Sina and Abu al-Barakat al-Baghdadi”; Alexandrin, “Rāzī and his medieval opponents”; Schmidke, “Doctrine of the transmigration of the soul”; Kamada, “Transmigration of the Soul”; Kamada, “Metempsychosis”; Smith, “Transmigration and the Sufis.”

40 Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth*.

Questions of whether it was possible for a human soul to be sent into the body of an animal, plant, or mineral, or whether non-Jewish souls also transmigrated, varied from author to author.⁴¹ Among Kabbalists in Safed, *gilgul* took on new levels of intricacy and significance. Many in that community believed in and encouraged the temporary “impregnation” of a living body and soul by the saintly dead for the sake of learning or in order to correct a minor fault on the part of a saintly, dead individual’s soul. On the other hand, Jews of Safed also feared the possibility of “impregnation” by sinful souls, doomed to wander and suffer until they could find a body to inhabit. These unfriendly, disembodied souls were known as dybbuks. These forms of *gilgul* were in addition to the more traditional view that souls could be reborn in new bodies, for which they would be the only or primary soul.⁴²

All of these forms of *gilgul* were part of the process of a given individual soul’s purification and/or punishment. Into what “wicked souls” could transmigrate, or for what sins, were as a much part of the rhetoric of religious differentiation as narratives rooted in more quotidian encounters, such as the one between Ibn Ayyub and Ḥayyim Vital just discussed. Sexual sins were of particular concern. In his autobiography, Ḥayyim Vital repeatedly criticizes Jews having intercourse with non-Jewish female servants, prostitutes, or other men.⁴³ These practices reflect similar, albeit not necessarily condoned, customs in the local Muslim community as well as the Jewish one.⁴⁴ Vital outlines the spiritual fate of Jews who succumb to such practices in his *Sha’ar ha-Gilgulim* (*Gate of Gilgul or Gate of Transmigrations*). There, a Jew who has intercourse with a non-Jewish woman will be reincarnated as a Jewish prostitute.⁴⁵ A Jewish man who has sexual relations with another man, on the other hand, will be reincarnated as a rabbit, an animal that had been associated with sexual promiscuity, and sometimes, specifically, homosexual

41 Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth*, 2, 6, 66, 68, 109, 120, 158–160, 169–171, 195–199, 221–233, 249–255, 257, 272; Yagel, *Sefer Ge’ Hiziyon*; Yagel, *Valley of Vision*, 189, 199–201.

42 Chajes, *Between Worlds*, 1–56; Chajes, “City of the Dead”; Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, 259–358; Fine, “Benevolent Spirit Possession”; Kallus, “Pneumatic Mystical Possession”; Sack, “Some Remarks on Rabbi Moses Cordovero’s ‘Shemu’ah be ‘inyan ha-Gilgul’”.

43 Vital, *Sefer ha-Ḥezyonot*, 66–69; idem, *Book of Visions*, 69–72.

44 Kia, *Daily Life in the Ottoman Empire*, 199–200, 205–207; Semerdjan, “Off the Straight Path,” 29–60, 94–137; Magid, *Metaphysics and Midrash*, 119–142; El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*.

45 Vital, *Sefer Sha’ar ha-Gilgulim*, chap. 22, 63; Wexelman, *Jewish Concept of Reincarnation*, 130.

behavior in medieval Europe.⁴⁶ Another potential penalty for same-sex relations, was reincarnation as a woman, which, for Jewish male Kabbalists, was definitely deemed a punishment.⁴⁷ Indeed, transmigration into any kind of female, human or otherwise, seems to have been an additional level of an individual (male's) chastisement. For example, according to Vital, intercourse with a married woman causes a person's metempsychosis into a donkey. A deeper breach of this sexual prohibition, having intercourse with one's own mother, means that the man will be reborn as a *female* donkey.⁴⁸ Likewise, man who has intercourse by candlelight, thus causing his children to be epileptic and die young, will be reincarnated as a female goat as punishment.⁴⁹

Such gendered censure using the threat of unfavorable *gigul* was not solely an attack on misbehaving men of the community. In *Sefer Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, men who violate the restriction against intercourse with a menstruating woman are condemned to be reborn as a non-Jewish woman.⁵⁰ This last assertion polemicized not merely against Jewish men who were not scrupulous in their observance of Jewish purity laws linked to sexuality, but also against Gentiles. A common medieval Jewish accusation against Christians was that they did not observe the biblical proscription against sex with a menstruating woman. Not only did Christian men make themselves impure by such intercourse, they ensured that their children were conceived from impure, even poisonous blood.⁵¹ Muslim women were also categorized as menstruants and thus forbidden as sexual partners to Jewish men.⁵² This association between

46 Vital, *Sefer Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, chap. 22, 63; Wexelman, *Jewish Concept of Reincarnation*, 129; Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 45; Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, 137–143, 307, 356–357.

47 Vital, *Sefer Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, chap. 9, 33; Wexelman, *Jewish Concept of Reincarnation*, 48.

48 Vital, *Sefer Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, chap. 22, 63; Wexelman, *Jewish Concept of Reincarnation*, 129.

49 Vital, *Sefer Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, chap. 22, 59; Wexelman, *Jewish Concept of Reincarnation*, 120.

50 Vital, *Sefer Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, chap. 22, 63; Wexelman, *Jewish Concept of Reincarnation*, 129.

51 Jewish, Christian, and Muslim medical thinkers debated the extent to which women's blood contributed to the formation of a fetus. Menstrual blood was usually seen as blood which had become spoiled and thus needed to be expelled, and thus would be a highly poisonous and detrimental substance for both the man who came into contact with it, and any child conceived from it. Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 98–101; Barkai, *History of Jewish Gynecological Texts*, 38–79; Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, 106–165; Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine*, 48–86; Meshullam, *Sex and Society*, 48–52.

52 Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond*, 163.

menstruation and intercourse during menstruation seems to be less strong in Jewish writing about Muslims, however, than it was regarding Christians. This indictment against Christians in general drew in part from the Jewish anti-gospel tradition, the *Toledot Yeshu*, in which Jesus was, in many versions, said to be conceived while his mother Mary was menstruating.⁵³ In his list of penalties in *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, Vital adds a new permutation to an old theme. Jewish men who have intercourse with menstruating women are behaving like non-Jews (Christians) therefore, in the next life, they are doomed to lose their Jewishness, their maleness, and their purity. Gentile women themselves are intrinsically linked to menstruation in this passage. Thus, Vital simultaneously disparages both “bad” Jewish men and non-Jews.

In the warnings above, non-Jews, if mentioned at all, are alluded to only obliquely. Other passages indicate clearly that non-Jews were a threat. In a convoluted piece of biblical exegesis regarding Nabal the Carmelite (1 Samuel 25:1–26), Vital ultimately concludes that those who cause Jews to eat an animal which was not slaughtered in a kosher fashion are doomed to repeated reincarnations as leaves upon a tree, blown, constantly, never at rest, and doomed to shrivel and die annually.⁵⁴ In part, Vital is indulging in word association, since Nabal or Naval, the personal name, also means “evil-doer,” and the word for an unclean animal carcass is *nivelah*. Verbal games aside, however, the passage points to the very real problem Jews, or especially *conversos* who wished to retain their Jewish identity had in maintaining Jewish food laws and customs without being targeted by the inquisition. To pass as Christians, they often had to eat pork, refrain from draining the blood from slaughtered animals, eat meat mixed with dairy, or eat parts of animals normally forbidden under Jewish law.⁵⁵ Here Vital assures his readers (and perhaps himself) that these individuals have an especially unpleasant fate waiting them in their next life. While it is possible that Vital was targeting other Jews or *conversos* who tricked or pressured their co-religionists into eating such meat, his focus on the character of Nabal, who himself was a non-Jew, suggests that Vital also intended non-Jews to be understood as the perpetrators of the sin and the recipients of the resulting castigation.

53 Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 119–131, 191–194. Most of the Hebrew and Latin versions that we have of the *Toledot Yeshu* come from the early modern period, thus it is likely that Vital would have been familiar with it. Krauss, *Das Leben Yeshu*.

54 Vital, *Sefer Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, chap. 22, 62; Wexelman, *Jewish Concept of Reincarnation*, 127.

55 *Jews in the Canary Islands*, 19, 27–28, 55, 56, 85, 86–87, 88, 99, 100, 105, 106, 109, 111, 113, 114, 118, 146–147, 148, 155–157.

At other times battles between non-Jews and Jews were fought on the spiritual planes. At one point, Ḥayyim Vital and his teacher were walking in a field in which there was the grave of a Gentile (*goy*) who had been dead for over a thousand years. The Gentile's spirit attacked Vital and attempted to kill him. Only through the intervention of many angels and the souls of the righteous was Vital saved. His teacher explained, after telling Vital not to go that way again, that spirit had tried to unify itself with Vital in order to cause him to sin.⁵⁶ Whereas in other instances non-Jews, especially non-Jewish women, were a temptation to sin, or becoming a non-Jew was a possible punishment for wayward Jews, here the non-Jew attempts to possess Vital in order to push him to sin. As we will see, wicked spirits who sought or were forced to possess others, were often non-Jews, had become non-Jews in subsequent transmigrations, or were such unobservant Jews, so that they were little better than Gentiles themselves. The souls of such individuals were imagined as dangerous, sometimes even deadly forces that could compel Jews to sin. Whereas in the discussion of Nabal, living Gentiles pressed living Jews into committing a sin, and were doomed to pay for their misdeed in the next life, in this example, the non-Jewish power seeks to become an internal one, unseen, leading a holy Jew to transgression.

Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim provides a theoretical guide to the processes, rewards and penalties of transmigrating souls. Exorcism narratives, on the other hand, often provide detailed accounts of the misfortunes specific souls endured as part of *gilgul*. Some such tales are fairly simple and serve to demonstrate the prescience and power of a given holy man, and to be a cautionary tale against certain sins. Sometimes the holy man simply demonstrates his power first by recognizing that some animal or plant houses a wandering soul, and then by releasing the soul by his prayers. For example, when R. Isaac Luria came upon a woman who had been reborn in a stone, he alone recognized the stone for what it was, and prayed for the soul of the woman within it.⁵⁷

Other narratives are more sinister, but also revelatory of the tensions between Jews and non-Jews. In the *Toledot ha-Ari*, a crow follows R. Isaac Luria and his companions as they visit the graves of the holy dead. The Ari (R. Isaac Luria) recognizes that the crow in reality is a transmigrated sinner, forced to live as a crow because he raised taxes in Safed and was cruel to the poor. The crow had come to ask R. Luria to pray for him. Instead, R. Luria rebukes the crow and sends him on his way.⁵⁸ Such a tale served as a warning to those of the Jewish

56 Vital, *Sefer Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, chap. 38, 158.

57 *Sefer Toldot ha-Ari*, 184.

58 *Sefer Toldot ha-Ari*, 183–184.

community who worked for the government in a way that was unfavorable to their fellow Jews. Similarly, an informer is condemned to return as a mouse, unworthy to be released to have his soul purged in Gehinom, despite his suffering and pleading in rodent form.⁵⁹ The harshness of this individual's imagined punishment reflects the degree to which informers were feared as a dangerous problem for Jews both in the Ottoman world and in Christian Europe.⁶⁰ Ha-'Ari encounters two more crows containing transmigrated souls, this time of the biblical figures, Balaq, the Moabite king, and Balaam, the non-Jewish prophet, who, at Balaq's request, attempted to curse the Israelites as they were on their way to the promised land from Egypt.⁶¹ They too request that Isaac Luria pray for them, but instead the rabbi say to them: "Evil ones, in this world you wanted to uproot Israel, and now in your suffering you have come to me that I should receive you. Go on your way."⁶² Here is a story of divine and saintly vengeance against age-old enemies of Israel. Doomed to many centuries of existence in the bodies of birds, not only are these non-Jewish sinners punished by God, the holy man himself condemns them, allowing the readers of this text to feel a more immediate sense of justified retribution, since someone of recent generations is depicted as speaking the words to sentence those who had tried to destroy the Jews to yet more punishment. Presumably other non-Jews who behave in a like manner could expect a similar fate.

Other accounts are more complicated, creating a hierarchy of transmigrations. In *Zafinat Pa'aneah* a text written by a Moroccan immigrant to Safed in the early part of the sixteenth century, a soul goes from being a Jewish man, to a "black Gentile", to one from Edom (i.e. a Christian) to a dog, and until the soul finally possesses a young boy in an effort to kill him because the father had killed the dog that the soul was inhabiting. The sins which prompted this downward spiral consisted of reading the Torah, but not the Talmud, praying only on Sabbaths and festivals, but not on weekdays, and failing to don *tefillin*.⁶³

This story works simultaneously to polemicize against Christians, Muslims, and against Jews who failed to be observant to the degree or manner deemed

59 *Sefer Toldot ha-'Ari*, 188–189.

60 Bornstein-Makovetsky, "Jewish informers"; idem, "Social and Communal Organization".

61 Numbers 22–24.

62 רעשים, בעולם הזה רציתם לעקור את ישראל, ועכשיו בצר לכם באתם אלי שאקבל אתכם, לך לדרככם *Sefer Toldot ha-'Ari*, 185.

63 Judah Hallelwah, *Zafinat Pa'aneah*, MS Dublin, Trinity College B. 5.27, 143b–45a as cited and translated in Chajes, *Between Worlds*, 141–142. On this author and work see: Chajes, *Between Worlds*, 25–27, 36–37; Idel, "R Yehudah Hallelwah". *Tefillin* are small black boxes containing parts of the Torah, which Jewish men are supposed to bind upon their hands and head during prayer.

necessary by the Safed Kabbalists who produced the account.⁶⁴ The text creates a descending hierarchy, where the next steps down from being a “bad” Jew, are two types of Gentiles, first an African, very likely a Muslim, and then, more clearly, a Christian. While in Yehudah Ḥallewah’s native Morocco, dark-skinned people – “Moors” – would have been common, the dark skin of the Jew’s first reincarnation may have been intended as symbolic. In Arabic, Muslim and Jewish literature, as well as in Western European traditions, having dark skin, being African, had negative associations, ranging from excessive merriment, sexual passion, barbarousness, lesser intelligence, lack of religion, and a divine mandate to servitude, although the degree of adherence to and content of these stereotypes varied considerably from author to author.⁶⁵ Jews in the Ottoman empire, like their Muslim and Christian counterparts there and elsewhere in the Mediterranean and in European colonies, did sometimes own African slaves, including occasionally, Muslim ones, despite prohibitions against this in Muslim law.⁶⁶ By specifying that the sinful soul had become a black Gentile, therefore, the author, Ḥallewah hinted that the person had been condemned not merely to lose his Jewish identity, but was required to live as one negatively viewed by those in the Ottoman and European lands, and, potentially, as one cursed to servitude.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, this status was one above being Christian.⁶⁸ Jews who did not mend their ways would become Christians in the next life. Lest that not seem a sufficiently horrible fate, the punishment following life as a Christian, was to become a dog, an animal depicted as unclean in Islamic

64 Chajes and Idel maintain that Ḥallewah wrote his book in part to instill discipline among the Jews he encountered in Palestine, using threats of punishment of the afterlife to do so. Chajes, *Between Worlds*, 26; Idel, “R Yehudah Ḥallewah”.

65 Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks*, 17–49, 102–165; Goldberg, *Curse of Ham*.

66 Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks*, 53–55.

67 Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks*, 135–165. Goldberg, *Curse of Ham*. Schorsch notes, however, that Jews associated blackness more intrinsically with Moses’ Kushite wife than with Ham and his sons, and that the servitude or blackness of the later usually came up as part of biblical exegesis rather than as a systematic justification of an economic, political or colonial agenda, like that found in Christian European literature. Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks*, 159–160. Also it is important to keep in mind that African slaves were regularly converted to Judaism and then integrated into the community, although this practice waned somewhat toward the end of the early modern and the beginning of the nineteenth century. Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks*, 70, 74–79, 85–93, 175–179, 219–226. The salient point is that one could be black, Jewish, and free in the sixteenth-century, although many in that category would still have the stigma of having been slaves or being descended from them.

68 In some threads of kabbalistic literature, Muslims were placed above Christians in a spiritual hierarchy. Cuffel, “Matter of Others”; Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond*, 160–164.

texts, and often looked down upon in both Islamic and Jewish cultures.⁶⁹ The final degradation, in this story, is to become a disembodied, vengeful spirit, exorcised, as we learn, because this soul has fallen beyond any hope of redemption. The harshness of this story needs to be understood in the light of Safed Kabbalists' struggles to push all Jews in their sphere of influence toward the fastidious execution of all commandments, and their Jewish audience's differing traditions of observance or resistance to the kabbalists' efforts. Polemic against "Edomites", namely Christians, was not merely against Christians *per se*, but against those *conversos* who continued Christian observance or who were tempted to fall back into Christianity. In *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, in order to avoid punishment in his next life, Ḥayyim Vital is obliged to fast and pray for the sin of drinking wine with a Jew who had converted to another religion.⁷⁰ Which other religion is not specified, but given that the individual is described as having come to Safed in order to return to Judaism, Christianity seems the most likely candidate. Seemingly as justification for the need for penance, the text clarifies that the person later reconverted from Judaism to that other religion.⁷¹ Both the exorcism story in *Zafnat Pa'aneah* and the passage in *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, underscore the degree to which *conversos*, undecided or minimally observant as some might have been, were perceived as a threat to Jewish identity in Safed.

While tales of transmigration and exorcism regularly included polemic against non-Jews, or against Jews who associated with or behaved like them, some of them also hint at the degree to which Jewish culture, including the practices of the kabbalists were deeply intertwined with that of their non-Jewish neighbors. At the beginning of Ḥayyim Vital's version of the possession of Rachel Anav – a young woman who was to turn this experience into a long-term visionary career – Vital notes: "They (her family?) took her to sorcerers but it was of no help at all."⁷² To what religion these magicians adhered is not specified, but given the tendency in Vital and Sambari to categorize non-Jewish wonder-workers as magicians, the individuals to whom the family first turned were probably not Jewish. In another narrative, this time in *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, the young Samuel Vital, Ḥayyim Vital's son, is called upon to assist a maiden who has been possessed. Samuel is uncertain whether the young

69 Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 42, 76, 210, 216, 220, 223.

70 Wexelman, *Jewish Concept of Reincarnation*, 211.

71 Wexelman, *Jewish Concept of Reincarnation*, 211.

72 ויוליכוהו אל המכשפים ולא הועיל כלל. Vital, *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*, 58; idem, *Book of Visions*, 57. On the career of Rachel Anav see: Cuffel, "Gendered Visions"; Faienstein, "Maggidim"; Chajes, *Between Worlds*, 104–113, 160–177.

woman is possessed by a wicked spirit (*mazziq*), a demon, or that of an evil one of Israel. He advises those who called him to bring a cleric/judge (*palil*) of the Gentiles to visit her. The *palil* successfully bottles and buries the evil spirit (which turns out to be a soul of a non-Jew who lusted after the young woman). Immediately thereafter, Samuel discovers that the young woman is also possessed by a Jewish spirit seeking redemption, with whom he proceeds to deal successfully on behalf of all, including the wandering Jewish soul.⁷³

The choice of the term "*palil*," the word regularly used in Vital's writings to designate a Muslim religious leader suggest that Samuel instructed the family to seek the help of a Muslim exorcist. The passing description of Samuel's reliance on and interaction with the individual suggests an easy, collegial relationship. The labor of exorcism is divided between a non-Jew (Muslim) to expel the non-Jewish soul from the Jewish girl, and a Jewish holy man, Samuel, to expunge the transmigrated Jewish man from her. In the first account, the religious affiliation of "magicians" is not given, however, since in the examples examined so far, when Jews in the Ottoman Middle East sought spiritual assistance from a non-Jew, the person they consulted was a Muslim, it is likely that "magicians" designated Muslims. Notably, the family of Rachel Anav sought the intervention of these "magicians" *before* they asked the help of another Jew. Together, these passages, along with the tale of Ḥayyim Vital's encounter with Shaykh Ibn Ayyub, suggest that sixteenth-century Jews in Palestine and Egypt recognized and relied upon the expertise of Muslim wonder-workers, sometimes over and above that of Jewish claimants to the same abilities. One particular area of expertise, was exorcism. This recognition was not presented as uniformly positive or even neutral. In the first instance, the non-Jewish practitioners were unable to do anything in contrast to the Jewish one, who is able to talk to and direct the possessing spirit. In Samuel's case, while the Jewish wonder-worker himself recommends the intervention of a Muslim cleric, that person only has power over the non-Jewish spirit. The Jewish holy man must deal with the Jewish soul. Nevertheless, in between the polemic posturing, the inter-reliance of Muslim and Jewish exorcists and healers is clear. If the practice of exorcism was common to both Jews and Muslims in the region, presumably the phenomenon which necessitated it, possession, also had some basic commonalities in the two cultures. Indeed, the possession stories in Lurianic literature and Sambari's chronicle strongly resemble possession and exorcism

73 Vital, *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, "Ma'aseh shel ha-ruah" 186; Chajes, *Between Worlds*, 177 ff. The printed version which I have used, and the manuscript account from which Chajes translated the story differ slightly.

practices described among medieval and early modern Muslims in North Africa, and the modern *zar* cult throughout the Middle East and Africa.

Not all possession stories, even when the possession was by a less than saintly soul, ended badly. Lurianic kabbalistic sources abound with accounts of Jewish women being possessed or “co-habited” with anything from sinful souls to angels. When the invading soul was malicious, such an event could harm or even kill the woman in question.⁷⁴ Very often however, Jewish women, such as Rachel Anav, parlayed such experiences into positions of authority over both men and women in the community that transcended the constraints of traditional gender roles.⁷⁵ Leo Africanus, the sixteenth-century baptized Muslim diplomat, geographer and traveler, describes a very similar set of behaviors among some Muslim women in Morocco. Like the Jews of Safed, designated men in the Muslim communities in Morocco were specialists in exorcism.⁷⁶ Also like the Jewish community in Safed and its environs, women possessed by spirits frequently became prophets and leaders among their co-religionists, although, according to Leo Africanus’ description, the women were much more in charge of their relationships with these “demons” than women in the Jewish possession stories from the Middle East.⁷⁷ Leo Africanus seems to link these practices in the Maghrib to a kind of Sufism, Islamic mysticism. The phenomenon he describes strongly resembles a set of practices rife in the modern Islamic Middle East and Africa, known as *zar* possession, which is indeed often, though not always, tied to the practices of a Sufi order.⁷⁸ Leo Africanus also describes the activity of kabbalists in the region, though he does not link the two.⁷⁹

The impression that possession and exorcism was both gendered and part of Muslim spirituality in the Maghrib is further supported in an eleventh-century North African hagiographic biography, praising the abilities of one Muḥriz b. Khalaf. There, a jinn has possessed a woman and speaks through her. The *jinn* asks the shaykh if he would like some dates, and when the shaykh replies

74 Cuffel, “Gendered Visions”; Faierstein, “Women as Prophets”; idem, “Maggidim”; Chajes, *Between Worlds*, 38–42, 48–54, 97–118. Faierstein cautions that visionaries were not predominantly women: Faierstein, “Maggidim”.

75 Cuffel, “Gendered Visions”; Chajes, *Between Worlds*, 101–118.

76 Jean-Léon l’African, *Description*, 1: 218–219.

77 Jean-Léon l’African, *Description*, 1: 217–218.

78 Basu, “Drumming and Praying”; Szombathy, “Some Notes on Spirit Possession and Islam”; Camelin, “Croyance aux djinns et possession”; Larsen, “Spirit Possession as Oral History”; Mercier, “Les Dieux naissent bâtards”; Bartels, “Les jeunes mères sont comme les chats”; Mohia, “L’hysterique et le djin amoureux”; al-Nagar, “Women and Spirit Possession”.

79 Jean-Léon l’African, *Description*, 1: 224–225.

in the affirmative, the fruit rains down on him and his disciples. Thereafter the shaykh asks the jinn to leave the woman, which he does, and does not bother her again.⁸⁰ This medieval narrative is not nearly so detailed or suggestive as that in Leo Africanus. Nevertheless, the account presents a scenario similar to the practices described in Leo Africanus and in the Jewish texts relating to gilgul in Palestine and Egypt, namely a possessed woman, whose inhabiting spirit is expelled by a holy man.⁸¹ Similar to the Jewish texts, Muḥriz asks the name and place of origin of the possessing spirit. The discussion between the shaykh and the jinn is not nearly so lengthy and dramatic as those between Jewish holy men, especially if the spirit is a wicked one – Muḥriz seemingly politely asks the jinn to abandon the woman, which he does without argument. In this Muslim text, the nature of the jinn is not clear, although the chosen vocabulary of the text implies that the possession was an uncomfortable one for the woman; the verb *takhabaṭa*, meaning “to beat, knock down or wander,” and related to the word *khubāṭ*, meaning “madness,” is used to indicate the jinn’s possession of the woman, and at the end of the story the text specifies that the jinn “did not threaten her [again]” once he departed at the shaykh’s request.⁸² This ambiguity, but clear potential for harm by the possessing spirit is similar to possession accounts among sixteenth-century Jews. What is missing in this earlier Muslim account in contrast to both the description by Leo Africanus and in the Jewish texts, is any indication that the woman benefited from the spirit inside her, in particular, obtained prophetic abilities because of it. Despite the brevity and the lack of prophecy, the parallels between this eleventh-century description of possession hint that possession (of women) and exorcism (by holy men) had long been extant in the Muslim world, specifically, in North Africa.⁸³

I would suggest that these instances of possessed women in Safed, are further indications of Jewish adaptations of the non-Jewish cultures in which they lived or brought with them to Safed. Morocco too was one of the main areas of settlement of displaced Jews, and many who came from or passed through there eventually settled in Palestine. Indeed, one of the early kabbalists

80 al-Fārisī, *Manāqib*, 132 (Arabic), 306 (French translation).

81 In the Jewish texts, men as well as women could be possessed, although, as we have seen, women were often the “targets” of such spiritual events.

82 *فلمّا تخبطها تكلم على لسانها . . . ثم سأله ان يترها . فتركها ولم يعد اليها .* al-Fārisī, *Manāqib*, 132.

83 More research needs to be done regarding the history of spirit/jinn possession in Islam. The research on *zar* and related phenomena has been conducted by anthropologists who have not delved into evidence for its pre-modern historical development.

to come to Safed and describe instances of possession and transmigration, Yehudah Hallelwah, came from North Africa. This kind of behavior, like the anxieties about and attraction to *conversos*, certain sexual behaviors, and the quasi-magical abilities of Muslim holy men were all part of a new mixture of religious identities and practices created by the translocation of people and religions in the sixteenth century. While the written narratives and the rhetoric about these practices were composed by men, significantly, Jewish women seem to have actively adapted and benefited from these new customs to construct a new kind of spiritual authority for themselves. Chajes, in his analysis of these narratives, notes that these women take on masculine identities and roles during possession.⁸⁴ Thus, one might argue, that through a “translocation” of gender, courtesy of possession, Jewish women attained a spiritual status equal to or above that of the men who surrounded them. Yet Chajes cautions against seeing possession as the only basis for these women’s authority – Rachel Anav’s career as a spiritual mediator begins in earnest after the spirit who possessed her has been exorcised – and argues that these possessions of women, whether by good or ill-intentioned spirits be seen as part of the wider, active women’s spirituality which comprised of both possessed and non-possessed women and which partook of the broader paradigm of positive possession as a path to spiritual instruction for men and women alike.⁸⁵ Jewish men reacted to these “translocations” by creating new forms of polemic which differentiated true believers, from those had indulged in what they deemed as wrong mixtures of religious behavior. According to their descriptions of women’s activities, women also engaged in this rhetoric, being recognized as authorities with the ability to discern and critique the nature of spirits and living humans. The movement of a spirit into a female body could transform the woman, for good or ill, even as being located in a female body, whether in animal or human form, regularly designated a punitive transformation for roving souls. The negative depiction of non-Jewish practitioners in these texts may have been motivated by an impulse to religious demarcation, however, another aspect of their motive may also have been to eliminate Muslim exorcists and healers as legitimate competitors to Jewish ones. Together however, the “translocations” of Jews in the Ottoman empire in the sixteenth century, crossed geographic, denominational, physical, spiritual and gendered boundaries.

84 Chajes, *Between Worlds*, 113.

85 Chajes, *Between Worlds*, 115–118.

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Translocating Religion in the Mediterranean Space: Monastic Confrontation under Muslim Dominion

Ana Echevarría

1 Andalusí Monasteries and Their Relationship with the East: The *Translatio* of Palestinian Chalcedonian Monasticism to the Iberian Peninsula

The image of anchorites living in a desert land, far from populated areas, devoted to their handcrafts, but at the same time receiving travellers and travelling themselves in search of manuscripts to build their spiritual life within the walls of their monastery may suit a variety of historical and geographical situations in the Antiquity and the Middle Ages. The spiritual concept of the “desert”, sometimes assimilated to mountains, had been transferred to Hispania from the Holy Land, in the other extreme of the Roman Empire, as early as the fourth century. Local trends of monasticism adapted the rules of the so-called “Fathers of the Desert”, especially the rules of Pachomius and Basilus.

There were two main types of monastic retirement: anchorites or hermits (from *eremos* = desert, in Greek) were living in caves or cells in the desert, apart from one another, sharing just the church during the weekends. The *laura*, as they called this place, was ruled by a prestigious anchorite, who in time became an abbot, but they had no common fixed rule. Work was carried out in the cells. With the development of monasticism and the growth of these communities of anchorites, some form of organization was deemed necessary, therefore resulting in the birth of the *coenobium*, which consisted in the practice of a similar life within an organized community or monastery. One of the most important fathers was Pachomius, who established his first community in Tabennesis (Upper Nile) by 320.¹ I will refer to his rules later.

Palestinian monasticism grew around Jerusalem and Bethlehem by means of the patronage of rich families, or the retirement of members of such families into the desert, using their revenues to provide for the monastery. Double monasteries for men and women were placed together, and anchorites kept

1 Patrich, *Sabas*, 3, 18–21.

an interesting correspondence with their patrons and relatives despite living in the Judean desert. Proximity to Jerusalem favoured their involvement in the theological disputations of the time, and monasteries soon became the centre of pilgrimage for other monks travelling to the Holy Land. On the other hand, the desert was considered as the ideal environment to come in contact with the Creation and, through solitude, with God.²

The Basilian tradition originated in Syriac and Anatolian monasteries, where Basil the Great (329/30–379) became the founder and organizer of coenobitic monasticism and integrated the monastic movement into the organization of the Church since his election as bishop of Caesarea in 370. His high status and reputation contributed to the diffusion of his ascetic writings and two rules, and later to the spread of Basilian monasticism in Palestine and throughout the Byzantine Empire.³ *Lauras* and *coenobia* spread in Palestine in an interpenetration of coenobitism and anchoritism showed in the mingling of the different traditions, with examples such as members of the *coenobium* living in retirement as anchorites in caves for certain periods, or travelling the desert for years before coming back to monastic common life.⁴

In the period between the sixth and seventh centuries, when Hispania was under the rule of the Visigoths, Palestinian and Egyptian patterns of monasticism are found making their way to the Western Mediterranean. The councils celebrated in Visigothic times referred to the teachings of Chalcedon, and the first Western coenobitic monks travelled to the East to learn about the monastic experience directly in its sources. However, following a rule seems to have been an import from Africa, when Donatus travelled with his monks to establish a house and a library in Hispania, as mentioned by Isidore of Toledo.⁵ Pachomian and Basilian traditions were spread through the work of the Gallician fathers Martin of Dumio⁶ and the Visigothic Fructuosus of Braga,⁷ who translated the

2 Patrich, *Sabas*, 4–7.

3 Patrich, *Sabas*, 28–35.

4 Constable, “Preface,” xxxii.

5 Díaz, “Legado,” 15.

6 Responsible for the translation of *Apophthegmata Patrum* as well as the *Sententiae patrum Aegyptiorum*, continued by his disciple Pascasius. His selection of *Capitula ex Orientalium Patrum Synodis (Capitula Martini)*, were incorporated to the 11 Council of Braga (572), which served as a rule to the monastery of Dumio. Ed. Barlow, *Martini opera omnia*, 11–51, 80–104, 123–144; cit. Codoñer, *Hispania visigótica*, 71–81.

7 (Died around 665). A member of an important Visigothic family, his monastic foundations started in Gallaecia, but soon reached the centre and south of the Iberian Peninsula (Mérida, Cádiz and a female house in Nono, between Seville and Cádiz). His *Regula monachorum* for the monastery of Saints Justo and Pastor in Compludo, el Bierzo, emphasized discipline

Lives of the Desert Fathers and their writings. Martin and Fructuosus' own rules, and the monastic agreements written by monks and abbots – known as *typika* in Byzantium, and as *pactus* in the Iberian Peninsula – show a clear impact of Eastern monasticism. Although it has usually been related to the Celtic influence in Galicia, the lives of these saints always mention their contact, either physical or spiritual, with the Holy Land, and not with Irish missionaries.

Meanwhile, the so called “Visigothic Fathers”, people such as Leander and Isidore of Seville, or Braulius of Zaragoza, were producing another kind of coenobitic rules, which would remain the widespread tradition of the Hispanic Church for the following centuries. Both trends, “Fructuosian” and “Isidorian”, contemplated the possibility of dual monasteries for men and women, a characteristic of *coenobia* both in the east and the far west of the Mediterranean (Celtic foundations, Southern Italy and Iberia), but not so common in the other European churches. As a result, the manuscripts copied in the Iberian Peninsula from the 6th to the 11th centuries for monastic use included not just one single rule, but a compilation of several rules and *pactus* to be used as necessary by the communities, from Casian, Basil, Pachomius, Augustine, or Caesarius of Arles to local fathers such as Isidore, John of Biclaro or other examples thought appropriate for a certain monastery.⁸ In general, the collection of rules would contain the ones written by the Visigothic Fathers, including Fructuosus, but there is another, less diffused tradition that transmits the rules of Basil, Pachomius and Horsiesius, translated by Saint Jerome;⁹ the rules of Saint Fructuosus, and pieces by other authors such as Faustus (bishop of Riez, 5th c.) or Augustine. This other corpus still has to be studied in comparison to the most common tradition, but it is clearly a selection of rules one might expect to be followed in monasteries of an Oriental inspired or Fructuosian tradition. In this way, the desert spaces were re-created in Hispania: after the transfer of ideas and the translocality of similar buildings had taken place, a rule applied in a similar environment finished the *translatio* of a model of worship.

The central place of the East – more precisely, of the Judean Desert or Palestine and the monastic dwellings of Thebes, in Egypt – as a node for the transfer of monastic traditions, and the translocation of such a determined type of space to the opposite part of the Mediterranean formed a network of

and was based in the writings of Augustine, Pachomius, Casian, and the *Regula orientalis*, being one of the mainstays of monastic thought for Andalusian Christians. Codoñer, *Hispania visigótica*, 121–128. His rule in PL 87, cols. 1099a–110c.

8 Díaz, “Legado,” 16.

9 Constable, “Preface,” xii. I will deal with the *Corpora regularum* in the Iberian Peninsula in section 3.

monasteries in which two places functioned as the main hubs of monasticism in the Iberian Peninsula: the place called Tebaida Leonesa, in a clear definition of the translocation of the Thebaidan/Egyptian monasticism, and the mountainous region around Cordoba, where monasteries spread in the valleys of the rivers around the future capital of the Muslim emirate. In the Tebaida Leonesa, foundations by Fructuosus such as Saints Justo and Pastor of Compludo or San Pedro de Montes (Rupianense) were strongholds of eremitic practices; in the area of Cordoba, the Tabannites – the popular name of the followers of the Egyptian Father Pachomius – found their way to the mountains around the city, in the monastery of Tábanos. Caves were occupied in all these areas, reproducing the scheme of the Egyptian Thebaida, where *coenobia* coexisted with some forms of anchoritism.¹⁰

In the same way, a number of Eastern martyrs and saints found their ways to the Iberian Peninsula, and were celebrated on the same dates as in the Eastern Churches. A very interesting group is that of Saint Mamas of Caesarea or saints from Antioch introduced by the influence of the monastery of Saints Cosmes and Damian in Agali (Toledo) – famous for being the house of St. Ildefonse – founded by Egyptian and Syriac monks.¹¹

2 Building a Sacred Space around Relics: The Martyrs of Cordoba and the Challenge of a New Iberian Christianity

The beginning of the Islamic domination in Iberia has been interpreted as a breaking point which hindered the development of monasticism in the Iberian Peninsula after 711. Scholars have neglected the monasteries that remained in the areas under Muslim domination, assuming that they had been erased or

10 Caves as “spelunca”, common word to the occupation of funerary areas in the Egyptian Thebaida, where some of the dwelling places for the monks were defined in Greek as “spélaion”, in Coptic with a word that recalled both the cave and a grave. The “construction of the desert” in Egyptian monasticism referred to it as a site of redemption and salvation, involving any land beyond the band of cultivation irrigated by the Nile. O’Connell, “Transforming Monumental Landscape,” 242, 269.

11 Fernández Ardanaz, “Monaquismo,” 207–209. Saint Mames appears in the Mozarabic calendar and the *Pasionario Silense*. The relics of Saint Babilas of Antioch seem to have arrived at Guadix and Saint Christophorus had churches in Toledo and Cordoba in the ninth century. Both were celebrated in the dates and with a liturgy taken from the Syriac-Palestinian Church. The cults are quite different from the Byzantine liturgy for the same saints. Although there is no clue as to the survival of the monastery of Agali during the emirate, lack of news is not enough to think that it was destroyed.

destroyed.¹² However, a careful reading of the sources shows that it was not so, and that monasticism survived during the following century provided they paid the tributes corresponding to their *dhimmī* status. One may find traces of monasteries in Arabic chronicles, in the form of surrender pacts, for example the *amān* granted by ‘Abd al-Rahmān I in 758 to the “patricians, monks, princes and citizens of Qastilyā (Elvira).”¹³ The name might not be accidental, since Kastillion was another well-known monastery of the network of St. Sabas, in Judea.¹⁴ These names repeated at both ends of the Mediterranean – Qastilyā/Kastillion, or Tabbanites/Tábanos – created the type of bilocal mental frameworks that have been mentioned in the introduction to this volume, and worked for the communities as reminders of their models and origins in Egypt and Palestine. The same happened with monasteries following the rules of the Visigothic Fathers, whose patron saints tend to suggest a pattern that moved from the original foundations to other geographic areas of the Peninsula: Fructuosus’ foundation of Saints Justo and Pastor of Compludo (León) in remembrance of the martyrs who were killed in Complutum (Alcalá de Henares) suggests a translocation of martyrs’ basilicas surrounded by a whole ideological construction, about which we will talk later. Fructuosus’ foundation in Nono (Cádiz) has recently been related to his desires of starting a pilgrimage to the Eastern Thebaida in Egypt, an initiative that was several times aborted by Visigothic authorities.¹⁵ A direct communication with the monks on the other side of the Mediterranean must have been kept since then, as revealed by the fact that this foundation is mentioned in the *Athanasios typikon* (c. 973–975) for the Great Laura of Mount Athos for such a late period as the tenth century.¹⁶

12 The recent approach of Aillet, *Mozarabes*, 45–93 (“Une géographie évolutive de christianisme en al-Andalus”), however, has taken into account the geographical approach to the Andalusī Church as a whole, combining textual sources and archaeology. In this effort he has achieved the first accurate maps of Andalusī Christendom.

13 *Amān* granted by ‘Abd al-Rahmān I to the patricians, monks, princes and inhabitants of Qastilyā (city in the province of Elvira), after their support to al-Fihri (758) in exchange for a tribute of 10.000 ounces of gold (around 276,5 kg.), ten thousand pounds of silver, ten thousand armours, a thousand iron casks and another thousand lances during five years. Ibn Al-Jatib, *al-Ihata fi ajbar Garnata*, in Sánchez Albornoz, *La España musulmana*, 78.

14 Patrich, *Sabas*, 139–143.

15 References to Egypt in the prologue of his *Vita*. Henriet, “Horizon hagiographique”, 97–98.

16 “Even if some monasteries were established out beyond Cadiz and some monks from those places visited here and then chose to be enlisted among our brothers, we would not call them foreigners. For I am reluctant to designate a monastery as foreign, since that

I would like to go back to the previously presented definition of diversity, according to Aristotle, as composed by a generic term (*genus proximum*) and a specific difference (*differentia specifica*),¹⁷ and try to identify them for the groups of Christians living under Muslim rule. The kind of spiritual unity the Iberian Christians share with their co-religionaries via the networks they establish with Christians from different denominations and geographical areas is probably the key-factor in this respect. After the Islamic conquest, it seems that the Iberian Christians were not completely divided from their neighbours. The link with Rome as a religious centre was kept, but during the eighth century some events marked a progressive isolation. The most important of them was the defence of Adoptionism by Elipandus, Archbishop of Toledo, which created a division with the clergy of Asturias and the Hispanic March, that resulted in the establishment of more “local” churches within the Iberian territory.¹⁸

The second item, a specific difference between the types of Christianity existent in the Iberian Peninsula, can be defined by their different relationships with the dominant religion, Islam. This aspect can also be defined in spatial terms within the domain of Islam, since all Christians subject to the caliph enjoyed another type of *genus proximum*, their shared status as *dhimmīs*, and the networks created by the diffusion of the theoretical and conceptual confrontation with Islam, much more advanced than among Latin Christians, who still did not have enough ideological tools to face a dialectical confrontation with Islam.

These two concepts create a basic diversity of Andalusī Christians with respect to all the other Iberian and European Christians, except in areas subject to the same political circumstances, such as Sicily, Cyprus and other Mediterranean islands. But still, there may be more nuances, for in the case of al-Andalus, the foundation of the Umayyad Emirate in 750 had undermined

word suggests to me a separation from God.” This fragment suggests that guest monks from distant places were welcomed at the Great Laura in every circumstance. Thomas, *Byzantine*, xix and 258. For Nono and the pilgrimage, Quiroga, “Actividad monástica,” 11–13.

17 See the introduction to this volume.

18 Cavadini, *Last Christology*; see updated bibliography in Deswarte, “Une minorité chrétienne,” 251–268, where he discusses the problems of unity and diversity in this controversy. It should be noted that Elipandus’s writings continued to be diffused in the following centuries, proving that transmission of the teachings of the Primate of Toledo was still important at least for the Andalusī Church. Díaz y Díaz, *Códices visigóticos*, 43, referring to El Escorial R.II.18 (seventh century to 882), p. 49 to Biblioteca Capitulare de Toledo cod. 14.

the unity of the whole caliphate, by placing a descendant of the fallen dynasty in the furthest province of the empire. Political factors started then to play an important role in the communication of the Christians of the different parts of the Mediterranean, as the extent of the authority of al-Andalus was reduced to the Iberian Peninsula and some Berber tribes of the Maghreb.¹⁹ Political references changed slightly, the ‘Abbasid Caliphate became a source of cultural influences, but also more distanced from this Umayyad corner of the Western Mediterranean. The new trends of religious thought came gradually to the Iberian Peninsula, but traces of shī‘ism were filtered, and Syrian schools of law such as al-Awzā‘ī’s was followed until it was superseded by the emir al-Ḥakam I to be substituted by Malik and the Medinese school.²⁰ The *dhimma*, granted in the caliphate to all the diversity of Christians disregarding their particularities, from Hispania to India, began to be assured now in much more local contexts. In al-Andalus, it had to do mainly with Chalcedonian Christians who accepted the primacy of the Pope of Rome, instead of the diversity of denominations and patriarchates existent in the Eastern Church. The influence of Christian theology coming from the Eastern Churches was felt, since the apologetic and polemic theological rhetoric against Islam was already thriving in those areas, but in a background of denominations clearly far from the Roman primacy. This influence shows in the writings of bishop Felix of Urgel – one of the theoreticians of Adoptionism, together with Elipandus of Toledo – who composed a first attempt at controversy with the Muslims, his *Dialogus contra sarracenus*, around 785, as a result of his preaching in Muslim milieus. The *Epistola monachos Aegypti* by Cirilus of Alexandria, quoted in his *Confessio fidei*, shows that works about monasteries in the Oriental Church were still treasured in the West. Precisely Felix of Urgel’s abjuration of Adoptionism placed a special importance on the issue of the unity of Christendom, in whose name he was ready to give up his preaching of the doctrine in the Hispanic March.²¹ In this complex setting, monastic institutions in al-Andalus, which still kept the variety of rules and organization typical of the previous period, were free to accept models from both the Eastern and Western churches, and to develop them under Muslim domain. Being far from the centres of power, they might

19 Although their claims to be the legitimate heirs of the caliphate made them speak of “our Syria and our al-Andalus”, in the letter of ‘Abd al-Rahmān II to emperor Teophilus of Byzantium (840). Ibn Ḥayyan, *al-Muqtabis II-1*, trans. 297.

20 Molina, *Dhikr*, Arabic 125; trans. 134.

21 Codoñer, *Hispania visigótica*, 259–263; edition in González Echegaray, *Beato de Liébana*, vol. II, 564–572.

be relatively safe from hindrance on the part of Christian political and ecclesiastical authorities.

Political upheaval in the frontier was in great part the reason for a decline of the greater Christian communities of the Marches, the ones that had held together Christianity in al-Andalus during the first century of Islamic dominion. Successive revolts in Merida and Toledo, and a continuous state of war in their lands for more than ten years caused devastation and, most probably, the emigration of population to safer places, among them Christians and their relics.²² Although archbishops of Toledo were still quoted until 926, the incorporation of a Cordovan authority as last resort around 858 in the person of Eulogius speaks about a new shift of the axis of Christianity in al-Andalus to the South, to the most central parts of the Emirate, which would become central to the *dhimmi*s as well. The void created in the traditional sacred places, both geographical and of leadership, meant that Christian communities, could not refer to Toledo as the head of the Hispanic Church any more,²³ or to Mérida as the city of martyrs *par excellence*. Cordoba is precisely one of the places where measures can be observed: for instance, Christian population was moved definitely out beyond the walls, leaving only the basilica of Saint Cyprian inside, and even that we can doubt, since Christian oratories were discouraged in Muslim neighbourhoods.²⁴ Competition in the Northern kingdoms with the discovery of the tomb and relics of Santiago (dated around 813, although the source is much later, 1077), where a monastery was founded by Ordoño II around 820, threatened the primacy of the Andalusi Church as heir to that of the Goths.

22 An increase in taxes favoured by new censuses has also been adduced for this decline. Ibn Hayyan, *Al-Muqtabas II-1*, fols.143v, 177v–180r; trans. 181, 285–293; Manzano, *Conquistadores*, 320–336.

23 Sanson, *Apologeticus*, CSM, II, p. 553, trans. 75. The bishops mentioned by Sanson belonged mostly to the Baetica (Baeza, Cabra, Écija, Baza, Almería), except Mérida and Elche. On the disbanding of the Toledan church structure, see Aillet, *Mozarabes*, 46–47. Unfortunately, there are no references to monasteries. Mérida suffered even worse, because of the religious tinge of the revolts, headed by the Christian convert Ibn Marwan al-Djilliḳī. The church of Saint Mary was dismantled and its foundation stone was placed in the city walls; the basilica of Saint Eulalia was almost abandoned, as well as several Christian quarters, and a new bishopric was founded in Badajoz after al-Djilliḳī moved his quarters there. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de El Escorial, Arabic ms. 1623, f. 4v; Simonet, *Historia de los mozarabes*, IV, 810; Aillet, *Mozarabes*, 65–67.

24 Aillet, *Mozarabes*, 70. The monastery and basilica managed to keep its status as centre of study during the caliphate, and was visited by the monks of St. German-des-Près in 858, as we shall see later.

What city in al-Andalus could then become “the holy place” for these Christians in disarray, whose traditional places of worship had been erased, and with them to some extent the memory of the martyrs they represented? A place-bound piety was difficult to build under Islamic domain, and yet it was achieved, at the expense of the Metropolitan see of Seville, which had remained as the untouched, official head of Christendom in al-Andalus.²⁵ In fact, the council called in Cordoba in 839, started the final coup to the ancient Metropolitan sees in the sense that the prestige of the Archbishops as heads of the church was displaced by political propriety of meeting in the political capital of the Emirate.²⁶

But there was still another factor to complicate matters even more: the set of restrictions concerning *dhimmīs* issued by al-Mutawakkil around 850, which was enforced during the following years (850–854), according to both Arabic and Syriac sources, reaching provinces with strong links to the West like Palestine and Jordan. However, *dhimmīs* were not the only objectives at the time. A wave of persecution of the *muʿtazilites* in just the same period made religious discussion a focal point of social disturbance. Crucifixion seems to have been a common practice to punish those found guilty among both groups, and further research might provide insights into a comparison of violence against *dhimmīs* in the midst of interreligious discussion, and *muʿtazilites*, from an intra-religious perspective.²⁷ According to Eulogius, the wave of limitations reached al-Andalus under Muhammad I (emir, 852–883). In other places with significant Christian minorities, the measures took more time to reach: between 878 and 884, a set of regulations almost identical to that of al-Mutawakkil’s was enforced by Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn in Egypt. The regulations became an accepted norm by the end of the ninth and during the tenth centuries in the entire Islamic world.²⁸ Christian communities in al-Andalus reacted to these regulations not only against the Muslim government, but also trying to redefine their own, internal divisions.

25 Aillet, *Mozarabes*, 81–83, 214. It should be noted that, by the mid-ninth century, Seville as head of the Baetica ecclesiastical province, was still able to keep nine of the ten bishoprics which were extant at the end of the seventh century.

26 Aillet, *Mozarabes*, 46, 81. Despite of the council being called by archbishop Juan of Seville and presided by Wistremirus of Toledo, still in his category as Primate of Hispania, it took place in Cordoba, even though Seville was one of the most important cities of the realm. Juan seems to have been involved in the teaching of Arabic in his bishopric, in order “not to follow, but to judge and persuade”, that is, for polemical confrontation. Alvare of Cordoba, *Epistolae*, CSM, I, 170–171, trans. 60–61.

27 Ibn Hayyan, *Al-Muqtabas* 11-1, fols. 175v–176v; trans. 281–282.

28 Lapidra, “Mártires de Córdoba”; Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims*, 122.

In this context, the literature written by the so-called “martyrs of Cordoba” can be understood as an attempt to build a new network of holy places, to work up a real “spatial turn” within the Andalusí Church, a strategy of both political and geographical significance – but also religious.²⁹ Eulogius of Cordoba, famous author of literary works and proposed as Metropolitan of Toledo,³⁰ in particular, depicts a landscape of holy places trying to reach a new order in sacred space, taking into account the redefinition of inter and intra-religious boundaries in the Peninsula and, by extension, in Western Christendom. For this, he used the most ancient tools to transform Christian places into particularly holy places: the relationship between place and event as represented by a new *martyrologium*. A new set of contemporary martyrs was created to sanctify a new set of holy places, in which two types of religious dedication were mingled: monastic life and the veneration of martyrs’ relics. The fact that normal worship of urban Christian communities was not enough to foster the veneration for the new martyrs has to be justified by the new order of things, under Muslim lords. Male and female monastic life related to the relics in more subtle ways, as guardians, preservers of the faith, and interpreters and counselors for the believers, as new intellectual and practical concerns were raised by the complicated political and social situation. Therefore, many of the martyrs found in the stories collected by Eulogius were monks, deacons or nuns, or at least lay people who had chosen retirement within the walls of monasteries. Eulogius depicts a landscape of Christian Cordoba where the new martyrs sanctify the religious buildings which were destined to substitute the markers of identity that were lost when the Christian basilicas inside the walls of the city had to be abandoned. The relics of the saints gave a renewed spirit to the ancient Roman martyrs whose relics the city had kept until then, but whose stories did not exactly match the new needs of the Andalusí Church.³¹

Eulogius retrieved, then, a number of ancient monastic foundations, which were developed as centres of cult, and added some new ones, whose foundation he attributed to the families of some of the Cordovan martyrs, and

29 Historiography about the martyrs is overwhelming, and it is not my concern here to analyse it except in the context of the spatial paradigm. For an updated assessment, see Aillet, *Mozarabes*.

30 Alvarus, *Vita Eulogii*, CSM, 1, 336; cit. Codoñer, *Hispania visigótica*, 277–284.

31 I am very indebted for this part of the article to the work of Markus, “How on Earth,” especially 265–266, 270 and Boyarin, *Dying for God*, especially 93–128. Also in this sense, Tolan, “Reliques et païens,” 41–42. It is very revealing that Carolingian bishops had decided in 794 at the Synode of Frankfurt that nobody could be venerated without a *vita* or *passio* that proved a remarkable life. The transmission of this clause in the Andalusí context is difficult to prove.

he invested both kinds of places with a number of relics from the martyrs of Islamic persecution.³² From this, and the combined information of archaeology and recent trends of interpretation, it can be inferred that the cult was mostly moved either to the new Christian neighbourhoods in the outskirts of Cordoba, or to the mountain range beside the city (Sierra de Córdoba), where the most ascetic ways of coenobitic monasticism were practiced in the areas of caves that provided shelter to the monks. As for the basilicas³³ mentioned in books II and III of the *Memoriale sanctorum*, only two martyrs are related to the basilica of Saint Cyprian of Carthage around 862, while three came from the basilica of Saint Aciscle, nowadays identified with the complex of the Theodosian palace in Cercadilla, close to the suburb of the parchment dealers of Cordoba, outside the walls.³⁴ The basilica dedicated to “the Three Saints”, corresponding to the martyrs Faustus, Januarius and Martial, was placed in the suburb “of the Tower”, and corresponds with the site of the church of Saint Peter, built by Fernando III after the conquest of the city, and from there came another two martyrs, a deacon and a monk.³⁵

Unfortunately, the amount of information Eulogius provided is not enough to infer if some of the monasteries in the Sierra de Córdoba had already been founded in the previous period, under Visigothic or Eastern rule, but other indicators can help. The most important monasteries to be founded or to survive into Islamic period were Saint Zoilus of Armila, by the river known nowadays as Guadalquivir (*flumen armilatense* in the sources). The relics of Saint Zoilus had been found around 613 by Agapius, bishop of Cordoba, and were kept in the monastery. During the Muslim period it was the first stop on the road north from Cordoba, where Muslim troops used to rest after their first journey, and

32 For accounts of who were the persecuted and why, as well as the question of which were the exact accusations made against them, see Penelas, “Introducción a la doctrina”; Fernández Felix, *Cuestiones*, 459–480.

33 This word is used with a very specific meaning, taken from Isidore, in the first place, who explained the change from the royal, laic basilica to the *basilica sanctorum* as a way to name temples where God – King of all – was worshiped. The word refers to the actual building of the church, be it or not inside a monastic complex, and to the cult of martyrs in it. Isidore, *Etymologiae*, xv, 4, 11. González Salinero, “La dimensión edificante,” 14–16.

34 Aillet, *Mozarabes*, 74, 76–79. Saint Cyprian was celebrated at this basilica on the fourteenth of September, two days before the Roman Church. Dozy, *Calendrier*, 138. The archaeologist Pedro Marfil rather identifies Cercadilla with Saint Zoilus. Only more archaeological activity may give a clue to this identification.

35 Euloge, *Memoriale*, CSM, II, 415; Aillet, *Mozarabes*, 75. On the *passio* of these three martyrs, which cannot be traced before the Islamic conquest, with all the implications this may have, see Codoñer, *Hispania visigótica*, 347.

during the caliphate a number of villas for the use of the Cordoban Muslim aristocracy, including the caliphs and their families, developed in the area, where they kept some contact with the monastery in shared festivals. The surroundings had caves that had been in use since the Neolithic period, and provided raw material for the monks' weaving activities.³⁶ Two martyrs came from the monastery, while another two are related to the basilica of Saint Zoilus, whose identification with the previous is uncertain.³⁷

Another landmark of Christian resistance was the monastery of Tábanos, whose likely relation with the rule of Pachomius has been mentioned above. Tábanos is one of the most interesting houses depicted by Eulogius. For a start, the monastery shared the characteristics of other houses in the East: double monastery for both men and women, with a reputed patron who had retired to live in it, directed by an abbot who was a member of the patron's family³⁸. This, and its name, that seems to derive directly from the Tabbanites, might indicate an earlier foundation than the period of the martyrs, although it does not rule out the possibility of further donations, which would establish the family of the monk Jeremiah as its most recent re-founder. Such an earlier origin would solve the problem of building temples or monastic fabrics during the period of Muslim rule, and even worse, precisely when the atmosphere was rarefied by new regulations against Christians.³⁹ The fact that no less than six martyrs (of which two were women) could be related to the monastery makes it the

36 Aillet, *Mozarabes*, 71; Rincón Álvarez, *Mozárabes*, 182–183, but still not quoting the geographical situation of the monasteries, which has now been traced by archaeologists. The relics were carried away by count Gómez Díaz to Carrión de los Condes, in Leon, to a Benedictine abbey that changed its name from St. John the Baptist to Saint Zoilus, in the 11th c., where the Islamic patterned textiles that covered the relic-chest can still be seen.

37 For a discussion of the possibilities of identification of the basilica as part of the suburbs, see Aillet, *Mozarabes*, 76. Even if we are speaking of two different places, the importance of this patron-saint in the translocation of religious authority among Andalusí Christians remains outstanding, so either in one place or in two different – a monastery and an urban basilica –, monks from Saint Zoilus kept their teachings and prestige intact, as shows the figure of Eulogius himself. My own view is that, given the outstanding status of Saint Zoilus Armilatensis in the sources – even the Arab ones, which are mostly uninterested in Christians –, and the fact that its relics were the ones taken by the counts of Carrion two centuries later, we can assume that after Eulogius' period, it was the mountain monastery and not the city basilica the one that prevailed.

38 Euloge, *Memoriale*, CSM II, 402, 422, 444, 448, 450; Aillet, *Mozarabes*, 71.

39 The same problem applies to Saint Saviour of Peñamelaria, as we shall see. Arce Sáinz, "Viejas y nuevas perspectivas," 81–82. On the regulations about churches in Islamic territories in Maliki treatises used in al-Andalus, see Fernández Felix, *Cuestiones*, 480–488,

objective of a *razzia* by Muhammad I, around 853, which resulted in some of the founders taking refuge in Saint Cyprian, inside the city.⁴⁰

The next stop in the mountains around Cordoba was Saint Saviour of Peñamelaria, founded, according to Eulogius, around 825 by the family of one of the martyrs following Basil's rule, a link with the East confirmed by the fact that Peñamelaria celebrated the feast of the Baptism of Christ on the sixth of January, as did the Byzantine Church.⁴¹ Here we find another example of family patronage under an Eastern rule, more suitable to this kind of houses than the Visigothic ones. However, an earlier foundation would explain why it was not destroyed by the Islamic authorities, and thrived as a centre of pilgrimage and relics in the following years. Although the buildings of the monastery have not been traced, it was related to no less than four martyrs, but became specially important as resting place for the relics of three of the most popular martyrs, due to the international networks that were built around them once the place of Cordoba as a node of worship was established outside the frontiers of al-Andalus, as we shall see.

Other monasteries mentioned as places of origin for the martyrs were small communities placed in the mountains, Saint Martin of Rojana, Saints Justo and Pastor of Fraga;⁴² Saint Felix of Froniano⁴³ and Saint Christopher's, and just one female house, Saint Mary of Cuteclara. The places where all these congregations stood were defined as hamlets (*vico, viculum*), apart from the main communication routes, and nevertheless, centres of learning and circulation of the faithful, who went there to visit and seek refuge during the persecutions. But the new religious landscape was definitely fixed after the martyrdoms took place, when the bodies of some of the most reputed martyrs went to some of these temples. Most of the bodies were not retrieved by the Christians, according to Eulogius, because they had been hung or cremated and thrown into the river, or else crucified or hung on the other side of the river, as an example for their followers. The remains that could be collected were placed in some of the monasteries and churches mentioned above: Saint Acisclus, Saint

where it can be seen that religious space could still be negotiated; Lapiedra, "Mártires de Córdoba," 454.

40 About the complete destruction of the monastery in this *razzia*, I am not completely sure, although most scholars have taken this view. See Arce Sáinz, "Los monasterios," 166–167.

41 Euloge, *Memoriale*, CSM II, 444, 452. Dozy, *Calendrier*, 28.

42 Same patron-saints as the Fructuosian foundation of Compludo, in the Tebaida leonesa, which might indicate followers of that rule. Their feast was celebrated in this monastery on the sixth of August, according to the Calendar of Cordoba. Dozy, *Calendrier*, 124.

43 Again named after a martyr from the north, in Gerona. The feast of Saint Felix was celebrated in both places on the first of August, according to the Calendar of Cordoba. Dozy, *Calendrier*, 122.

Christopher's in the suburb of Saqunda and the Basilica of the Three Saints, in the city area; Peña-melaria, Saint Mary of Cuteclara and two that had not been mentioned previously, the female monastery of Saint Eulalia of Fragelas, between the city and the mountains, and Saint Genesis of Tercios, in a hamlet less than five kilometres from the city.⁴⁴ Saint Cyprian and Saint Zoilus did not achieve any new relics. One may wonder if the former ones were prestigious enough, or whether Eulogius did not feel the need to exalt these two basilicas any more, given their central place in the city.

But the network created by the new martyr cult was not restricted to local or regional spaces, and it was vital that it reached the rest of Christendom. This could be achieved by the figures of the martyrs themselves. The link with Palestine and Egypt could not be lost, especially in the context of the Islamic polity, which looked East for all kinds of influences. In a common Mediterranean space, where contacts were again possible with the Palestinian monasteries, we find a certain monk George travelling to Iberia and claiming the dependence of some of its monasteries to the coenobium of St. Sabas (in the Judean Desert), in the person of its abbot Daniel, a fact that would enable this monk to ask for alms. Eulogius of Cordoba, referring to the main *coenobium* in the mountains of Cordoba, recorded the visit and some details about monastic life in Palestine, and narrated the martyrdom of George together with other members of the Cordovan community.⁴⁵

Travelling monks were contemplated in Eastern rules, especially in Pachomian monasticism, so it is not strange to find them as far as the Iberian Peninsula.⁴⁶ However, some of the details given by Eulogius might have been exaggerated or even invented. It is not our concern here whether this monk George was a historical character, but what is of interest is his role as an impersonation, a literary *topos* that shows the links of Iberian monasticism with a spiritual network that reaches the Eastern monasteries.⁴⁷ Eulogius claimed that the community in Saint Sabas was then no less than five hundred brothers,

44 Aillet, *Mozarabes*, 73. The martyr Eulalia recalls earlier cults in Barcelona and Merida, while Saint Genesis of Arles had another basilica in Saint Genesis of La Jara, close to Cartagena, with a very interesting cult developed during the Middle Ages. In Tercios, it was celebrated the 25th of August. Dozy, *Calendrier*, 128.

45 Euloge, *Memoriale sanctorum*, CSM, II, 424–430; French translation by Millet-Gérard, *Chrétiens mozarabes*, 159–160; see Lilie, “Georgios”; Levy Rubin and Kedar, “A Spanish Source”, also take the information contained in the *Memoriale sanctorum* on George as strictly historical.

46 Thomas, “Early Monastic Rules,” 34–35.

47 The same problem has been analyzed for a slightly later period in European monasticism by Lilie, “Sonderbare Heilige”. I wish to thank Dr. Marie-Louise Favreau-Lilie for this reference.

a figure we know is false, since the Great Laura in Palestine could only have housed around one hundred twenty in its epoch of splendour around 555.⁴⁸ Whether the visit was genuine or not, it shows some interest to trace the origins of Saint Zoilus in the prestigious atmosphere of the Judean Desert, one of the most important centres of eremitism and monasticism in the whole of Chalcedonian/Melkite Christianity – the central denomination of Christians during the Umayyad and ‘Abbasid caliphates –, linked to houses spread as far as Europe through a network of monasteries that might be visited to ask for alms, as he had George do. The identification was not by chance: the accounts of martyrdoms and persecutions in Saint Sabas are used by Eulogius to transfer the stories of those Sabaite monks’ martyrdoms as a spiritual model for the Andalusi martyrs of his time.⁴⁹

When the relics from Peñamelaria were transferred to France, after 858, and a whole new body of authors took care of re-writing the sufferings of the Cordovan martyrs from the viewpoint of the Carolingian/Roman Church, the translocation of the Andalusi Church took a new turn.⁵⁰ Through all this “propaganda”, Cordoba became the real hub of Andalusi Christian life:⁵¹ councils started to be celebrated there, probably under the presidency of a representative of the emir or the caliph – most likely the *comes Christianorum* –, and the

48 “The countryside of Bethlehem saw him born, and the foreign coasts were his heavenly home; he was born, I said, beyond the sea, and from his youth he rejoiced in the service of God. He spent twenty seven years in the monastery of St. Sabas, which is to the south of Jerusalem, at 8 milliards, in the company of five hundred brothers, as he himself has told us, who lived in the same monastery under the teachings of their rule. And as the venerable abbot David, then administrator (*hoigoumenos*) of the laura sent him to Africa, to ask for alms for the monks, he did not lose any time to confront the dangers of all the lands and seas that divided him from there. Dangers which made him think that they would earn him the merit of the highest virtue, obedience. But finding the church of God severely under proof due to the invasion of the tyrants [the Muslims], he crossed to Hispania following the advice of those to whom he had been sent.” Euloge, *Memoriale*, CSM II, 425. Patrich, *Sabas*, 9 calculates around five hundred monks in total for the whole of Palestine around the year 480. It is difficult to think that under Muslim domain the numbers would be much higher. Constable, “Preface,” xvi–xvii, speaks of average communities between four and twenty members, with the big ones raising to eighty. Very few could house hundreds of members.

49 Millet-Gérard, *Chrétiens mozarabes*, 163–165.

50 The version in the *De translatione sanctorum martyrum Georgii monachi, Aurelii et Nathalie*, by the monk Aimoin, from Saint Germain-des-Près, and the mention in Usuard’s *Martyrologium* have received a great deal of attention. Updated bibliography and interpretation in Tolan, “Reliques et païens,” 45–55.

51 Markus, “How on Earth,” 259.

Metropolitans from Toledo and Seville started to travel from their sees to the new centre of power. The work was finished for internal consumption by the *Calendar of Cordoba* (compiled around 961), which consecrated the celebrations of all the martyrs, Roman and Andalusi, in the sanctuaries of the new religious landscape.⁵²

3 The Confrontation between Eastern and Western Monasticism in Al-Andalus during the Ninth Century: A Question of “Space”?

With Cordoba as the centre of monastic pilgrimage, and the progressive homogenization of European monasticism according to Benedictine models, the situation in the ninth century started to change. Rules were still collected and transmitted in groups, in manuscripts that combined rules and pacts consistent with the ideals of each single monastery concerned: the *Corpora regularum*. A particular ninth century manuscript shows the circulation in the Iberian Peninsula of a tradition of monasticism related to the Eastern rules, instead of the models of the Visigothic *Corpus regularum*, or the more recent Benedictine corpus, which becomes extended in the Peninsula only during the tenth century.⁵³ Scholars have not been able to explain this mixture of rules and pacts in the context of other contemporary models of transmission of rules.⁵⁴ My opinion is that only a monastery created in a particular trend of monasticism, that of monasteries imported directly from the Holy Land, would explain this selection, and it is possibly in al-Andalus where such background was preserved still in the ninth century. The miscellaneous manuscript is a combination of three parts, of which only the first belongs to the ninth century. It contains the rules and other writings of Basil of Caesarea, the *Consensoria*, Pachomius and Horsiesios, translated by Jerome; some parts of Leander’s instructions for female devout (*Sententia de regula devotarum*), that

52 Euloge, *Memoriale sanctorum*, CSM, II, 412. For instance, Saints Adulfo and John, martyrs in Cordoba, were quoted in the calendar; other popular saints like Simon the Zealot and Juda, were registered on the 1st July – similar to the Copts, who celebrated them on the 2nd-, and not in October, as the Catholic Church did; Dozy, *Calendrier*, 108, 142. Fernández Ardanaz, “Monaquismo oriental en Hispania,” 208, has already remarked the high number of Eastern saints that appear in the calendars and martirologies of the Andalusi Christians.

53 This does not mean that the Benedictine corpus was unknown in Early Medieval Iberia, but it was never circulated together with the Visigothic corpus before the end of the ninth or the tenth century. Velázquez Soriano, “Reflexiones,” 563.

54 Antolín, “Un Codex Regularum,” 27; Velázquez Soriano, “Reflexiones,” 562.

correspond in fact to chapter 77 of Pachomius's rule;⁵⁵ Canon 11 of the Council of Seville (619) on the same subject; the writings by Fructuosus of Braga; the sermons of Faustus, abbot of Lérins and bishop of Riez (also acknowledged as a saint by the Orthodox church); and Augustine's *Soliloquies*.⁵⁶ This order of rules speaks of a dual monastery of a shared anchorite and coenobitic model, such as the ones fostered by Pachomius. Unfortunately there is no mention of place or community to which this rule was attached.⁵⁷

Díaz suggests that monasteries might have chosen their rules in the Visigothic period according to their geographical setting and their economic needs, for the Visigothic tradition of Isidore, Braulio and Leander was more suitable to urban *coenobia*, while the Fructuosian paradigm would be preferred for retired monasteries in wild areas.⁵⁸ If we assume this distinction might still have been applied under Muslim domain, it is possible to classify the monasteries in Cordoba and other cities of al-Andalus, according to this distinction. Thus, the communities living in urban settlements like Saint Zoilus, Saint Acisclus or Saint Christopher would follow the former Roman-Visigothic model of monasticism, while the communities placed in the mountains of Cordoba are more likely to have chosen an Eastern based *corpus regularum*.

In confirmation of this tradition of Eastern monasticism, we can also quote the repeated references to guests, hospitality and travels both in the rules and the description of Andalusi monasteries. While the Visigothic and Basilian traditions discouraged the existence of hostels inside the limits of monasteries, and the contact of monks and nuns with persons outside their immediate family,⁵⁹ the shorter rules and the writings of St. Sabas or St. Fructuosus held a relatively liberal attitude towards visits and travel. No journey could be undertaken without the superior's permission, but they were ready to open their doors to pilgrim monks, family and friends – whose visits were discouraged but not forbidden – or lay people interested in retirement and prayer, especially

55 Díaz y Díaz, *Códices visigóticos*, 101, referring to the *Codex regularum* known as Leodegundia's (El Escorial, a.I.13), which contains the same section and the Council of Seville.

56 El Escorial S.III.32, ff. 1–158v. Additions to this fragment contain undated texts from Hilarius and Ambrose, ff. 159r–166v. Finally, ff. 167–206 is a thirteenth century version of a *Catena Patrum*. The texts, therefore, complete the collection, but are not strictly part of the ninth century transmission. The manuscript will be studied in the short future.

57 The provenance of the codex, from the convent of Carmelites in Cordoba, might suggest an origin in the area. Antolín, *Catálogo*, vol. IV, 82–85.

58 Díaz, "Legado," 19; Henriët, "Horizon hagiographique," 94.

59 Linage Conde, *Monacato visigótico*, 240; Díaz, "Legado," 20; Thomas, "Early Monastic Rules," 26.

if they belonged to the patron's family. In Pachomian foundations, travel was not encouraged but seen as inevitable and necessary, and even women were welcome as guests, providing they were lodged in different buildings from the monks or nuns.⁶⁰ It is clear from the descriptions of Eulogius and others that the monasteries around Cordoba hosted guests, not only the monk George, but other persons who were part of a concept of patronage common to the early period of monasticism. Familiar monasteries, as we have seen, flourished around Cordoba, but if they really wanted to follow the rules of the Fathers, they had to be approved by bishops, who in this case were close to Muslim authorities.⁶¹

Confrontation between monks – or abbots – and bishops was not an exceptional case under Muslim domain, as before during Visigothic times and in the Byzantine Church. For a start, monastic estates were independent from the bishop's authority and remained very much in the hands of the community or the patrons or the abbots. Bishops had the spiritual authority over the communities, but seldom imposed it, and abbots were careful to establish their relative independence in theological and practical terms.⁶² The independence of monastic institutions, discipline and properties from bishops can be found in the Arabic collection of canons of the Visigothic Church (compiled around 1069), adapted to the needs of the Andalusí Christians by means of a selection of canons from different collections.⁶³ Its second book is devoted to "The institutions of the monasteries and monks, and the order of penitence"⁶⁴, but only one title out of twenty-three deals with monks. Titles II to XIV speak about female monasteries and the relationship between nuns and their male counterparts, priests and monks, using the same canons as suggested by the Visigothic Fathers. The lack of regulations in such a collection, compiled for very precise needs, would lead one to think that the bishops who ordered the

60 Thomas, "Early Monastic Rules," 29, 35.

61 The *Regula communis*, 1 denounces: "Solent enim nonnulli ob metum gehennae in suis domibus monasteria componere et cum uxoribus, filiis et seruis atque uicinis cum sacramenti conditione in unum se copulare et in suis sibi ut diximus uilli et nomine martyrum ecclesias consecrare et eas tale nomine monasteria nuncupare. Nos tamen haec non dicimus monasteria sed animarum perditionem et ecclesiae subversionem." Díaz, "Legado," 18.

62 A discussion of the *ius possessionis* of the monasteries and the conflicts between them and the bishops in Visigothic times, in Díaz, *Formas económicas*, 55–65.

63 I have presented the peculiarities of this source for different subjects in Echevarria, "Los marcos legales de la islamización," and "La jurisdicción eclesiástica mozárabe".

64 Arabic Ms. El Escorial 1623, ff. 111v–147v.

collection of canons under Muslim rule had in fact very little power over male monastic institutions, which had their own rulings.⁶⁵

In the fourth century, episcopal appointments such as those of Basil and Eustathius, great leaders of Eastern monasticism, were followed by revolts among the monks of their monasteries.⁶⁶ This may have to do with the low proportion of ordained monks, who were opposed to ecclesiastical authority over their monastery, and rejected the figure of a bishop-abbot. After the example of Martin of Braga and Fructuosus, the Iberian Peninsula became home to a number of “bishops under the rule” (*sub regula*), interesting characters who would be designated bishops while living in a monastery under its rule, and who made the distinction between the functions of abbots and bishops more artificial.⁶⁷ But eventually, the same conflicts between bishops and abbots, or among the monks of one monastery, who had to turn to the bishop, arose.⁶⁸ However, the situation under Muslim rule became more complicated again, reproducing conflicts that were in place in the Byzantine context, between partisans of different trends of religious thought, those closer to the political authorities – the bishops – and the defenders of independent, hard core Christian thought, represented by the heads of monastic communities. What was a simple question of sects or heresies in Byzantium, in the Iberian Peninsula introduced the need to differentiate clearly from “the other”, once the development of the emirate of al-Andalus made *dhimmī* Christians face the fact that Muslims were “there to stay”. Political pressure, in the form of the enforcement of the regulations against *dhimmīs* by Muhammad I, prompted new reactions from some sectors within the clergy. In 862–863, the confrontation between Hostegesis, bishop of Malaga, and Samson, hermit and later abbot of Peñamelaria, which had by then become a famous place abroad thanks to the circulation of its relics and their transfer to France, raised the issue of what kind of Christianity were the Andalusī Christians supporting, the new revisions sponsored by Rome and the Carolingians, or the teachings “of the older Fathers”. And monasticism was at the centre of the controversy.

65 Díaz, “Legado,” 18–19.

66 Patrich, *Sabas*, 197–198. Horsiesius also suffered from internal revolts due to his rebukes of the monks' economic expansion. Constable, “Preface,” xxiv.

67 Of course, this was not exclusive of the Iberian area. In the Thebaidan area of Egypt, at least from the seventh century, bishops, rather than living in capital cities, lived in the monasteries that repopulated the Pharaonic tombs of Sheikh ‘Abd el-Gurna and the monastery of Phoibammon, which occupied the temple of Hatshepsut in Deir el-Bahari. O’Connell, “Transforming Monumental Landscape,” 250; Bishko, “The Pactual Tradition,” 12.

68 Some tenth century cases in Martín Viso, “Memoria de los hombres santos,” 13–15.

The attacks against a body of Andalusí bishops who were close to the Muslim authorities was phrased directly by Samson (c. 810–890), first as priest of saint Zoilus, and later – only after the council where he was accused of heresy – as abbot of Peñamelaria. Learned in Arabic, he seems to share the same cultural background described by Alvaro and Eulogius, but in his case – as in that of some of the martyrs of Cordoba – knowledge of Arabic for the purpose of religious debate with Jews and Muslims was not a handicap, but an advantage.⁶⁹

Liturgical and practical concerns appear when the *Apologetics* of Abbot Samson denounced, not only the inconvenient relationship of Andalusian bishops with the hierarchy of the conquerors, but also the existence of a tradition of monasticism that was “strange” to Roman-Visigothic Christian practices. The analysis of the lives and works of other bishops under Muslim rule shows that in fact, most of them only acted as any bishop under *dār al-Islam*: through negotiation, collaboration with the Muslims in the collection of taxes, and exercising their jurisdiction and spiritual guidance for the Christian community.⁷⁰ The intervention of Muslim power in the selection of Metropolitans or just interlocutors hindered the prestige of these religious leaders among the faithful and, on the opposite, their rejection of designations by Christians enhanced the figure of polemic characters such as Eulogius. A careful reading of the *Apologetics* of abbot Samson, devoid of the biased accusations against bishop Hostegesis of Malaga and his family, shows more or less the same patterns. Struggles between monks and regular clergy had been a commonplace in Visigothic times, and often ruled by Councils of Toledo, and they were also typical in Byzantium. But what is of interest here is that the confrontation between Samson and Hostegesis, started precisely over matters of monastic practices.

The first to be mentioned was a liturgical controversy, over an *antiphon* taken from an Eastern ritual (“the most ancient Fathers”, according to the text) that was still recited in the Iberian Peninsula. This particular prayer considered

69 Samson, *Apologeticus*, CSM, II, 8; trans. 75; biography in Pérez Marinas, *Sansón de Córdoba*, 121–133 and Codoñer, *Hispania visigótica*, 288–290. An unbiased study of the controversy between Samson and Hostegesis, bishop of Malaga, is still to be written, but more research into the historical and cultural background of the Andalusí Christians is necessary before we can place their literature in the context of Christian-Muslim relations in the Mediterranean. This work is an attempt to propose some alternative readings of this case, in the context of monasticism only. For instance, we may ask whether Samson's entrance in the monastic life of Peñamelaria was some kind of banishment from the most important church of Saint Zoilus, where he had an easier access to the faithful, who might be “corrupted” by his discourse.

70 Codoñer, *Hispania visigótica*, 278–279, 290–292.

Christ's incarnation with respect to the position of the Church of the East (Nestorian): "Oh how great and unprecedented miracle! [God's] Power regarded from Heaven, covered the Virgin's womb with His shadow, and majesty could be locked inside the lodging of the heart with closed doors". The meaning of the *antiphon* was subsequently explained: "And so that Nestorian doctrine might be refuted, we do not doubt that Christ was locked as the unique Son of God, and we believe that he became incarnate, not in the river Jordan, but in the Virgin's womb".⁷¹ Samson was ready to abolish this piece from the ritual because he felt it had no more use in the liturgy of the West. However, the phenomenon of Nestorian influence in the Iberian Peninsula was not as simple as Samson wants the reader to think. Nestorians were the strongest Christian denomination in Baghdad at the time of the regulations about *dhimmīs* mentioned above, and their Patriarch was instituted as the highest authority above all Christian groups. Traces of their doctrines in some Christian authors of al-Andalus – even Eulogius – have been found, and pieces of polemics such as the *Dialogue between the Patriarch Thimoteus and al-Mahdi* or the *Risāla* of Pseudo al-Kindi seem to have circulated in al-Andalus.⁷² Likewise, the rejection of Nestorians by Felix of Urgel was one of the key-chapters of his *Confessio* just one century earlier. Given that the Arabic *Collection of canons* devotes two whole Titles (*titulus*) to the question of Nestorians,⁷³ it is not strange to find a public condemnation of Nestorian Christology such as this *antiphon* still being used in the liturgy of Andalusī Christians in the mid-ninth century.

A more comprehensive problem was differentiation from Muslims. Writings from the East as well as from the Western Mediterranean suggest that by this period, Christians and Muslims had become quite assimilated in matters of costume and appearance. All the sources quoting the different agreements about *dhimmīs* criticize their attempts to look and behave like Muslims.⁷⁴ Monastic habit and beards were called into question.⁷⁵ Beards, especially, arose a great deal of controversy. It had been a common hagiographic trope in early times of monasticism to describe practices of anchorites as using little clothes and a long beard as covering for the body. Likewise, more or less long

71 Samson, *Apologeticus*, CSM, II, p. 563; trans. pp. 86–87.

72 Lapidra, "Mártires de Córdoba," 461; Millet-Gérard, *Chrétiens mozarabes*, 165, 195–199.

73 Arabic ms. 1623 El Escorial, fols. 408r–415r.

74 Lapidra, "Mártires de Córdoba," 454; Levy-Rubin, "Non-muslims," 92–96.

75 For a study of the diffusion of Eastern monastic habits in the Iberian Peninsula before the Islamic conquest, see Torallas, "Hábito monástico oriental," especially 160–161, where the typology and colours of the habits are explained. It seems that at this early period, homogeneity was not the norm.

beards had remained as distinctive of the coenobitic monks, whose trimming and arrangement of the beard was also instructed in some of the rules.⁷⁶ Facial hair was a mark of maturity in men, as opposed to beardlessness, which was characteristic of novices and eunuchs, who were not excluded from becoming monks or priests but were always regarded as being from a lower status.⁷⁷ It is difficult to know exactly when beards became strange to Iberian Christians, the “point of tension”, as Bartlett has termed it.⁷⁸ Since beards and long cloaks were also the marker of the ruling Muslims, some members of the hierarchy of the Church would prefer a more Roman, shaved, appearance as a way of distinction from the “Other”.⁷⁹

Leovigild, monk and presbyter of St. Cyprian of Cordoba who accused bishop Hostegesis together with Abbot Samson, also wrote a treatise on *De habitu clericorum* (c. 864).⁸⁰ Leovigild not only criticized the use of hair-style, beards or certain robes, but used this metaphor to categorize the different types of clergy according to their relationship with power, i.e., the Muslims. Leovigild started by denying alms as a way of redemption for trespasses against poverty. After a defence of tonsure, which probably was starting to fall out of practice in al-Andalus – given the amount of attention it deserves in such a

76 On the identification of ethnic groups in the Iberian Peninsula by hair markers, see Bartlett, “Symbolic Meanings,” 47. Patrich, *Sabas*, 218–219. It does not appear in the *typika*.

77 Constable, “Preface,” xxii. In Western monasteries, the debate continued until the twelfth century, and includes treatises such as Burchard of Bellevaux’s *Apologia de barbibus*, ed. R.B.C. Huyguens, *Corpus Christianorum*, 62, Turnhout, 1985. This was written for the Cistercian abbey of Bellevaux before 1163, addressed to the lay-brothers.

78 Bartlett, “Symbolic meaning,” 58 defines the point of tension as “the moment when we see shifts or clashes of contemporary understanding.”

79 The importance of hair as a marker in a “system of oppositions” has been stressed by Bartlett, “Symbolic meaning,” 57. The oppositions might be intrareligious or interreligious, and beard or beardlessness needed not be coherently imposed to diverse groups at different times, but rather functioned symbolically in opposition to a desired group.

80 Díaz y Díaz, *Códices visigóticos*, 269–278 describes the manuscripts of this work. He believes the work opposed the customs of the Easterners and those of the Europeans and Iberians, in a context of defense of Mozarabic traditions facing the influences of Eastern monks who travelled several times to the Peninsula, as well as against some Muslim habits. Our understanding is that these Oriental habits were not imported, but had been in the Iberian territory for long, which made them even more difficult to erase. Unfortunately, the question can only be studied indirectly, as both Leovigild’s *De habitu clericorum* and the Arabic *Collection of Canons*, have been expurged by nineteenth century ecclesiastical scholars who decided that “the image that these works conveyed about the Iberian monks did not match the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church”, and therefore we can only examine the question by analogies. See also Codoñer, *Hispania visigótica*, 284–285.

short treatise –, Leovigild turns in chapter four to the question of ‘Why Asian and Libyan clergy wear beards, and on the opposite Europeans shave it to the root’.⁸¹ Leovigild is clearly trying to identify Andalusī clergy as a part of the ‘European Church’, i.e., Roman. Very revealingly, St. Peter is chosen to deliver the message as chief of the Roman Church, in the middle of the controversy against St. Paul about wearing beards as the Jewish Christians did, or shaving, as did Christian converts in the Roman Empire. St. Peter prefers to oppose the customs defended by Moses, to make differences more recognizable, and so Leovigild states what should be the ideal to follow in al-Andalus. The lost fragments of the text prevent us from following the argument. Bartlett suggests that the change from beard to beardlessness in Christian priests and monks happened around this ninth century in the Western Church, and is related to the defence of celibacy as opposed to married priesthood marked by beards in the East.⁸² And indeed this seems to be the line of argument followed by Leovigild, who goes on about the robes of the clergy, with especial emphasis in the difference between deacons and priests –between the lines one can see an implicit criticism of the ranks of priests, who were closer to power and therefore have more chances to become impure by contact with Muslims.⁸³ As a colophon to his thoughts on beards and inconvenient costume, the last chapter is based on his own debates with Eastern Christians – whether in al-Andalus or in a journey abroad, he does not say – and is devoted to the reasons why Eastern priests can marry, according to their own testimony, to avoid fornication and temptation.⁸⁴ However, he does not deal with the question of beards in this respect.

The other issue that shows the confrontation between Eastern and Western uses is the controversy about the permitted degrees of marriage. Samson was in contact with the Frankish church, as shown by his role as translator for the embassies and letters directed to king Charles the Bald by the emir,

81 Leovigild, *De habitu clericorum*, CSM, II, 675–676.

82 Bartlett, “Symbolic meaning,” 57.

83 Leovigild, *De habitu clericorum*, CSM, II, 677–679, where deacons –most of the monks– dress pure white while priests wear scarlet and black. The latter was also forbidden by Islamic legislation because it was too close to costumes used by Muslims (black was reserved for them in the caliphate), especially if worn together with jewellery or head cloaks that might cover tonsure. Could these debates have been an attempt to protect the Christian community from Islamic retaliation for not complying with dress code limitations? Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims*, 95, 106.

84 Leovigild, *De habitu clericorum*, CSM, II, 683–684.

around 863, a role which he claims for himself in his *Apologeticus*.⁸⁵ Either through embassies or by other means – since travelling was possible with the convenient safe-conducts – he was informed of recent trends in church discussions in Europe, such as the forbidden degrees of marriage, which he defended against Eastern practices in both his *Apologeticus* and a short treatise composed for this purpose, *De gradibus consanguinitatis tractatulus*. It seems that some parts of the Christian clergy of al-Andalus were counting up to the sixth degree, instead of just five, as was the practice depicted in Frankish canon compilations, such as the *Statute* by Haito, bishop of Basel (806–822), which declares unions up to the fifth degree as incestuous.⁸⁶ Such differences made Hostegesis accuse Samson of “permitting marriage among cousins”, and caused the abbot to answer in a short treatise about *De gradibus consanguinitatis*, which is still extant among his writings.⁸⁷ Since marriage among cousins was also permitted by Muslims, the question raised was not strange to the social background in intercultural exchanges.

If we recall that Eulogius was trying to encourage the association between the monastery and the prestigious Mar Sabas monastery in Palestine, why would Samson, later abbot in the same monastery, want to divide from such a long tradition of links with Eastern Christianity? The matter of following Eastern rules as opposed to the Latin tradition of Isidore, fostered by the French Church and Rome, only became an issue in the ninth century. This was precisely because in the eyes of some of the Church leaders, the confrontation of the monks with Islamic thought and practices required an answer that, according to them, could not be offered through “Eastern” rules and practices, which were considered, in this Western location, as too “similar” in their outer manifestations to the dominating religion (Islam). In fact, we may argue that the Eastern form of monasticism was more adaptable to Islamic conditions of life imposed by the dominant society, in a context of being part of *dār al-Islam*. Islamic rulers might have been more used to such anchoritic practices combined with coenobitical life, and having the monks outside the main cities would in any case be convenient for them, so it may be inferred that they would support such trends of monasticism, rather than more urban settlements

85 Samson, *Apologeticus*, CSM, II, p. 554; trans. p. 76. One of such embassies to France took place under ‘Abd al-Rahman II (852–886), just the period when Samson should have been translating the letters. James, *Early Islamic Spain*, 109.

86 Gaudemet, “Statutes,” 319.

87 Samson, *Apologeticus*, CSM, II, pp. 563, 659–664; trans. 84, 87, response in 97. And therefore, he wrote his *De gradibus consanguinitatis tractatulus*, ed. J. Palacios Royán y G. del Cerro; Pérez Marinas, *Sansón*, 227–241.

favoured by Roman inspired rules. The location of monasteries, the establishment of networks with their vital nodes of worship and pilgrimage, and the nuances of a religious practice transferred from an Eastern desert to a Western location.

4 Conclusion

We can conclude that in the ninth century, not by a process of diffusion, but rather contraction and limitation, Andalusí Christians tried to cross the boundaries of concurrent religions, claiming the same sacred cities as Muslims – Cordoba, in this case –, which they believed were theirs beforehand.⁸⁸ Through the translocation of the sacred space of the Judean desert surrounding Jerusalem to Cordoba and the surrounding mountains, full of monasteries, Cordoba, the Patrician city of the Romans, became a symbol of religious resistance, even more than Seville, the Metropolitan Bishopric. Relics had their role in claiming a place for Cordoba as opposed to Toledo, Merida or Seville itself, where the relics of former Roman martyrs were kept. A new node of power, learning and worship was thus created. It was hoped that this new image of Cordoba would attract pilgrimage or at least attention from the rest of Christendom, an attraction to be paralleled to that of Santiago de Compostela for the Northern Christians. Translocation of monastic spaces and liturgy has been studied as a multi-layered phenomenon: from Palestine, Syria and Egypt to the mountains in Leon and around Cordoba; from the martyrs' basilicas in Cordoba to the monasteries in France; from Baghdad to Cordoba; from Visigothic Gallaecia to Cadiz, and from there back to Jerusalem. It seems that the *dār al-Islam* also functioned as a space for the interaction of Christians living under Muslim rule, allowing for the interacting of different networks of pilgrimage, scholars and places of learning. In the ninth century, Cordoba clearly appears as the new point of densification of religious traditions in al-Andalus, not just Islamic – symbolized in the Great Mosque – but also Christian – symbolized by the new martyrs.

88 See Introduction to this volume.

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The Mirror and the Palimpsest: The Myth of Buddhist Kingship in Imperial Tibet

Georgios T. Halkias

Thereafter, the emanated king (Srong-btsan-sgam-po) established the law according to the sūtra of the *Ten Virtues* in order to convert all sentient beings in Tibet, the land of snow, to Buddhism. That is to say, because there were no religious laws in former times, twelve Tibetan princes were unsteady in their ways. Because the imperial law was unwholesome, there was no happiness in the Tibetan kingdom. However, now that there is a King who protects the Buddha's doctrines, all Tibetans have been converted to the dharma and virtue.

MAṄI COMPENDIUM, VOL. E, 266a1–3

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[M]yth is a system of communication . . . it is a message . . . it is a mode of signification, a form . . . *myth is depoliticized speech* . . . it purifies [things], it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact . . . it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth.

MYTHOLOGIES, 143

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1 Introduction: The Development of Buddhist Kingship in Tibet

There is no political-cum-religious figure that has been so widely referred to in Tibetan historical writings and celebrated in prophesy and legend as the emperor Songtsen Gampo (Srong-btsan sgam-po, c.613–c.649 C.E.), the architect of the political, legal and cultural foundations of the Tibetan empire and an alleged embodiment of the Mahāyāna bodhisattva of compassion,

Avalokiteśvara. His symbolic import as the first ‘Buddhist King’ of Tibet (Skt. *dharmarāja*; Tib. *chos.rgyal*) signals a historical event and foretells the making of an intricately woven story that merits closer examination. The historicity of the event in question concerns Tibet’s transition from a tribal confederacy to a vast and sophisticated empire renowned in Central Asia, while the story recounts the deeds of heroic men in Tibet’s successful conversion to Buddhism. The teachings of the Buddha are said to have flourished in Tibet under the ‘enlightened’ patronage of Songtsen Gampo who, like the Indian Mauryan Emperor Aśoka, nearly a millennium before the rise of Tibetan imperialism, united much of India and passed down in Asian historiography as a religious devotee and an extraordinary sponsor of Buddhism.

During the bygone age of heroic men, the emperor served as the custodian of the wisdom of the race. He stood as a symbol of an ideology that ascribed to the upper classes the mythical qualities of the gods (from which the heroes are supposed to descend) and to the lower classes the attributes of savages in need of the civilizing forces of Buddhism. In several ‘revealed texts’ (*gter.ma*) of presumed imperial provenance, which appeared centuries after the collapse of the Tibetan empire, Songtsen Gampo is considered the first ‘Buddhist king’ in a lineage of monarchs whose prerogative to rule was sanctioned by a Mahāyāna plan of salvation drafted *in illo tempore*. The construction of Buddhist kingship marked the origins of an enduring tradition of *historia sacra* in Tibetan historiography from at least the twelfth century onwards.¹

At first glance there is nothing remarkable about a fictionalized portrayal of Songtsen Gampo. Early depictions of the emperor go back to a statue in the Potala palace in Lhasa said to date from Tibet’s imperial era. The theme of emperors personified as celestial bodhisattvas was commonly embellished in Tibetan post-imperial histories, but in all likelihood this figurative trope goes back to an eighth century letter. Inspired from a number of episodes of the Buddha’s past lives as a bodhisattva, in texts known as *Jātaka*, the Indian Tantric teacher Buddhaguhya adopted the same model when, in a letter addressed to the Emperor Trisong Détsen (Khri srong lde btsan) and his forefathers, he wrote: “Because of rLung-nam ’phrul-gyi-rgyal-po [’Dus-srong], the Lord, and

1 Treasure or revealed texts from the 12th century, like the *Maṇi Compendium* (*Ma ṇi bKa’ ’bum*) attributed to Sontsen Gampo, the *Pillar Testament* (*bKa’ chems ka khol ma*), and especially those associated with Nyang ral nyi ma ’od zer (1124–1192) articulated “a narrative of Buddhist divinities intervening in the life of the Tibetans, who adopted a position heretofore exclusively occupied by Indian personalities;” Davidson, “The Kingly Cosmogonic Narrative,” 67.

Srong-btsan sgam-po, the embodiment of Avalokiteśvara, the lineage of bodhisattvas is uninterrupted.”²

In order to appraise the symbolic elements that went in the formation of Buddhist sacred history that would become commonplace in the Tibetan literary tradition, let us return to the image of the emperor and his domestication in a popular narrative by an anonymous sculptor. The life history of the statue, its archaeological past, will not concern us here even if it is not entirely independent of its capacity to represent more than a person’s identity, rank and history. The image invokes a particular understanding of place, time and agency, elements which feature in the legendary life of the emperor, his encounter with Buddhism through his Nepalese and Chinese wives, and his eventual apotheosis as an enlightened ruler dedicated to guiding his non-Buddhist subjects towards the lofty goal of Buddhism. In the first instance, a competent spectator would note that Songtsen Gampo is elegantly clothed in golden silk befitting the noble presence of a formidable statesman who expanded the borders of his territory as far as the ancient empire of Zhangzhung, China, Nepal, and the Indian Himalayas. He could not fail to notice that the emperor sits on a throne in a tranquil posture bearing some of the ‘major marks’ (*lakṣana*) said to have adorned the body of the Buddha. Songtsen Gampo’s ‘golden complexion’ compliments his ‘long, soft and tender fingers’ ‘hair in blue-black colour that curls to the right,’ and arresting ‘blue eyes.’ In the *Mahāpadāna* and *Lakkhana Sutta* we read that the signs of a ‘great being’ (*mahāpuruṣa*) were first observed on the body of young Siddhārtha by the court astrologers who foretold that the child was destined to become either a ‘universal monarch’ (*cakkavattin*) or an enlightened being, a Buddha.³ In a fine synthesis of these two potentialities, the Tibetan emperor wears a red turban that resembles the Buddha’s *uṣṇīṣa* (cranial protuberance), on top of which emerges the head of the Buddha ‘Infinite Light.’ His appended head symbolizes both his heavenly connection

2 Dargyay, “Srong-Btsan-Sgam-po,” 105–106, argues that the identification of Emperor Songtsen Gampo with Avalokiteśvara existed in Tibet by the second half of the eighth century and reflected Indian ideas. This theme was later developed and embellished in works such as the *Maṇi Compendium*, the *Pillar Testament*, Songtsen Gampo’s hagiography (*rmam.thar*) the *Gab pa mngon byung*, and others. For a discussion of the development of the narrative of Buddhist kingship in Tibetan historical sources, see Davidson, “The Kingly Cosmogonic Narrative.”

3 The thirty-two physical marks on the body of the Buddha are mentioned in several places in the Pāli canon and elsewhere in Buddhist literature; for a historical discussion see Lopez, “Buddha,” 20.

with Sukhāvātī, Amitābha's pure land, and his 'soteriological mission' to convert his Tibetan subjects to Mahāyāna Buddhism.⁴

Seeing the self-created Buddha sNang ba mTha' yas (one who emits infinite light) on the crown of the body, his father covered it with the head-dress of opium silk. Then his father, concealing the face of Amitabha from outside, put the opium silk covering on the crown of his head. . . . After seeing the countenance of Amitabha, he was known as the king having two heads. Thus it is said. He was named Khri Srong btsan after much merry-making day and night. He, being possessed of all the profound and deep qualities, was named Srong btsan sgam po.⁵

In the following study we will reflect on the adaptation of this theme in Tibetan post-imperial historical writings and appraise the ways mythical appropriations challenge the problematic opposition between 'fact' and 'fiction' and the unhelpful classification of texts as 'historical' and 'quasi-historical'.⁶ I will argue that rather than being predicated on an epistemological divide between myth and record, the historical domain exhibits a spatial-cum-temporal field of integrated entities that cannot be plainly relegated to the province of imagined or fictionalized history. The dynamic entanglement between 'imagined' and 'experienced' history had a concrete effect on Tibet's socio-political institutions and the religious convictions of the Tibetan people. They continued

4 This is a favourite artistic motif in Tibetan and Nepalese traditions of Avalokiteśvara crowned with head of Buddha Amitābha, a convention attested from the Gupta period onwards. According to the *Pillar Testament* and the *Mañi Compendium*, Avalokiteśvara despaired at his own inability to save beings across numerous world systems and revoked his bodhisattva vow. As a result of foregoing his Mahāyāna promise to be of benefit to all sentient life forms, his head broke into ten pieces, which were gathered by Amitābha who transformed them into ten heads placing his own on top; see Davidson, "The Kingly Cosmogonic Narrative," 68.

5 From a recent compilation of biographical accounts of Songtsen Gampo's foreign brides, *The Liberation Narratives of the Chinese and Nepalese Princesses (Rgya bza' bal bza'i rnam thar)*; see Shakya, *Princess Bhrikuti*, 91.

6 For too long, and not without their critiques, the relationship between these pairs has been conceived as an opposition undermining the extremely complex relation that binds us to the past. Nietzsche as early as 1874, in the "The Use and Abuse of History," 42, charged the 'eunuchs' in the 'harem of history' for privileging an unrestrained historical sense which, when pushed in its logical extreme, "uproots the future, because it destroys illusions and robs existing things of the only atmosphere in which they can live." Nietzsche's critique may equally apply to attempts to devalue works as fiction for celebrating the mythical as a legitimate, if not essential aspect of the individual and collective experience of historical time.

to pay homage to a variety of incarnations of the 'Saviour Monarch' who, like the Buddha, possessed the inherent power to change the world and the will to transcend it.⁷

2 The Mirror and the Palimpsest: Processes of Entanglement

The mirror itself is the instrument of a universal magic that changes things into a spectacle, spectacles into things, myself into another and another into myself... The mirror appears because I am seeing visible, because there is a reflexivity of the sensible; the mirror translates and reproduces that reflexivity.

THE PRIMACY OF PERCEPTION, 168

Throughout its history in India, Buddhism interacted with other religions in its environment, such as Brahmanism, Jainism, Hellenistic cults, and so forth, both influencing and being influenced by them. In its long and varied history of transmission beyond the Indian subcontinent, Buddhist monasticism had to secure patronage among the elite and the public and effectively deal with various pre-existing religious beliefs, cultural practices, and forms of government. Prior to its arrival in Tibet, Tibetans followed their own system of governance based on ancient non-Buddhist beliefs and traditions through which they structured and regulated their polities. The eventual fusion of Buddhist salvation schemes with native conceptions of Tibetan sacred kingship is the by-product of a long negotiation, a self-conscious mediation between Buddhist ideology and pre-existing objects and explanations of cultural representation.⁸

Tibet's divine king of old was not a saviour of transmigrating souls, but he became one retrospectively after his encounter with Buddhism. His charisma turned into a joined symbol of spiritual and secular power that heralds one of the most particular features of Tibetan Buddhist civilization namely, the 'interdependence between religion and state' (*chos srid zing 'brel*), a connection that rests on ancient Tibetan social values which have long determined the

7 Up until the reign of the 14th Dalai Lama Tibetans upheld this ideal, which is still in currency among Tibetans in Tibet and the diaspora.

8 This fusion offers evidence for the comparative study of similar developments elsewhere in Asia. For a recent collection of articles on Buddhism and politics in Southeast Asia, see Harris, *Power and Political Order*.

importance of religious sentiments in Tibetan social and political structures.⁹ While this union attests to the ideological legitimization of political actions and the politicization of religion, it goes beyond the reduction of one sphere of actions and ideas to that of the other.¹⁰

There are just a few extant imperial sources for studying the transplantation of Buddhism to Tibet from the 7th to the 9th centuries.¹¹ For the most part we must rely on a variety of post-imperial sources written by Tibetan Buddhist scholars whose contents often overlap despite their distinct designation as 'religious histories' (*chos. 'byung*), 'annals' (*lo.rgyus*), 'royal chronologies' (*rgyal.rabs*), 'origin narratives' (*byung.tshul*), 'lineage hagiographies' (*ser.phreng*), 'hagiographies' (*rnam.thar*), and so forth.¹² The fictional material contained in these records, especially as they pertain to the legendary age of the 'Buddhist Kings,' should not deter us from the task of acknowledging the fact that Buddhist kingship has been instructive for the subsequent expression of Tibetan historical writing. In the words of one author:

While in Chinese and Mongolian literature, political leaders were portrayed as the embodiment of virtue, heroism, and political shrewdness, the Tibetan texts depict them as divine beings who are only concerned with guiding their subjects towards the lofty goal of Buddhism, supreme enlightenment and buddhahood. For this reason Tibetan biographies of

9 The articulation of the relation between Buddhism and the political domain seems to have been delicate in most, if not all, Buddhist societies. There is a substantial body of literature on the conception of the union of religion and state (*chos srid gnyis ldan* or *chos srid zung 'brel*) formulated to describe the formation of the Sakya-Mongol government; for a recent volume on the subject, see Cüppers, *Religion and State*.

10 The organizing structural patterns of myth (if any) and the intentions of the Tibetan historians lie beyond the scope of this contribution. Some important aspects of Tibet's ancient indigenous traditions and their Buddhist re-appropriation have been analyzed by Kapstein, *Tibetan Assimilation*.

11 Although an appeal to chronological dating affords no relief from the charge that the coherency of the historical sources may be just as mythological in nature, Walters is right to suggest in *Buddhism and Empire*, xxi–xxii, that a historian ought to be aware that only some inscriptions mostly in Central Tibet date with certainty to the reigns of the Tibetan emperors, along with the *Tibetan Annals* and documents and fragments from sites in the Central Asian colonies of the Tibetan Empire in what is now Gansu and East Turkestan (Xinjiang). To this we may add invaluable information contained in the two extant imperial registers of Buddhist works translated from Sanskrit to Tibetan, see Halkias, *Tibetan Buddhism Registered*.

12 For a brief expose of the different genres that comprise Tibetan historiography, see van der Kuijp, "Tibetan Historiography."

kings may be considered to be much closer in spirit to Indian royal biographies, which transfigure the mundane into a celestial realm even at the cost of neglecting factual history, than to Chinese biographies.¹³

Arguably, Tibetan historiography is synecdochic. According to Turner synecdoche is a trope that plays “a fundamental role in articulating clusters of conceptual and affective associations constituting complex ritual symbols, and at higher levels of complexity in mediating the relation of symbols, frames, and ritual acts to one another.”¹⁴ In Tibetan contexts, it sanctions an inclusive movement towards the integration of social, political and cultural phenomena and correspondences into a meta-empirical reality governed by a doctrinal interpretation of emptiness, or lack of substantial entities. The entangled trajectories of Tibetan historical events and religious aspirations stretch through the past, present and future, and give rise to ‘Buddhist history’ where each event, whether factual or not, that appears in the glass surface of the mirror of metaphysical reflection does not rest on a substantial event of the past but yields an ongoing interpretation of phenomenal pluralities that constitute the present.¹⁵

To state it in a different way, the history of Buddhism in Tibet is not a linear account of how the Tibetans received and interpreted Indian Buddhism. Rather, it concerns how they viewed, idealized and integrated their own past as part and parcel of the universal mission of Mahāyāna Buddhism – an evolutionary process of theological efficacy that afforded them a special place in history as the ‘chosen people.’¹⁶ After all, Buddhism was the main foreign civilizing force in Tibet, which informed assumptions concerning ideal governance and social justice. It had concrete effects on the structure and administration of Tibet’s political institutions.¹⁷ It would be naïve to dismiss Buddhist legends and pious stories as ‘historically useless,’ for they shaped Tibetan civilization

13 Dargyay, “Srong-Btsan-Sgam-po,” 99.

14 Turner, “Structure, Process, Form,” 238.

15 The Mahāyāna concept of *śūnyatā* (Skt. emptiness) does not entail a nihilistic annihilation of all entities but that explanatory force that situates them in their interrelatedness. This doctrine can be traced back to the early Buddhist teachings of ‘dependent origination’ (Pāli *paṭiccasamuppāda*) and ‘no-self’ (Pāli *anattā*) that applies to all existents which are without a permanent self and independent substantiality.

16 Schwieger evaluates this eclecticism in his “Geschichte als Mythos-Zur.”

17 Richardson, *Political Aspects*, 197, noted that the Chinese sources described the Tibetans at that time ‘as rather primitive’. “They preferred to live in tents rather than houses; but they were highly organized for war and had a hierarchy of ministers loyal to the *btsan-po* (king) to whom they took allegiance every year.”

just as history furnished the background for Buddhist mythological elaboration that influenced the ways Tibetans interpreted their past and structured their present.¹⁸ The mythical appropriation of the doctrines of ‘reincarnation’ and ‘liberation’ elaborated in the sacred texts of Buddhism suited the monastic instrumentalization of political power by incarnate lamas vying for patronage and social influence. At the same time, the incorporation of native Tibetan myths, folk beliefs and conventions offered a unique ritual repertoire of deities and associated practices to the Tantric traditions of Buddhism in Tibet.

The discovery of a shared ‘cultural system of symbols and meanings’ may be the reflection of a *post eventum* analysis, a retrospective objectification. Nevertheless, it points at two historical processes that occurred parallel to each other: the Tibetanization of Buddhism and the Buddhist conversion of Tibet – two asymmetrical sides of a single operation with distinct ramifications. Although the so called ‘Tibetanization of Buddhism’ merits a separate investigation, it does not seem to imply that the creative and innovative adaptation of Indian Buddhism to local conditions essentially succumbed to the transforming influence of Tibetan pre-Buddhist traditions. This is to say, it did not cease to be functionally Buddhist losing its own integrity as a continuous religious tradition able to accommodate other views and forms of practice.¹⁹

On the other hand, the Buddhist conversion of Tibet does not imply a violent rupture with the past, but a selective mirroring and reworking of what has been there, albeit reconfigured over time in new challenges and forms of complexity.²⁰ A sharing of attributes and concepts in systems of close

18 The mythological interpolations of post-dynastic histories urged many Tibetologists, like Vostrikov, *Historical Literature*, 59, to relegate much of the post-dynastic corpus to the realm of fiction. He writes: “this doubtless is the biggest defect of Tibetan historical literature. In describing the past, especially the remote past, Tibetan historians cannot always distinguish facts from myths – what is historical from what is legendary – and often mix one with the other. This is mainly observed in the works of Tibetan writers on ancient India, on the initial period of Tibetan history and on the life and exploits of more ancient and honoured teachers of Buddhism.” Recently, Mills, “Ritual as History” has challenged Vostrikov by showing how mythic events recorded as Tibetan history served as the basis for their social and political re-enactment as ritual.

19 Instances of Tibetanization suggest the ways by which Buddhism in Tibet acquired its particularity and became an integral part of Tibetan civilization. At the most obvious level is the transformation of native Tibetan gods and goddesses into enlightened beings committed to save sentient beings.

20 Apropos the term used for the conversion of the Tibetan land and its people to Buddhism is *’dul.ba*, which has a range of meanings: “to tame, conquer, subjugate, subdue, educate,

proximity is not necessarily due to any essential reason or logic that dictates this to be the case. Rather, these cultural translations and transferences of meaning occurred according to the way in which Tibetan historiography as an enterprise of gathering, collecting and interpreting has been enacted over time. Arguably, an entangled encounter between different religious traditions and cultural spheres generates a vibrant manifold of similarities and differences where both indigenous and imported elements and processes reveal their identities relationally, in their creative responses to the challenges of identity and continuity they faced.

3 Two Plays in One Act: Renouncing and Conquering the World

Indian Buddhism was informed by a Mahāyāna family of concepts including, a rich pantheon, cosmological narratives, metaphysical assumptions and ethical prescriptions, which were related back to native Tibetan experiences, traditions and credulities. I have dealt elsewhere with the topic of kingship and Indian Buddhism, and it will suffice to reiterate some points that are relevant to this discussion.²¹

In the religious figure of Buddha Śakyamuni we discern a tension between his life as a prince and his performance as an enlightened teacher. In the Pali collections of the *Dīgha Nikāya* (“The Book of Long Sayings”), the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (“The Book of Gradual Sayings”), and several *jātaka* and *avadāna* stories of the Buddha’s previous lives as a bodhisattva (Skt. “a being aspiring for awakening”), Śakyamuni is portrayed as perfecting both the virtues of kingship and the virtues of renunciation – hence, preparing the way for his supreme enlightenment in which the two strands of sovereignty and renunciation “receive their final synthesis and fulfillment.”²²

discipline and punish.” Hence, the Buddhist conversion of Tibet is described as a conscious cultural and religious project of ‘cultivation’ and ‘domestication’ and not one of substitution or effacement. Though much credit is given to Songtsen Gampo for the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet, Buddhist monastic sustenance and protection did not start before 779 C.E. during the times of Emperor Khri srong lde brtsan (756–ca.800), who is regarded as the second ‘Buddhist King’ of Tibet. In the late eighth century he declared Buddhism the official religion of the Tibetan empire by issuing two royal edicts swearing to preserve Buddhism and actively support the Tibetan *sangha*. He is invariably referred to as an incarnation of Mañjuśrī, the celestial bodhisattva of wisdom and knowledge.

21 This section draws material and insights from Halkias, “Enlightened Sovereign.”

22 Reynolds, “The Two Wheels of Dhamma,” 14.

Generally speaking, the Buddhist monastic community respected the autonomy of the political field, yet as done elsewhere in Asia, it directed its proselytizing efforts at the governing elite, at monarchs in particular, who were targeted as potential promoters and sponsors of the Buddhist faith. In this respect, it did not hesitate to legitimize the political power of patron kings who were represented as 'enlightened beings' in a Buddhist fashion.²³

Early on in the Buddhist scriptures, Buddha Śākyamuni is portrayed as a 'universal monarch' (Pāli *cakkavatti*; Skt. *cakravartin*), a characterization that superseded Buddhist contractual models of the state discussed in the *Aggañña-sūta*. Unlike the first contracted king Mahāsammata, in the *cakkavatti* model the ruler is not elected by the people but assumes power on the basis of being born a 'Great Being' (*mahāpurisa*) that bears 'thirty-two' major signs (*lakkaṇāni*) and many accompanying minor marks in his body. However, contrary to Indian monarchies his power is not automatically passed from one generation to the next.²⁴ Auspicious events and astrological configurations precede such extraordinary birth, and he who bears these marks is destined to become either a 'universal monarch' or a 'fully-enlightened being' (*sammāsambuddha*) whose dharma bears universal implications, since "the welfare of the entire world is considered to depend on it."²⁵ The 'universal monarch' is confronted by two options: he may remain a secular leader and acquire the stature of a *cakkavatti*, or abandon his kingdom and become a world renouncer like Śākyamuni. These options share much in common, for Buddhas and universal monarchs are two sides of the same coin. Just as there can be no more than one universal monarch at a time in the world there can be no more than one Buddha. This identification is reinforced in the funeral a Buddha, a Tathāgata that ought to be carried out in the same way as the funeral of a *cakkavatti*.²⁶

23 Tambiah, *World Conqueror*. This holds true for many religious traditions and it is in no way unique to Buddhism. The continuation, development and expansion of the Buddhist movement required an ongoing transaction with the secular sphere, for in an environment of competition for patronage with other spiritual traditions like Brahmanism and Jainism, "had it not been able to furnish the necessary justification to the political power, it would have been replaced by another religious system." Houtart, "Buddhism and Political Power-Construction," 209.

24 Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka*, 47.

25 Wiltshire, *Ascetic figures*, 188.

26 Śākyamuni tells his disciple Ānanda that in a former life at Kuśinagar he was the king Mahāsurdarśana and when he passed away he was given the funeral of a wheel-turning king. For an elaboration of this traditions see the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (§5.11.).

Across Buddhist literature, Sākyamuni's life is thoroughly fused with royal mythology and symbols of sacral kingship. He is often addressed with epithets of sovereignty: 'the Conqueror,' 'the Vanquisher,' 'the Ruler of Rulers,' and even *stūpas* are referred to as repositories of the Buddha's 'power of conquest.'²⁷ Moerman aptly suggested that there is a tension that lies within the earliest tradition in which the Buddha and the king are placed in a relationship of both identity and opposition when he writes:

Sākyamuni abjured kingship in order to become a buddha and yet his hagiography, his iconography, and his ritual prerequisites are those of the cakravartin, the wheel turning universal king. By abdicating the throne he became the royal par excellence. One could thus say that the king is always already present in the figure of the Buddha and hence also the Buddha in the figure of the king.²⁸

While Buddhist interpretations of kingship and narratives about the Buddha's royal past provided the framework for secular leaders to embrace the status of *cakravartin*, references to righteous kings and Buddhist saints of the past also functioned to fix ethnic identification with the places and characters in the stories. In India and abroad, Buddhists identified sites in the local geography where events described in these stories took place.²⁹ In Tibet, pre-Buddhist beliefs and rituals dedicated to 'mountain gods' (*lha.ri*), or the 'soul of the mountain' (*bla.ri*), gave way to circumambulations around 'sacred mountains' (*gnas.ri*) as a meritorious activity for Buddhists who designated them as sites for pilgrimage. At the same time, a good number of local deities and spirits propitiated by the people had to be 'tamed' and 'converted' to Buddhism. The taming of the physical landscape and its human and non-human inhabitants served to reorder a sense of spatial belonging with the surrounding physical world through the adaptation of Buddhist cosmological narratives.³⁰

²⁷ Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stupa*, 90.

²⁸ Quoted in Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka*, 38.

²⁹ For example, according to the Nepalese, Singhalese, Khotanese and Burmese chronicles Buddha Śākyamuni allegedly visited these countries and delivered sermons; see Shakya, *Princess Bhrikuti*, 17–18.

³⁰ A case in point concerns a description in the *Avatamsaka sūtra* of a mountain called Potala which had close connections with Avalokiteśvara, who refused to attain liberation, though fully entitled to it, until all beings of the world obtained freedom from suffering. Songtsen Gampo's palace built on the 'Red Hill' (*dmar.po ri*) is the forerunner of the so-called Mt. Potalaka on which the Potala Palace was built much later in 1645 CE by the

Buddhist missions in Tibet had to adapt to the opposition they encountered from ministers and priests who upheld indigenous cults of kingship and local deities. This struggle eventually led to a reworking between soteriology, political authority and nation building that had its rhetorical and symbolic impact in Tibetan material culture (i.e., religious-cum-state institutions, buildings, festivals, iconography, etc.). Native modalities of divine kingship were reconfigured according to the *cakravartin* ideal imported from India, while Indian Buddhist deities acquired historical, social and institutional consistency beyond their scriptural identities and local cultic practices and offered continuity to indigenous conceptions of royal divinity and orders of legitimate succession.

4 Cosmologies of Conversion: Kings and Bodhisattvas

The outside is already within the work of memory.

DISSEMINATION, 109

Religious beliefs in pre-Buddhist Tibet were heterogeneous and fluid, while the evolution of sacred kingship remains an important subject in the history of early Tibetan religiosity.³¹ Certain prevailing ideas, such as the local mountain deity as the ancestral origin of the local people, were without doubt common to many Tibetan clans in different regions, though each group may have had a distinctive version of ancestral cults. Early Tibetan cosmologies would have differentiated between mountain and heavenly gods, but over time, their apparent physical proximity, together with similarities in ritual worship and 'parental associations', led to an increased identification between terrestrial and heavenly gods.³²

Dalai Lamas forging a suprahistorical connection between the first Buddhist king, the Indian deity and his incarnation in the guise of the dGe-lugs-pa hierarchs.

- 31 The topic of Tibetan sacred kingship from the perspective of the history of religions was first systematically studied by Professor Giuseppe Tucci (1949) and (1955). One of the most noteworthy contributions Tucci has made is that he has pointed out the essential difference which exists between the royal ideology of ancient Tibet and that of ancient India. He has strongly suggested that the Tibetan royal ideology owes much to the religious tradition of the pastoral Turco-Mongolian peoples. Recent studies have examined the sources of scholarship on this subject; see Dotson, "Theorizing the King".
- 32 Karmay, "The Tibetan Cult," 60–61, explores the topic of genealogy in the origin myths of the first king and his relation to mountain deities. He notes, that the nine mountain deities, the first Tibetan king's 'cousins,' were evoked as witness amongst other deities taken

Among several foundation myths in Tibetan lore, the narrative that traces the line of the Tibetan emperors (7th–9th centuries) back to the gods of heaven is common. The line begins with Nyatri Tsenpo (gNya' khri btsan po), the first 'divine emperor' (*lha.sras btsan.po*) of Pugyel (sPu.rgyal) who descended on Mountain lHa.ri Gyang.do and ventured towards the Yar.lung valley.³³ According to the version of the legend preserved in a twelfth century Tibetan text, the *Pillar Testament*, there were seven divine monarchs ('seven heavenly thrones') starting with Nyatri Tsenpo, who after death left no bodily remains behind, but ascended to heaven through a beam of light.

With reference to those seven, they possessed, on their crowns, the so-called 'divine daemon-cord' (*mutak*). This was a ray of white light. When those seven passed from suffering and journeyed to the realm of the gods, they dissolved into light from their feet upwards, and after the light faded into the sky they left no corpses behind. So it is said that the mausoleums of the seven thrones were planted in space.³⁴

Nyatri was succeeded by sovereigns with the syllable *khri* in their names and it is said in the *Tibetan Chronicle* that when the son was old enough to ride a horse the father withdrew to heaven.³⁵ The divine genealogy came to an end after the passing of 'seven thrones' (*khri.bdun*), when the arrogant ruler Drigum Tsenpo (Dri gum btsan po) engaged in conflict that brought about his demise. Similarly, for the historical traditions of the Bön, some of which are preserved in the fourteenth century *The Testimony of Ministers* (*Blon po bka' thang*),

upon the establishment of Buddhism as the state religion by the emperor Khri srong lde btsan (742–c.800) in his edict; Karmay, "The Tibetan Cult," 62.

33 In the inscription on the pillar at the tomb of Khri lde srong btsan and on the Sino-Tibetan treaty pillar 'O lde spu rgyal is mentioned as the founding ancestor of the Tibetans who came from being a god to rule over men. Though their identity has been conflated in later Tibetan histories, like the *Blue Annals*, there is nothing in these diverse traditions that clarifies the relationship between them; for a relevant study of the sources see Richardson, *Tibetan Kingdom*. Other Buddhist traditions brushed aside the stories of the king's divine descent and attributed Indian origins to the royal line. For these versions, and there are a few, the first Tibetan king was a descendant from the Śākya clan into which Buddha Śākyamuni was born; for a documented study of early official accounts of the origin of the first king, the activities of his successors and other members of the royal line; see Karmay, "The Origin Myths".

34 Translation by Kapstein, *The Tibetans*, 37.

35 Richardson, "Tibetan Kingdom," 124, suggests a violent ritual resulting in the termination of the father's reign.

Nyatri Tsenpo descended from heaven upon the summit of a sacred mountain where he was eventually received by a circle of twelve chiefs. Because he came down from the sky and was a divine being, they decided to make him king and installed him on a wooden throne which four men carried on their necks. This is why, according to some interpretations, he was called Nyatri Tsenpo, the 'Neck-Enthroned Mighty One.'

There is little doubt that the symbolism of a vertical cosmology, a heavenly descent or *katabasis* according to Tucci, plays a salient role in Tibetan foundation mythology and political legitimation. The 'sons of heaven' (*lha.sras*), as the Tibetan emperors were called, were remodeled on the Indian ideal of the *cakravartin* monarch and were identified as *Dharmarajas*, 'Buddhist Kings.' After the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet and up until the collapse of the Tibetan empire, the 'Buddhist Kings' are mentioned in the inscriptions as patrons of Buddhism and 'divine rulers' of the old beliefs, 'protectors of the religion of heaven, the great order of the world.'

They annually worshipped a holy mountain in which their *bla*, their life force, resided. They were buried with non-Buddhist rites. They consulted omens, and a diviner was attached to their court . . . An annual ceremony of oath-taking was marked by animal sacrifice and the smearing of the lips with blood. The people, of course, continued to worship and propitiate spirits of trees, mountains, lakes, the hearth and so on, as they still did and perhaps still do.³⁶

There are two registers at work in the motif of divine descent and heavenly-ordained kingship: one concerns the constitutional mythology of the old Tibetan Empire, and the other the divine origins of Buddhist deities in Mahāyāna lore. In the wake of the collapse of the Tibetan empire, the incorporation of these registers into national conversion narratives reflected archaic models of leadership associated with the Tibetan Empire, and a religious mythology concerning the founders of both Buddhism and Bön having descended from heavenly-realms.³⁷ These themes established distinct patterns of articulation that dominated all later Tibetan religious historiography. In the Buddhist side, they elaborated on Avalokiteśvara as Tibet's predestined protector, a saviour who repeatedly intervenes by incarnating in the Land of Snows,

36 Richardson, "Political Aspects," 198.

37 According to the *Pillar Testament*, the founder of the Bön, Tönpa Shenrap (s'Ton-pa gshen-rab), was also the incarnation of Avalokiteśvara; see Davidson, "The Kingly Cosmogonic Narrative," 78.

driven by ‘unbearable compassion’ for the population of the ‘barbarous borderlands’ (Tibet): first as the monkey-progenitor of the Tibetan people; then as Tibet’s first Buddhist Sovereign, and later as the eighth century tantric guru and Tibet’s second Buddha, Padmasambhava, the lotus-born. Many stories associated with the life of Padmasambhava are discussed in the *Testimony of Padmasambhava* (*Padma bKa’ thang*), a popular hagiography of the Central Asian tantric *siddha* who was requested by emperor Trisong Détsen (Khri srong lde btsan) to expel the opposing factions to the construction of the first Tibetan Buddhist monastery, Samye (c.779). His skills at taming the autochthonous spirits that populated the Tibetan landscape, binding demons with oaths and turning them into Buddhist protectors, and eventually serving as the Emperor’s Tantric teacher, are recurrent themes in Tibetan religious narratives and serve as ritual antecedents to the ways Tibetans came to rely to the Buddhist clergy for protection, blessings and spiritual guidance.

In the *Clear Mirror of Royal Genealogies* (*Rgyal rabs gsal ba’i me long*), a famous Tibetan history written in the 14th century by the Sakya scholar-monk Sönam Gyeltsen (bSod nams rgyal mtshan, 1312–1375), the origins of the Tibetans is traced back to descendants from apes. Avalokiteśvara voices the aspiration to turn the demon-infested country of Tibet into a field of conversion, a ‘pure land’ (*rnam.dag zhing.khams*). In line with Mahāyāna missiology, Amitābha empowers Avalokiteśvara for this task and the latter incarnates as a monkey in Tibet to prevent a native rock-ogress (*brag.srin.mo*), and supposed emanation of Āryā Tārā, from causing further harm to the Tibetan people. Similar to modern accounts of evolution, from their intercourse emerged the human line of the Tibetans and the Buddhist conversion of Tibet becomes a cosmogonic scheme that transcends the historicity of the event.³⁸ While this ancestral tale has been interpreted in a variety of ways, we discern a readiness to countenance Avalokiteśvara not just as a deity of an indigenised Indian cult, but as the progenitor of the Tibetan people and lord of a trans-regional and trans-historical domain whose remit transcends the locality of his Indian

38 The narrative of Songtsen Gampo as a manifestation of Avalokiteśvara and Tibet as the land converted by Avalokiteśvara is preserved in other Tibetan chronicles such as, the *Religious History of Deu* (*lDe'u chos 'byung rgyas pa*), the *Scholars' Feast* (*mKhas pa'i dga' ston*), and the *Maṇi Compendium*, a heterogeneous collection of texts primarily concerned with the cult of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara and the belief that he was the patron saint of Tibet and the very embodiment of Tibet’s first Buddhist emperor. It had a profound impact in the development of a distinct view of Tibetan history. For an informative study and treatment of relevant Tibetan and western sources, see Kapstein, “Remarks on the Maṇi bKa’-’Bum,” 79–169.

origins.³⁹ It is no accident perhaps that tradition places Buddhism's first appearance in Tibet with the appearance of a few texts, among them the *Karaṇḍavyūha-sūtra*, a text devoted to Avalokiteśvara. It is said to have fallen from the sky, along with other sacred objects, nearly one thousand years before the reign of Songtsen Gampo and during the times of King Lha Totori Nyentsen (lHa tho tho ri gnyan btsan) who in all probability came in contact with Buddhist missionaries from Central Asia.⁴⁰

The apotheosis of Songtsen Gampo as Avalokiteśvara is a complex trope that draws from Indic notions of kingship, Mahāyāna theological formulations, and ancient Tibetan (and somewhat universal) beliefs of the king's divine descent from heaven endowed with the power and legitimation to rule over its people. Political legitimation in Tibet, as in Egypt with the Pharaohs and in China and Persia with their heavenly monarchs, relied in assigning the ruler a lofty place of origin, a non-earthly realm reserved for the gods. The Tibetan kings of old were exalted as the 'son of the gods' (*lha.sras*) and came from heaven via a light-beam allowing for their 'ascent to heaven after death' (*dgung.du.gshegs.pa*). The socio-political appropriation of Buddhist soteriology in Tibet and the theocratic re-enactment of the 'bodhisattva-monarch' concept till the modern times can't be properly mapped in a relational frame without taking into account an explicit appeal for Indic interpretations of Buddhist soteriology and kingship on the one hand, and pre-Buddhist Tibetan categories and traditional beliefs concerning secular legitimation on the other. After all Buddhism functioned during the times of the Tibetan empire as part of a complex and powerful political culture, while there is a long incremental development of Buddhist myths concerning secular legitimation extending far back in Indian cultures and literature. Davidson notes:

The earliest of the annals literature from Dunhuang foreshadows the later cosmogony, even though indirectly, by providing a divine genealogy to the royal family and articulating the myth of divine descent. For example the section on *the Names Occurring in the Kingly Lineage* (Pelliot

39 For an overview of issues concerning the politicization of pure land ideology in Tibet see Halkias, *Luminous Bliss*, 187–192.

40 According to the religious history, the *Precious Treasury* (*Chos 'byung rin po che'i gter mdzod*) two Buddhist translators from Khotan (Li.yul) and Tokharistan (Thod.dkar) visited Yum.bu bla.mkhar in Tibet during the reign of lHa tho tho ri, but since there was no system of writing the dharma could not spread among the people; Tarthang Tulku, *Ancient Tibet*, 168.

Tib. 1286: *rGyal rabs rim byung gi ming*) explicitly discusses the celestial origins of the dynasty. There, the kingly lineage is said to descend from the sky and have divine ancestors (*yab lha*), from whom the royal house issues.⁴¹

In a Buddhist reworking of this archetypal motif, Avalokiteśvara descends from the pure land of Sukhāvātī motivated by his compassion for the Tibetan people. He enters Tibetan history in a series of active ‘emanation bodies’ (*sprul.sku*), first in the guise of Songtsen Gampo and later in the incarnation of top hierarchs of the Kagyud and Gelukpa Schools of Tibetan Buddhism empowered by an institutionalized system of spiritual nobility, privilege, and inherited power. The powerful symbolism of myth turned into an effective instrument for control over the region of Lhasa and its main cathedral, the Jo.khang (whose origins go back to emperor Songtsen) leading to lingering disputes between the heads of Tibetan Buddhist schools.⁴² While the system of reincarnated lamas is in some ways an elaboration of typical Buddhist ideas on the validation of political organization, it clearly exceeds any other Asian system in its complex and enduring entanglement between the religious and the political.

In Tibetan religious and monastic histories, many eminent Tibetan Buddhist masters and major reincarnation lineages or Tulku (*sprul.sku*) have identified themselves with Tibet’s celebrated patron bodhisattva, assuming in his guise decisive roles that shaped the political and religious life of Tibet. In Buddhist terms this is eloquently explained in the biography of the first Dalai Lama whose previous incarnation includes various figures such as, the emperor Songtsen, and the master of the Kadampa School Dromtön Gyelwé Jungné (‘Brom ston rGyal ba’i ’byung gnas, 1005–1064), renowned in Tibetan history as another living embodiment of the bodhisattva of compassion:

41 Davidson, “The Kingly Cosmogonic Narrative,” 66.

42 The Jo.khang along with bSam.yas and Khra. ’brug temples are often grouped as the three *dharmacakras* of Central Tibet, the three main sacred and pilgrimage sites in imperial Tibet; see Sørensen and Hazod, *Thundering Falcon*, 4. Sørensen, “Lhasa Diluvium,” 120, notes that “...since the heads of both orders [dGe-lugs and bKa’-brgyud] considered themselves manifestations of the Tibetan deity of Compassion, Avalokiteśvara...[i]t became increasingly clear to the parties involved that control (and not least the underlying legitimacy thereof) over Lhasa eventually was tantamount to the control over Tibet (Central Tibet), and the site should gradually turn into a veritable battleground of ideologies fought between ambitious hegemonies.”

The manifestations of Avalokiteśvara are such that some take the form of a wheel-turning king, others of a monarch, others of Indra and Brahmā and similarly of the lay or mendicant forms of bodhisattvas, and the manifestations are of innumerable forms, each adapted to the people to be converted. Just as a singular lunar disc shows its reflection simultaneously in various vessels on the earth, so does [the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara] show [his manifestations] without difficulty. In particular, in this land of Tibet there appeared Srong-btsan-sgam-po and other kings who were manifestations of Avalokiteśvara, as well as their retainers, and many scholars and teachers who were manifestations of the Victorious One Amitāyus and established monasteries and many monastic communities in Lhasa and elsewhere.⁴³

The depiction of the emperor as the first emanation of Avalokiteśvara, the patron-saint and spiritual progenitor of the Tibetan people, is part of a grant evolutionary scheme, which in its various literary reductions is doctrinally formulated in accordance with the Mahāyāna notion of the ‘three-bodies’ (Skt. *tri-kāya*; Tib. *sku.gsum*) of the Buddha – a formula favoured by the Tibetan School of the Old Tantras, the Nyingma, and first attested as an explanatory trope in the *Pillar Testament*. In this formula, Amitābha represents the ultimate reality, the universal dimension of the Buddha’s gnosis (*dharmakāya*). From the intangible universal emanates Avalokiteśvara who teaches the *dharmā* in a buddha-field and represents the articulation of this truth (*sambhogakāya*) and a revealed movement from speechlessness to form. At the final level of revelation we find the singular existential particular of this realization that lends itself to multiple contingencies – one of them being Songtsen Gampo who manifests and embodies the expression of this truth on the material plane (*nirmāṇakāya*).

While the Avalokiteśvara theme of origins never lost its currency among Tibetan historians, from the fourteenth century onwards a number of eminent Buddhist scholars, like Butön (Bu-ston, 1290–1364) and Gö Lotsaba Zhön Nupel (’Gos lo tsā ba gzhon nu dpal, 1392–1481), favoured theories that traced the lineage of the Tibetan kings not to the sky-gods of ancient lore, but to a royal dynasty in India – the Indian prince Rūpati and his army who crossed the Himalayas during the Pāṇḍava wars between the Pāṇḍu brothers and the Kuru family and settled in Tibet.⁴⁴

43 Translation by Yumiko, “Manifestation of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara,” 45.

44 Tarthang Tulku, *Ancient Tibet*, 140–142. This narrative is indebted to the *Maṇi Compendium* where the youngest of three brothers from the Śākya clan is said to have escaped with his army and retinue to Tibet, while the *Tra Druk Guide Book* (*Khra ’brug gnas bshad*)

5 The Buddhist Taming of the Land of the Demoness

[*Kong-jo*] prophesied that after the [different] locations in the environs [of *lHa-sa*] had been remedied (*bcos*) [in order to neutralize the malevolent *sa bdag-s*] by [installing] a *caitya*, a stone-lion, a support [i.e., phallus] of *Śiva*, a [statue of] the *Garuḍa* [bird], and a white conch, etc. The temple [of *Ra-sa* 'Phrul-snang] should be erected upon the dried-up lake [of 'O-thang that floated underneath] *Ra-sa* 'Phrul-snang, whereupon the divine [statues of] China and Nepal should be requested to take up their seat [i.e. be installed]. Thereupon the Teaching of Buddha will spread and during the [later] generations of ruling kings, a monk community and the transmission of hermeneutics and spiritual realization [based upon] *sūtra-s* and *tantra-s* will spread and disseminate.

TRA DRUK GUIDE BOOK, TEXT A, 55.

The introduction of Buddhism to Tibet under the aegis of Songtsen Gampo also corresponded with at least the standardization of writing using Tibetan script with which to translate Sanskrit, and to a lesser extent Chinese Buddhist literature into Tibetan. The fact that many of these early translations of Buddhist texts remained unintelligible to most Tibetans seems to have increased rather than interfered with their respect and power. Through the introduction of literacy, Buddhism greatly contributed to other processes required for more unified forms of political authority, including the development of legal codes that reflected the influence of the ten Buddhist precepts, as the following passage on the 'oral instructions to a prince' from the *Maṇi Compendium* suggests.

The emanation of Great Compassion (Bodhissattva Avalokiteśvara), the protector of Buddhism, King Srong-btsan-sgam-po, instructed his own son as follows: 'Listen to me divine prince. If you do not administer the royal domain according to Buddhism, a secular state will become the cause for bad transmigrations. In this life, bring kingship and dharma in harmony. While serving the *ācārya* (Buddhist scholar), administer the land according to the Buddha's teachings. Practice the 'ten virtuous' which like a ladder leads to the higher realms (higher rebirths). Renounce the 'ten non-virtues' that makes us fall into the cycle of bad rebirths. No matter if the monarchy lasts to the end of the world, you may day along the next day and thus you should accomplish the practice of

traces an unbroken royal line of descent for Tibet's first king, Nyatri Tsenpo, with the first Indian king, Mahāsammata who descended from the gods of Clear Light (*ābhāsvāra*); see Sørensen and Hazod, *Thundering Falcon*, 44.

Avalokiteśvara. You cannot remain in the comfort of the palace grounds forever, but you should meditate on the purity of the buddha-field. If you establish the imperial law tightly, it will be the cause of vice and bad transmigrations. You must therefore, establish the law of religion well.⁴⁵

Among Songtsen Gampo's enduring ritual and regal acts was the foundation of the Central Temple of Lhasa, the Jo.khang, or Ra.sa'i 'Phrul.snang, which boasts an unrivalled place as a monument of national heritage and a major pilgrimage site. Its lasting prestige is crucial to understanding Tibetan conceptions of political and religious identity, and of legitimate Buddhist governance in the struggle among religious masters and local rulers for controlling the site.⁴⁶ When Songtsen took to marriage the Nepalese Princess Bhṛkutī and Chinese Princess Wencheng (Kong-jo in Chinese) his first attempts to build a temple to enshrine the Jo.bo statue of Śākyamuni and other gifts which he received as part of dowry failed, being mysteriously undone at night by the local *genius loci*. To determine the source of the trouble, the princess divined utilizing Chinese astrological charts and geomantic techniques the presence of an unruly 'supine demoness' (*srin.mo*) fallen on her back that inhabited the whole subterranean landscape of Tibet.⁴⁷ Her subjugation was necessary not just for housing the precious Buddhist objects, but for implanting Buddhism on Tibetan soil that was a *rākṣasī* land (*srin.mo yul*).⁴⁸ For this purpose, she had

45 Vol. *wam*, 15b5–16b3. While curiously there is no elaboration on the cosmogonic myth of Songtsen Gampo as the emanation of Avalokiteśvara in the *Testimony of Minister Ba (dBa' bzhed)* – a classic source concerning the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet – there is a passing reference to the people of Li.yul [Khotan] who believed the emperor to be an emanation of the celestial bodhisattva. According to the narrative (3b) two Khotanese monks who visited Lhasa on a pilgrimage were about to loose faith in the 'bodhisattva-emperor' having seen how he enforced draconian laws upon villains by executing them, sending them to exile, holding them prisoners in an enclosure of thorns, while for others their noses were cut off and their eyes removed; Diemberger and Wangdu, *dBa' bzhed*, 32. For an illuminating analysis on the narrative of the Khotanese pilgrim monks vis-à-vis the divinity of Songtsen Gampo, see Mills, "Ritual as History." A version of the story is also preserved in the *Mañi Compendium* where by the power of having aroused extraordinary devotion for the emperor, the Khotanese monks became arhats. Though in principle I agree with Mills' orientation to "reinvest the process of mythic historiography . . . rather than reading the process as a mere exercise in formulaic piety," 223, I take on a more inclusive approach to the divide between factual and mythical representation.

46 For detailed study of the intra-religious conflicts surrounding the *sanctum* in Lhasa, see Sørensen, "Lhasa Diluvium," 112–127.

47 Gyatso, "Down with the Demoness," discusses the context of this story in Tibetan histories.

48 Sørensen and Hazod, *Thundering Falcon*, 180, note that in pre-imperial principalities *srin* represented a category of deities closely associated with the earth and territorial cults.

to be pinned down, 'suppressed' (*gnon*) by erecting thirteen Buddhist temples upon her body, at cardinal and other significant points laid out in the Tibetan terrain. With the Jo.khang erected on the heart of the demoness, the binding-down temples were organized topographically in three concentric squares.⁴⁹ Thus, beyond the Lhasa heartlands lay the innermost square of four temples nailing down her hips and shoulders, called the 'district-controlling temples' (*ru.gnon gyi lha.khang*); the four intermediate temples for nailing down her elbows and knees were the 'border-taming temples' (*mtha. 'dul gyi gtsug.lag.khang*); and four 'further-taming temples' (*yang. 'dul gyi lha.khang*) supervised by foreign 'architects' (*lag.dpon*) from Minyak (east), Thogar (south), Hor (north) and Nepal (west), were erected for nailing down her wrists and ankles.

This configuration of ritual power is reminiscent of Tibet's military organization of its polity into 'four horns' (*ru.bzhi*),⁵⁰ while there is nothing in the myth to suggest an obliteration of Tibet's indigenous forces, which remained very much alive in post-imperial narratives of the empire's Buddhist conversion.

Srong btsan sgam po's erection of thirteen structures to suppress the Srin-mo, and later repetitions of the tale by other builders, constitute eloquent testimony to the continuing presence of the supine demoness. She may have been pinned, and rendered motionless, but she threatens to break loose at any relaxing of vigilance or deterioration of civilization. Indeed, the architectural erections insure her per durance below; she provided no less than the organic unity of the land, the totality of the context in which civilization could thrive. In the final analysis, the very measures taken to subdue the Srin-mo have sustained her vitality in the Tibetan world.⁵¹

The story of Tibet's physical and spiritual conversion is one of ongoing resistance by traditional structures, a tale of subjugation and taming not only of the people but of their beliefs concerning the inherent power of the land, and of elite practices translated into popular beliefs. The fate of the *srin.mo*,

Hence, the "identification of the Tibetan kingdom as a *srin mo* body may therefore have had its roots in this old milieu of '*srin* territories,' all of which are to be located in the region of the four horns of later Tibet".

49 The geomantic model and its antecedents have been thoroughly discussed by Aris, *Bhutan*, 15–22.

50 In the times of the Tibetan kings, Tibet was divided into three military zones, or horns (*ru*) but from 733 onwards it is reported to have been divided into four horns, see Uray, "The Four Horns of Tibet".

51 Gyatso, "Down with the Demoness," 50–51.

the rock demoness tells a story of resistance, conquest and a case of conformity to certain culturally validated norms. The tale of the subjugation of the demoness offers new ground for correlative thinking that links a ritual narrative into an organizing principle for the territorial ambitions of the state and the creation of a new symbolic order. Furthermore, it poses an abstract unity between Buddhist history, Chinese imperial schematizations of power, and societal beliefs in thinking about the adoption of Buddhism in Tibet as a transition from mobile centres of power to fixed territorial markers in the process of empire building.

6 Conclusion: The Myth of History and the History of Myth

Taking on a pragmatic approach that measures knowledge on the basis of its impact in a given society and cultural milieu and not against its truth value, I have deliberately refrained from deciding between facts and myths in Tibetan historical narratives, for in a sense they are both verbal constructs the contents of which are as much invented as they are found. The presumed objectivity of historical knowledge, in the manner of final knowledge, is unattainable owing to the impossibility of ever completing the hermeneutic task, which is constantly reborn and cannot be realized by demythologizing or purging history from those very ingredients that allow for its present signification and impact. This is to say, the potential of historical representation to elicit culturally embedded responses, divide or unite the community, and even offer a sense of identity and cultural continuity, cannot be regarded as exhausted or complete because no reduction, however convincing and factual, can force itself upon any mode of representation as the definitive one.

The arrival of Buddhism in Tibet presents a unique case of a foreign religious culture whose transplantation relied on a process of transmission that treated mythical temporality as if it were historical time, devaluing in this process the historical particular as a fleeting expression of a macrocosmic totality. Buddhism did not simply replace nor effaced indigenous Tibetan beliefs and political customs but came to assimilate dominant cultural notions, archetypal stories, physical markers and so forth, into a master phenomenological narrative that asserts the insubstantial and impermanent nature of all things, events and actions and postulates their inter-subjective mutability.

As we have seen, images like that of Songtsen Gampo are connected by spatial and temporal relations, yet these relations are not derived in any way from the objects they represent. Representations are always somewhat in the process of becoming familiar. And to the extent that they become so, they animate

a 'space-time' continuum populated by simulacra of people and events related to each other through associations. The question if the Tibetans believed in and lived according to their myths is answered in the affirmative and this does not imply the degradation of Tibetan historiography to the status of ideology or propaganda. The implications of such beliefs and related practices are inseparable from what constitutes a collective experience of mythical time, while statements foreign to experience are neither true nor false. In fact, the Tibetans showed no particular interest in a version of history comprising a collection of facts – as if facts, or verbal images of reality from a Buddhist perspective, were ever independent of their subjective interpretation and respective programs of truth. Tibetan historiography, to a large extent, was based on an implicit program in which the project of writing history reinforced the pre-eminence of religion not merely as ideology, but as individual experience, communal practice, and a distinct way of life.

In the representation of the crowned emperor we may anticipate the meeting of two worlds and their eventual departure: the world of Indian Buddhism with its own history and didactic stories about the Buddha's own royal past, universal authority, and salvific activities, and the world, obscure to us, of Tibet's pre-Buddhist era with its indigenous beliefs concerning the inherent charisma and magical power of the sky-king, the son of heaven. This meeting of cultural realms is recorded in historical literature like a palimpsest enveloping two distinct layers of meaning and practice: the spiritual world of Buddhism concerned with the attainment of liberation from the sufferings of this life and the next, or from *saṃsāra*, superimposed upon an older layer of ancient Tibetan customs and beliefs concerning the divine origins of kingship. How are we to understand these discursive crossovers by which different periods of history are integrated into a single macroscopic process of development?

Arguably, the crowned image of the emperor is misleading, for it is not a representative portrayal of Songtsen Gampo who transformed Tibet – not just through divine grace, but through military might – into a Central Asian empire. And it is not an accurate representation of Buddhism defined as a system of soteriological tenets that ought, in principle at least, to maintain a healthy distance from worldly ambitions, the martial brutality of rulers and the commonplace intrigues of the royal court where competing interests disrupted the lives of one too many Tibetan kings and legitimate heirs to the throne. The image and its many references are not related to one another in any essential way. Rather they are linked by a set of abstract correspondences that forge a relation of similitude between accounts of past events incorporated in stories endowed with culturally sanctioned meaning. Tibetan histories draw from a pool of culturally provided *mythoi* in order to constitute the facts as figuring

a story of a particular kind where the individual entities in the field are related to one another not by causes, but organically, in part-whole relationships that mirror the structure of the totality of Tibet's cultural environment and religious heritage.

Legitimation of rulership is central to the image of Songtsen Gampo that we encountered in the beginning of this essay – not only in the sense familiar to religion and political economy, but in the making of the particular features of an inconceivable totality which are no less 'real' than those framed by the conscientious historian. Arguably, Tibetan history is an ongoing creation of continuously productive actions and distributions of knowledge of what is possible (not necessarily actual) defining, as well as defined by their proximity to religious sentiments, intensity of beliefs, and faith. Far from being opposed to the truth, fiction is only its by-product. This statement is not likely to be received sympathetically by anyone who wishes to argue that fiction and history deal with distinct orders of experience and therefore, pose distinct, if not opposed, forms of discourse. Wishing to go beyond the philosophical sides of this debate, it may be useful to invoke Joseph Needham's idea of correlative thinking that was later related to the idea that reality consists of multiple layers, each mirroring all others in some fashion. It is fair to say that Tibetan religious history displays a general propensity to bypass the fragmentary in an effort to organize natural, political, social, and cosmological data in a highly ordered array of systems of correspondence.

These systems tended to emerge most rapidly in times of political integration or broadened foreign contact or in harmony with developments in literate technologies that accelerated textual flows. In the most advanced traditions, repeated syncretic fusions of sources over long periods eventually led to the emergence of systems with highly exaggerated correlative properties (known in mathematics as 'self-similar' or 'fractal' structures) in which every part of the cosmos was said to mirror every other. The links between the development of extreme high-correlative systems and syncretic process is suggested by the fact that similarly structured systems emerged in China, India, the Middle East, Europe, and Mesoamerica whenever information flows increased and tendencies to harmonize traditions reached extremes.⁵²

52 Farmer, "Neurobiology, Layered Texts, and Correlative Cosmologies," 50–51.

All along I have been arguing, perhaps implicitly, from the perspective of correlative structures that could explain this latency of power, in its political and religious significations, to reform itself in customized narratives that transformed the Tibetan despot into an absolute monarch and the Buddhist monk into an avatar of spiritual and secular sovereignty. The correlative tendency of reflection provides a reasonable account for understanding the formation, legitimation and role of Buddhist kingship in Tibetan contexts. The Buddhist King flickers before the mirror of Tibetan history in culturally familiar patterns which might suitably serve to model reality, real or merely imagined. In the oscillation between 'historical myth' and 'mythical history' we may find ourselves drawn in a reversal of two dimensions: a 'temporalisation of space' in a diachronic quest for meaning that allows for regional varieties of participation with the sacred, and a 'spatialization of time' in which, every important religious and political act is ritually re-enacted in a present-day epiphany originating in sacred time.

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Prester John, the Ten Tribes, and the Raja Rum: Representing the Distant Ally in Three Pre-Modern Societies

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The intention of this piece is to parse geographical space, real and imagined, the relationship between mythology and politics, the relationship between power and distance, and the transferal of ideas across cultures.

I wish to discuss three different pre-modern societies: medieval and early modern Latin Christianity; medieval and early modern Judaism, both in Spain and in Ashkenaz; and the Muslim societies of the early modern and more recent (19th and early 20th century) Malay Peninsula, and the islands of Sumatra and Java in what is today Indonesia. Through these disparate constructions of the same mythologizing process, I hope to demonstrate the ubiquity of creating the “distant powerful other” and its importance in creating early, international diplomatic policy and geographical cosmology in the age of empire building.

In Europe, even before the rise of Christianity, special powers were thought to exist among peoples of distant and unseen lands: piety, military skill, and unimaginable material wealth, to name a few. People or items that arrived in ancient Rome or Greece from great distances, while treated as “odd” or “barbaric” because they were foreign, were also accorded a great level of fascination. In Book One of the *Iliad*, for example, Zeus and the other gods went to visit the “blameless Ethiopians,” whom the *Odyssey* referred to as the “remotest of men.”¹ The Ethiopians possessed such virtues naturally, as opposed to the “artificial” virtues of Persians or even of the Greeks themselves. The men of distant lands had no artifice.²

With the rise of Christianity, such fascinations came to blend with a religious component: stories of global Christian evangelization established a belief in the West that Christians existed in lands to which no Latin had

1 *Iliad* 1.423; *Odyssey* 1; Strabo (*The Geography*, 44.25) likewise, wrote of them as notable for their piety and justice.

2 On this, see Georges, *Barbarian Asia*, 189; Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, 165, 168. On the rhetoric of remoteness as it related to Ethiopians in the classical canon, see Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity*.

ventured, most notably India, Ethiopia, China, the first two of which do, in fact, have Christian communities dating from the first four or five centuries of the Common Era.³ With the rise of Islam in the seventh century, and the subsequent conflicts between the two religious groups over political, economic and religious supremacy in the Mediterranean Basin, the belief in the existence of such Christians became of even greater interest. Could such Christians be found and coaxed to come and help their coreligionists defeat Islam? As early as 643, we find the Christian Byzantine emperor Constans II sending to China for help against invading Muslim armies, purely on the supposition that there were Christians in China.⁴

It was, however, not until 1122, nearly 600 years later, that the West actually received anything even remotely resembling confirmation of the distant, wealthy and powerful Christian polity about which they had mythologized. Such evidence, if we can call it such, came in the appearance at the Pope's court, of a man, claiming to be patriarch of a distant Christian land. Hearing of the West's ongoing and largely unsuccessful struggles against Islam, this distant land's king wished to extend a hand of friendship and alliance to his western brethren. The patriarch spoke of his land's untold luxuries, mighty armies, and advanced technologies, but also of a deep and abiding Christian faith, which he traced back to the Apostle Thomas.⁵ I doubt we shall ever know his identity, and the likelihood of his being a charlatan is great. However, he was believed because he fit so nicely and neatly into the preexisting mythologies of the Latin West about what a distant Christian should represent. The appearance of this visitor and the fantastic stories of wealth and power he related and which

3 On India, see *Didascalia Apostolorum*, 33. On the early traditions of Thomas as they relate to Malabar, see Brown, *The Indian Christians*, chap. 2 (esp. 49–50). For Ethiopia, see Acts 8:26–40. Also, among others, Bede, *Commentary on the Acts*, 8:27a–c. Some Christian writers, such as Theophylactus Simocatta openly acknowledged that the Chinese “nation practices idolatry, but,” he added, “they have just laws and their life is full of temperate wisdom.” See *The History of Theophylactus Simocatta*. 7.9. Pseudo-Caesarius of Nazianus (IV CE) contradicted Theophylactus, stating that they did not in fact, worship idols, and that they lived in a society completely free from crime of any sort. See Pseudo-Caesarius of Nazianus, *Dialogues*, PG 38, col. 984; see too *Moses Khorenats'i*, 231.

4 Liu Xu, *Jiu Tang shu*, chap. 198; Ou-yang Hsiu, *Hsin Tang Shu*, chap. 221; and Ma Tuan-lin, *Wen-hsien tung-k'ao*, chap. 330 in Hirth, *China and the Roman Orient*, 105, 106–107, 117 (transl. at 55–6, 60, 86).

5 His arrival, and the fantastical stories he related about his realm and the Thomasite community, were chronicled anonymously in a tract. For the text, see Zarncke, *Der Priester Johannes*, 7: 837–843.

were chronicled in an anonymous text, represented the nexus of two beliefs.⁶ “Prester John”, the name with which the ruler of this visitor’s land came to be known, was a Christian, and he ruled a land of coreligionists beyond the boundaries of the known world. Faith and distance were quite significant issues in the 12th century, for they carried with them several, meanings readily understood by a Church and a secular nobility engaged in a struggle with Islam for political, economic and religious supremacy in the Mediterranean. As the narrator of the anonymous eyewitness account of the “patriarch’s” arrival expressly remarked, the visitor to the Papal court claimed to have come from the Indies – a land to which no westerner had traveled successfully in the memory of those present in 1122.⁷

The preconceptions regarding the East had been well-established before the prelate’s arrival in the West in 1122. More than a millennium’s worth of myth-making had ensured the Papal court and its followers that the presence of an eastern Christian leader in their midst was a boon to their war against Islam. An ambassador from the Indies was an ambassador who *per force* represented a land of wealth. Similarly, a Christian, of whatever stripe, was sure to have a great animosity for Islam. It is no wonder that the “patriarch’s” arrival was heralded so enthusiastically. The stories he related, which spoke of miracles associated with the shrine of the Apostle Thomas, were consistent with miracle tales from earlier generations.⁸ The wealth and power of which he spoke was likewise extraordinary, but not outside the bounds of credibility.⁹ Such confirmations were glad tidings to a Papal court mired in an ongoing struggle with Islam for supremacy in the Mediterranean. His visit, and his king, were true, significant landmarks, for it was a search for him that was on the agenda for most of the initial voyages of expansion and exploration (or imperialism) launched down the West African coast in the fifteenth century. As the Portuguese prince Henry the Navigator’s contemporaneous biographer put it, the prince wanted

6 There has been a renewed scholarly interest in Prester John over the past two decades. See Beckingham and Hamilton, *Prester John, the Mongols* and the bibliography contained therein. See also *Prester John: the Legend and its Sources* which supersedes Zarncke’s *Der Priester Johannes*; Ramos, *Ensaio de Mitologia Cristão Prester João*; Baum, *Die Verwandlungen des Mythos vom Reich des Priesterkönigs Johannes*.

7 See *De adventu patriarchae Indorum ad Urbam sub Calisto papa Ilo* in Zarncke, *Der Priester Johannes*, 7: 837.

8 Zarncke, *Der Priester Johannes*, 7: 837–843.

9 Odo of Rheims, the well-respected abbot of St. Remy, claimed to have been present at the “patriarch’s” arrival, and related the circumstances which brought the traveler to Rome, in a letter to Count Thomas of Marle. Text of Odo’s letter in Zarncke, *Der Priester Johannes*, 7:845–846. See, too, Slessarev, *Prester John*, 67–79.

little more than to find other Christian princes on the other side of Islam with whom he could fight the Moors.¹⁰ And this, more than three hundred years after our visitor appears in Rome.

By the mid fourteenth century, the title “Prester John” was confirmed as the common reference to describe the king of Ethiopia. When Ethiopia was reached by Latins, at the end of the fifteenth century, and after a century or so of desultory embassies, it was discovered that here, in the highlands of a dry and desolate country, was a king without gold or guns, but with Muslim enemies of his own, looking to the Portuguese for assistance in their wars and conflicts. For them, the Portuguese were the long sought allies; the distant coreligionists. The Portuguese kings could thus claim all of Prester John’s assumed powers as their own. As far as the Portuguese were concerned, Ethiopian weakness was not a political tragedy. While it had been the Ethiopians’ ability to conquer geographical distance that had been at the root of their perceived power in the West, now the king of Portugal, whose ambassadors, ships and soldiers dotted the known world, and carried on regular and profitable commerce over vast distances, had himself conquered the same geographical distance. The wealth, Christianity, prophetic claims and ability to unify many lands under one Christian banner, granted as attributes of Prester John and other potential eastern allies, were now the attributes of the kings of Portugal, in their new roles as masters of the Indies. The Portuguese king Manuel began to appropriate imperial titles for himself, indicating his sovereignty over greater parts of Africa and Asia.¹¹ Initially, he was the “Lord of the Conquest, and of the navigation and commerce of Ethiopia, Arabia, Persia, and India.”¹² The identification of Manuel as Lord of the Conquest was a title that, after all, had been granted to him by the papal bull *Ineffabilis*, in 1497, to be recognized before the other princes of Europe.¹³ By 1505, however, Manuel was being referred to in far grander terms. Valentim Fernandes, in his 1502 Portuguese translation of Marco Polo, noted how the king’s name was known in the most remote regions of the earth. He urged the king to take an imperial title.¹⁴ Others called for the king to be recognized as Emperor of the Indies, because of the fealty granted him by so many kings of the east.¹⁵ By the time Manuel died in 1521 and was

10 Zurara, *Cronica*, chap. 7.

11 For an extensive discussion of the following, see Thomaz, “L’idée impériale,” 37–50.

12 “Senhor da conquista e da navegação e comércio de Etiopia, Arabia, Pérsia e da India.” *Documentação*, 1, doc. 2, 6ff.

13 Witte, “Les lettres papales”.

14 Marco Paulo, “Prologue”.

15 *As Gavetas*, 9:50; Farinha, “A dupla conquista”.

succeeded by John III (r. 1521–77), the new king was lauded as a “king of many kings.”¹⁶ With such great honor, and without his father’s messianic ambitions regarding Jerusalem, John III displayed none of the enthusiasm for the eastern alliance, or for the need of Prester John that his predecessors had shown. Prester John was unnecessary. The Portuguese king now embodied all of those virtues once bestowed only on the greatest princes of the Christian East.

From the time of John’s accession, the Portuguese were keenly aware of their new role in the world. As sovereigns over the Indies they believed themselves in a far superior position to the Christians of Asia and Africa and were quite willing to flex both political and doctrinal muscle to further enhance their power and prestige in the eyes of their clients, Rome and the other Christian princes of Europe. Portugal had displayed a mastery of distance that was unequaled, even by the Spanish with their new discoveries in the West. The establishment of the Portuguese seaborne empire represented a major shift in the distance/power paradigm from one of a Latin sense of dependence upon outside allies to a notion of their own global supremacy. Mythologization had formed the basis for a broader imperial policy.

While the Christians searched for their military ally against Islam, the Jews of Europe desired their own liberators to free them from both Christian and Muslim overlordship. Jewish knowledge and belief in unexplored regions was, likewise, based on a combination of scholarship, myth and religious text, but, like Christians, there was a strong belief among European Jewish communities in the existence of unseen coreligionists. Often, Jews envisioned these coreligionists as members of the so-called Lost or Ten tribes, who had not returned to Israel following the Babylonian exile.¹⁷ Their return, as the Prophets claimed, would herald the coming the Messiah.¹⁸ In this way, the search or desire to make contact with these hidden Jews always held a special significance for Jewish commentators that went beyond the hunger for political liberation from Christian or Muslim oppressors.¹⁹

16 “Carta I, A El-Rei nosso senhor,” in Sá de Miranda, *Poesias*, 187ff.

17 1 Chron. 4:43, 5:26.

18 Is. 11:11; Jer. 31:7; Eze. 37:8. On this, see Neubauer, “Where are the Ten Tribes?,” 14–16.

19 It is interesting to note that, considering the eschatological significance of the Ten Tribes (or, perhaps because of it), they have been treated very poorly in academic scholarship. Few studies have actually examined the significance of the tropic nature of the Tribes, choosing, instead, to highlight the possible connection of certain diasporic Jews to the Ten Tribes. As will be noted below, most of the primary texts are in dire need of new editions and evaluations.

Jewish claims of the existence of powerful coreligionists dwelling in some unknown and distant place, hold particular importance in the ongoing polemical debate between Jews and Christians in medieval and early modern Europe. Christian, anti-Jewish polemic had long maintained that the Jews were a stateless people. That their lack of a king or army was proof of their doctrinal errors in light of Jesus' assumption of Davidic messiahship.²⁰ In essence, Christian polemicists denied the possibility of Jewish participation in the power/distance paradigm.

For Jews, on the other hand, the belief in the existence of a distant and powerful Jewish state gave lie to Christian polemic. It also allowed for the Jewish assumption of a type of power Christians claimed as exclusively their own and used the notion of the eventual return of these armies/tribes as proof that the Davidic messiah had not yet come (i.e. that Jesus was a false messiah).

In truth, medieval Jewish notions of geography and distance varied little from their Christian contemporaries, using Biblical and Talmudic geographical concepts to envision the world. India and Ethiopia/Cush, according to the book of Esther, marked the edges of the known world (as personified in this case by the boundaries of Ahasuerus' kingdom.²¹ The Indies were, likewise, viewed by both groups as lands of great material wealth.²² Christians in the west came to know of their coreligionists and their kingdom in Ethiopia.

Psalm 67 speaks of Ethiopia stretching out its hand to God, which, we can assume, was interpreted (as it was by later Christian commentators) as meaning the acceptance of monotheism in the country.²³ Jews in Spain and Ashkenaz also came to believe in the strength of their brethren in northeastern Africa where Jewish traditions regarding Ethiopia were based on mishnaic sources regarding Moses, who, according to Josephus, was asked by Pharaoh to lead an army against the Ethiopians and subsequently wed an Ethiopian woman.²⁴ The words of the Prophets regarding the wealth of Cush came to be

20 Baron, *A Social and Religious History*, 2: 139–40; 5: 118; Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, 121, 123, 143–145; Olster, *Roman Defeat*, 76–79, 120, 125–131.

21 Est. 1:1, 8:9. Talmudic commentators come to interpret this as being from one end of the earth to the other. (BT. Megillah 11a; EstR 1:1). On European Jewish views of Ethiopia, see the *Song of Songs* VI. 9,3 and Lassner, *Demonizing*.

22 Job 28:19; Is. 45:14.

23 For Christian interpretations of Psalm 67, see Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, 174; Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, vol. 2, 746–747.

24 In general, see Aescoly, "Yehudi habash ve-sefrut ha-ivrit," 316–336, 411–435. See Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 2: 286; Rajak, "Moses in Ethiopia", 111–122; Shinan, "Moses and the Ethiopian Woman," 66–78; Josephus' "Antiquities of the Jews" in *Josephus* 2.242ff. See later medieval re-workings of Josephus in the *Chronicles of Moses* in Shinan, "Divre ha-yamim

enhanced by a midrashic tradition that linked Jews in Ethiopia with some of the Lost Tribes whose coming was to have such significant eschatological and millennial repercussions.

The appearance during the Middle Ages of numerous pseudo-Messiahs among west and central Asian Jewry raised questions in the West of strong Jewish rulers and armies who might be able to come to the assistance of their brethren. Numerous tales of Jewish leaders defeating Muslim and Christian armies in the East piqued the interest of Sephardi Jews in particular.

Yitzhak ben Yakov (first half of the 8th century), was an active prophet-messiah near Isfahan in Persia. Also known as Abu Isa, he supported the idea that both Jesus and Muhammad were legitimate prophets among their own peoples. He urged the redemption, reclamation and rebuilding of Zion and subsequently attracted a considerable amount among the local Jewish population. While not explicitly described as being a member of one of the Lost Tribes, he was discussed as having gathered an armed force and, in some accounts, of defeating Muslim armies in battle.²⁵

“Serenus” was another messianic claimant from Syria/Persia, whose fame and news of his supposed military exploits reached the Jewish communities in western Europe. Isidore of Badajoz, as well as other Spanish chroniclers spoke of his following and some stated how Jews from the West, in hearing of his coming, went eastward to join him.²⁶

We know that the Khazars of Central Asia, or at least their monarchs, did, in fact, convert to Judaism. Scholars have debated the actual date, and suggestions have ranged from 740 to 861.²⁷ News of the Khazar conversion was well known in the West by the time the poet/philosopher Yehudah ha-Levi, wrote his famous *Kuzari* between 1120 and 1140. Jewish authors often assumed that the Jews of Khazaria, in Central Asia, were somehow descended from one of the Ten Tribes. The anonymous author of the so-called “Schechter Letter” (c. 949) mentioned, albeit skeptically, a tradition that the Khazar Jews were

shel Moshe rabbenu,” 100–116. See also Shim'on ha-Darshan, *Yalqut Shim'oni*, 1.168 and the *Sefer Hayashar: The Book of the Generations of Adam*. For an English rendering, see *The Chronicles of Jerahmeel*, 113ff.

25 Lenowitz, *Jewish Messiahs*, 71–76; Nemoy, “al-Qirqisani’s Account”; Maimonides, *Epistle*, xviii–xix.

26 Lenowitz, *Jewish Messiahs*, 77–78; Isidore of Badajoz, *España sagrada*, vol. 8 (*Chronicle*), 298; on this, in general, see Starr, “Le Mouvement messianique,” 81–92.

27 For a provocative discussion of the issue, see Kovalev, “Creating ‘Khazar Identity’”; see also Zuckerman “On the Date of the Khazars’ Conversion,” 246; Pritsak, “The Khazar Kingdom’s Conversion,” 278–279; Pines, “A Moslem Text,” 47; Golden, “Khazaria and Judaism”.

descended from the tribe of Simeon.²⁸ News of distant Jewish tribes came to the West manifestly in the letter to the Jews of Spain from “Eldad the Danite” in the 9th century. A Jew of Babylon, “Eldad” represented himself as a descendant of one of the Lost Tribes who wished to bring news of Jewish power and success afar to Jews living under Muslim rule across the Mediterranean.²⁹ A letter of 883 sent to the Jews of Spain, reputedly from Eldad, noted how strong Jewish armies of a Jewish kingdom fought and defeated Christian Ethiopians princes.³⁰ He wrote, too, of Jewish armies and “mighty men of war” who defeated Muslim armies in the Hejaz, and who exacted tribute from Muslims in Iraq.³¹ Eldad’s views on the Khazars were that they even took tribute from Muslim nations. Other versions of the Eldad story exists, such as those collected in Jerahmeel b. Solomon’s *Chronicles of Jerahmeel* (12th century). One of Jerahmeel’s documents, the Chronicle of Elchanan b. Joseph, is more specific than Eldad’s account in discussing the great Jewish nations that took tribute from Muslims in the East.³²

Perhaps even more significantly, in the mid-10th century, Hasdai ibn Shaprut, vizier to the Umayyad caliph Abd-al-Rahman III (r. 911–961) and Hakim (r. 961–976), heard of a Jewish kingdom in Central Asia and sent investigators to discover what they could.³³ Following Hasdai’s inquiries, news of its existence came to be widely disseminated, both in Spain and Ashkenaz. A letter (now lost) received by Hasdai’s ambassador, and reported by Jehudah al-Barceloni, came to be considered an important treatise in Spain.³⁴ Hasdai

28 Golb and Pritsak, *Khazarian Hebrew documents*, 113.

29 There are a number of editions and translations of the Eldad texts. The most recent is an Italian translation with analysis: Loewenthal, *Il libro di Eldad il Danita*; many scholars cite *Sefer Eldad ha-Dani*, which was reedited in *Kitvey Avraham Epstein*, 1:1–189; the only English translation is that contained in *Jewish Travellers*, 5–15. The editions and translations differ considerably in the order in which they present the text. The first printed edition was printed in Mantua (c. 1475).

30 These, according to Eldad, are the tribes of Naphtali, Gad and Asher. The text of Eldad’s letter printed in Istanbul (1519) is much more explicit in describing the defeat of the Christian Ethiopians. Considering the (then) current failure of the long hoped-for Prester John alliance to pan out in Ethiopia, the Jewish reemphasis of Jewish strength in light of Christian weakness is particularly pointed.

31 The tribe of Ephraim and the half-tribe of Manasseh dwelling in the Hejaz. The tribe of Simon and the half tribe of Manasseh live in Babylonia.

32 *The Chronicles of Jerahmeel*, 199–200.

33 On Hasdai’s correspondence, see Golb and Pritsak, *Khazarian Hebrew documents*, chap. 9.

34 Assaf, “R. Yehuda `al-Barzeloni,” 113–117; Assaf, “L’divre R. Yehuda Barzeloni `al ha-kuzarim,” 48; Mann, *Texts and Studies*, 1:8; cf. Dubnow, “Maskanot aharonot,” 3; Dinur, “me-arkivno shel Perets Smolenskin,” 257.

himself wrote a letter to the Khazar khan requesting information on the extent, strength and scope of his kingdom.³⁵ While no verifiable reply was ever received, a letter, purporting to be from the Khazar khan Joseph, circulated in Spain in the 11th century.³⁶ While no specific mention was made of the possibility of the Khazars coming to assist their coreligionists in Spain, rumors of a strong Khazar army certainly suggests that such action was not far from the minds of many European Jews. Abraham Ibn Da'ud (fl. 1160–61) noted that he had seen Khazar descendants in Toledo.³⁷

Quite apart from the case of the Khazars, the belief in the existence of other large Jewish communities, particularly those under independent Jewish leadership, was very significant for western Jews for the liberatory potential such lands might possess. Moses ibn Ezra (fl. 1080) wrote that Khorasan was the dwelling place of the 10 tribes in his own time.³⁸ Benjamin of Tudela (fl. 1170) noted 80,000 Jews dwelling in Ghazna (in Central Asia).³⁹

By the end of the twelfth/beginning of the thirteenth century the letter of Prester John had been in wide circulation and had been translated into French and other western vernaculars and, most noteworthy for our purposes, Hebrew.⁴⁰ The Hebrew Letters of Prester John are not, however, merely translations, but transpositions directed toward a Jewish audience. Possibly influenced by the Eldad narrative, Prester John comes to talk about his coeval neighbor, a Jewish king, who, if not Prester John's overlord, is certainly his equal.⁴¹ Gog and Magog are now peoples who have great battlefield power.⁴² The redactions are quite striking as they write to convince Jews that, in the distant east, are other Jews who are able to rule themselves and who can muster forces of arms – in contradiction to Christian anti-Jewish polemic which denied the possibility of Jewish self-rule, let alone sovereignty and strength.⁴³

The fifteenth century, with its concomitant persecutions, but also its expansion in geographical knowledge, saw a renewal of speculation in the Jewish communities about the arrival of an army of liberation. A report, for example, preserved by Joseph ben Jehudah Sarko, noted a 1419 mission to Pope Martin v,

35 Mann, *Texts and Studies*, 1:23. Attribution of Hasdai's letter has been a subject of dispute.

36 Kokovstov, *Evreïsko-khazarskaia*.

37 Ibn Da'ud, *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*, 68, 93.

38 Schreiner, "Le Kitab al Muhadara," n. 13.

39 Benjamin, of Tudela, *The Itinerary*; See Fischel, "The Jews of Central Asia (Khorasan)," 39.

40 *The Hebrew Letters*.

41 *The Hebrew Letters*, 60/61, 70/71.

42 *The Hebrew Letters*, 46/47, 80/81–82/83.

43 *The Hebrew Letters*, 60/61.

announcing that an army comprised of the Ten Tribes, was on the march.⁴⁴ By century's end, as in the Christian world, much Jewish speculation focused on Ethiopia. While Latin diplomats and kings wrote in great expectation of an alliance with Prester John and his Christian Ethiopian armies, so too did Jewish sources ring with news of Jewish armies battling Christians and Muslims for supremacy in this distant land. Three reports, one anonymous account of 1454 and two attributed to Obadiah of Bertinoro (from 1488 and 1489 respectively) note that the Jews had defeated the armies of Prester John.⁴⁵ These reports are not to be understood simply in the context of Jewish speculation about the survival and existence of the Ten Tribes, but within the context of prevailing European ideas of Ethiopia and Ethiopian power. As we have already seen, by the end of the fifteenth century, Ethiopia and its king, Prester John had been accorded great power in the eyes of Christian observers. Italian and Iberian rulers had made it known that the negus of Ethiopia was a brother to whom they would gladly turn to aid them in their ongoing battles against Islam. Given this view of Prester John, Obadiah's claims of a Jewish army defeating Prester John is a frontal assault on the Latin claim to the distant power "monopoly." If Prester John, the great unseen and powerful king, could be defeated, how strong must such an army have been to have defeated him?⁴⁶

These bold speculations continued throughout the last decade of the fifteenth century and well into the sixteenth, where Jewish claims to distant power confront the Christian world through David ha-Reuveni.⁴⁷ Reuveni, charlatan or not, was quite aware of his audience (both Christian and Jewish), and was able to build upon mythologies already developed in Europe to raise anticipation, expectation and fear in his listeners and readers. Supported by the belief in him held by such worldly Jewish scientists as Abraham Farissol, he was clearly viewed as convincing.⁴⁸ A fragment of a letter, possibly by Reuveni, claimed that a Jewish army, under the command of one Joseph ben Solomon, was massing near Ancona, ready to march on Rome.⁴⁹ This, at the same time that Reuveni was trying to convince the powers of Christendom to join with the Jews in freeing the Holy Land from Muslim domination. Whether inspired by Reuveni's tales or the tales of newly discovered lands and peoples coming

44 Kaufmann, "A Rumour about the Ten Tribes," 503–508.

45 Neubauer, *Qevutsot 'al 'inyane 'aséret ha-shevatimu-vene Mosheh*, 22, 35.

46 On this matter, see *The Hebrew Letters*.

47 For details on the *Reuveni saga*, see the (possibly) pseudepigraphic *Sipur David ha Reuveni*. On *Reuveni* in a broader context, see Eliav-Feldon, "Invented Identities," 203–232.

48 Farissol, *Igeret orhot shalem*.

49 Mann, "Glanures de la Gueniza," 148ff.

back from Asia, Africa and the Americas, the sixteenth century is replete with stories of marching Jewish armies and the return of the Lost Tribes. Abraham of Perugia, living in Italy, began to collect such stories from throughout the Diaspora, which spoke of Jewish armies defeating Christians or poised to conquer the Holy Land. Other stories abounded in which the so-called “Red Jews” would arrive from afar to liberate their coreligionists.⁵⁰

And yet, it was with the advent of the Sabbatian movement, and the almost universal expectation of Jewish liberation in the mid-17th century in both Jewish and Protestant chiliastic circles, that it seemed as if the army of liberation had, indeed, arrived. It is only with the final indignity of Sabbatai Sevi's apostasy that much of the mythology of hidden Jews began to disappear from Jewish “political” writing. While desultory rumors continued to arise of Jewish armies, such as those which were rumored to be gathering in Yemen in the 1860s under Shukh-Khayl II, the expectation and search for liberatory polities became, increasingly, a medieval solution to problems facing a modern world. With the rise of secular Jewish political movements and secular Zionism in the 19th century, the messianic view of a liberator came to be viewed as more a subject for religious scholars than secular community leaders. Jewish liberation would, it was argued, come from another source, closer to home and closer to reality. The story of the Ten Tribes did, in fact, hold great fascination for some Christians as well as the Jews.

The Biblical exegetes (or interpreters) of radical Protestantism, with their near obsessive desire to pin-point the eschaton (that is, the end of the world) reckoned that any sign of the coming together of the Tribes would herald the return of the Messiah and thus, judgment day. With the discovery of the Americas, and the hitherto unknown peoples there, Protestant theologians raised questions of the possible Jewish origins of the American Indians. While I have written on this subject elsewhere, I would like to point out that a certain leniency began to appear in northern Europe at least, toward the Jews, in case such cataclysmic rumors be true.⁵¹ Jews were, for example, readmitted into England in the mid-seventeenth century after a 400-year absence. There was, too, heightened expectations in the Jewish community that the Messiah might, in fact, have appeared in the person of one Sabbatai Zvi, who carefully shrouded his preaching among Jewish communities in obscure, eschatological language. The Sabbatian movement became widespread across Europe in

50 See the reports of Jewish converts to Christianity in Victor von Carben (1422–1515), *Judenbüchlein* and Antonius Margaritha, *Der gantz jüdisch glaub*, edited and translated in Gow, *The Red Jews*, 247–252, 261–262.

51 Knobler, “Crusading for the Messiah,” 83–92.

the seventeenth century, as Jewish notions of a genuine liberator came to be more openly voiced, and it was only when Sabbatai renounced Judaism under scrutiny of the Ottoman Sultan did the movement quickly die out. From that point onward, the search for distant liberators was a desultory matter in Jewish communities through the 19th century, when more secular political means for the liberation of the Jews came to be openly and frequently discussed. The notion of distantly diasporic Jews, so ingrained in folklore as well as canon, came to be a matter of policy in establishing Israel's "Law of Return", allowing all Jews the right to claim Israeli citizenship.

Islam presents us with several possible avenues of exploration regarding the distant ally. On one hand, there is the more theologically oriented concept of the Hidden Imam in Shi'a Islam where, near the end time, a leader who has lived in hiding for many centuries, will come to preside over the final stages of judgment.⁵² However, here I shall examine a phenomenon which parallels that of the Latin Prester John in many respects: the Raja Rum of the Malayo-Indonesian world.

The rise of European imperial power in Asia and Africa saw a concomitant development of a mythology of a distant and powerful king serving as a liberator from their new oppressors. In the case of the Malayo-Indonesian world, for example, the great king of the West, the Raja Rum, came to be directly identified with the Ottoman sultan who came to play a symbolic role of great significance in the way in which Malayo-Indonesian Muslims came to conceive of the wider world. In Johore, for example, he was described as the eldest of the three sons of Iskandar Dzulkarnain (Alexander the Great), along with the Raja Cina (the great Eastern king) and the founder of Johore's own Minangkabau dynasty.⁵³ As late as the 1770s, the Sultan of Minangkabau styled himself as the younger brother of Raja Rum.⁵⁴ Likewise, in Kedah, the Raja Rum served as a close associate, in this case the master of the father of the founder of the Siamese, Kedah, Patani and Perak ruling houses.⁵⁵ By the mid-16th century, the Raja Rum or Sultan Ngrum came to be identified in Southeast Asia with the Ottoman sultan, and thus mythology and politics were conjoined as the Islamic polities of the region came to play a role in the Portuguese-Ottoman struggle for economic and political supremacy in the Indian Ocean Basin.

52 On the "hidden" Imam and his occultation, see sources listed by Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 160 and ch. 8.

53 Marsden, *The History of Sumatra*, 341–342.

54 Marsden, *The History of Sumatra*, 338–341.

55 Siti Hawah Saleh, "Hikayat Merang Mahawangsa," cited by Reid, "Sixteenth century Turkish Influence," 396, n.4.

Perhaps the most striking conflation of myth and politics appeared in Atjeh, on the northern Sumatran coast, which established political ties with the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century. The *Bustanu's-Salatin*, written in Atjeh by Nurud-din ar-Raniri in 1638, stated that during the reign of Sultan Alau'd-Din Ri'ayat Shah al-Kahar (c. 1537–71), the Atjehnese sent a mission to the Raja Rum in Istanbul to “strengthen the Muslim religion” in Sumatra, and establish formal ties with the strongest of the world’s Muslim princes.⁵⁶ In reply, so the text says, Sultan Rum sent gunsmiths, canon and craftsmen to assist the Atjehnese. Such correspondence is confirmed by letters from Selim II addressed to Ala'ad-din from both 1567 and 1568, noting Atjehnese requests for help in combating the Infidel and offering a supply of ships, craftsmen and arms.⁵⁷

Later Atjehnese sources moved to extend the length of the relationship between Atjeh and the Raja Rum well into the seventeenth century, during the reign of Iskandar Muda, often viewed as the greatest and most powerful of Sumatra’s Muslim leaders. The gift of canon, skilled crafters and officers was, for example, attributed to the reign of Ottoman Sultan Mehmed III by a variety of encomiastic epics, such as the poetic *Hikayat Meukota Alam and the Hikayat Atjeh*, which attempted to compare Iskandar Muda with his Turkish contemporary.⁵⁸

Whatever the case about when or how the Turkish guns came to Sumatra, the linkage between the rulers of Atjeh and the Raja Rum remained part of Atjehnese oral tradition long after any substantive contact between the Ottoman Empire and Atjeh ceased in the early modern period.⁵⁹

56 Raniri, *Bustanu's-Salatin*, 31–32. For Atjehnese in Constantinople at this time, see also Hammer-Purgstall, *Histoire de l'Empire ottoman*, 2:115; and Tiele, *De Europeërs in den Maleischen Archipel*, 424.

57 Letter from Selim II to Sultan Ala'ad-din Ri'ayat Shah al-Kahar (16 Rabi'ul 975/20 Sept. 1567) in Saffet Bey, “Bir Osmanli Filosunun Sumatra Seferi,” 606–609; Selim writes 4 months later (5 Rajab 975/5 January 1568) to Husain, Atjehnese envoy, regretting the delay in the Sumatra campaign, due to rebellion in Yemen. Saffet Bey, “Bir Osmanli,” 11: 680. The largest gun resulting from this diplomacy was, supposedly, the so-called lada sa-chupak gun, which remained at the mouth of the Atjeh River until 1874 when it was captured by the Dutch and taken to Holland, where it remains to this day.

58 See Sabil, *Hikayat Soeltan Atjeh Marhoem*. See also *Hikayat Malem Dagang; De Hikajat Atjeh*, 167 (238 in MS).

59 Two versions of Atjehnese oral tradition regarding this gun were recorded early this century. See Snouck Hurgronje, *The Achehnese*, 1:208–209; Saffet Bey, “Bir Osmanli,” 11:681–683. Modern traditions also speak of a “Turkish village” in Atjeh, Bitay, whose residents are supposedly descended from the artisans sent by the Sultan.

During the era of Dutch colonial rule, stories of distant liberators appeared in Java. While the Raja Rum stories do not appear with the frequency associated with them in Sumatra and the Malay peninsula, the Javanese have a rich messianic tradition, centering around two figures of prophesied just kings, the Ratu Adil and the Erucakra, who would emerge at a time of crisis to lead their people. The Ratu Adil is an oft-studied phenomenon, and I shall not detail it here.⁶⁰ A few incidents occur where the Ratu Adil and Erucakra appear to be associated, like the Raja Rum, with a foreign (and specifically Turkish) ruler, and are thus evidence of the indigenous desire for liberation (both millennial and political) with a source of distant power.⁶¹

The most frequently examined messianic figure in Javanese history is Prince Deponegara, who led an uprising against the Dutch in the late 1820s.⁶² Prior to 1825, Diponegara claimed to have a vision of the Ratu Adil. His assumption in 1825 of the title of Sultan Erucakra implies that he saw himself in a messianic light.⁶³ What is particularly notable is the way in which Deponegara's claims may be seen in light of the prophecies outlined in the old *Jayabaya* stories. These prophetic tales speak of the Ratu Adil having two earthly courts: one in Java and another in Arabia.⁶⁴ In addition, one version of the *Pralambang Jayabaya* notes that the rule of the first *Erucakra* would give way, first to a foreign ruler from Europe (*Nusa Srenggi*), but that liberation would be achieved by a descendant of the Erucakra from Rum.⁶⁵ While the Deponegara rebellion was quashed, a long parade of Ratu Adil pretenders continued to raise messianic expectations in Java during the last century of Dutch rule.⁶⁶ As late as 1913, some Javanese Muslims called upon the Ottoman sultan to aid them in their struggle against the Dutch, and rumors of an Ottoman annexation of Java were noted in the local press.⁶⁷ In Atjeh, the role of the Ottomans in the war

60 On the Ratu Adil, see Kartodirdjo, *Ratu Adil*.

61 See Carey, "Waiting for the 'Just King'".

62 On Deponegara, see Adas, *Prophets of Rebellion*; Carey, *The Cultural Ecology*; Carey, *The Power of Prophecy*.

63 Carey, *Cultural Ecology*, 27.

64 Carey, *Cultural Ecology*, 29; Wiselius, "Djâjâ Bâjâ," 188.

65 Carey, *Cultural Ecology*, 31. This perhaps begs the question "Did Deponegara claim Turkish descent?" The answers are rather equivocal. He clearly took inspiration from Ottoman and Turkish sources in his military organization. There is also evidence of his claimed intention to retire to Ottoman-controlled Mecca after his defeat by the Dutch. See Carey, *Cultural ecology*, 31, n. 104, 33; Ricklefs, "Diponegara's early inspirational experience".

66 See Kartodirdjo, "Agrarian Radicalism in Java," 71–125.

67 *Pernijagaan* (Djokja, Java) (1913), no.206, cited in Kartodirdjo, *Protest Movements*, 180, n. 71.

against Dutch colonialism took an even more active turn. In 1873, for example, Atjehnese diplomats began to argue their right to be free of Dutch rule, due to their long standing recognition of Ottoman suzerainty, under the conditions of the diplomacy of the mid-sixteenth century.⁶⁸ The Turkish sultan, as the Raja Rum, was appealed to and the Ottomans, for their part, informed both the British and the Dutch through diplomatic circles of their intention to protect their old vassals, the Atjehnese.⁶⁹

While little practical assistance came from the Ottomans during the last years of Atjehnese independence at the beginning of this century, interest in maintaining connections and recognizing ancient myth-historical ties remained strong.⁷⁰ Whether as the Raja Rum or the Erucakra, the Ottoman sultan remained an important and potentially liberating ally for Southeast Asian Muslims, until political realities, notably the defeat of the Ottomans in World War One, presented the necessity of a new liberator, again, perhaps closer to home.⁷¹

Three societies; three religions; multiple cultures, yet a similar phenomenon from each. From western Europe to Southeast Asia, Jews, Christians and Muslims had a shared expectation of a far-off coreligionist savior. The answer lies in what we could call a distance/power paradigm.⁷² The projection of power onto those who are afar is a relatively easy step to make and, indeed, the greater the perceived distance, the greater the perceived power societies are willing to attribute to others. When Prester John is finally “encountered”, he is far less powerful than when he was at a distance. Christians were willing to accord respect to David ha-Reuveni, as long as he represented Jews who were at a distance, however when he began to communicate with Jews who were close at hand, he was branded an enemy of crown and church. The Raja Rum, on the other hand, always remained apart from southeast Asia and was, therefore, always accorded power in Malayo-Indonesia.

68 See Reid, “Habib Abdur-Rahman az-Zahir,” 37–59.

69 Rashid Pasha (Ottoman foreign minister) to Constantine Musurus Pasha (ambassador to Britain/Holland), 11 August 1873, in *Bescheiden betreffende*, 1: 612.

70 For a discussion of Atjehnese-Ottoman relations, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Reid, “Nineteenth-Century Pan-Islam,” 267–283. Note the rise of a khalifate revival movement in Java after the deposition of the Ottoman sultan in the 1920s. See Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement*, 222–225.

71 Interestingly enough, the “father” of Indonesian nationalism, Sukarno, came to use prophetic titles during his struggle against the Dutch in the post-Ottoman period in the 1920s. On Sukarno’s early use of messianic imagery, see Legge, *Sukarno*, 101–102.

72 See Helms, *Ulysses’ Sail*.

The examples are connected. Prester John and David ha-Reuveni are both connected to the story of Eldad ha-Dani. The number of Prester John texts and Eldad editions available at the time of Reuveni are legion, and according to Perry, Eldad might well have been the source of the Prester John stories.⁷³ Likewise both Prester John and the Raja Rum can be connected through the Alexander story, of which both of them make mention, as well as both noting the role of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel.⁷⁴ In the end, all of these tropes, while being based in legendary material, become part of genuine diplomatic and political activity. It proves a contact between the imaginary and *real politik*.

Many societies were able to mix cosmological mythologies with political realities without seeing any hint of contradiction. Jews, even today, are still searching for the whereabouts of the ten lost tribes of Israel. The Portuguese were willing to follow an age-old Prester John mythology across the globe without questioning its legitimacy as a geo-political fact. The stories are translocative in several senses: the trope of the distant, powerful king crosses boundaries of religion and ethnos quite strikingly; but the stories themselves also rely upon the willingness of the listener to believe that a distant power will cross that distance to render aid to coreligionists he has never seen, simply because they are coreligionists. The sixteenth century was a time of a great change, as distance, once thought impenetrable, was traversed, and the blank spaces on the map, where Prester John, the Ten Lost Tribes and the Raja Rum were believed to dwell, began to be filled in.

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73 See Perry, "The Imaginary War".

74 Doufikar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, 181–92, 248–9, 341–8; Cuffel, "Sambatyon".

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Locating Religion, Controlling Territory: Conquest and Legitimation in Late Ninth-Century Vaspurakan and its Interreligious Context

Zaroui Pogossian

In 915 Gagik Arcruni of Vaspurakan¹ started the construction of a luxurious palace complex with a church on the Island of Alt'amar on Lake Van. The Church of the Holy Cross inaugurated in 921 is the only surviving witness to this grandiose project and has justly earned its fame as a jewel of medieval Armenian architecture. No wonder, then, that it has been the focus of scholarly attention – especially of art historians – for more than a century.² The incontestable importance of Alt'amar has overshadowed, even if not totally obscured, Gagik's and his predecessor's other projects and accomplishments. Yet, Gagik's foundations on the Island – both the Church of the Holy Cross and the palatial structure that was once adjacent to it – were the culmination of his and his forefathers' long efforts of claiming territories south and east of Lake Van and instituting various means of marking and controlling them. As the construction of the Church of the Holy Cross already implies, Gagik's policies of power consolidation included a religious component, or, in the context

1 Busfurrajân in Arabic sources. The approximate borders of Arcruni Vaspurakan in the ninth century were the Great Zab [river] in the south (a left attribute of Tigris), the Araxes River in the north, Lake Van in the west and Lake Urmiya in the east. Cfr. Laurent, *L'Arménie*, 42 and 121 for the domain of the Arcrunis; Hewsens, “Van in This World,” 22–28. Needless to say, these boundaries are approximate and throughout the course of time, including the period under discussion here, they changed quite considerably on which cfr Vardanyan, “Borders of the Kingdom.” For Vaspurakan and relevant sites discussed in this paper see the map at the end of this article based on Hewsens, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas*, map #93, reproduced here with the kind permission of Prof. Hewsens to whom I express my deep-felt gratitude.

2 Cfr, among others, Orbeli, “Monuments”; Der Nersessian, *Aght'amar*; Mnats'akanian, *Aghtamar*; for a brief overview of the ninth–tenth century architectural legacy in Vaspurakan see Cuneo, *Architettura armena*, vol 1, 38–40 and on the Church of the Holy Cross of Alt'amar, *Ibid.*, no. 331, 556–560; for an attempt to evaluate the significance of the Church for Gagik's royal ideology cfr Cowe, “Relations”; Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, and a review of the latter in Kouymjian, “An Interpretation”.

of the present volume, necessitated the “locating of religion”. Yet, the connection of territorial control, the patronage of religious sites or traditions and an inter- or intra-religious dynamic of these activities have not been explored. In this paper I attempt to shed some light on this complex of relationships using as an example the region of Vaspurakan of historical Armenia in the second half of the ninth to the first two decades of the tenth century. This timeframe marks a period of crisis at the Abbasid court which allowed a freer hand to local lords, especially at the fringes of the Caliphate, to assert their independence. Consequently, it corresponds to a period of expansion by the Arcruni family from their ancestral domains centered in the town of Adamakert to a much larger territory south and east of Lake Van, culminating in the Kingdom of Vaspurakan established by Gagik Arcruni in 908. This process can be traced thanks to the dynastic historian of the Arcruni clan – T’ovma Arcruni’s *History of the House of Arcrunik*³ and its continuation by another witness to early tenth century events – his [First] Anonymous Continuator. Using these sources, as well as others when necessary, I will look at how and whether the patronage of pre-existing religious sites and traditions, as well as the establishment of new ones fit into the expansion of the Arcrunis and what the examples available to us tell about the inter- or intra-religious implications of these efforts. Placing the activities of Gagik in this background will emphasize and trace the general lines of development of some ideas and behaviors, such as moving from sponsoring pre-existing sites and traditions to establishing new ones with specific dedications, which more often than not contained a precise message on royal ideology.

1 The Historical Background

In the middle of the ninth century, the province of Armīniya of the Abbasid Caliphate was in the grip of rebellions. The hereditary Armenian princes – *naxarars* – among whom Bagarat Bagratuni and Ašot Arcruni the Senior³ took the lead, refused to allow the newly appointed governor – *ostikan* – Abū Sa’īd Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Marwāzī (Abuset’ in Armenian sources) to enter their

3 I will use the titles Ašot the “Senior” and Ašot the “Junior” solely for the purpose of distinguishing the two homonymous Arcruni princes – the elder being the grand-father of the younger Ašot. These are not common denominations used in the scholarly literature, but are employed here in order to avoid confusion.

territories for the purpose of tax collection in 850.⁴ As if this was not enough, when the latter's son Yūsuf was sent the following year for the same purpose and, subsequently, arrested Bagarat Bagratuni, an open revolt in the district of Xoyt' broke out and Yūsuf was killed.⁵ To suppress the unruly princes and the population of Armenia, the Caliph al-Mutawakkil dispatched his most able general Bugha al-Kabir. The latter arrested numerous leading princes, sending them as prisoners to the capital Sāmarrā, and effectively rooted out any possibility of a similar unrest in the near future. The autonomy of the remaining, mostly junior representatives, of the local nobility was severely reduced. At the same time, some of the Muslim Arab settlers who had moved to Greater Armenia earlier and tried to establish local centers of power, were able to enlarge the territories under their control after the expedition of Bugha at the expense of the Armenian lords. Thus, north of Lake Van, the Ẓaysites who had earlier conquered the province of Apahunik' (Baḵunays), now established themselves in the city of Manazkert (Manāsdjird).⁶ The coastal towns of Xlat' (Khilāt) and Arckē (Ḍat al-dja'ūz) also came under their control. The Shaybānī from their centre in Amida (Amid) expanded to the eastern shores of Lake Van up to Datwan (Ṭayṭawāna), where they eventually came into competition with the Arcrunis. The Zurārids of Arzn (Arzan), on the other hand, both maintained their ties with the Shaybānī and attempted to become integrated into the Armenian *naxarar* system, by establishing marriage alliances with the Bagratuni and the Arcruni nobility simultaneously. Lastly, the 'Uthmānids of

4 For the Arabic governors of Armenia cfr Nalbandyan, "Arabic governors," and Ter-Ghevondyan, "Chronology". The term *ostikan* of Iranian origin is usually translated as "governor" but the exact functions and responsibilities of an *ostikan* of Armīniya varied considerably and other titles appear in the sources too, such as *zorawar* (roughly *general*), *išxan* (prince), etc who seem to have carried some of the same responsibilities and privileges (such as the collection of taxes) as the *ostikan*. A useful discussion of the the term *ostikan* and other relevant titles and their meanings can be found in Vacca, *From K'usti Kapkoh*, 109–115, where she compares this office to those from the Sassanian administration.

5 The rebellion and its suppression between 850 and 855, as well as the ensuing events in the late ninth and early tenth centuries take up a major part of Book Three of T'ovma Arcruni, *History*, (tenth century), 194–338, who focuses especially on the Arcruni family. For the English translation cfr Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni*. The same events are discussed also in Yovhannēs Draxanakertc'i, *History*, 118–135 (also tenth century). For the English translation cfr Maksoudian, *Yovhannēs Draxanakertc'i*. This historical period is analyzed by Ter-Ghevondyan, *Armenia and the Arabic Caliphate*, 138–150; and briefly in Idem, *Arab Emirates*, 42–44; Garsoïan, "The Arab Invasions," 140–142; Eadem, "L'indipendenza ritrovata," 173–175; and Martin-Hisard, "Dominazione Araba," 149–171.

6 Information for this section, until the end of the paragraph is based on Ter-Ghevondyan, *The Arab Emirates*, 26, 51–56.

Berkri (Bārghirī) on the north-eastern tip of Lake Van, moved southward conquering the fortress of Amiwk and reached the Mountain of Varag, they too becoming direct rivals of the Arcruni in that area. The city of Dwin (Dabīl) – the first administrative centre of the Caliphate, later replaced by Partaw (Barda'a), had a substantial Islamic population, was an important trading entrepôt, and played a major role in the economy of the entire region. It is noteworthy that the central mosque and the cathedral church in Dwin stood next to each other, a fact noted by the geographer Al-Istakhri.⁷ Occasionally, Dwin came under Bagratuni sway in the ninth and tenth centuries, but the Bagratuni never managed to secure their hold on the city for any length of time.⁸

The rivalry between various ruling hereditary princes of Armenia – the *naxarars* – was an endemic feature of medieval Armenian society and has been described since the earliest specimen of written tradition of Armenian historiography.⁹ The ninth and tenth centuries were no different in this respect. But now, besides the Armenian lords, local Muslim rulers also contended for local power and claimed territories for themselves. Thus, when just before the murder of al-Mutawakkil in 861 the imprisoned Armenian princes were gradually released and returned to their homes, they were faced with a complex situation. On the one hand, the anarchy that ushered in the murder of al-Mutawakkil in Sāmarrā, loosened the grip of the Abbasid control on the provinces, including Armīniya.¹⁰ As a result, it was exceedingly difficult for the central government to collect taxes from the provinces, as well as reign in centrifugal tendencies.¹¹ This situation allowed the Armenian princes to consolidate their hold on their ancestral territories but also to enlarge their domains. But their previous prolonged absence also meant that they had to wrest or wrest back their power from others once they returned. The rivals could be the members of the same noble clan or even only slightly extended family, representatives of other Armenian nobility or local Muslim rulers, all

7 Ter-Ghevondyan, *Armenia and the Arabic Caliphate*, 204.

8 Ter-Ghevondyan, "The Chronology of Dwin" and Idem, "Dwin under the Salarids".

9 An early example is the fifth century *History of the Armenians* attributed to one P'awstos Buzand, which is replete with such tales of rivalry, where personal valor and courage in combat are decanted in highly epic terms. Garsoïan, *Epic Histories*, provides a minute analysis of this 'ethos'. The *History of the House of Arcrunik'*, to be explored in this paper, also includes numerous such narratives.

10 The murder of al-Mutawakkil and the subsequent turbulent political situation in the Abbasid heartland is analyzed in Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 169–171.

11 Waines, "Crisis of the Abbasids" with a focus on the Sawād for an explanation of the decline in Abbasid tax revenues.

of whom had in the meantime reinforced or increased their own interests and territories.¹² Alliances were formed and discarded startlingly fast and the religion of the parties involved was by no means an obstacle or the most determining factor in creating partnerships or betraying a one-time ally. The Byzantine Empire, ever watchful for its interests in the east, could also influence these struggles either directly or indirectly.

Eventually, the three most important Armenian aristocratic clans that subdued the majority of the lesser lords were the Bagratunis in the north, the Arcrunis in the south and the Siwnis in the north-east. The Sādjid governors – *ostikans* – of Atrpatakan (Ādharbāyjdjān) were the strongest Islamic rivals at the end of the ninth- beginning of the tenth century, who at times acted just like any other local ruler fighting against the central Abbasid government, but, at other times, could claim to represent the Caliphate and thus demand the loyalty or submission of the Armenian princes.¹³ In 884 the Bagratuni Prince Ašot (v), after having been “Prince of Princes” for twenty five years became King Ašot I, a title bestowed by Caliph al-Mu‘tamid (870–92) and recognized by the Emperor Basil I (867–886).¹⁴ Some twenty five years later, in 908, his grandson (from his daughter Sop‘i) Gagik, the Lord of Vaspurakan, also received what is reported by the Armenian sources as a “royal investiture” from the Sādjid Governor of Ādharbāyjdjān Yūsuf b. Abu‘l-Sādj (901–919).¹⁵ Gagik’s status was confirmed by Caliph al-Muqtadir in 916 and 919, but only in 924 did the Byzantine court employ the title “Prince of Princes” for Gagik. He, thus, became the first Arcruni King of Vaspurakan and even harbored ambitions of being recognized as the King of [all] Armenians.¹⁶ Gagik pursued his political

12 The small-scale struggles for power among the junior members of the Arcruni family are colorfully depicted in T‘ovma Arcruni, *History*, 298–300.

13 Ter-Ghevondyan, *The Arab Emirates*, 66–70; Bosworth, “Sādjids”.

14 Ter-Ghevondyan, *The Arab Emirates*, 59–60, who notes, however, that the seal of Ašot I bears only the inscription “Asot b. Sumbat” without reference to his royal title. The title “Prince of Princes” is a translation of the Armenian *išxanac’ išxan*, which became *batrik al-batarika* in the Arabic sources and ἀρχων τῶν ἀρχόντων in the Byzantine sources. The title and its use in the Armenian and Byzantine sources, as well as its international legal-diplomatic significance are discussed in minute detail by Yuzbašyan, “Armenia of the Bagratid Period”.

15 The information is found in the Anonymous Continuator of T‘ovma Arcruni, *History*, 442–444.

16 Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc‘i, *History*, 236–237. The historical situation and the sources of information on the various crowns received by Gagik Arcruni are critically analyzed in Vardanyan, *Arcruni Kingdom*, 79–81, 88, 93. Maksoudian, *Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc‘i*, 23 convincingly argues that Gagik received the dignity of ἀρχων τῶν ἀρχόντων from the

goals in a direct competition and, at times, downright animosity towards the reigning Bagratuni King Smbat I, his maternal uncle.

While Gagik represents the high point of Arcruni rule in Vaspurakan, the expansion of this family's domains from their smaller hereditary regions centered around the town of Adamakert had a longer history (see map).¹⁷ Its fortunes can be traced back to 774/5 when after a failed rebellion some important Armenian noble houses of ancient lineage gradually disappeared. Among those whose diminishing importance played into Arcruni hands were the Anjewac'is and the Rštunis. The Rštunis had traditionally ruled the south-eastern shores of Lake Van, including the towns of Ostan (Wustan), Van (Wan) and the Island of Alt'amar, while the Anjewac'i family held lands south of Lake Van.¹⁸ It was Gagik's forefathers, but especially his grandfather and father who extended the Arcruni control to all these areas and laid the groundwork for Gagik's own ambitious expansionist policies. In their efforts, all the three ruling princes of Vaspurakan relied not only on the force of arms, but also engaged in active support of the most significant religious establishments that marked the Anjewac'i or Rštuni territories, as well as traditional Arcruni holy sites.

The Arcruni (and other) princes' rise to power at the end of the ninth century, through numerous incidents of skirmishes, battles and longer campaigns fill the pages of the *Histories* of T'ovma Arcruni and his (First) Anonymous Continuator, as well as the somewhat later Catholicos Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'i: the most important historiographic sources of the period and not only for Armenian history. But the military triumphs, small or large, could only translate into a lasting success if the acquired territories were maintained and their resources properly managed. The foundation or re-foundation of monastic complexes or churches at the end of the ninth and the beginning of the tenth century was one of the ways to achieve these goals. By creating new religious spaces or re-enforcing the pre-existing ones, sponsoring

Byzantine court in 924 and that this title was transferred to him from the Bagratuni King Ašot II Erkat'.

17 Laurent, *L'Arménie*, 124–125 for the Arcruni hereditary territories and their expansion in the ninth century.

18 On the Anjewac'i family of ancient, possibly Medo-Carduchian origin cfr Toumanoff, *Studies*, 198–199. Ibid., 213 for the Rštunis whose domains centered on the southern shore of Lake Van, including the settlements of Ostan (their capital), Alt'amar and Van. Toumanoff hypothesizes that they may have been of royal Urartian origin. As is common in Classical Armenian, the toponym for the geographical territory under the control of these (and other) families was formed by using the nominative plural of their names, i.e. Rštunik', Arcrunik', Anjewac'ik' for the respective domains of the homonymous aristocratic families.

monastic foundations in their old or recently acquired territories, in other words by “locating religion”, the Armenian princes not only visually marked their domains, publicly and constantly declaring their ownership, but also gave an impetus for the development and use of their resources.¹⁹ The latter aspect was especially important in the context of the expanding economy in the second half of the ninth and the first of the tenth centuries. Moreover, the hostilities between the invigorated Byzantine Empire under the Macedonian dynasty and the disintegrating Abbasid Caliphate caused a shift in international trade routes which now passed through Armenia – a neutral territory between the two antagonistic empires. This had a significant impact on the involvement of Armenia in international trade, with the subsequent growth of economic wealth and the availability of a new type of capital to the hereditary princes.²⁰ The period also witnessed the development of urban settlements, especially those on trading routes, such as the already important cities of Dwin, Naxčawan (Nakhčiwān) and Partaw, but also new ones such as Ani, Kars, Arcn, as well as Van and Ostan in Vaspurakan. Industries, particularly textile production and other related crafts, the various branches of metallurgy, glass production, and others developed in these cities. The revival of Armenian monastic culture, including numerous princely and royal foundations, cannot be imagined without all these factors. Moreover, the “locating of religion” could serve also a polemical tool, both from an intra and interreligious perspective.

2 Conquering Territory, Locating Religion: The Arcruni Princes of Vaspurakan before King Gagik

2.1 *The Monastery of Hogeac’ Vank’*

The support of monastic foundations as a means of reinforcing a renewed or new Arcruni presence in lands that were previously held by other, now weakened, aristocratic clans, went back to Gagik’s grandfather and father, Ašot the

19 A comprehensive study of this phenomenon for the end of the ninth- beginning of the tenth century is a desideratum. For the revival of Armenian monasteries in this period cfr Mahé, *Essor et développement*, 8–33. For observations on the foundation of tenth century monasteries in Armenia cfr Maksoudian, “A Note on the Monasteries”. For one case study, exploring the phenomenon of monastic foundations and the expansion of territory control by the Bagratunis, cfr Pogossian, “The Foundation”.

20 The subject is magisterially treated in Manandyan, *The Trade and Cities*, 138–153.

Senior and Derenik²¹ respectively. Derenik, born c. 844 and taken as a prisoner to Sāmarrā when still a child along with his father, returned to his homeland c. 858/9, subsequently (in 863) marrying the future King Ašot I Bagratuni's daughter Sop'i.²² Ašot the Senior came back later, between 859 and 862, and took the reigns of Vaspurakan in his hands until his death in 874/5.²³ The expansionist policy of Ašot the Senior and Derenik south-east of Lake Van where the domains of the once celebrated Anjewac'ik' (al Zawazan) nobility lay, brought them into conflict with a kinsman – Gurgēn Apupelč. The latter had had a remarkable military career while Ašot the Senior and Derenik were in exile in Sāmarrā. The description of his deeds by T'ovma Arcruni is imbued with an epic pathos and leaves the impression that Gurgēn had become the most popular and beloved ruler of the area in the middle of the ninth century. Moreover, T'ovma also gives him credit for supporting Derenik upon the latter's return from Sāmarrā and for the very idea of creating a dynastic alliance through the latter's marriage with the daughter of Ašot I Bagratuni.²⁴ Despite his popularity and military valor, unable or unwilling to compete with Ašot the Senior and Derenik who had Caliphal approval to rule Vaspurakan, Gurgēn Apupelč attempted another strategy of securing a territorial base for himself. He married the widow of the last reigning prince of Anjewac'ik' Mušel, according to T'ovma Arcruni at the request of Mušel's widow Helinē.²⁵ The situation vexed Derenik whose military aggression against Gurgēn ended in a fiasco. When Ašot the Senior himself returned, he attempted to annex Anjewac'ik' again. This time Ašot did not limit himself to military action, but used other means of gaining support in Anjewac'ik' against Gurgēn. We learn from T'ovma that Ašot encamped near a village called Blrak [lit. *little hill*], but before launching an attack on Gurgēn, he sent two spokesmen to the latter with the offer to capitulate. One of the bearers of the message was a junior Arcruni prince – Vahan – while the other was T'ēodoros the abbot of the monastery of Hogik' or Hogeac' Vank'.²⁶ This move and the choice of T'ēodoros

21 Like many Arcruni princes, Derenik had a double name, i.e. Grigor-Derenik. I will refer to him simply as Derenik in the body of this paper.

22 For the chronology cfr Vardanyan, *Kingdom of Vaspurakan*, 24, 36. Not all dates provided by T'ovma Arcruni are easily reconcilable, however.

23 Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni*, 280 estimates that Ašot the Senior returned only in 867.

24 His deeds are described by T'ovma Arcruni, *History*, 300–322, who probably relied on a pro-Gurgēn source, oral or written. The career of Gurgēn Apupelč is analyzed in Laurent, “Un féodal arménien” and Ter-Ghevondyan, *Armenia and the Arabic Caliphate*, 148–150.

25 T'ovma Arcruni, *History*, 324.

26 T'ovma Arcruni, *History*, 330. The monastery of Hogeac' Vank' (called Dermeryem Kilisesi today), is located in the village of Kasrik (near Kirkgeçit) in the Republic of Turkey. For a

could not have been accidental and surely communicated another message to Gurgēn, i.e. that an important religious center of the Anjewac'ik' region was on Ašot's side. It must be remembered that according to some Armenian apocryphal traditions the Apostle Bartholomew stayed at the location where the monastery of Hogeac' Vank' would be erected, during his missionary journey to Armenia. He is reported to have built the earliest structure of the complex, the Church of the Theotokos, and deposited a miraculous icon of Virgin Mary there. This legend is recorded in a *Letter to Sahak Arcruni* allegedly penned by Movsēs Xorenac'i – the “Father of Armenian historiography.”²⁷ The *Letter's* date has not been determined with any certainty, even though based on its contents it may be cautiously placed between the accession of King Ašot I Bagratuni in 884 and Gagik Arcruni's coronation as King of Vaspurakan in 908.²⁸ Yet,

description of the monastic complex at the beginning of the twentieth century, written evidence on the monastery from the earliest sources up the beginning of twentieth century, as well as popular legends associated with it, cfr Oskean, *Monasteries of Vaspurakan-Van*, Vol. 3, 759–778. For an art historical survey carried out in the 60s of the twentieth century cfr Thierry, “Monastères arméniens du Vaspurakan I,” 169–177; for the situation in the 80s, cfr Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, 244–245; the ground plan and a brief description of the monastery can be found also in Cuneo, *Architettura armena*, no. 325 p. 546–548; and Idem, *Le basiliche*, which places the earliest structures of the monastery into the context of local, southern Armenian architectural trends from the palaeo-Christian period.

27 The personality and the date of Movsēs Xorenac'i is one of the most *vexatae questiones* of Armenian historiography, but are not of direct concern to this paper. The date of Movsēs' *History* is hotly debated and is assigned from the fifth to the end of the eighth centuries. Movsēs Xorenac'i, *History*, 158 contains a reference to the mission of Apostle Bartholomew in Armenia. In the period under consideration in this study, in the tenth century, this tradition is reiterated in Yovhannēs Draxanakertc'i, *History*, 6, 36, 39, and especially 47 where the autocephaly of the Armenian Church is justified based on its apostolic foundations going back to the mission of Bartholomew and Thaddaeus in Armenia. According to Thomson, *Moses Khorenatsi*, 175 fn 8, Step'anos Siwnec'i of the eighth century was the first author to refer to Apostle Bartholomew's missionary activities in Armenia. But see the note below. The *Letter to Sahak* recounts that Apostle Bartholomew was not present at Mary's Dormition. When he returned to Jerusalem and learned about her passing away, he was immensely saddened. In order to console him, a miraculous wooden icon of the Virgin, which she had blessed before her death praying that it cure illnesses, especially leprosy, was given to him. It was this icon that was allegedly placed in the Church of the Theotokos built by Bartholomew, around which the monastery of Hogeac' Vank' developed.

28 The *Letter* contains a prophecy about the ascent of the Bagratunis as Kings who will eventually rule in Dwin, but attempts to explain why the Arcrunis had not yet received the royal title. Thus, this prophecy seems to belong to a time period between 884 and 908, i.e. after the coronation of Ašot I Baratuni but before that of Gagik I Arcruni. It also indicates

whatever the date of its final redaction, the *Letter* appears to be a composite text whose various layers belong to different time periods and incorporate diverse narratives, particularly those focusing on the Dormition of Mary and the mission of Apostle Bartholomew in Armenia, including hagiographical traditions on the Virgin's miraculous icon housed in this monastery. The *Letter* also refers to earlier pre-Christian traditions about sacred sites in the area near Hogeac' Vank' and attests to the significance of the cult of Virgin Mary in replacing that of Goddess Anahit – the Lady of Armenia, in the first centuries of Christianization of Armenia.²⁹ Whatever historical realities may stand behind these stories, it is important that they were part of the local traditions which highlighted the continuity of the cult site from pre-Christian to Christian times, obviously emphasizing the eventual triumph of Christianity. Hogeac' Vank' is mentioned also in a late eighth- early ninth century text, again attributed to Movsēs Xorenac'i, known as the *History of Hrip'simeank' Saints*.³⁰

that the Bagratunis did not hold Dwin but that would do that soon. This hope, however, was never fully realized, thus indicating that we are dealing with a real prophecy here. The *Letter* must be studied more thoroughly before any definite conclusions can be drawn about the date of its composition. While it is a pro-Arcruni piece of writing, it is not belligerent towards the Bagratunis. Rather, it affirms that the Bagratunis and the Arcrunis are like the “two eyes” or the “two hands” of a body and should rule all of Armenia in unity. *Letter to Sahak*, 284. Van Esbroeck, “La naissance du Culte”, 174, dates the *Letter* to slightly after 1080 based on its reference to the death of Prince Atom. Yet, the *Letter* does not contain any such reference. Van Esbroeck also notes (*Ibid.*, 174–175) that the *Letter* has a much older nucleus and affirms that the mission of Bartholomew and his foundation of a church dedicated to the Theotokos was placed in Karin/Theodosiopolis according to a Greek source of Armenian Chalcedonian provenance – the so-called *Narratio de rebus Armeniae*. According to van Esbroeck the cult of Bartholomew spread from north-western Armenia, specifically the region of Karin/Theodosiopolis, to the other Armenian regions. The *Letter* is dated to the end of the eighth beginning of the ninth century in Thierry, *Monuments du Vaspurakan*, 452 fn 41 and “probably [to] the ninth century” by Thomson, *Moses Khorenats'i*, 175 fn 8. The last two authors do not clarify the basis of their dating.

29 For an informative overview of various narrative traditions on the Apostles of Armenia – Thaddaeus and Bartholomew – including a translation and commentary of the relevant texts cfr Calzolari, *Les Apôtres*. On the cult of Goddess Anahit in Armenia, cfr Russell, *Zoroastrianism*, 250–253, including a discussion about the sites mentioned in the *Letter to Sahak*. Russell notes the transferral of the title “Lady”/*tikin* from Anahit to the Theotokos in Christian Armenian culture, and describes the remnants of the cult of Anahit among the modern-day Kurds of the Dersim region.

30 *The History of Hrip'simeank' Saints*, 297–303. The hagiographical traditions on Hrip'simē, her Abbess Gayanē and their thirty five companions are recorded in the fifth century Agat'angelos, *History of the Armenians*, §137–210. According to this source they were consecrated virgins from Rome who fled to Armenia in order for Hrip'simē to avoid a

This source claims to trace the route that the Virgin Hrip'simē and her companions travelled when they fled Rome for Armenia. By indicating the various cities (such as Alexandria, Jerusalem, Edessa), as well as holy sites and relics that the Virgins visited, the text allows us to evaluate the popularity of certain relics or hagiographical traditions connected to sacred spaces both outside and inside Armenia among Armenians.³¹ That Hogeac' Vank' and its icon are mentioned in this text means that not only they were popular enough at the end of the eighth century, if not earlier, but that this monastery claimed a connection also to St. Hrip'simē, St. Gregory and King Trdat, the three most popular saints of Armenia. If the dating of the *Letter to Sahak's* final redaction is, indeed, the end of the ninth–beginning of the tenth century, it indicates that the representatives of the Arcruni family made attempts at linking their noble clan to local religious traditions of Anjewac'ik' and, thus, reinforced their presence in this area by becoming patrons of an important regional monastery. It is possible that the *Letter to Sahak* was commissioned by a member of the very Arcruni clan intent on conquering Anjewac'ik'.

No archaeological data on Hogeac' Vank' is available which could give us more precise information on the dates of its various buildings, their function and their possible reuse. However, according to an art-historical survey the oldest nucleus of the later monastic complex is datable from the fifth to the seventh century.³² It is possible that the *Letter to Sahak* was redacted after the monastery of Hogeac' Vank' acquired further fame due to Arcruni patronage in the 870s and the need to put its foundation legend into writing. But the question of when these narratives started circulating in Armenia and for what purpose must remain open. The lack of secure archaeological data from the region and the uncertain dating of the texts do not allow firm conclusions

forced marriage to the Emperor Diocletian. However, in Armenia King Trdat wished to marry Hrip'simē too, but the latter preferred martyrdom. Her execution, then, is linked to the evangelical activities of St. Gregory the Illuminator and the conversion of King Trdat. Saint Hrip'simē and her companions enjoyed immense popularity in the Armenian Christian culture and it is natural to expect the growth of legends and oral traditions about them, including those that linked the foundations of monasteries or other types of holy sites to them. There is much literature on the Christianization of Armenia and its first saints, all of which cannot be cited here, but see Garitte, *Documents*; "Introduction" in Thomson, *Agathangelos*; Winkler, "Our Present knowledge"; Pogossian, *Women at the Beginning*. An art historical-archaeological analysis of the sites mentioned in the *History of Hrip'simeank' Saints*, as well as their state of conservation, is discussed in detail in Outtier-Thierry, *Histoires des Saintes*.

31 *History of Hrip'simeank' Saints*, 302.

32 Cuneo, *Le basiliche*, esp. 65–67 for conclusions and dating.

as to the pan-Armenian significance of Hogeac' Vank' at the time of Ašot the Senior and Derenik's expansion to Anjewac'ik'. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that the monastery enjoyed great prestige at least in Vaspurakan and the choice of its abbot as his mediator by Ašot the Senior attests to the importance he attached to the support of this spiritual center in his struggle for the domination of Anjewac'ik'.

The incident involving Hogeac' Vank' indicates that rather than "locating religion" on a *tabula rasa* or in a contested religious space, the Arcruni princes aimed at locating their presence in this and other politically and militarily contested regions through establishing a link to pre-existing celebrated religious centers. By claiming to be patrons of a monastery strategically located in the valley of the so-called eastern Tigris (Bohtan su), not far from the Anjewac'i dynastic fortress of Kanguar, the Arcrunis made their control of the territory visible both symbolically, physically and militarily. Moreover, considering the association of the monastery to the mission of Apostle Bartholomew, the Arcruni patronage of the monastery and the cult of St. Bartholomew had a pan-Armenian significance, since the theory of the apostolic foundations of the Armenian Church rested on these traditions. This, in its turn bequeathed the Arcrunis with a greater spiritual prestige as protectors of holy sites with such important associations.

There is yet another important aspect when considering the inter-religious significance of Ašot the Senior and Derenik's support of this or any other religious institution. While prisoners in Sāmarrā, Ašot the Senior and Derenik, along with other Armenian princes, had denied their Christian faith rather than submitted to a sure martyrdom. Upon their release, they openly declared to be Christians and repudiated their previous apostasy. However, T'ovma Arcruni describes the tremendous fear and torments that Ašot the Senior experienced at his death-bed in 874/5, shaken by remorse and doubts about the fate of his sinful soul. T'ovma's final words on Ašot are rather dry and unforgiving: "But it is not known whether [his supplications] would be fruitful, since it is difficult to heal [such] scars..."³³ Compare this to T'ovma's praise of their opponent Gurgēn Apupelč Arcruni when the latter was imprisoned by the Emir of T'p'lis (Tiflis) c. 860 and persisted in his Christian faith despite repeated pressures and tortures imposed upon him. We are told that Gurgēn had a vision where a handsome man "shining like fiery light" appeared to him and exhorted him in these words: "do not deviate to the false religion of the Ismaelites who have turned away from the truth, *like those Armenian*

33 T'ovma Arcruni, *History*, 336–338.

*captives who [also] turned away [from the truth].*³⁴ This comparison and indirect attack on Ašot the Senior's and his young son's apostasy during the imprisonment in Sāmarrā clearly indicate what a formidable rival the returned Arcruni princes found in Gurgēn Apupelč and how important it was for them to prove to their subjects and opponents the sincerity of their reconversion (or shall we say double apostasy?). They must have taken all measures to propagate as widely as possible their attachment to the religious institutions of the Armenian Church, something that could be achieved through the reciprocally supportive relationship of specific establishments, such as monasteries, in the Arcruni ancestral or newly acquired territories. This form of patronage and open re-conversion to Christianity after the return from Sāmarrā also served to underline their independence from the Caliphate and was, presumably, based on personal conviction (or fears of afterlife as attested above) too. Conversely, losing favor with a monastic community could turn out to be fatal. The same Gurgēn Apupelč, trying to avoid yet another conflict with Derenik, decided to emigrate to Byzantine territory. While fleeing Vaspurakan, he came across an unnamed monk who was "the abbot of a monastery" and asked for a place to hide. Curiously, the monk imprisoned Gurgēn and spread the false news of his death. Eventually, Derenik arrived at the monastery, seized Gurgēn again and tried to find an accommodation by granting the latter some estates within Vaspurakan.³⁵ The fact that T'ovma does not indicate the name of the monastery or of its abbot causes difficulties in evaluating this piece of information. It would certainly be crucial to know which was the monastery in question, who was its abbot and why he manifested such zeal in cornering Gurgēn. But the morale of the story is clear and points to the importance of maintaining good relations with the local religious exponents. It also represents a specific example of how the control of territory on the local level could benefit, or, conversely, become problematic, with the help of a monastic/religious institution and its personnel.

2.2 *The Monastery of Varag and Its True Cross*

The patronage of the monastery of Varag reinforces some of the points made above, but also adds a tinge of interreligious rivalry.³⁶ Ašot the Senior and

34 Ibid., 318. Italics are mine.

35 Ibid., 320.

36 A description of the monastery of Varag, known in Turkish as Yedikilise, its environs and the state of conservation at the beginning of the twentieth century, as well as relevant historical documents, can be found in Oskean, *Monasteries of Vaspurakan-Van* 1, 268–339; for the situation in the 60s of the twentieth century cfr Thierry, "Notes sur des monuments,"

Derenik's conquests on the eastern shores of Lake Van brought them into conflict with the Muslim 'Uthmānids who controlled the important fortress of Amiwk. T'ovma legitimizes the Arcruni policy of expansion as re-claiming what was rightfully theirs. In fact, he affirms, the fortress of Amiwk had been part of Vaspurakan since Alexander the Great and King Artašēs, according to tradition the son of Sanatruk – a contemporary of Jesus.³⁷ This explanation implies that Arcrunis already achieved domination in some parts of Vaspurakan at the time of T'ovma, where they were new rulers. But according to T'ovma's rhetoric they were legitimate heirs to all of that region at its greatest expansion. Thus, military conquests, which easily could be considered as usurpation by some, even by members of different branches of the same Arcruni clan, appeared as re-claiming what justly belonged to Ašot the Senior and Derenik, because they annexed back what was part of Vaspurakan since time immemorial, according to this view. On a different level, one must remember that the control of Amiwk was particularly valuable if the Arcrunis wished to connect to the international trade that flourished especially in the northern regions of Armenia.³⁸ Thus, Arcruni efforts to conquer this fortress not far from Berkri, as well as Gagik's later emphasis on developing the cities of Van, Ostan and Alt'amar, could be viewed as attempts at overcoming a seeming economic marginality of Vaspurakan. Their efforts probably bore fruit. The lavish construction projects of Gagik are at least evidence of the wealth available to him, even if not an incontestable proof of trade as being the origin of this wealth. However, during the first half of the 70s of the ninth century, Ašot the Senior and Derenik were not able to take Amiwk which would facilitate their access to Berkri. They tried

177–178 and Idem, *Monuments*, 132–149, where he describes the two parts of the complex, i.e. the Upper Convent and the Lower Convent; for a description in the 80s of the twentieth century cfr Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, 190–192. A brief architectural analysis and the plan of the monastery is presented in Cuneo, *Architettura armena*, no. 322 p. 538–543.

37 T'ovma Arcruni, *History*, 332.

38 This point is made in Ter-Ghevondyan, *The Arab Emirates*, 147. An analysis of Muslim geographers' descriptions of international transit routes that passed through Armenia lead Manandyan to the conclusion that the main highway passed along the northern shores of Lake Van, through Muslim-held cities of Bit'lis (Badlis), Xlat', Arčeš (Arčiš), Berkri and onward to Tabriz. Only a less important southern road crossed the cities of Vaspurakan, such as Van and Ostan. Yet, the latter are not mentioned in a tenth century Armenian itinerary, which, again, focuses on the northern cities. Cfr analysis and maps of trade routes in Manandyan, *The Trade and Cities*, 148 for the so-called southern, somewhat secondary route, which included Van and Ostan within Vaspurakan; 156–157 for evidence from Islamic geographers; and 169–171 for the tenth century *Armenian Itinerary*. The main commodities exported from the region of Lake Van were salt and the *tarex* fish.

to make the best out of the situation by focusing their energies on liberating the not-so-distant monastery of Varag.

The Monastery of Varag, on the slopes of the homonymous mountain, was known to have housed a celebrated relic of the True Cross. Like in the case of Hogeac' Vank', here too apocryphal traditions and local hagiographic narratives come to help us understand the significance of Varag and its precious relic before and after the Arcruni conquests. The connection of this relic with the memory of the previous lords of these territories – the Rštunis – add another layer of meaning to the Arcruni patronage of Varag. According to the *History of Hrip'simeank' Saints* noted above, a piece of the True Cross was placed on Mount Varag, in a hut built for that purpose, by Virgin Hrip'simē and her companions, while they were traversing Armenia.³⁹ The holy women are told to have sojourned on the mountain for some time, in caves later known as Caves of Friday [Urbat'ayrk']. For reasons not explained in this source but obviously because the story had to be harmonized with the older tradition of Hrip'simē's martyrdom in Vałaršapat (today's Ejmiacin), the virgins had to continue their flight northwards.⁴⁰ Another narrative cycle focused on the re-discovery of the True Cross hidden by Hrip'simē on Mount Varag which is ascribed to the second half of the seventh century, at the time of the Rštuni prince Vard Patrik's (Vard the Patrician) rule in Vaspurakan. In order to appreciate the Arcruni's support of what one may term as “selective memory” of local Vaspurakan traditions, I would like to dwell on the personalities of Vard and his father T'ēodoros Rštuni, the significance of these figures or of their memory in the interreligious context of Vaspurakan, as well as the competing versions of stories about them.⁴¹

T'ēodoros was the Byzantine-appointed Prince of Armenia (639–654) during the first Arabic incursions. He receives an unequal treatment in the seventh

39 *History of Hrip'simeank' Saints*, 302. This source relies on apocryphal narratives, such as one transmitted under the authorship of Labubnay, about the discovery of the True Cross by Protonikē (Patronikē in Armenian sources), the wife of Emperor Claudius, co-emperor of Tiberius. The *History* claims that the True Cross was given to Protonikē by St. James, brother of the Lord. Cfr Labubnay, *Letter of Abgar*. For the various versions of the *Discovery of the Cross*, including its so-called P version (related to Protonikē), cfr Drijvers, *Helena Augusta*, esp. 147–163 for the Protonikē legend.

40 *History of Hrip'simeank' Saints*, 302.

41 Of course, the Arcrunis were not the only ones to emphasize or choose to remember certain versions of historical events that were beneficial to the memory of their ancestors and their dynasty as a whole. This is, in fact, a wide-spread cultural phenomenon. Interesting thoughts on this attitude traceable in the Armenian sources and the creation of the so-called “family histories” can be found in Greenwood, “A Reassessment,” 143–145.

century *History* of Sebēos. On the one hand, Sebēos branded the peace agreement stipulated between Muawiya and T'ēodoros as a "covenant with death and alliance with hell."⁴² On the other hand, the *History* preserves traces of a much more positive image of T'ēodoros, likely due to a Rštuni source the author had access to.⁴³ This dichotomy of attitude extends to the actions of his son Vard Patrik recounted in the late eighth century *History* of Łewond on the one hand and in a source based on local oral traditions, possibly written down only at the end of the tenth century, known as the *Anonymous Story-teller*, on the other. According to Łewond, Vard betrayed the Byzantine forces in a battle on Easter Saturday, in an unspecified location on the bank of the Euphrates, resulting in Muslim victory. While the date of the battle seems to be 661, Łewond notes that Vard was acting according to his father's instructions, who, however, was already dead by that point.⁴⁴ Not only the chronological problems but also Łewond's pro-Bagratuni agenda should make one cautious when evaluating the historicity of the details in his report. However, the historical accuracy is not what concerns us here. Rather, it is the reworking of the event in different geographic and dynastic contexts that is relevant to this study. Thus, contrary to Łewond, the *Anonymous Story-teller* which is anchored in local memories of Vaspurakan and its popular tales, presents a pro-Rštuni version of the same episode.⁴⁵ Here, Vard experiences continued nightmares, where he is drowning in a sea of blood, after his betrayal of fellow Christians and their death. However, with the help of an ascetic, Vard is able to rehabilitate himself by building a thousand churches in his domains, as well as through the translation of the relics of St. Stephen from Jerusalem to Vaspurakan. Moreover, the *Anonymous Story-teller* concludes the narrative by reminding the readers that it was at the time of Vard Patrik that the True Cross of Varag was re-discovered.⁴⁶ Thus, Vaspurakan traditions insisted that Vard

42 Sebēos, *History*, 164.

43 Thomson and Howard-Johnston, *The Armenian History*, vol. 1, lxix.

44 Łewond, *History*, 741–742. This chronological inconsistency was noted by Ter-Ghevondyan, *Łewond*, 142 note 31. Greenwood, "A Reassessment," 137 dates the battle to 661 and hypothesizes that Łewond must be conflating T'ēodoros Rštuni's change of policy in 652 and a final Byzantine-Arab confrontation on the banks of the Euphrates ten years later, at the time of T'ēodoros' son Vard's activities. Greenwood dates the *History* of Łewond to the end of the ninth century but this dating has not received wide acceptance. Ter-Ghevondian, *Armenia and the Arabic Caliphate*, 46 places the first year of Vard Patrik's office in 654. Vard also participated in the rebellion of 703 against the Caliphate, *Ibid.*, 75.

45 *The Anonymous Story-teller*, 93–107.

46 In time, the echo of Vard Patrik's betrayal of the Byzantine army transformed him into a national hero, fighting against the treacherous "Roman Emperor" and even assimilated to

had been forgiven for his anti-Byzantine or anti-Christian behavior through his pious foundations. Another text, most likely also written in Vaspurakan, diffused an even more positive image of Vard Patrik, emphasizing his armed struggle against Islamic forces on behalf of Christianity, quite contrary to what Lewond transmitted, and closely associating his piety with the True Cross of Varag. It is a *Homily* ascribed to one Yovhannēs K'orepiskopos (Chorbishop) of late seventh- early eighth century.

According to the *Homily*, a pious anchorite named T'odik dedicated his life to asceticism on Mount Varag, along with his disciple Yovel. Due to T'odik's zeal and devotion a magnificent vision of a shining cross surrounded by angels appeared to them and indicated the exact spot where Hrip'simē and her companions had buried the True Cross. The news of this re-discovery spread to the "entire land of the Armenians until the borders of Georgia and Aluania."⁴⁷ This text dates the re-discovery to the office of Catholicos Nersēs III (641–661) and, like the *Anonymous Story-teller*, the rule of Vard Patrik. Moreover, the narrative concludes with a panegyric on T'ēodoros R̄štuni and Vard. T'ēodoros is described as a "brave, virtuous and Christ-loving" ruler who fought throughout his life against the "nation of Ismael," while Vard appears as "God-fearing . . . filled with wisdom and the grace of God, living in holiness, virtue, humbleness, love of the church, love of honor, love of religious rites and never diminishing the singing of divine Psalms day and night in his house."⁴⁸ The Armenian *Synaxarion* preserves this tradition of the re-discovery.⁴⁹ Moreover, a hymn on the True Cross of Varag is ascribed to the late seventh century Catholicos Sahak Jorap'orec'i (677–703), which again indicates the importance of this relic at the end of the seventh century.⁵⁰ Given this evidence, there is

one of the most beloved Armenian military saints – St. Sergius. Cfr Aščean, *Fast Helper*, 70–75 comments and 117–121 for texts.

47 The text on the rediscovery of the Cross of Varag is partially published in Ališan, *Hayapatum*, 229–231 and fully in Ananean, "Two homilies." The "Cave of T'odik" was located in the upper complex that came to be known as Upper Varag. Oskean, *Monasteries of Vaspurakan-Van*, 277–278.

48 Ananean, "Two homilies," 23–28, esp. 28.

49 Bayan, *Le Synaxaire*, 94–95. The day of the Rediscovery of the Cross of Varag is 9 Meheki or 26 of February.

50 Tahmizyan, "Sahak Jorap'orec'i" about this and other hymns dedicated to the cross. However, Findikyan, "Armenian Hymns," 65 remarks that the Armenian received tradition attributed numerous hymns to Sahak Jorap'orec'i, but that this is not always accurate. However, Findikyan did not study this specific hymn and its attribution to Sahak Jorap'orec'i has not been refuted by other scholars. The Rediscovery of the True Cross of Varag at the end of the seventh century, connected with the name of Vard Patrik,

no reason to believe that the negative image of Vard Patrik transmitted in the *History* of Lewond was wide-spread in the former Rštuni domains, which were now being conquered by the Arcrunis. On the contrary, T'ovma Arcruni knows about the re-discovery of the True Cross of Varag at the time of Vard Patrik. The *Anonymous Story-teller* describes at great length the process whereby Vard was granted remission of his sins. At the very least these texts attest to the fact that positive traditions about Vard persisted in his homeland over the next two centuries, if not longer as it turned out to be.⁵¹ If we remember that the conquest of Varag and other locations on the eastern shores of Lake Van, such as the cities of Van, Ostan and the Island of Alt'amar to be discussed below, were originally Rštuni country, but was presented as a re-conquest from the Muslim 'Uthmānids, then we can fully appreciate why the Arcrunis had all the interests in cultivating a "selective memory" of previous Armenian Christian rulers of Vaspurakan and emphasizing their piety and struggle for the preservation of Christianity. The commemoration of the True Cross of Varag was one of the three major feasts dedicated to the Cross in the Armenian liturgical calendar. The fact that it was preceded by a one-week fast further underlines its solemnity.⁵² No other tradition of a True Cross relic veneration, which various Armenian monasteries claimed to possess, found its way into the liturgical calendar. Whether this commemoration entered the Armenian liturgical calendar due to the influence of the Arcrunis or was already wide-spread before their conquest of Varag is a question that needs further research. But in any case it is clear that the Arcrunis were interested in patronizing and supporting hagiographical traditions about such a precious article in their possession.

deserves further study. First of all, it should be put in the context of other True Cross stories that circulated in Armenia in the seventh century, especially those that claimed to be donations by Emperor Heraclius. One of the most popular among these narratives was that of the "Cross of Hac'iwn" reported, again, in the *Anonymous Story-teller*, 59–69. See also the development and diffusion of this narrative in later centuries in Sahakyan, "The Apocryphal Story". The end of the seventh century marked the decline of the Rštuni family fortunes, especially after the death of T'eodoros Rštuni in exile in Damascus c. 656. One may hypothesize that the interest of T'eodoros' son Vard Patrik (if we believe the *Homily* cited above) or any high ranking Rštuni prince in the relic of the True Cross in the second half of the seventh century may have served to boost the honor and prestige of the family at a difficult moment in its fortunes. It publicized the presence of a True Cross in Rštunik' independent of Emperor Heraclius and even pre-dating him, plus the prestige of attaching St. Hřip'simē to this True Cross story.

51 T'ovma Arcruni, *History*, 394.

52 Renoux, "La Croix," 131.

We learn from T'ovma Arcruni that the 'Uthmānids had subjected Varag to their rule, including taxation imposed on the "servants of the Holy Cross", as well as imprisoned its Abbot Grigor. Ašot the Senior liberated Grigor and focused his attention on conquering another fortress on the eastern slopes of Varag, "not far from the Church of St. Hrip'simē." Like in the case of Hogeac' Vank', the sources emphasize that the Church of Hrip'simē stood on the site of a pagan temple, and thus, it was a sign of the victory over the Armenians' pervious "idolatrous" beliefs.⁵³ Incidentally, this information also reveals the continuity of sacred sites in this location that transcended religious change and conversion. The area was home to a number of archaic pre-Christian legends associated with various localities, particularly connected to the legendary Assyrian Queen Semiramis and her magical powers, as well as Mithras and his cult.⁵⁴

Several interesting elements emerge from the description of Varag's conquest. First of all, T'ovma Arcruni attests the existence of a coenobitic monastic community on the mountain in the middle of the ninth century, thus before a major revival of this tradition towards the end of the ninth and the tenth centuries, dedicated to the Holy Cross, and gives the name of its current abbot Grigor. The indignation of T'ovma against the 'Uthmānids who had subjected the monastery to taxation implies that while it was expected for the monasteries to be tax-exempt, not all of them were able to benefit from this privilege.⁵⁵ Political circumstances and the location of a given site could have a significant impact on its fortunes. Varag was near the important city of Van. As the Arcrunis and the 'Uthmānids attempted to expand their domains from two opposing sides, Van and Mount Varag, with all of their holy sites, and the adjacent territories became a sensitive border area. Its control, including the patronage of the sites, became both a religious and a political/military matter. After the Arcruni conquest, the monastery of Varag marked the boundary between Christian-held Vaspurakan and Muslim-held 'Uthmānid polities for some time. The possession of Van, then, moved back and forth between various Arcruni princes and Muslim rulers until Gagik's final conquest of the city. The latter also pushed his eastern boundary further north, finally conquering

53 T'ovma Arcruni, *History*, 332–334. The name of the temple *Vahevanean* has been interpreted as dedicated to God Vahagn (Verethragna) by Vardanyan in T'ovma Arcruni, *History*, 335 note at the bottom of the page, but Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni*, expresses doubts about this identification.

54 Russell, "Van".

55 See also the comments of Ter-Gheonvdyan, *Armenia and the Arabic Califate*, 173 and 193.

also the fortress of Amiwk. In this process, the patronage of Varag and its True Cross remained central to his assertion of territory control in this area.

There were two monastic complexes on the Mountain: the Lower Varag and the Upper Varag, the latter located, as the name indicates, an hour walk up the mountain from Lower Varag. Within Lower Varag, the Church of the Theotokos is cautiously suggested to be the earliest structure, possibly dating to the seventh century. However, traces of construction activity identifiable through an art historical survey and confirmed in the written sources date to the end of the tenth century, thus after the period under discussion in this paper.⁵⁶ Ruins of early churches survive at Upper Varag too and the eastern slope of the mountain had other religiously significant places. Based on local traditions, both written and oral, it would seem that the original holy sites were concentrated at Upper Varag – the locus of hagiographical narratives and miraculous events, particularly those related to the Virgin Hrip'simē and the True Cross which she carried with her to Armenia, as well as the seventh century re-discovery of the cross by the monk T'odik.⁵⁷ The attention paid to Varag and its holy relic, particularly linking their liberation to the struggle against the “infidel” further reinforced Ašot the Senior's and Derenik's standing as protectors of Armenian Christianity and its holy sites, and may have functioned as a further proof of the sincerity of their re-conversion. If the *Homily* of the rediscovery of the Cross of Varag was known, as it seems to be the case, then Ašot and his son Derenik could project themselves as the continuators of the struggle carried out by T'ēodoros Rštuni and his son Vard, thus adding a further religio-political spin to their conquests. Derenik's sons, especially the future King of Vaspurakan Gagik, continued in this tradition, promoting, among others, the

56 Oskean, *Monasteries of Vaspurakan-Van*, 269–277 for Lower Varag and 277–280 for Upper Varag. Lower Varag included seven churches (hence the Turkish name Yedi Kilise) among which Thierry, *Monuments*, 141 cautiously suggests that the Church of the Theotokos could have been the oldest building based on its architectural features. Thierry hesitates on providing any firm conclusions, but does not exclude that it was this church that was originally built to house the relic of the True Cross of Hrip'simē. However, local traditions associated most of the earliest hagiographical tales to Upper Varag. The latter had three churches according to old and new descriptions of the monument, such as Oskean, *Ibid.*, and Thierry, *Monuments*, 148–149. Unfortunately, no archaeological research has been carried out on these sites. Thus, the relationship of the complexes of Upper and Lower Varag, their relative and absolute chronology, as well as the medieval settlement context, remain hypothetical if not unknown. Local oral traditions assume that the original location of the holy sites was Upper Varag, but other buildings were added at different times as the fame of Varag grew and attracted further aristocratic sponsorship.

57 Some of these traditions are reported in Oskean, *Monasteries of Vaspurakan-Van*, 276–290.

reverence of the cross in general and the cult of the True Cross in particular. In doing so, Gagik also posed as the heir to local, Թճունի traditions of sponsorship of the True Cross, reinforcing the sense of continuity between himself and the preceding Christian rulers of Vaspurakan. As we shall see below, Gagik had no qualms about allying himself to Muslim potentates, including an involvement in a bloody conflict with the King of Armenia Smbat – Gagik's own maternal uncle. Yet, his public image cultivated since the days when he was still a General was that of a pious Christian ruler, engaged in a struggle against the Islamic foes, and a protector of the church and its holy relics. Parallel to his solidification of control on Թճունի and other territories, Gagik created visible monuments on strategically placed, former Թճունի settlements, thus, emphasizing the continuity also through construction projects and the reoccupation of abandoned military or residential sites.

2.3 *The Island of Att'amar*

T'ovma Arcruni does not offer much information on the construction or support of religious institutions accomplished by Derenik's elder son Ašot the Junior who succeeded his father, possibly for not casting any shadow on the activities of his younger brother Gagik – T'ovma's patron. This historian, however, emphasizes a particularly strong devotion to the cross within the Arcruni family maintained also by Derenik's sons. The latter wished to link this veneration to their immediate family, i.e. their parents. Ašot the Junior was nine years old at the time of his father's death in 885/6 and took full control of Vaspurakan only c. 895, until his death in November of 903.⁵⁸ T'ovma states that Derenik and his wife Sop'is (the latter died only a year and eight months after her husband) three sons – Ašot the Junior, Gagik and Gurgēn – established the day of their parents' commemoration on the Feast of the Exaltation of the

58 T'ovma Arcruni, *History*, 354 on the age of Derenik's sons as nine for Ašot the Junior, seven for Gagik and five for Gurgēn. Ibid., 338 he tells that Ašot was born in 877, Gagik in 879, without giving the date of Gurgēn's birth. This must mean that Derenik died in 886. Yet, we also learn that Ašot the Junior died at the age of 29, which would place his death in 906. However, the precise number and the day of the week that T'ovma provides for Ašot's death would place it to November 14, 903. For a discussion of these issues cfr Vardanian, *Kingdom of Vaspurakan*, 35–36 and Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni*, 280 and 311. Vardanian thinks that Derenik was killed at the end of 884, beginning of 885, while Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni*, 281 and 292 implies that the year must be 886, and on 19 notes 887 as the year of Derenik's assassination. Ašot the Junior took effective control of Vaspurakan after the murder of Gagik Apumrwan, c. 894/5, who was their elder cousin (from the mother's side) and also Ašot the Junior's father-in-law. Ašot himself died at the end of 903. Thus, Gagik's control of Vaspurakan should be dated to the beginning of 904.

Holy Cross (a Sunday between September 11 and 17) and made several donations to the Church of the Holy Cross on Alt'amar.⁵⁹ This information is both puzzling and revealing. Derenik and Sop'i are said to have been buried at the monastery of the Holy Cross in the district of Great Aġbak, not far from the heart of the Arcruni ancestral domains – the city of Adamakert. In fact, throughout his *History* T'ovma mentions this monastery several times as the burial ground of some Arcruni family members.⁶⁰ It is therefore not clear why in the next paragraph after mentioning Derenik and Sop'i's burial there T'ovma talks about donations made “afterwards” to the Church of the Holy Cross on Alt'amar. The suggestion that this information is a later interpolation is possible but cannot be determined with certainty due to the absence of any other manuscript witnesses.⁶¹ If we assume that the information comes from T'ovma it would imply that there was a church dedicated to the Holy Cross on Alt'amar before Gagik's constructions.⁶² Moreover, this church was used for the commemoration of Gagik's parents, presumably still buried at the monastery of the Holy Cross in Aġbak. Similarities between a church within the latter complex and Gagik's Church of the Holy Cross on Alt'amar have been independently noted by art historians as well. It has been suggested that the ground plan of the Church of St. Ejmiacin in Zoradir, identified as part of the monastery of the Holy Cross in Great Aġbak, i.e. the Arcruni family burial grounds, was the prototype for that of Gagik's Church of the Holy Cross on Alt'amar.⁶³ Based on this typological similarity Cuneo has suggested that the palatial Church of the Holy Cross on Alt'amar had a funerary function. While it is not within my competence to discuss these art-historical conundrums, the excerpt cited above makes an association between the Arcruni ancestral burial site – the monastery of the Holy Cross of Great Aġbak – and a homonymous church on Alt'amar. The latter must have been built by the previous lords of the land –

59 T'ovma Arcruni, *History*, 356.

60 T'ovma Arcruni, *History*, 356 says “they were put to rest in *the same* monastery of the Holy Cross”, which implies that the monastery in question is that mentioned several times before as the burial ground of the Arcruni princes, such as Gurgēn, the brother of Ašot the Senior (310), Ašot the Senior himself (338), as well as Derenik and Sop'i (356).

61 Oskean, *Monasteries of Vaspurakan-Van*, Vol. 3, 808–809, suggests that there may be an interpolation here, citing also Inčičean. The *History* of T'ovma Arcruni has survived only in one manuscript copied in 1303 on the Island of Alt'amar. Cfr Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni*, 15. Thus, there is no textual evidence to back this hypothesis.

62 Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni*, 19 notes that Arcruni's *History* did not go beyond 905, even if the last pages of the work are lost. Polarean, *Armenian writers*, 134 suggests 906, but with a question mark, as the date of T'ovma's death.

63 Cuneo, “Étude sur la topographie,” 135, Idem, *Architettura*, 524.

the Țștuni princes. In fact, the Island of Alt'amar appears several times in the seventh century *History* of Sebēos as a secure place of refuge for T'ēodoros Țștuni, where the latter retreated in difficult political and military situations, or due to poor health.⁶⁴ However, nothing is known about a Church of the Holy Cross on Alt'amar built in Țștuni times. Nor is there any archaeological data on the various layers of constructions on the Island. What we can safely state is that T'ovma wished to highlight the continuity of traditions between those associated with Arcruni ancestral territories – in this instance the family burial grounds – and those of more recent conquests, thus, “translocating” a holy site, to use the terminology proposed and explored in this volume. In both cases the emphasis on the veneration of the Cross was central, as can be inferred already from the dedication of the monastery of Ałbak and the choice of a homonymous church on Alt'amar. This dedication will be maintained also by Gagik, when his own marvelous church will appear on Alt'amar.

T'ovma's testimony makes it clear that Derenik's sons wished to link their family traditions to a strategically important physical location where the Arcrunis had to strengthen their control by making their presence visible. But they did more. Firstly, they backed up these associations materially, by making donations to the Church of the Holy Cross on Alt'amar, even if the location of their burial remained the monastery of the Holy Cross in Ałbak.⁶⁵ It cannot be determined when this deed was accomplished. At the time of their parents' death the Arcruni princes were too young to have made such a decision. Moreover, T'ovma himself says that this happened “afterwards.” We may suppose that they instituted the commemoration day after Așot the Junior took the reigns of Vaspurakan from his father-in-law Gagik Apumrwan c. 895, upon the latter's murder by Așot's middle brother Gagik. Secondly, and more importantly, the Arcruni princes proclaimed a fundamental ideological and theological position by establishing Derenik and Sop'i's commemoration on the same day as the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. The latter was one of the earliest and most solemn celebrations of the Cross in the Armenian liturgical calendar, originating in the *Jerusalem Lectionary* and connecting the Armenian Church traditions to those of Jerusalem.⁶⁶ During the liturgy of the Vespers on the Saturday proceeding the Sunday of the Exaltation of the Cross, the faithful performed the rite of the elevation of the cross, which was

64 Sebēos, *History*, 134, 166, 169, 172.

65 In this section I am assuming that T'ovma is referring to a church of that name that existed on the Island before Gagik's constructions.

66 For the Feast of the Holy Cross in the Armenian Church, including its origin and celebration, cfr Renoux, “La croix”.

concluded with a procession to the western façade of the church and the recitation of the *Trishagion*. The same rite was repeated at the eastern, northern and southern sides of the church.⁶⁷ Through this liturgy and the pronunciation of the *Trishagion* with the addition of the clause “who was crucified for us” the faithful declared the non-Chalcedonian orientation of their church.⁶⁸ Connecting their parents’ memory to this celebration not only exalted them in an unprecedented manner, but also created a mystical union between the Church of the Holy Cross on Ałt’amar and the holy sites of Jerusalem, including the True Cross, possibly also reminding the faithful about the presence of a True Cross relic in Vaspurakan. Moreover, it went beyond local or dynastic traditions of cross veneration and tapped into a strongly felt pan-Armenian devotion to the Instrument of Salvation, as well as affirmed the Arcruni princes’ unflinching orthodoxy from the point of view of the Armenian Church. Thus, even before Gagik conceived of his plan to build a lavish church of the Holy Cross on Ałt’amar, his brothers and he himself had taken several important steps towards the creation of a spiritual link between some monasteries of Vaspurakan, the veneration of the cross in the Armenian Church in general and within the Arcruni family in particular, the devotion to the True Cross (be that of Hřip’simē, Protonikē or Helen), a connection to Jerusalem and the memory of specific Arcruni ancestors. Gagik’s sacralization program of Vaspurakan, which one may term a “hierotopic project”, will make an even fuller use of all these elements.⁶⁹

3 Gagik’s Control and Sacralization of Key Locations in Vaspurakan

Gagik Arcruni commissioned T’ovma Arcruni’s *History*. Moreover, the Anonymous Continuator of T’ovma composed basically a eulogy of his patron, extolling him for his courage in war, intelligence, piety and physical beauty. It is therefore not surprising that Gagik’s deeds, including the construction of both

67 Renoux, “La Croix,” 127–128.

68 For a detailed analysis of the “addition” to the *Trishagion* and its significance in Armenian-Byzantine or Armenian-Georgian interreligious polemics cfr Martin-Hisard, “Le[s] Discours”.

69 Various works of A. Lidov have proposed the idea of “Hierotopy” and explored some of its expressions in medieval cultures. For a general introduction to this concept cfr Lidov, “Ierotopia”. This method has been applied by Kazaryan to the medieval Armenian material, exploring the Church of Ejmiacin as a “New Jerusalem”. Cfr Kazaryan, “New Jerusalem”. The creation of a “New Jerusalem” on the Rock of Van by Gagik Arcruni to be discussed below has not been subject to a thorough analysis.

religious and secular buildings, as well as various urban development projects receive a much larger treatment than those of his predecessors. T'ovma sets the stage for Gagik's ecclesiastical foundations, especially those involving the True Cross, by telling a "miraculous story" from "the years when Gagik was still a General", i.e. 895–904.⁷⁰ The story of the "miracle of the cross" is placed immediately after the death of the Catholicos Maštoc' and the accession of his successor Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'i in 898, and before a punitive expedition of King Smbat Bagratuni against the ̄aysites of Manazkert in 902. We can thus assume that the events to be recounted below happened some time in this four-year interval.⁷¹

The narrative starts with the description of a "four-edged sign of Christ crafted of wood" and gilt in superior quality silver by a skilled artisan. Significantly, this activity is compared to that of Bezalel and Oholiab, the prototypical craftsmen of holy objects.⁷² Continuing his Biblical parallels, T'ovma then introduces a certain "Nestorian heretic" who is compared to two Old Testament villains – Nebuzaradan and Zimri – the first one destroyed the Temple of Solomon by setting fire to it and the second betrayed his master, the King of Israel, and was punished for it.⁷³ But what was the crime of "the Nestorian" in T'ovma's story? We are told that one night he entered a "fortified and walled hill" where he further accessed a "holy shrine." His intention was to steal the cross described above. Having successfully removed it from the altar, the man exited from a window and hid in a rock cave "on the western shore of the lake." He apparently tried to peel off the valuable silver wrapping from the wooden core of the cross.⁷⁴ Yet, for some reason – T'ovma says he was attacked by an evil spirit – the man

70 Gagik received the title of the "General of the Armenians" by King Ašot I Bagratuni's son Smbat in 895, upon Gagik's murder of his elder cousin Gagik Apumrwan, their regent. T'ovma Arcruni, *History*, 370, 376–380.

71 On this expedition cfr Ter-Ghevondyan, *The Arab Emirates*, 51–55.

72 Ex. 35: 30–33. For the significance of Bezalel and Oholiab as creators of holy objects whose real author is, however, God, cfr Lidov, "Ierotopia," 18.

73 2 Kings 25,8 and 3 Kings 16.15–20. Nabuzaradan was directly responsible for the destruction of the Temple of Solomon by fire, after the conquest of Jerusalem by Nabuchadnezzar. Thus, the actions of the "impious Nestorian" of the story would appear as equivalent to the destruction of the Temple. The other – Zimri – had become a pejorative name for stigmatizing anyone who betrayed one's master. Zimri had murdered Elah King of Israel and tried to usurp his throne. In this case too there is destruction by fire. When Zimri realized that his position was untenable he set fire to the royal palace and himself died in it.

74 T'ovma says he broke to pieces the wood and the silver, which is probably aimed at denigrating the man's actions as gratuitous vandalism. Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni*, 307 simply translates it as "stripped the silver from the wood."

fell and rolled down all the way to the plain below “where there are orchards”. The next morning when the robbery was discovered a search was set to find the thief. He was captured and duly executed. The broken parts of the cross were taken to Gagik, who ordered them to be cleaned from the blood of the “possessed” man, painstakingly pieced together and gilt in “pure silver, more beautiful than before.”

This story is remarkable for its ambiguity. No precise location or toponym is provided in the body of the text. This may be due to the popularity of the incident in local memory, which made more specific details unnecessary. It is from the title of the chapter that we learn that the event took place in Ostan but it is not clear if the chapter divisions were original or added later. Nevertheless, the title indicates that for the locals in the fourteenth century (the date of the manuscript), but possibly earlier, the location of the “miracle” was the city of Ostan. T’ovma’s description implies that Ostan had a “fortified hill” – presumably where the citadel was located – and a church on this promontory housed the cross in question. Moreover, Ostan had orchards at the bottom of the citadel. The story also assumes that Gagik used Ostan as his residence during the years when he held the title of the General while his brother Prince of Vaspurakan resided in Van. T’ovma had several reasons for including this story in his *History* in this specific location, as we shall see below. Gagik, in his turn, would also want to spread this ‘miraculous’ tale as widely as possible.

First of all, it placed Gagik in an extremely positive light as a judicious ruler and a protector of Christianity, or, more specifically the Armenian version of orthodoxy. In fact, T’ovma engages in polemic against the so-called Nestorians by which he could mean any duophysites, including the adherents of the Byzantine Imperial Church.⁷⁵ This in turn was easily meant to be an affront to Gagik’s uncle King Smbat Bagratuni’s (890–912) overtures towards the Emperor Leo the Wise (886–912), if not a general criticism of the Bagratuni policy of the years between the 860s and the 880s, aimed at probing an ecclesiastical union with the Byzantine Church.⁷⁶ In his external policy King Smbat tried to use the Byzantine support as a counter-weight to the Abbasids, even if always taking care to maintain good relations with the Caliphate, as well as the Muslim rulers of *Ādharbāyḍjān*. In fact, on the one hand he exchanged gifts with the newly appointed Governor Yūsuf. On the other hand, the same was done with the

75 The Armenians often accused the Byzantine Duophysite Church as having fallen to the “Nestorian heresy.” T’ovma too, some pages later lump sums the “Nestorians, Chalcedonians and all the other duophysites”. T’ovma Arcruni, *History*, 394.

76 Dorfmann-Lazarev, *Arméniens et Byzantins*, for the Armenian-Byzantine ecclesiastical relations and negotiations for the union of Churches in this period.

Emperor Leo the Wise. The historian Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'i asserted that Leo considered Smbat to be "his beloved son." Moreover, at the conquest of Dwin c. 892 Smbat sent its two captured Muslim *ostikans* to Leo.⁷⁷ The polemic against the duophysites carried out here and further in the *History* of T'ovma could well reflect another aspect of tensions between the two most significant families of medieval Armenia and their different orientations in foreign policy: King Smbat tried to maintain good relations with the Byzantine Empire and Church without raising the suspicion of the Caliphate, while the Arcruni princes were more anchored or still unable to fully break free of the military cooperation with or submission to the Muslim rulers of the region, as well as Baghdad, and emphasized their support of the Armenian Church as a way of asserting their spiritual independence from Byzantium.

Secondly, the story again underscored the devotion to the cross by Gagik and the population of Vaspurakan. Let us remember that the end of the ninth century saw the resurgence of the so-called Tondrakite movement of protest against the church, perhaps reinforced by the Paulician refugees from Asia Minor, following Emperor Basil I's destruction of their strongholds along the Arab-Byzantine frontier in the 870s.⁷⁸ While it is difficult to reach positive conclusions about the doctrine of the Paulician-Tondrakite movement in the late ninth century due to the antagonistic nature of our sources, the ecclesiastical authors who condemned them emphasized the movement's disdain of the official church, its hierarchy and sacraments, but also the veneration of such sacred objects as icons, crosses or even the buildings of churches. This is one of the locations in the text of T'ovma where the targets of his polemic could be not only the explicitly mentioned "Nestorians" but also the Tondrakites,

77 Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'i, *History*, 199–200. For the date of the conquest of Dwin by Smbat, see Maksoudian, *Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'i*, 278 note # 13; analysis of the historical situation can be found in Ter-Ghevondyan, *The Arab Emirates*, 61.

78 There is a considerable amount of literature on the Paulicians and the Tondrakites, among which cfr (chronologically) Hovhannisyan, "Smbat Zarehavanc'i"; *Sources for the Study*; Garsoïan, *The Paulician Heresy*, esp. 140–150 for this time-period; "Les sources grecques"; Lemerle, "L'histoire," esp. 85–109; and Nersessian, *The Tondrakian Movement*. Most scholars assume that the Paulicians and the Tondrakites shared the same or very similar doctrinal beliefs, even if there are doubts whether both were "dualists" in their theology. The issue of the relationship between the Paulicians and the Tondrakites is too complex to start a discussion here. For an overview of existing opinions cfr Nersessian, *Tondrakian Movement*, 47–54. From the point of view of the arguments at hand, it should be remembered that both groups rejected the church hierarchy, objects of devotion and the building of the church as sacred space. I will thus refer to the likely targets of T'ovma's polemic as Paulicians-Tondrakites.

among others. A similar conclusion can be drawn with regards to another piece of polemic, placed several pages later, but relevant to the same time-period and location, i.e. Gagik's rule as a General and his constructions in Ostan and the surrounding area. We do not know when exactly the Tondrakites attracted a large following in Vaspurakan, but at the end of the tenth century the great mystical poet and theologian Gregory of Narek wrote an admonishing letter to the monks of the monastery of Kčaw, not far from Ostan, condemning the Tondrakite sympathies of some of its monks.⁷⁹ T'ovma's insistence on the inviolability of any consecrated cross, such as the above-mentioned one, but also a spiritualizing interpretation of the church and its sacred objects that will be discussed below, all indicate that a protest movement akin to that of the Tondrakites must have been gaining force in Vaspurakan during this period, further complicating its religious landscape.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this tale, however, is T'ovma's agenda of connecting this cross to a True Cross relic and the significance of the latter object in Gagik's other religious constructions or endowments. This narrative unit appears to be a prelude, both for its content and location in T'ovma's *History*, to Gagik's future acts of religious patronage, such as the attention given to the True Cross of Varag, the re-foundation of the Church of the Theotokos in Ostan where he placed the above-mentioned cross, and, finally the dedication of his palatial church on the Island of Alt'amar to the Holy Cross. All three mark Gagik's efforts at creating or re-enforcing religious-spiritual centers in his territories by linking those to his name in various ways. On this specific occasion, T'ovma associates the above-mentioned cross with the True Cross quite skillfully. At the beginning of the story he seems to be talking about any luxuriously crafted liturgical cross made by an artisan, with no further implications. Yet, at the end of the story, once this object broken to pieces is brought to Gagik, T'ovma uses terms that normally denote a True Cross relic, i.e. "the invincible wood of the cross of Christ."⁸⁰ Some modern scholars have even interpreted the story as referring to the True Cross of Varag, presumably based on this allusion.⁸¹ Gagik is then credited for having renewed the destroyed "wood of the cross . . . to the glory of the Christians and to the shame and dishonor of the enemies of the cross of Christ." One can easily detect here yet another level of religious polemic, this time addressed against the Muslims as "the enemies

79 Gregory of Narek, "Letter to the Monastery of Kčaw" and Nersessian, *The Tondrakian Movement*, 56–58.

80 T'ovma Arcruni, *History*, 378 [զանյաղթ փայտ խաչին Բրիստոսի].

81 Outtier-Thierry, "Histoire," 727–729. The text of the *History* of T'ovma does not support this identification.

of the cross.” The Tondrakites too could be considered the enemies of the cross. Thus, Gagik’s actions and the support of religious traditions or objects, including his involvement in ‘miraculous’ stories – presumably widely known among his subjects – were part and parcel of his (re)sacralization of his newly acquired territories, be those conquered from the Muslims or acquired from their former Christian lords. Gagik appeared as a generous patron and a champion of the Armenian Church in the face of non-Christian or non-orthodox (from an Armenian point of view) Christian detractors.

Among the religious and secular buildings erected by Gagik at this time T’ovma mentions those carried out in Ostan first.⁸² These were realized when Gagik held the office of General, i.e. the same period of the ‘miraculous cross’ incident between c. 895 and 904, even though their descriptions are not placed in the same narrative sequence. The Anonymous Continuator also writes about Gagik’s renovations and structural improvements made in Ostan, singling out those and the buildings completed on the Island of Aht’amar as two of the most representative examples from among numerous others accomplished by Gagik, largely presented as defensive structures. The Anonymous

82 T’ovma Arcruni, *History*, 390 and the Anonymous Continuator, *Ibid.*, 450–452. The Anonymous Continuator has a different chronological arrangement. He talks about the construction projects of Gagik after the turbulent conflict between the Sādjid Governor of Ādharbāydjān Yūsuf and King Smbat Bagratuni. This lasted from the spring of 909 to the execution of Smbat in 914. See Vardanyan, *The Arcruni Kingdom*, 83–88 for an analysis, but he places Smbat’s death to 913. The Anonymous Continuator expectedly downplays Gagik’s negative role in the whole affair and emphasizes Smbat’s mismanagement of his alliances with the Caliph, on the one hand, and with Yūsuf, on the other. For an analysis of T’ovma and his Continuator’s text on Ostan, cfr Orbeli, *Monuments*, 22–24. For the meaning of the word “ostan” cfr Hübschmann, *Die Altarmenischen*, 460–461. Originally Ostan meant “royal, princely” and referred to the core territories held by the reigning royal dynasty of the Aršakunis. After their downfall in the fifth century (428), the term came to denote a key location/settlement, perhaps a city or a town, of a given aristocratic clan. In this case, Ostan Rštuneac’ on the southern shore of Lake Van marked the center of the homonymous aristocratic clan whose political significance had disappeared since the end of the eighth century. Presently at the location of medieval Ostan is the town of Çeavaş in Turkey. Thierry, “Notes sur des monuments,” 180 reports that there were no traces of medieval Armenian monuments there as of his visit in 1965. Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, 222–223, mentions the remains of a wall belonging to a now destroyed castle (called Hişet Kale) on the promontory. This seemed to be of Urartian origin to Sinclair, but he detected also traces of later, Ottoman masonry. One may cautiously hypothesize that this was the location of the citadel of Ostan. A description of Ostan based on older maps can be found in K’ert’menjian, “Urban Design,” esp. 113–114, since the rest of the article focuses on Aht’amar.

Continuator describes the natural and man-made amenities of Ostan and its location, such as the winds “that breathe through it from all four parts of the world,” the bounty of its orchards, the abundance of fresh water which made the land fertile, the beneficent vegetation on Mt. Artos which rose near the city, etc. He then describes Gagik’s construction of “beautiful palaces, pavilions and streets” on top of the citadel of Ostan. Even if the Anonymous author may have had some personal predilection for Ostan, it is clear that Gagik too attached great importance to this site since the earliest days of his rule in Vaspurakan.

There were numerous reasons why Ostan attracted Gagik’s attention. The toponym Ostan – or Ostan of ʔštunik’ more completely – implies that it was the center of real or symbolic power of the previous holders of these territories, i.e. the ʔštunis and the local memories of earlier ʔštuni princes must have been still alive in the ninth century as we have seen above in connection with the re-discovery of the True Cross of Varag. Ostan was also an important economic and strategic center. Already T’ovma Arcruni mentions its marketplace in the 850s, where a peasant was publicly executed.⁸³ One presumes this was not its main function. Some hundred years after Gagik, when the celebrated Persian traveller Nasiri-i-Khusraw passed through Ostan, he mentioned how pork was freely sold at the markets, as well as described men and women drinking wine publicly.⁸⁴

To mark his possession of the city visually was of prime importance to Gagik at this early stage of his rule in Vaspurakan, possibly combined with an intention to underline a continuity with the ʔštuni past both religiously and politically. Gagik achieved this through a physical intervention in the landscape of the city, reconstructing both secular and religious buildings whose earliest structures were associated with the ʔštunis, as is clearly stated by the historian T’ovma. This presumed continuity – carried out visually and through the narrative of Gagik’s two historians – would also clear various locations, including the city of Ostan, of memories from a less distant past of Arcruni in-fighting for their control. During the repressive measures of Bugha in the 850s, Ostan served as a base for one of his generals, Ibrahim. But when the latter retreated to Naxčawan, the representatives of various Arcruni branches assembled there to elect the prince Vasak Kovaker as their leader.⁸⁵ In the early 860s, during his interminable fights for a territory to rule, Gurgēn Apupelč also fortified himself in Ostan making use of its fortress.⁸⁶ But somewhat later,

83 T’ovma Arcruni, *History*, 202.

84 *Sefer Nameh*, 20–21.

85 T’ovma Arcruni, *History*, 306.

86 *Ibid.*, 310.

when Ašot the Senior contended the possession of Anjewac'ik' from Gurgēn Apupelč, subsequently suffering a defeat near the monastery of Hogeac' Vank' and the Fortress of Kanguar, it was Ašot who fled to Ostan for protection.⁸⁷ Gurgēn Apupelč was particularly interested in claiming the possession of the city, as it was the location of his father's murder by Ašot the Senior's own father.⁸⁸ He was never able to do so, but we can deduce that the control of a strategically important location could be justified by various means, including the memory of one's dead or murdered ancestors, something that must have been considered as a noble cause by the contemporaries, even if not the best of publicity for Gagik Arcruni's direct forefather.⁸⁹ Gagik's renovations of secular structures, including the wall of the citadel "which was in ruins for many years," or the construction of "beautiful palaces, pavilions and streets" on the "summit of the fortress"⁹⁰ either replaced or radically changed the previous Rštuni buildings, without obliterating them. Their elevated, dominant location meant that Gagik's modifications of previous buildings would be visible from the settlement and its surroundings below, impressing the name of its current owner in the viewers' minds. We do not know if Muslim rulers who at times passed through or resided in Ostan had left any physical monuments reminding the population of a Muslim presence there. It is therefore not possible to evaluate the interreligious message that Gagik's construction of religious sites could bear. But Gagik made sure to associate his name to the religious symbols and traditions of the city, taking us back to the idea of "locating religion", thus publicizing also the fact that Ostan was in Christian hands. Thus, he first renovated the Church of the Theotokos on the citadel of Ostan, donating to it various luxurious liturgical items. But a closer link was forged between this pre-existing church of likely Rštuni foundation and the person of Gagik when he placed the cross that was recovered from the unsuccessful theft, discussed above, in this church. This clever move tied Gagik's name to a previously existing religious space not only because of his renovations, but also because of the presence of a cross whose "salvation" was inextricably linked to him as well.

Gagik's sacralization project included also the countryside of Ostan. Thus, not far from the city, in the village of Mahrašt, he converted an old palace structure which T'ovma again specifies to have belonged to Vard Patrik Rštuni, into a monastery. Not only is Gagik credited for having organized a coenobitic

87 Ibid., 332.

88 Ibid., 320.

89 Ibid., 362.

90 Ibid., 390 and 451.

community there but he even appointed its abbot, one Yovhannēs.⁹¹ The monastery was endowed with villages which were to provide enough resources for the “reception of the visitors and the care of the poor.” In the same location, presumably within the new monastic grounds, Gagik built a complex of three churches and the issue of its dedication caused T’ovma Arcruni to engage in further religious polemic. This is occasioned by Gagik’s original desire to dedicate the church to the “Savior.”⁹² T’ovma views this as a tradition fit for “Nestorians, Chalcedonians and other kinds of duophysites” according to whom “the flesh taken from the Virgin [is] the house and the tabernacle of the Logos and not the flesh being in union by nature with the Logos.”⁹³ Thus, in T’ovma’s opinion the dedication of a church to Jesus, i.e. the “Savior”, would imply adherence to a Chalcedonian, or generally duophysite Christology and a betrayal of the miaphysite Cyrilline confession of the Armenian Church. On the surface, T’ovma’s anti-Chalcedonian polemic is directed against the Byzantine Imperial Church, but he, and presumably his commissioner Gagik, very likely wished to attack also the Bagratid *rapprochement* with the Constantinopolitan Court and Church hierarchy, as suggested above. Moreover, T’ovma’s disapproval of the dedication of Gagik’s new church in Ostan to the “Savior” is a direct criticism of the Great Church of Constantinople dedicated to Christ – the Wisdom of God, as well as the more recent Nea Ekklesia of Basil I, which, among others, was dedicated to Christ.⁹⁴ Yet, the anti-Bagratuni subtext of the polemic should not be overlooked again, especially in view of King Smbat Bagratuni’s foundation

91 T’ovma Arcruni, *History*, 394.

92 T’ovma’s words փրկչալիւն աւնու are translated literally as the “Saving Name” by Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni*, 318. He further comments that it could be a reference to the Cross, as the instrument of salvation, or to the Holy Sepulcher. However, T’ovma’s subsequent discussion on the single nature (or refutation of the two natures) of Jesus – the Savior – reveals that the “Saving Name” refers to Christ. This is still surprising, given the dedication of churches to the Savior of All *Amenap’rkič’* in the Armenian tradition. For example, Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur*, 43 and 297 provides two cases of early Christian churches from Armenia dedicated to the Savior of All. However, no written tradition on these churches exist and it cannot be determined whether such a dedication is a later tradition or the original one. Still, somewhat later than T’ovma, Queen Xušuš of Bagratuni origin, the wife of Gagik’s grand-son King Senek’erim, built a church within the Lower Varag monastic complex and dedicated it to St. Sophia, thus, to the Wisdom of God. Thierry, *Monuments*, 137 notes the exceptional character of this dedication in the Armenian context and suggests a Byzantine influence. The subject of the dedication of Armenian Churches is barely touched in the literature. In view of T’ovma’s polemic and other potential sources, this topic deserves further study.

93 T’ovma Arcruni, *History*, 394.

94 Mango, “Nea Ekklesia”.

of the Church of the Savior in Yerazgawors adjacent to his palace at some point after 890.⁹⁵

T'ovma continues his theological *excursus* by citing Paul's saying "you are the temple of the living God" in support of his position.⁹⁶ This scriptural context indicates that the historian assimilates his adversaries to impious pagans and calls for a spiritual understanding of the church, identified as the community of the faithful who represented "the living temple of God". For T'ovma the dedication of a church to the Savior would transform the building of the church itself into an object of worship, which he defines as ridiculous. Even worse, he says, such a dedication and the implied identification of the church with the physical body of Christ would lead the faithful to eat the stones, the wood and the furnishings in the church instead of the body and the blood of the Son of God during the Eucharist. Rather than a "curious discussion"⁹⁷ this seems to be another instance of polemic against the movement of the Tondrakites which was on the rise exactly at this time. It is noteworthy that both incidents that seem to imply a Tondrakite presence or "impiety" are connected to Ostan and the same time period. T'ovma's criticism of the literal interpretation of a physical church building as the physical body of Christ is a counter-argument to Tondrakite accusations of orthodox Christians doing exactly that.⁹⁸ T'ovma's purpose is to re-claim a spiritual understanding of the church as part of the orthodox Armenian tradition. In doing so it is not accidental that he cites Paul, the one New Testament author highly revered by the Paulicians and the Tondrakites. Moreover, the Tondrakites declared that the church building had no sacral value at all and that the "authentic church" was the assembly of the believers. The eventual dedication of Gagik's new church to St. Peter is also significant from an anti-Paulician-Tondrakite point of view since the latter rejected all the writings ascribed to Peter and considered him a traitor for having denied Christ.⁹⁹ Thus T'ovma pursued a multi-level polemic: on one hand he targeted directly the duophysites, yet on the other, he aimed

95 Cited in Dorfmann-Lazarev, *Arméniens et Byzantins*, 59.

96 2 Cor 6.16. T'ovma Arcruni, *History*, 394.

97 Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni*, 318.

98 Two later sources, one from Vaspurakan, also argue in support of the physical building of the church in an explicitly anti-Tondrakite sense. One of them belongs to the pen of Gregory of Narek (tenth century) and is included in his *Book of Lamentations* and the other one is a *Letter* by the eleventh century erudite Grigor Magistros. For a discussion cfr Nersessian, *The Tondrakian Movement*, 58–59 and Yuzbaşyan, "The Tondrakite Movement," 43–44.

99 Reverence for Paul and an aversion to Peter among the Paulicians is noted, among others, in a text attributed to Patriarch Photius, cfr "Les sources grecques," 127–129, § 23–8.

indirectly at a movement branded as heretical – the Tondrakites – who charged the Armenian Church practices as idolatrous. The ultimate purpose of this whole theological passage was to affirm Gagik's spotless orthodoxy and support of Armenian orthodox traditions on the one hand, and the importance of his cooperation with the learned clerics lest undesirable decisions be taken with regard to religious foundations and dedications, on the other. Lastly, we must presume that T'ovma expressed also the feelings and the general religious policy of his patron, Gagik, and that the latter agreed with the theological stance of T'ovma's polemic.

Gagik's building of religious sites was paralleled with his activities in strengthening the defensive structures of his territories, such as the construction of fortresses which guarded important routes of communication. T'ovma Arcruni provides only one specific example of such activity before Gagik's assumption of the title of Prince. Gagik creates something like a military village, a settlement where the Arcruni army would be encamped, and moves the population of some villages there. Significantly, the place was called Gagkakert, i.e. the "City of Gagik." Gagik's later building projects included both religious and secular structures. It must be noted that T'ovma does not pass any value judgment when recounting Gagik's religious or secular constructions. In fact, it is doubtful if Gagik separated his sphere of activities into "secular" and "religious", as we modern scholars do. His overall efforts were aimed at a combination of territorial control and projection of an image of rulership. These objectives could be accomplished by means of strengthening defensive structures, such as mountain fortresses, or endowing land to his trusted companions-in-arms, but also through a so-called hierotopic project, e.g. the foundation of churches or monasteries in key locations of Vaspurakan where, as in the case of Ostan, he could even directly place his own personnel as heads of such institutions. Unfortunately, we have only written sources on Gagik's foundations and no reliable archaeological data from the region to help define the historical topography and the significance of specific sites for territory control or interreligious dynamics. Let us then delve into a final exploration with what is available to us of Gagik's most brilliant stage of "locating of religion" and the message those physical monuments and their location transmitted to their viewers about their founder.

4 Gagik as the Prince of Vaspurakan

T'ovma describes Gagik's construction projects in more detail after the death of his elder brother Ašot the Junior in November 903, upon the division of

Vasपुरakan between Gagik and Gurgēn, and Gagik's appointment as the Prince of Vasपुरakan. Since T'ovma's *History* extends only slightly beyond 905, the number of buildings that he ascribes to Gagik during this short time-span is impressive and must contain at least some grain of exaggeration. Significantly, when describing Gagik's and Gurgēn's accession to power after the death of their elder brother Ašot, T'ovma remarks that these Arcruni princes issued from the seed of two Biblical kings – Sennacherib and David.¹⁰⁰ The Arcruni claim to descent from a son of King Sennacherib, as well as the Jewish ancestry of the Bagratunis, were reported by Movsēs Xorenac'i and reflected the Armenian nobility's need for creating Biblical genealogies in the early Christian period.¹⁰¹ The Arcruni historian's assertion of a Davidic origin of Gagik and Gurgēn through their mother was a direct challenge to the reigning Bagratunis, who prided themselves of this lineage.

Having established Gagik's Biblical credentials, T'ovma identifies five locations where he either built or rebuilt various structures. Those included: religious and secular buildings, as well as structural improvements on the citadel of Van; "places of merriment" on a hill in the locality of Getk' to be used, among others, when hunting; fortifications in the locality of Maṛakan and a palatial structure slightly below it in a place called Jork' [lit. *ravines*]; and, finally, a new reliquary for the True Cross of Varag.¹⁰² T'ovma's Anonymous Continuator makes general remarks about numerous fortifications that Gagik built all over his domains but then singles out the palace of Ostan and the celebrated palace and church on the Island of Alt'amar as the most significant ones. Thus, information on Gagik's building activity in Van, arguably the most important settlement of Vasपुरakan, is found only in T'ovma and is dated to before Gagik's reception of the royal crown. These are important for understanding Gagik's on-going projection of himself as a divinely sanctioned ruler

100 T'ovma Arcruni, *History*, 388.

101 The Jewish ancestry of the Bagratunis was reported by Movsēs Xorenac'i, *History*, 68–69, 110–111 but T'ovma is the first Armenian author to connect them to King David. However, this claim was made by the Georgian Bagratids already at the end of the eighth century, cfr Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni*, 313, Toumanoff, "On the Date," 472–474, Idem, *Studies*, 201–203, and possibly stemmed from even earlier Armenian traditions of which no evidence has survived. For the Arcruni descent from King Sennacherib, through the latter's sons Sarasar (Sanasar in the Armenian sources) and Adramelek' cfr Movsēs Xorenac'i, *History*, 70. The relevant Biblical verse is Is 37.38. Toumanoff, *Studies*, 199–200, provides a brief overview of the Arcrunis' Orontid origins and their ancestral domains around the town of Adamakert.

102 T'ovma Arcruni, *History*, 390–6.

and the deliberate connection he wished to create between his realm and Jerusalem as part of that ideology, even before he became king.

Van, an ancient settlement, once the capital of the Urartian Kingdom, maintained its importance throughout the middle ages and beyond. Without reciting the long and eventful history of the city, one may infer already from its physical location how vital the control of Van would be for the Arcruni expansion on the eastern shores of the Lake.¹⁰³ Expectedly, the conflict for the fortress of Amiwk in the first half of the 870s and the eventual Arcruni extension of control to Varag, involved also Van – the largest settlement in the area. The direct competitors of the Arcrunis in this case were the Muslim ‘Uthmānids who appealed to the ruler of Amid ‘Isā b. al-Shaykh al-Shaybani, who is called Yisē of Amid son of Šeh in T’ovma and who at this time held the office of the Governor of Armīniya.¹⁰⁴ Eventually, a pitched battle near the city was avoided through the mediation of other Arcruni princes. It is significant that after this settlement, ‘Isā retired to Van, while Ašot the Senior encamped with his army near the much less significant town of Artamet to the south, not far from Van. Through this action ‘Isā underscored his position of dominance over the Arcrunis, hitting home the message that he was in control of Van. It is there that Ašot the Senior and Derenik went in order to negotiate the terms of a peace treaty, which involved the “payment of royal taxes” and the sending of hostages.¹⁰⁵ After this, ‘Isā is told to have retired to Partaw and it seems that Ašot and Derenik took hold of Van. We know that at some point Derenik built a palace on the summit of the citadel of Van, the so-called Rock of Van, but we have no exact dates or any further specifics about these constructions. The latter are mentioned only in light of Gagik’s additions to what his father had accomplished.¹⁰⁶ Upon Derenik’s untimely death Van passed to his eldest son Ašot the Junior, while Gagik’s residence was Ostan.¹⁰⁷ But their elder cousin and regent (who was also Ašot the Junior’s father in law) Gagik Apumrwan,

103 For a brief overview of the history of Van cfr Hewsens, “Van in This World”, esp. 15–28 for Van’s history up to the middle ages and its historical geography. For the best discussion of Van’s historical topography cfr Cuneo, “Étude sur la topographie,” esp. 133–138 for the period under discussion here. For the Islamic sources on Van (Wan), cfr the brief summary in Minorsky-[Bosworth], “Wan”.

104 T’ovma Arcruni, *History*, 334. Yisē is identified by Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni*, as ‘Isā b. al-Shaykh al-Shaybani. On ‘Isā’s exploits for extending his control to southern Armenia cfr Ter-Ghevondyan, *The Arab Emirates*, 44 and Idem, “Chronology,” 128.

105 T’ovma Arcruni, *History*, 336.

106 *Ibid.*, 390.

107 *Ibid.*, 360 says that Ašot received a “large territory of our land up to Naxčawan”, while Gagik was assigned “the part of Řštunik”, i.e. including the city of Ostan. Their younger

whom T'ovma Arcruni accuses of vicious plans to "usurp" Vaspurakan from its legitimate heirs, had his own designs on Van too, which, again comes to confirm the city's strategic and symbolic importance for the rule of the entire Vaspurakan. Thus, when Ašot the Junior decided to submit to the Governor of Ādharbāyḏjān Muhammad Afshin (889–901), to the disdain of his uncle King Smbat Bagratuni, he left his wife Seta (the daughter of the very Gagik Apumrwan) in the fortress of Van with an armed contingent.¹⁰⁸ Taking advantage of Ašot's absence, Gagik Apumrwan besieged the citadel for thirty days and eventually conquered it. Upon this, through various ruses he was able to imprison the three Arcruni brothers and kept them in bonds between c. 890 and 895, the date when he was murdered by Gagik Arcruni, the middle son of Derenik. Only then were Derenik's three sons able to fully exercise the control of "their ancestral domains", as T'ovma writes. But as the military fortunes changed, so did the possession of Van. Between 898 and 901 (the date of Afshin's death), when the latter wished to punish Ašot Arcruni for his support of King Smbat Bagratuni, he seized Van, placing it under the control of his trusted man – the eunuch Sap'i.¹⁰⁹ On this occasion too T'ovma implies that the control of Van was essential for the control of Vaspurakan, and specifically for the collection of taxes from the region.¹¹⁰ After Sap'i's death in 901 Van returned to Arcruni possession. Like in the case of Ostan, also in relation to Van we do not know what, if any, physical monuments were left by the Muslim rulers and if certain locations of the city could become contested sacred spaces. What we can infer from Gagik's constructions is, again, the importance of reinstating the Christian possession of the city also by means of a new building program.

These constructions provide evidence for an important aspect of Gagik Arcruni's image of himself as a ruler transmitted since the earliest years of his investiture as the Prince of Vaspurakan. The first building mentioned is the Church of St. George located on the most dominant position of the city, i.e. on the summit of the Rock of Van. The dedication of the church to a military saint, with all the implications of an armed struggle against the enemies of one's faith speaks for itself. But even more significant was Gagik's creation of a complex of sacred buildings with a clear reference to Jerusalem, on the bottom of the Rock, on its northern side. The structure included:

brother Gurgēn controlled the south-east, including the Region of Aḥbak, the core of Arcruni ancestral domains.

108 T'ovma Arcruni, *History*, 362.

109 The discussion of events in Ter-Ghevondyan, *Armenia and the Arabic Caliphate*, 242; Vardanyan, *Arcruni Kingdom*, 50.

110 T'ovma Arcruni, *History*, 372.

a wonderfully constructed church of marvelous forms, [built] from hewn stones [brought from] the city of Manazav on Lake Van and dedicated to Holy Zion which is in the Holy City of Jerusalem. And to the right of the altar, on the same foundation, he built a [chapel] to commemorate the place of the Crucifixion of our Lord, the Golgotha. And above it he built a chapel [dedicated to] the Upper Room of the transmission of the Holy Mysteries to the New Covenant.¹¹¹ And on the left side of the altar he built a chapel to commemorate the Resurrection of Christ from the tomb on the third day, raising after he pillaged Hell.¹¹² And above that he built a chapel [dedicated to] the Ascension to Heaven and the sharing of the throne with the Father and in remembrance of the Second Coming, when He will come with the glory of the Father, like the angels to the Apostles, bringing them the Good News of consolation and encouragement.¹¹³

After this information, T'ovma passes immediately to describe Gagik's secular buildings on the Rock of Van "on the western and eastern sides", such as "places of feasting" with balconies and golden decorations. The Prince also constructed a new aqueduct to bring water from Mount Varag to the summit of the citadel. This highlights the fact that Gagik gave as much attention to religious foundations as to secular ones.

Gagik, thus, made important new additions on the Rock of Van which could be seen from all sides: on the summit – the Church of St. George, on the northern side – his "New Jerusalem," while on the east and west – banqueting halls. Nothing has survived from these structures. Thus, our only written source of information cannot be compared to actual material remains. The description of T'ovma is also open to interpretation from an architectural point of view. It is not altogether clear if he is talking about separate churches or chapels incorporated within one large, two-storey complex.¹¹⁴ Whatever

111 This is a reference to the Last Supper.

112 As indicated by Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni*, 315 the "Harrowing of Hell" was a well-known theme in the Armenian tradition, studied by Der-Nersessian, "An Armenian Version".

113 T'ovma Arcruni, *History*, 390. Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni*, 315 notes that the combination of the idea of the Second Coming and the Pentecost is expressed also in the frescoes within the Church of the Holy Cross on Alt'amar.

114 Der Nersessian, *Aght'amar*, 2–3 assumes that the various buildings were actually chapels of the main Church of the Holy Zion. This is how I have translated the excerpt above. Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, 101–102 analyzes Byzantine parallels to this two storeyed structure. She suggests various purposes which this construction could have fulfilled, such as representing a "copy" of the Holy Sites in Jerusalem, employing

the actual structure looked like, T'ovma's description of what can be termed as Gagik's "New Jerusalem" is loaded with symbolism, similar to any such a site from other medieval cultures.¹¹⁵ Perhaps it is worth remembering that the reigning Macedonian dynasty had been developing its own New Jerusalem in Constantinople, within the Great Palace, especially through the construction of the Nea Ekklesia and other chapels within the Palace where various relics relevant to Christ's earthly life were assigned.¹¹⁶ In Gagik's "New Jerusalem", the main church, the Holy Zion not only referred to its Christian meaning as the Mother of All Churches,¹¹⁷ but explicitly linked its present location – the Rock of Van – to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and, by implication, to King David. In fact, it was David who conquered Mount Zion from the Gebusites and renamed it the City of David.¹¹⁸ The dedication also invoked the memory of the Old Covenant, the basis of the New.¹¹⁹ In fact, the complex symbolized the passage from the Old to the New covenant, a momentous event accomplished by Jesus' sacrifice. Thus, churches (or chapels) were dedicated to the commemoration of Jesus' earthly life, such as the Crucifixion on Golgotha, the Last Supper interpreted as the moment when the mystery of the Covenant was handed down to the New People of God, and his Resurrection with the typical Armenian addition of the Harrowing of Hell, and the Ascension. The latter event is typologically linked to the Pentecost and the eschatological future of the People of God – the *Parousia*.

Gagik's complex was more than a tribute to Jerusalem, a recreation of some of its sites associated with Jesus' earthly life and the Passion, a way of

Krautheimer's definition of a "medieval copy"; replacing the need for an actual pilgrimage to Jerusalem by creating a "Jerusalem" within one's realm; expressing a form of piety common to all medieval Christian cultures. Jones' dating of this complex of churches to 904–915 (Ibid., 104) does not take into account the upper limit of T'ovma Arcruni's *History*, i.e. 905. Thus, the complex must have been built before that date and could not be intended as yet another pious act for the remission of Gagik and his brother Gurgēn's sins for the betrayal of their uncle Smbat Bagratuni, leading to the latter's death in 914, as discussed above. As far as creating a new pilgrimage site is concerned, one must explore further the location of this complex. Its position within the citadel leaves the impression that it was not part of public space, but rather represented private evergetism. The issue certainly needs further study, especially in light of historical topography.

115 A variety of issues related to the creation of "New Jerusalem" in different Christian cultures can be found in Lidov, *New Jerusalem*s.

116 Guran, "The Constantinople – New Jerusalem," esp. 53.

117 Noted in Thomson, *Thomas Arstruni*, 315 based on the *Lexicon* of Lampe.

118 2 Sam 5.6–10.

119 2 Chron 5.2 implies that the Ark of the Covenant was in the City of David "which is Zion."

sacralization of Gagik's own city or even an establishment of a new spiritual center in his realm which evoked Jerusalem. It represented a vision of history that moved from the Old Covenant to the New and looked forward to Second Coming and the End of world history, a history in the middle of which stood Gagik – a descendant of King David from his mother's side, just like the Lord – and the creator of this new House of God. Bringing this enriched "New Jerusalem" to Van, bestowed a new sacral meaning to its citadel and its lord, projecting Gagik's image as that of New David, but also of New Solomon, since Gagik built a "Temple of God" on his Rock of Van. Once more, all of these associations could and should be viewed as part of Gagik's consolidation of power in direct competition with the Bagratunis and his efforts to appropriate their claim to legitimacy through a Davidic lineage. Gagik, in fact, *translocated* Jerusalem to Vaspurakan and by creating a "New Jerusalem" or a "New City of David" in the center of his power he posed as a much worthier New David than his relatives to the north.

Gagik had other ways of strengthening the connection of his realm to the Holy Land and to Jerusalem in particular. Not far from Van stood Mount Varag which hosted a celebrated relic of the True Cross, already discussed above. Continuing in his family's tradition of patronage of this famed monastery, Gagik lavished further gifts to its invaluable relic. T'ovma uses elevated language to describe Gagik's visit to the monastery to venerate "the wood of the cross of Christ, adorned by God, crowned by Christ." Moreover, this historian makes an explicit connection between the True Cross and the idea of Christian Kingship: "the host of kings who believe in Christ boast and are crowned [by the True Cross]."¹²⁰ T'ovma reminds the readers about the re-discovery of the Cross during the reign of Vard Patrik and may wish again to emphasize a continuity of patronage of the site and its relic from the vanished Rštunis to the now ruling Arcrunis. But as in the case of pre-existing architectural structures or oral traditions on which the Arcrunis added their own layer, the True Cross also received its share of attention. Gagik commissioned a new and luxurious golden reliquary for the Cross. His wife too participated in the patronage of Varag, donating a lavishly illuminated Gospel manuscript – known as the Gospel of Mlk'ē – and several villages to the monastery in 908.¹²¹

The Rštuni connection to the True Cross could serve Gagik for polemical purposes as well. The re-discovery of the True Cross was associated with Vard

120 T'ovma Arcruni, *History*, 394. Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, 117 also emphasized this idea. However, my interpretation of Vard Patrik's significance as a "model" for Gagik diverges significantly from that of Jones.

121 Mat'evosyan, *Colophons*, 49.

Patrik, whose image, as we saw above, had been subject to very diverse interpretations. Certainly, Vard Patrik's description as a champion of the Christian faith in the narrative on the rediscovery were positive models to tap into. But even the less flattering tradition which accentuated Vard's anti-Byzantine stance could fit Gagik's foreign policy of independence from Byzantium and cooperation with Islamic rulers, especially after 908 and before 921/2 when he actually changed his attitude to the Empire as a result of the latter's advances in the east. The patronage of the True Cross of Varag bestowed similar spiritual advantages for the Arcruni princes. It was free of strong associations with the Byzantine Empire. True, it was brought to Armenia by Hrip'simē – a Roman noblewoman – but the tradition connected her to the city of Rome directly. Moreover, it was not an Imperial gift, like the other True Cross relics that existed in Armenia and were especially linked to Emperor Heraclius.¹²² Thus, Gagik was free of spiritual dependence from Constantinople and its dispensation of sacred objects. This True Cross could compete and win the day with at least one True Cross in Bagratuni possession which was a gift from the Emperor Basil I and Patriarch Photius to Ašot I Bagratuni.¹²³ The True Cross of Varag came to symbolize not only Gagik's connection to Jerusalem, but his independence from a Byzantine largess of holiness, something that the Bagratunis could not boast about.

5 Gagik as King and his Church of the Holy Cross on Alt'amar

Finally, a few words on Gagik's celebrated palace and the Church of the Holy Cross on Alt'amar are due. About ten years separate the events and buildings narrated about by T'ovma Arcruni and Gagik's grandiose projects on the Island of Alt'amar. It took seven years to complete the construction of the Church,

¹²² Some of the True Cross relics found in Armenia and their Byzantine origin are discussed in Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, 112–115. There are numerous legends preserved in diverse types of sources about the presence of True Cross relics in Armenia. Many of them are discussed in Tsovakan, *Armenian Crosses*. Unfortunately the book was not available to me at the time of writing this article. A further systematic analysis on the cult of the True Cross in Armenia is bound to be a rewarding enterprise.

¹²³ Dorfmann-Lazarev, *Arméniens et Byzantins*, 84–85. This True Cross was donated to the monastery of Sevan established by Ašot I's daughter Mariam (who was, thus, Gagik's aunt). For a discussion cfr Pogossian, *Foundation*.

between 915 and 921.¹²⁴ In the meanwhile, both Gagik's status and the internal situation in Armenia had changed. In 908 Gagik had forged an alliance with the Governor of Ādharbāydjān Yūsuf as a protest to King Smbat Bagratuni's grant of the city of Naxčawan to the neighboring region of Siwnik'.¹²⁵ This was certainly neither the first nor the last time that an Arcruni prince acted in alliance with the Muslims. In fact, at times a pro-Muslim policy characterized also the rule of Gagik's elder brother Ašot the Junior, generated, again, by the rivalry with the northern Bagratunis. Thus, Ašot the Junior had travelled to Partaw c. 890 to declare his submission to its newly appointed governor Abu 'l-Musāfir Muḥammad Afshin (Yūsuf's brother), rather than the Armenian King Smbat.¹²⁶ But in his absence King Smbat had passed the rule of Vaspurakan to Gagik Apumrwan, who eventually imprisoned the three brothers. After the murder of Apumrwan in 895 Ašot followed a policy of cooperation with the Bagratuni King and so did Gagik during the first years of his rule as the Prince of Vaspurakan. Nevertheless, even during this time, i.e. 905–8, his construction of religious sites, especially the symbolically charged "New Jerusalem" on the Rock of Van, T'ovma Arcruni's references to Gagik's Davidic descent, as well as this author's (and presumably his commissioner Gagik's) insistence on associating the True Cross of Varag with the power of kings, all indicate that Gagik harbored royal aspirations from the beginning of his accession as Prince of Vaspurakan, in direct competition with his uncle Smbat. Smbat's withdrawal of Naxčawan from Gagik's control provided the *casus belli* and resulted in the latter's change of policy. He abandoned his earlier cooperation with King Smbat and pledged his allegiance to Yūsuf, receiving in recompense a royal crown in 908 and again in 909.¹²⁷ The enmity between Yūsuf and Smbat, on the other hand, led to

124 Der Nersessian, *Aghtamar*, 5 suggests 915–921 as the period of construction based on a list of catholicoi of Alt'amar; the dates are accepted by Mnatsakanyan, *Aghtamar*, 11.

125 T'ovma Arcruni [Continuator], *History*, 438–442. Yovhannēs Draxanakert'ci, *History*, 209. On the significance of Naxčawan from economic and strategic points of view Vardanyan, *Arcruni Kingdom*, 56–57 and 75–78 for this specific period.

126 Vardanyan, *Arcruni Kingdom*, 41–44; Yovhannēs Draxanakert'ci, *History*, 171 disapproves of Ašot's submission to Afshin, considering it an act dictated by his desire "for rank and glory." T'ovma Arcruni [Continuator], *History*, 424 justifies Ašot's policy, citing the uncertain political situation and his desire to avoid troubles "for the holy church and the faithful" through this policy.

127 T'ovma Arcruni [Continuator], *History*, 438–440; Yovhannēs Draxanakert'ci, *History*, 208–210, p. 212 on a second crown bestowed on Gagik by Yūsuf and p. 306 on Gagik's third crown from the Caliph; Vardanyan, *Arcruni Kingdom*, 79–82 for a general analysis of the situation and Gagik's various crowns received from Muslim potentates; Yuzbašyan, *Armenia*, 37–40 also discusses the significance of Muslim "investitures" performed upon

a protracted bloody conflict between the spring of 909 and 912, when Smbat was taken as a prisoner to Dwin, eventually tortured and crucified in that city in 914.¹²⁸ A policy of repression by Yūsuf ensued this chain of events. From some contemporaries' point of view Gagik's initial collaboration with Yūsuf had a decisive influence on the tragic conclusion of this conflict, even though it is glossed over by Gagik's panegyrist, the Anonymous Continuator of T'ovma Arcruni. Yet, the historian Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'i, who presents a neutral if not a pro-Bagratuni perspective, affirms that Gagik and Gurgēn too blamed themselves for this unforeseen outcome and the unfavorable situation created for the Armenians. Moreover, they are told to have undergone a rite of penance according to Church canons. Yet, it is also significant that according to the same Drasxanakertc'i Gagik made his peace with Smbat before the latter capitulated and was taken as a prisoner to Dwin. At a convenient moment, Gagik left Yūsuf's army and fled to his native Vaspurakan. Thus, Gagik made efforts to exculpate his name from accusations of subversion and improve his tarnished reputation both by undergoing an official rite of penance and making sure that his repentance and reconciliation with King Smbat before the latter's capture and death were known and publicized.¹²⁹ While Gagik's withdrawal signaled a change in the policy of cooperation with Yūsuf, it did not mean that he wanted or could sever his ties to the Caliphate. In fact, Caliph al-Muqtadir's (908–932) own disagreements with Yūsuf lead to Gagik's reception of at least another crown, this time from the Caliph, in 919, exactly during the years when his

the Bagratuni and the Arcruni princes on the one hand and their anointment by the Armenian Catholicos, on the other, considering the latter as fundamental for the recognition of the legitimacy of a king by his Armenian subjects. However, he notes that Islamic "investitures" were *ad hoc* ceremonies and aimed at confirming the authority of a prince or a king for a limited period of time and not for life. According to him, this is the reason why Gagik received more than one crown. Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, 25–30 also explores Gagik's multiple investitures. Like Yuzbašyan, Jones too emphasizes that Gagik's seeming lack of legitimacy was due to the fact that he was never anointed by the Catholicos, as was the case with the Bagratuni kings. While this holds true for Gagik's Armenian rivals or the internal audience of his royal propaganda, it was hardly of concern to his Islamic interlocutors. Thus, their insistence on sending *regalia* to Gagik more than once should be viewed as attempts at keeping the latter in their sphere of influence.

128 The disagreements between Gagik and King Smbat are described by the Anonymous Continuator of T'ovma Arcruni, *History*, 438–442 and by Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'i, *History*, 209–221 from two different perspectives.

129 Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'i, *History*, 232 and 236 where Gagik is qualified as "wise". For a general analysis of the whole situation Vardanyan, *Arcruni Kingdom*, 87–88. Vardanyan places Smbat's death at 913, but most scholars accept 914, cfr Maksoudian, *Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'i*, 294, note # 12.

Church of the Holy Cross was being constructed.¹³⁰ On this background, the construction of the palace and the Church of the Holy Cross on Alt'amar was no longer a matter of territory control, but a statement of Gagik's royal claims and a proclamation of his support of the Armenian Church despite political dealings with the Caliphate. The "locating of religion" still remained fundamental, but acquired a new ideological quality.

It is not my purpose here to give a full analysis of the Church of the Holy Cross on Alt'amar, a major undertaking that would take me beyond the purpose of this paper. Moreover, it has been and continues to remain the subject of studies by art historians, much more qualified for the task than myself. Rather, I would like to provide some remarks on the Church of the Holy Cross as the crowning achievement in Gagik's religious foundations and its significance in the larger scheme of his power consolidation.

Gagik's constructions on the Island of Alt'amar are described by the Anonymous Continuator of T'ovma Arcruni and is a rather rare, if not a unique, type of narration in the Armenian literature.¹³¹ The Anonymous historian first emphasizes that any other constructions on the Island were "like tents or huts" before Gagik selected this location for his majestic project, a narrative strategy that aggrandizes Gagik's achievements even more. The King not only wisely chose a perfect position – protected naturally by the Lake – but also took an active part in its realization. Thus, it was Gagik who "with an architect's line in his hand"¹³² sketched and indicated where exactly certain structures should be located, such as places of enjoyment, paved streets, terraces, orchards and flower gardens. The palace itself was a cubic structure of forty cubits in height, length and width, standing on the highest point of the island and visible from all parts, featuring halls with arches, domed chambers and walls with painted decorations. Its construction took five years to be completed and it was so

130 Vardanyan, *Arcruni Kingdom*, 92–93. According to Vardanyan Gagik received two crowns from the Caliph, one in the autumn of 914 and another one in 919. According to Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'i, *History*, 306 the crown from the Caliph was the third one received from Islamic rulers by Gagik. Maksoudian dates the event to 919 in Maksoudian, *Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'*, 302, note # 5. The reception of a crown from the Caliph is mentioned also by the Anonymous Continuator, cfr T'ovma Arcruni [Continuator], *History*, 442.

131 T'ovma Arcruni [Anonymous], *History*, 456–460.

132 As noted by Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni*, 356 note 3, this image was borrowed from Agat'angelos' description of King Trdat's building of chapels for the Hrip'simēank' Saints. The same *topos* appears also in a panegyric-style *Homily* on the inauguration of an un-named church ascribed to the same author who wrote about the re-discovery of the True Cross of Varag, cfr Ananean "Yovhannēs K'orepiskopos," 18–23, esp. 20. Other similarities are noted below.

marvelous that the panegyrist expresses his inability to find suitable words for describing it.¹³³ The foundations of the Church of the Holy Cross were laid after the palace structure was completed. It is the only one of Gagik's buildings to have survived to our days. Its uniquely rich external sculptural decorations have bedazzled the viewers for generations and were meant to create such an effect. Both these and the internal frescoes have been subject to various art historical studies.

Before describing the Church, the Anonymous Continuator sets its construction within a context of Gagik's military struggle with the Muslims. Thus, Gagik, the "anointed of . . . our Savior Jesus" appears as a hero who has overcome the "savage race of Ismael."¹³⁴ After having pacified his domain through various military exploits, he is told to have destroyed a fortress belonging to the Zurārid tribe in the region of Aġjnik' and used its stones for the construction "of his church, erecting a temple of glory instead of an impure house of idolatry." Thus, the Church not only symbolized Gagik's religious, and consequently, political independence from various potentates, be those Muslim or Christian, but also served to purify his domains from religious "impurity" of the Muslims who are typologically associated with idolaters. The Anonymous historian then describes the specifics of the church and its decoration, singling out the sequence of Abraham, David and "our Lord Jesus Christ," and a host of prophets and apostles, without naming any specifically. He also notes that the church was decorated inside, as well as included precious liturgical vessels. The altar is then compared to a "Second Jerusalem, as well as the gates of Upper Zion."¹³⁵

Scholars have emphasized the importance of royal ideology for understanding the message that the Church and its decorations projected. Thus, the portrait of Gagik on the west façade of the church with a nimbus, holding a model of his church and presenting it to Christ, who is smaller in stature, is thought to emphasize his own piety and royal power simultaneously.¹³⁶ His clothing

133 For this *topos* in the description of palaces cfr Carile, "Imperial Palaces".

134 T'ovma Arcruni [Continuator], *History*, 46o.

135 *Ibid.*, 46z.

136 Mnatsakanyan, *Aghtamar*, views this monument as dedicated to emphasizing the might and piety of the Arcruni family and discusses the sculptural decoration of the church from this point of view; Cowe, "Relations," largely subscribes to this opinion, adding further comments on the Biblical scenes which featured Biblical Kings as examples to emulate or, at any rate, associations of kingship to be made with Gagik. Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, 77–8o, develops some of these theses further, revealing various ways in which King Gagik was compared to Adam as the "King of Paradise" and presented as an ideal king.

is supposed to represent Islamic textiles, possibly based on *regalia* donated to him by Yūsuf or the Caliph, thus, attesting to a cultural exchange with the Islamic world that is largely obfuscated in the written sources.¹³⁷ Influences of Islamic or Sassanian art on some of Ałt'amar's sculptures have also been suggested.¹³⁸ The presence of warrior saints George, Theodore and Sergius could be interpreted as proclaiming Gagik's readiness to protect his Christian subjects with the sword, tallying well with his idealized image projected both by T'ovma and his Anonymous Continuator. Pious Arcruni ancestors such as the eighth century martyrs Hamazasp and Sahak reminded the viewers of this family's saintly genealogy. Daniel and the Three Youths, Jonah and the whale emphasize the theme of redemption, whereas the presence of various Biblical Kings, like Saul, David and Solomon implied parallels between those and Gagik.¹³⁹

Gagik's portrait on the west façade combined with its description by the Anonymous Continuator provides the best evidence of his royal propaganda and the importance of religion as part of it. The Anonymous author describes Gagik's depiction in these words:

in front of the Savior is crafted in precise likeness the glorious image of King Gagik, raising the [model of] the church on his hands with a proud faith, as a golden jar full of manna and as a golden box filled with perfume. He stands depicted thus in front of the Lord, as if asking the remission of [his] sins. And even if our narration is about [writing] history, [let us add that] the king will not miss the gifts that he had asked for, hoping for a future redemption.

137 Der Nersessian, *Aght'amar*, 30–32, who notes other figures depicted on the Church as wearing Islamic clothing; Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, dwells at length on the Islamic context of Ałt'amar, drawing attention to Gagik's (and other identifiable Arcruni princes') clothing, the cross-legged sitting position of another presumed portrait of Gagik on the east façade, the depiction of peaceful vs savage animals, and other examples, as inspired by Islamic models. Her overall interpretation of this evidence focuses on Gagik's display of his source of power as the Abbasid Caliphate. This interpretation of visual material does not tally with what we know from the written sources, especially the Anonymous Continuator of T'ovma Arcruni, who continually insists on Gagik's *divine* appointment and approval to rule. It is rather unlikely that Gagik would project a radically different message about the source of his power through visual arts compared to the written sources. For a critical evaluation of the visual evidence cfr also Kouymjian, "An Interpretation".

138 Der Nersessian, *Aght'amar*, 26, 28–31.

139 Cowe, "Relations," 82–83.

Moreover, the altar of the Church – the Holy of Holies – is referred to as a “New Jerusalem” and “the Gates of Upper Zion”, while the church is called “the City of the Great God founded on two eternally flowing springs, the holy font and the incorruptible blood of the Son of God.”¹⁴⁰ The latter statement emphasizes Gagik’s adherence to Armenian Christology and a specific interpretation of John 19.34, as well as Armenian liturgical praxis. According to these, the use of pure wine during the Eucharistic celebration (as opposed to mixing it with water like in the Byzantine Orthodox Church) stood for the unity of Christ’s natures, while the water issuing from His rib on the cross referred to His baptism.¹⁴¹ The identification of Gagik’s constructions as a “New Jerusalem” or the “City of God” blend harmoniously with the Anonymous Continuator’s constant rhetoric of King Gagik as the “anointed of God.”¹⁴² Moreover, the description of Gagik’s combined building activity – a palace and a sanctuary – is typologically reminiscent of King Solomon’s similar accomplishment, who constructed both a palace and the Temple. This interpretation fits with Gagik’s earlier interest in tying his realm to Jerusalem and its righteous kings. Yet, while Solomon built a Temple for the Old Alliance, Gagik was erecting the “City of God” for his Armenian subjects who were the New Israel. These motifs culminate in the last, unfortunately incomplete, extant chapter of the Anonymous’ narrative aimed at describing the King from all aspects. Here, his physical image represents the ideal of beauty and is described in terms reminiscent of the image of the lover in the Song of Songs.¹⁴³ As a ruler Gagik is compared to Josiah, but, “ruling over New Israel, superior to [Josiah]”. Finally, Gagik is praised again as the anointed of God and superior to all the kings on earth.¹⁴⁴ In fact, the majestic image of the King on the west façade, facing Christ and presenting his “New Jerusalem”, i.e. his new Church to Him, are the visual expression of his written propaganda. But one more interpretative nuance can be added to the Anonymous historian’s description of Gagik’s donation. He states that by presenting his church

140 T’ovma Arcruni [Continuator], *History*, 462–464. Here similarities with the *Homily* of Yovhannēs K’orepiskopos can be noted. In the latter the Church contains “the incorruptible spring”, i.e. Christ, and it is called “the city of the living God . . . the Upper Jerusalem,” as well as the “House of David.” Ananean, “Two Homilies,” 20.

141 John 19.34. There is a large body of literature on this subject and the Armenian-Byzantine polemic on the interpretation of the relevant Biblical verses. A concise discussion can be found in Cowe, “Armenian Christology”.

142 T’ovma Arcruni [Continuator], *History*, 432 states that “the Lord of all was with him.” While Gagik was not anointed by the Catholicos, as mentioned above, his panegyrist affirms that his anointment was performed “invisibly by the Holy Spirit” in *Ibid.*, 442.

143 I am indebted to Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni*, 366 for these identifications.

144 T’ovma Arcruni [Continuator], *History*, 470.

to Christ Gagik beseeched the remission of his sins and, as the author of the panegyric affirmed, the King would, indeed, be granted this wish. Certainly, asking for forgiveness and the remission of one's sins is a common enough *topos* for pious donations evident especially in the thousands of colophons of Armenian manuscripts. Their donors or commissioners often used similar wording to express their piety. The characterization of the Church as a "golden jar of manna" may be interpreted in numerous ways, such as a generic reference to the church as a "jar" or a "vessel" and to Jesus as the "manna".¹⁴⁵ For St. Paul the "golden jar of manna" was hidden within the "Ark of the Covenant" in the Holy of Holies in the Temple.¹⁴⁶ Thus, the historian of Gagik may have wished to emphasize that the Church of the Holy Cross was the New Temple for a New Israel. This interpretation would continue to emphasize the biblical parallels between Gagik and righteous Kings of Israel. Following this line of thinking, one may state that Gagik hoped to attain the redemption of his sins by presenting a church to Christ, an action that would guarantee his salvation. On the other hand, there were some Jewish apocryphal traditions according to which the "golden jar of manna", concealed in the Ark of the Covenant, would be revealed at the time of the appearance of the Messiah.¹⁴⁷ An echo of this motif could have reached the Armenian authors through an anonymous text entitled *On the End of the World* ascribed to one Agat'angel. According to this source, at the End of Times the golden jar of manna will be discovered by the Antichrist, but his attempt to eat the manna will immediately result in his annihilation and lead to the Second Coming.¹⁴⁸ Thus, presenting his Church to Christ as a "golden jar of manna", whose content will be truly revealed only at the End of Times and only to the righteous, Gagik posed as a ruler beseeching the remission of his sins at the Parousia. That Gagik was interested in eschatology could be deduced from other examples too. First, was the dedication of a chapel within his "New Jerusalem" complex on the Rock of Van to the Second Coming. Then, he is told to have made generous donations to various churches

145 Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni*, 360 implies that the image of the church as a "vessel" or a "box" is found normally in patristic texts. In Ex 16.33 Moses commands Aaron to "keep" the golden jar of manna. The typological identification of Jesus with the manna is ultimately based on John 6.48–51. The reference to a "golden jar of manna" may contain eschatological allusions too, as suggested here.

146 Heb. 9.4.

147 Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, vol. 3, 48–49.

148 Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, No. 641, fol. 245r. The text is tentatively dated to the seventh century. Cfr Pogossian, "Jews".

and monasteries upon the death of his brother Gurgēn, hoping that at the day of the Judgement his brother would appear “among those on the right-hand side”.¹⁴⁹ Lastly, the internal decoration of the Church of the Holy Cross included also a scene on the Second Coming positioned beneath the royal gallery, where Gagik would be sitting.¹⁵⁰ The cross held by two angels below Gagik’s and Jesus’ feet on the west façade of the Church could also become part of this eschatological message, symbolizing the Wood of Redemption which will be placed on the Golgotha just before Jesus’ Second Coming. But it also reminded the viewers who entered the church both of the dedication of the Church to the Holy Cross and the relic of the True Cross housed in Vaspurakan. Last but not least, as already indicated above the liturgy of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, which would be carried out in this church, also included a procession, with the rite of the Elevation of the Cross performed first at the west side of the church accompanied by the singing of a specifically Armenian form of the *Trishagion*. Through this ritual the faithful would then raise the Cross just beneath Gagik’s portrait facing Christ, further emphasizing a spiritual connection between Jerusalem, the Church of the Holy Cross on Alt’amar and Gagik, its founder.

To summarize, Gagik’s constructions on the Island of Alt’amar, especially his Church of the Holy Cross, tied together a number of theological concepts, ideas of rulership and policies of territorial control traced in this paper. The emphasis on Gagik as the anointed of God took T’ovma Arcruni’s claim to his Davidic descent a step further. While acting as a General, Gagik created a “New Jerusalem” in one of the most significant settlements of his domains, on the Rock of Van. As a King, the building of his Church of the Holy Cross standing next to his palace, came to embody a New Jerusalem on a whole new level. Gagik now posed both as a New David and a New Solomon, standing on the giving end of his earthly foundation – the Church of the Holy Cross – to the Son of God, reminding his subjects or his rivals of the divine protection he would enjoy not only in this life but also in the next to come, waiting for the universal Redemption.

149 T’ovma Arcruni [Anonymous], *History*, 446. Mat 25:33–4.

150 Der Nersessian, *Aght’amar*, 41. 47–48. The cycle of the internal decorations on the lower walls starts above the royal gallery with the Annunciation scene, then moves to scenes from Jesus’ earthly life and the Passion and concludes with the Second Coming below the royal gallery, i.e. where Gagik would be sitting during the liturgy. Here too, then, Gagik would appear sitting in the middle of a cycle depicting Christ’s life.

6 Conclusions

This paper traced three generations of Arcruni rulers and their efforts to consolidate and expand their control over the territories of Vaspurakan from the second half of the ninth to the first two decades of the tenth century. One obvious conclusion is that while the “locating of religion” was an integral part of this policy, we do not find a sustained polemical engagement with Islam on theological terms. Thus, one of the two early examples of Arcruni patronage of monastic sites presented here – those of Hogeac’ Vank’ and Varag – the latter is presented in terms of a *reconquest* from the Muslims. Yet, the ninth century author who witnessed those events and described them, T’ovma Arcruni, was not interested in elaborating any *theologically* anti-Islamic implications of this act. Rather, he placed the emphasis on the military aspect of the whole incident. The religious significance of this re-conquest, as far as we can deduce from the source, was the prestige it bestowed on the Arcrunis as supporters of a pre-existing spiritual center. But the military-strategic importance of this potentially pious act is even more evident. It marked the Arcruni presence in a border area (for that specific time) of a newly conquered territory and, thus, is more appropriate to be viewed as the Arcrunis “locating themselves” within a preexisting religious landscape. By associating their names to celebrated monasteries, the Arcruni princes created pockets of influence and control. It is possible that T’ovma Arcruni singled out the conquest of Hogeac’ Vank’ and Varag from many more such deeds since the latter were the most famous, but this conjecture must remain hypothetical until more research on historical topography or archaeology of the region is carried out.

The policy of patronage also came to legitimize the Arcruni rule in territories that were not part of their ancestral domains but that came under their sway as other noble houses gradually disappeared. This legitimation was achieved by other means too. One was reviving various religious traditions relevant to specific sites, such as narrative cycles on the Christianization of Armenia connected to the monasteries of Hogeac’ Vank’ or Varag, or the Rediscovery of the True Cross of Varag in the seventh century. The other, was to emphasize the idea of reconquest from the Muslims which is most evident in the case of Varag. By doing so, the Arcrunis glossed over any internal struggles or disagreements over territorial control. The sense of continuity was achieved also by personally associating themselves to the sacred traditions and sites of these territories through the reconstruction of once abandoned buildings, sometimes changing their destination from secular to religious use, as in the case of a monastery in the village of Mahrašt. The memory of the Rštuni lords was not obliterated either physically or through narratives. Rather, both went through a process of reelaboration and, in the case of written/oral traditions

the preservation of a “selective memory” of the R̥štuni princes’ deeds. Another way to strengthen their hold on the territories was to create new traditions and patronize new miraculous objects, always placed in strategically important locations, such as a cross that was saved from a robbery attempt in the town of Ostan and donated by Gagik to a new monastery, founded on the ruins of an old R̥štuni fortress. Conversely, older Arcruni traditions relevant to religious sites in their ancestral domains, such as the monastery of the Holy Cross in Albak, were translocated to Vaspurakan, to the Island of Alt’amar. Establishing the commemoration of Derenik Arcruni and his wife Sop’i on the day of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, to be celebrated in the Church of the Holy Cross on Alt’amar, serves as an example of this translocation. But it also ultimately linked an Arcruni family devotion to a wide-spread Armenian veneration of the Cross and relics of the True Cross, as well as to their original location, i.e. the Holy City.

In all of these activities, the interreligious polemic is in the background but rarely erupts openly. When T’ovma Arcruni engages in a theological discussion, his opponents are either the duophysites or the Paulicians/Tondrakites. Only a polemical reference to the “enemies of the cross” may generally apply also to the Muslims. Similarly, the Anonymous Continuator of T’ovma Arcruni presents Gagik as the anointed of God and fighting the “race of Ismael”, but there is no theological discussion or refutation of Islam as such. Thus, while the “locating of religion” had also an interreligious significance by reinforcing a Christian presence in specific locations, the larger implications of this process or theological reflections that it may have generated cannot be easily discerned. One area that could be explored further is the dedication of churches. Dedications to the Holy Cross or the Theotokos could be taken as implicit theological polemic against Islam and should be studied further.

Finally, the most impressive ruler of Vaspurakan in this period – King Gagik – injected a whole new quality to the legitimation of military conquests and victories, through the medium of the written sources, constructions, and visual representations of himself. As a prince he continued his forefathers’ tradition of supporting certain pre-existing religious foundations or founded new ones. He also exhibited his patronage through the commission of a new reliquary of the True Cross of Varag, thus forging a link between his rule and a holy object of ultimately Jerusalemite provenance. In the two Arcruni sources explored in this paper Gagik appears as the anointed of God who built at least two versions of New Jerusalem – one a complex on the Rock of Van and the second one his Church of the Holy Cross on Alt’amar. Thus, going beyond the control of territory, Gagik transferred the blessings and the protection accorded to the Holy City, to his Kingdom, and, transformed his subjects to a New Israel.



FIGURE 7.1 Map of Vaspurakan.

SOURCE: ROBERT HEWSEN. ARMENIA: A HISTORICAL ATLAS. CHICAGO: UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, 2000, MAP NO. 93. REPRINTED WITH THE KIND PERMISSION OF ROBERT HEWSEN TO WHOM I WISH TO EXTEND MY HEARTFELT GRATITUDE.

93. The Kingdom of Vaspurakan, 908–1021 (after V. M. Vardanyan)



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The Meeting of Daoist and Buddhist Spatial Imagination: The Construction of the Netherworld in Medieval China

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1 Introduction

The Buddhist encounter with Chinese culture is an almost inexhaustible fountain of interesting and challenging topics involving a wide variety of religious and cultural issues. Among these is that which relates to the netherworld and its hells. It should come as no surprise that the concepts of the netherworld would captivate the imagination of the common Buddhist faithful in medieval China to a particularly high degree, since the belief in rebirth based on the sum of one's previous actions, i.e. the law of cause and effect, was (and still is) universally upheld by Buddhists worldwide. For this reason, the canonical *sūtras* and associated scriptures dealing with the punishments in the netherworld were, if not popular in the sense of being well-liked, then at least their morbid messages were well-known and conceptually established in the mainstream culture well beyond the circles of Buddhist followers. Moreover, the vivid imagery with its graphic details were certain to be held in awe among the common believers of medieval China regardless of creed.

More than a decade ago Stephen F. Teiser wrote a lengthy study in which he endeavored to show how the concepts constituting the netherworld had become standardized in Chinese Buddhism by the late Tang 唐 (618–906), culminating in the fabrication of the apocryphal scripture, *Shiwang jing* 十王經 (*Scripture on the Ten Kings [of the Netherworld]*), and its derivatives.¹ As regards the structuring and formulation of the netherworld scenario into ten departments, each of which being presided over by an official-king with Yamā at their head, Teiser is undoubtedly right in placing this phase in the development of the netherworld towards the end of the Tang dynasty. However, this should not lead us to believe that the actual Sinicization and the concurrent bureaucra-

1 Cf. *Foshuo yuxiu shiwang shengqi jing* 佛說預修十王生七經 (*Scripture Spoken by the Buddha on Preparing the [Ritual of the] Ten Kings [for] Rebirth after Seven Days*), ZZ 21.1. See the comprehensive study by Teiser, *The Scripture on the Ten Kings*.

tization of the Daoist and Buddhist hells took place at such a late date. In my opinion that development was already well under way by the late Nanbeichao period (386–581), something which can be clearly testified to in the Buddhist and Daoist primary sources from that period.

The present study aims at throwing further light on the ways in which the Chinese netherworld was conceived and conceptualized through the imagination of Buddhist and Daoist believers during the medieval and early pre-modern periods. In order to achieve this, special attention will be given to those issues of religious and cultural conflation which eventually gave rise to what can best be described as a unified vision of the netherworld, in other words the Buddhο-Daoist hell. In what follows I will make use of a wide range of written sources such as primary Buddhist and Daoist scriptures, apocryphal writings and miracle stories, as well as some examples of material culture including religious art. With this I hope to afford a better understanding of the historical developments which brought about the concept of a unified hell in traditional China on the one hand, and on the other hand to demonstrate how religious contact, diverse systems of thought and spatial imaginations eventually brought about a synthetic, structural vision which has persisted largely unchanged since the late medieval period and up to present times in Chinese religious culture.

Given that the primary issue here concerns the construction and formulation of the netherworld as a concrete locus with an extended bureaucracy and various judicial halls, in what constitutes the formation of an imaginary geography and architecture, we shall look at how these imagined spaces came into being, and how related systems of belief developed and influenced each other. Given the daunting amount of the primary sources and the existence of an abundance of examples of material culture relating to the Chinese netherworld, I cannot do justice to it all within the limited scope of an essay such as this. Therefore, this presentation will inevitable be heavily condensed with certain self-imposed limitations. However, I must also point out that my primary purpose here is to highlight one important aspect of the exchanges and interaction that took place between Daoism and Buddhism in medieval China, namely how the netherworld came about as the result of a combined, inter-religious and intercultural process.

2 Concepts of the Netherworld in Pre-Buddhist China

There is precious little in religious thought of early China surrounding the after-life which may serve as a comparative material with the developments

we find after Buddhism had arrived and began its centuries long process of inculturation. Concepts of the netherworld as found in the primary sources do not really match the Indian Buddhist vision of a netherworld consisting of several, inter-linked hells. In fact we find little which resembles standard notions of a hell or hells as such. Nor do the pre-Buddhist sources link the further journey of the dead within the complex of a moral or ethical meta-system building on natural and semi-automatic occurrences of cause and effect as we find in Buddhist and Daoist texts from the first two to three centuries of the Common Era.

The earliest clear indication of the existence of a netherworld for the dead can be found in the concept of the Yellow Springs (*huangquan* 黃泉), a subterranean realm where the spirits of the dead assembled, much like the Hades of classical Greece. The origin of the belief in the Yellow Springs has traditionally been set in the Spring and Autumn period (722–481 BCE), but may in fact date from the Warring States period (403–221 BCE). A story recounted in the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (*Zuo Commentary*) tells of an official, who wished to see his beloved, deceased mother, and subsequently dug a passage into the earth to go to the Yellow Springs to meet her.² In any case, by the early Western Han (206 BCE–5 CE) the Yellow Springs had become a common literary trope indicating the existence of a widespread belief in the netherworld.

Belief in the tomb as the personalized abode of the dead, i.e. for those from the nobility and upper classes of society, a practice closely associated with ancestor worship, is in evidence from early on in Chinese history.³ In a series of articles on the roots of early Daoism in Han and pre-Han religion with special emphasis on tomb lore and mortuary practices, building on the work of Anna Seidel and Donald Harper,⁴ Peter Nickerson has shown that there was a wide-spread belief in a complex after-life among the Chinese at that time. He has also shown that the lore surrounding the tomb and its occupant(s) had by then attained a more or less fixed format in official (and non-official) religion.⁵ A god, the Yellow Emperor 黃帝, was believed to be in charge of the resisters of the living and the records of the dead, a whole range of messengers and officers

2 Cf. *Han shu* 40.247. See also Thompson, “On the Prehistory of Hell”.

3 See Dien, “Chinese Beliefs in the Afterworld” and Lai Guolong, “Death and the Otherworldly Journey”.

4 Especially Seidel, “Geleitbrief an die Unterwelt” and eadem, “Traces of Han Religion”; cf. Harper, “Resurrection”.

5 See Nickerson, “Let living and dead take separate paths”; idem, “The Great Petition for Sepulchral Plaints”, and idem, “Opening the Way”.

serving on him, etc.⁶ While Nickerson rarely touches upon the imaginations pertaining to the lay-out of the netherworld, it is clear that the tomb played a major role in after-life beliefs as the abode of the fortunate dead. Although the physical structures of the netherworld as such has remained rather oblique, at least until the beginning of the Eastern Han 東漢 (25–220), we do know, that the world of the dead as early as the 1st century BCE was conceived of as a kind of subterranean duplicate of the world of the living. In particular the extensive bureaucratic norms commonly associated with Han governance, including both its civil and military aspects, had been extensively transposed onto the world of the dead by the beginning of the Common Era.⁷ Nevertheless, it would appear that much of the lore concerning the subterranean bureaucracy was created in order to separate the world of the living from that of the dead, since the latter were always held in awe by the living and were treated with a mixture of respect and fear.

In general terms, the dead were conceived of as having twin souls, the *po* 魄 and *hun* 魂. It would appear that the spirit of the dead was first identified as the *po* soul, and only later was it joined by the *hun* soul to form a dual entity in the Eastern Zhou. The origin of belief in the *hun* soul may have been the non-Chinese southern kingdom of Chu, from where the celebrated song *Zhao hun* 招魂 (*Summoning of the Hun Soul*) has come.⁸ A practice which later became a fixture in traditional funerary practices. What is important to note here, is that in the Chu material we find references to both a netherworld as the abode of the souls of the dead, the Youdu 幽都 (Capital of Darkness) as well as a god of the earth, Tubo 土伯 (Lord of the Earth), cast as a dangerous snake-like creature, who guards the subterranean realm and its inmates.⁹ Concepts relating to the dual souls were further developed during the middle of the Han, resulting in new models of understanding.¹⁰

An important aspect of the development of the beliefs concerning the netherworld in pre-Buddhist China are the cults associated with certain, important

6 Seidel, "Geleitbrief an die Unterwelt." The Yellow Spirit Lord appears later in the Daoist material on the netherworld from the late Nanbeichao period as one among several judge-kings. Cf. eg. *DZ* 1139.25, 307bc. See also Drexler, "On Talismans fu (符)".

7 Discussed in Pirazzoli-T'Serstevens, "Author de la mort". See also the interesting note by Friedrich, "The 'Announcement to the World Below'".

8 See Hawkes, *Ch'u Tz'u*.

9 Hawkes, *Ch'u Tz'u*, 105. Later, he becomes Houtu 后土, minister of the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi 黃帝).

10 See for instance the study by Braisher, "Han Thanatology".

mountains.¹¹ It appears that these beliefs were originally related to mythological or semi-mythological mountains such as the fabled Penglai 蓬萊, Mt. Kunlun 崑崙, etc. as abodes of immortals and mythological beings, but already by the 2nd century BCE we encounter cults associated with the Five March Mounts, what later became the Five Holy Mountains of Daoism.¹² The *Taiping jing* 太平經 (*Scripture of the Great Peace*)¹³ contains a fairly detailed description of the lore associated with beliefs in the Five Mountains, including associated gods or spirit officials. This may be taken as representative of beliefs current during the 1st century CE.¹⁴ Important among the Five Mountains and of special significance for the present purpose, is Mt. Tai 太山/泰山, the Eastern March Mount.¹⁵ During the Western Han dynasty it functioned as the location for the imperial *feng* 封 and *shan* 禪 rites of offering to Heaven (*tian* 天), and in the course of the Eastern Han became an important center for popular worship.

The emergence of beliefs in the netherworld as an administrative, judicial unit under divine control is evident in the pre-Han sources, although a more well-defined bureaucracy as a mirror-image or duplication of that in the human world, did not come about until well into the Han dynasty. There can be little doubt, that the importance of legalistic thought, which was a dominant trend in governance from the Qin 秦 Empire (221–206 BCE) onwards, contributed greatly to this development. This meant that the traditional Chinese judicial system in China was, and to a large extent still is, primarily concerned with establishing guilt and dispensing punishment. Not with formal justice. As on earth, the officials of the netherworld were susceptible to bribe and other human failings. Moreover, they could make mistakes or otherwise loose documents relating to the dead. In other words, the bureaucracy in charge of the netherworld was a close, and frighteningly, realistic copy of that in the world of humans. This feature later carried over in conceptualizations concerning the punishments in the netherworld in as well Daoism as in Chinese Buddhism.¹⁶ Petitions sent to the bureaucracy of the netherworld as documented by findings from a number of tombs, are indicative of the curious attitude the Han

11 An example of this can be found in the *Liezi* 列子 (Book of Mr. Lie), dating from the 4th century BCE. Cf. Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzu*, 97.

12 For a general over-view of this topic, see Hahn, "The Standard Taoist Mountain".

13 For the standard edition, see *Taiping jing hejiao*.

14 Cf. *Taiping jing hejiao*, 384.

15 A brief over-view can be found in Bujard, "Cultes d'état et cultes locaux".

16 Perhaps the best study on violence as reflected in the Chinese netherworld as a mirroring of punishment in traditional Chinese society can be found in Orzech, "Mechanisms of Violent Retribution".

Chinese had to the netherworld. One that was at the same time pragmatic and matter-of-factly, and on the other side one which caused the greatest anxiety and fear.¹⁷

3 The Buddhist Netherworld at the Time of Buddhism's Introduction to China

Buddhist notions of the netherworld or more precisely of the hell have undoubtedly their antecedents in pre-Buddhist Indian religious imagination. It is not the place to discuss this here, but for the sake of convenience let me point out that in the earlier tradition(s) hell was conceived of as a place where those with evil *karma* were reborn. Here it is important to be aware that while the netherworld, similar to Christian and Muslim concepts of hell, was a place associated with extreme pain and torment from early on, it was never understood as a permanent abode for those who ended there, but as a temporary place of sojourn, no matter how long, it otherwise was believed to have lasted.

The temporal aspect of rebirth in the netherworld is of course narrowly linked with the over-all Buddhist notion of the human, psycho-physical entity's transmigration through numerous rebirths. The significance of which is important to bear in mind as our story unfolds, as it shows that cause and effect always played a central role in Buddhist cosmology and imaginations, and in the context of rebirth in the hells or heavens, tended to be closely related to moral concerns. Rebirth in hell was a punishment for evil doing while ascent to one of the heavens a reward for having done good. When seen from this perspective the temporal aspect of hell takes on a dimension which it does not share with the monotheistic traditions. It is not a place for eternally damned souls as we find in Christianity or Islam, but in a sense a place of cleansing, of purification, even though it was obviously not something one embraced involuntarily. Karmic expiation was understood as a necessary prerequisite for the human entity's progress or rather, continuation in the seemingly endless wheel of transmigration.

Despite the hell(s) being imagined as temporary, or rather the time spent there as relative, the netherworld as a place was conceived of as consisting of several, compartmentalized hells arranged in tiers. Of these the deepest and most horrific was the Avīci Hell, a cruel place which consisted of seventeen

17 For a discussion of bureaucratization and legal aspect of religion in China, see Katz, *Divine Justice* and idem, "Trial by Power".

sub-hells in descending order according to the severity of tortures meted out there.¹⁸

In its more detailed conceptualization, the Buddhist hell(s) are envisaged as being ruled over by a demon-god, Yāmarāja assisted by an assorted, but usually, generic groups of demon-attendants, who assist him in meteing out punishment to the deserving sinners. As King Yāma appears in the earliest strata of Buddhist writings, it is evident that he, and the system of belief surrounding his persona, represents yet another Buddhist adoption from the Hindu pantheon.

At some period in time, probably during the early Guptā, a new tendency concerning the imagination on the hells can be detected in the literature of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Hell, as a location, is increasingly being conceived of as a mental construction, an objective concretion so to speak, based on the *karma* of each individual. This leads to hell being seen as an expression of *upāya* (*fangbian* 方便), i.e. as a necessary, but ultimately illusory locus, created as a *fata morgana* in order to lead sentient beings along the right path.¹⁹

The Indian Buddhist material divulging information on the conceptualization of the netherworld and its after-worldly torments is relatively rich and it is not possible within the time span of this a paper to do full justice to it all. Nevertheless, one important source, namely the *Devaduuta sutta* (*Messengers of the Gods*) can be singled out for its importance. Together with a few similar texts, this scripture may be one of the earliest examples we have in which conceptualizations of the Buddhist hell have been fully crystalized. Or rather, here we find essentially all the elements on which the later traditions build.

Let us look briefly at this source as a means of contextualizing the Buddhist conceptualizations of the hells prior to the religion's arrival in China.²⁰ This short sutta describes how people who do evil or who ignore their human duties are punished after they die. During their lifetimes so-called heavenly

18 A useful listing of the descriptions of the Buddhist hells from the Chinese sources can be found in Xiao Dengfu, *Han Wei Liuchao fo dao liangjiao zhi tiantang diyu shuo* (Statements by Two Religions, Buddhism and Daoism during the Han, Wei and Six Dynasties concerning the Heavenly Halls and the Hells).

19 A highly useful and detailed Chinese survey concerning the description of the hells in Indian Buddhism, can be found in Daoshi's 道世 (d. after 668) encyclopedic *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 (*Pearly Trees in the Dharma Garden*), T. 2122.53, 322a–332c. See also his earlier work, the *Jinglu yixiang* 經律異相 (*Extraordinary Affairs of the Sūtras and Vinaya*), T. 2121.53, 258b–268c.

20 Early Chinese translations of Indian Buddhist scriptures containing information on the hells are numerous, and most feature data similar to that we find in the *Devaduuta sutta*.

messengers appear as warnings.²¹ On the basis of the information found in this important source we may establish a series of central features associated with rebirth in the netherworld as follows:

- Those who engage in unwholesome activities are alternatively reborn as hungry ghosts (Skr. *preta*), as animals or in hell, the latter of which is the most severe form of rebirth as it involves intense and prolonged suffering.
- The netherworld has a king (*Yāma*), actually a minor god, before whom the spirits of these dead appear. They are subjected to serious, moral scrutiny.
- King *Yāma* has a staff of demonic minions who act as prison wardens.
- Divine messengers are sent to the world of humans to issue warnings (these were originally conceived of as natural, *samsaric* signs of impermanence meant to appeal to the benevolent side of the human psyche, but later became concrete, personified messengers).
- The spirits of those reborn in hell are interrogated and asked why they did not heed the heavenly messengers, i.e. the tell-tale signs, sent to warn them. Punishment is therefore meted out as a consequence of the individual's own actions.
- The torments of hell are mirroring those found among humans.
- The body of the tormented is being repeatedly revived to renewed suffering until his or her evil *karma* has been exhausted.
- Graphic and detailed account of the tortures
- The hells are conceptualized as actual, physical places each with their own distinct topography such as the Great Hell enclosed by four walls of iron with four gates covering a vast area, or the Hell of Excrements, the Simbali Forrest of thorns, the Forrest of Sword Trees, etc.²²

These details all reflect the traditional Indian concepts of rebirth as a hell-being, and the sources clearly stipulate that those who end in the hells, do so on account of the accumulated sum of their own previous actions. In other words, evil *karma* leading to rebirth in one of the three unwholesome states as

21 In the *Devadutta sutta* five messengers or harbingers are mentioned: 1) infancy, 2) old age, 3) sickness, 4) punishment and 5) death. Other sources such as the *Dirghāgama* mentions three messengers only: 1) old age, 2) sickness and 3) death. This may reveal that the former scripture is of a slightly later date as it offers a more elaborate model. Cf. *T. 1.1*, 126b. See also *Further Dialogues of the Buddha*, vol. 2, 255–261.

22 Different text-traditions, which do not always tally with each other concerning the physical aspects of the hells are in evidence as documented by Xiao Dengfu, *Han Wei Liuchao fo dao liangjiao zhi tiantang diyu shuo*, 82–96.

outlined above, is the result of individual *karma*. The judgment, tortures, and netherworld staff of the demonic attendants to King Yāma, are therefore all reflections of the *karma* of those who suffer there. All is self-generated, wherefore the sufferings in the hells are ultimately self-inflicted.

When Buddhism arrived in China during the first century CE such concepts of the netherworld and torments in the hellish prisons were introduced together with the Buddhist doctrines of *karma* and rebirth.²³ As already mentioned, at that time the Chinese do not appear to have had a fixed or unified concept of the netherworld. In any case, nothing close to the elaborate set of beliefs and fixed structures which we see in Buddhist concepts of the netherworld existed then. Moreover, the Chinese did not have a systematic system of thought linking the afterworld with a moral system of cause and effect as did the Buddhists. Especially the Buddhist concept of individual karmic guilt/sin and responsibility, which was conceived of as playing out over the course of many lives involving multiple bodies, was in large measure alien to the Chinese.²⁴ Hence, when Buddhism introduced the hell and its detailed version of the netherworld to China it was not only a new cosmology they brought with them, but an entire new way of conceptualizing the individual person and the consequences of his or her actions in the world.

4 Early Daoist Concepts of the Netherworld

Let us now turn for a moment to early Daoist concepts of the Netherworld and try to get a more firm understanding of how it was conceptualized at the time when Buddhism in earnest began to make cultural inroads in China. This phase in the development of the Daoist concepts of the netherworld, can be conveniently divided into two parts, one in which we find no overt Buddhist traces, and the other where Buddhist influence can be readily observed.²⁵ Let us begin

23 Much of the early and later Indian Buddhist and material was compiled by the Chinese monk Daoshi 道世 (d. after 668) during the early Tang. This material can be found in his encyclopedic *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 (*Pearly Trees in the Dharma Garden*), T. 2122. 53, 322a–332c; as well as in his earlier work, the *Jinglu yixiang* 經律異相 (*Extraordinary Affairs of the Sūtras and Vinaya*), T. 2121. 53, 258b–268c.

24 For a highly useful study of the impact of Buddhist beliefs on the afterlife of the Chinese during the first centuries of the common era, see Bokenkamp, *Ancestors and Anxiety*.

25 For an overview of Daoist texts dealing with the netherworld, see Xiao Dengfu, *Han Wei Liuchao fo dao liangjiao zhi tiantang diyu shuo*, 359–444.

by looking at the situation at the time Buddhist thought began to make inroads into the conceptual world of the Chinese netherworld.

It is perhaps not surprising that early Daoist concepts of the netherworld, are in large measure a continuation of the types of beliefs which characterized popular religion during the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220 CE). Several scholars have already showed how Daoism rose in a more or less stream-lined fashion from earlier religious formations, and there is no reason to go over that ground again here.²⁶ Suffice to say is that Mt. Tai and its god Taishan Fujun 太山府君 had already entered the imagination and beliefs of the Chinese by the time the early Daoist movements came about towards the end of the Han dynasty. In the centuries to come the cult of Mt. Tai would gradually be incorporated in mainstream Daoist belief and lore. What is interesting to note in connection with this, is that the belief and lore of Mt. Tai, in particular its function as the netherworld, entered Chinese Buddhism more or less at the same time it entered Daoism.²⁷

In connection with after-life beliefs in early Daoism, it is important to distinguish between the manner in which it was envisaged for ordinary people including normal Daoist believers on the one hand, and that of Daoist adepts and masters on the other hand. The former were able to improve their karmic deposits through worship and the performance of good deeds, so that their life-records would be in order, i.e. conducive for a long life and the avoidance of an evil fate. In contrast Daoist adepts could, through their mastery of the cosmic powers and command of spirits and gods, ascend directly as immortals circumventing as it were the bureaucracy of the netherworld. Even so, there were many collateral traditions existing side by side, with varying after-life conceptions and different prescriptions for attaining immortality and liberation of the corpse.²⁸

Added to this, we must acknowledge the fact that Daoism as a bona fide religious system was still in its infancy at the time of its encounter with Buddhism during the 3rd and 4th centuries, hence many of its ideas concerning inherited

26 For some of the most pronounced of these, see Seidel and Hussein, “Taoïsme”; Kohn, “Himmel, Höllen und Verwaltung”; Yü Ying-Shih, “O Soul, Come Back!”.

27 The earliest occurrence of Mt. Tai as the Buddhist netherworld, can be found in the *Zapīyū jīng* 雜譬喻經 (*Scripture on Miscellaneous Avadānas*), translated between 147–186 CE. Cf. *T.* 204.4, 501a. This indicates, that already during its formative period in China, Buddhism actively embraced and engaged with local cults on the conceptual level, even if it was primarily as strategical or literary devices.

28 Kohn, “Himmel, Höllen und Verwaltung,” 630–656. See also the numerous examples in Kohn, *Taoist Experience*.

guilt, *karma*, the netherworld and transmigration were to a large extent shaped through its contact with the incoming Indian religion in the course of the period in question.

One thing which is important to note in this context, is that the development and crystallization of Daoist conceptions of the netherworld as well as the eventual take-over of the hell visions found in the Buddhist scriptures, took place more or less simultaneously. In other words, the Daoist imaginations of the netherworld to the extent that they deviated from traditional Chinese imaginations about the after-life, did not develop independently of Buddhist influence. Likewise the Chinese Buddhist formulation of the netherworld with its hells, whether or not it was ultimately based on ideas and beliefs informed by the growing translations of Indian Buddhist sūtras, was on its part also affected by local traditions and developments.

The second phase, which shows considerable, albeit unsystematized, incorporation of Buddhist concepts and patterns of beliefs can be detected in the earliest scriptures associated with the Lingbao 靈寶, or Numinous Treasure, tradition beginning in the late 4th to early 5th centuries. It is not possible to give a comprehensive over-view of all the relevant material here, for which reason I shall limit myself to a few representative examples. Among the earliest of these scriptures are the *Dongxuan Lingbao wugan wen* 洞玄靈寶五感文 (*Text of the Five Gratuities of the Cavern Mystery Numinous Treasure*),²⁹ the *Dongxuan lingbao changye zhi fu jiuyou yugui mingzhen ke* 洞玄靈寶長夜之府九幽玉甌明真科 (*Liturgy of the Sworn Alliance with the Zhenren, Kept in the Jade Chest of the Nine Realms of Darkness, in the Yamen of the Long Night*),³⁰ and the *Shangqing tianguan santujing* 上清天關三圖經 (*Scripture on the Three Passes to the Heavenly Barriers of the Highest Purity*),³¹ which is a scripture

29 DZ 1278.32. It is attributed to Lu Xiuqing 陸修靜 (406–477) and dates from the mid-5th cent. For additional information, see *The Taoist Canon*, vol. 1, 253–254. Briefly discussed in Bokenkamp, *Ancestors and Anxiety*, 3–5.

30 DZ 1411.34. This scripture reveals that whoever authored it, had assimilated certain, isolated elements from Buddhist cosmology, especially relating to the physical aspects of the Buddhist hells. For further discussion of this text, see *The Taoist Canon*, vol. 1, 225–226.

31 DZ 1366.33. Traditionally considered a work of the Shangqing tradition from the first half of the Nanbeichao, but would appear on internal evidence to date from the end of the period as it has traces of Buddhist influence as well as elements from the tradition of the Heavenly Masters. The version that has come down via the *Zhengtong Daozang* appears to post-date the *Zhengao* (DZ) from the early 6th century wherefore we may tentatively place it in the second half of that century, most likely during the Northern Zhou 周 (557–577). For additional information on its contents, see Robinet's entry in *The Taoist Canon*, vol. 1, 163–164.

belonging to the Shangqing 上清 tradition. It contains an illustrative example of the direct relationship between the concepts and ideas constituting belief in the Daoist cave-heavens and the netherworld as represented by the six subterranean palaces under the mythological mountain, Mt. Fengdu.³²

The first of these texts, the *Dongxuan Lingbao wugan wen*, deals primarily with the expiation of sin from the perspective of early Daoist conceptualizations of *karma*. It refers to the tortures of the netherworld in some detail, which indicates borrowing from Buddhist scriptures. While the imagery it contains does indeed reflect primitive descriptions of the Buddhist hells as outlined in the examples given above, including the sword trees, knife mountains, the freezing hell, etc., it does not provide us with an over-all concept of the netherworld in the sense of a more structured pseudo-geography as found in later works.³³

The second text, the *Dongxuan lingbao changye zhi fu jiuyou yugui mingzhen ke*, opens with the Heavenly Worthy of the original Commencement sitting surrounded by a following consisting of seven-thousand and forty youths. The text reads:

At that time the youths stayed together in one place, whence they beheld all the blessed halls of the gods [as well as] the good people, including men and women [reborn in heaven] strolling in the distance doing nothing (*wuwei* 無為), their clothing and food [manifesting] spontaneously. [After that] they (i.e. the youths) widely saw the worlds without limit [including] the hells with their prisoners (*qitutu* 囚徒) undergoing punishment, [such as] hungry ghosts (Skr. *pretas*) and the souls of the dead (*sihun* 死魂) their naked bodies without clothes, their heads and feet in chains and fetters, their feet treading on the Mountain of Swords, their bodies carrying iron staves. All being dragged along, their five body-parts injured, without the shapes of ordinary people. When starving they had to eat [burning] coal, and when thirsty they had to drink fiery stuff. Being

32 The exact status of Mt. Fengdu is unclear in the early texts in which it occurs. It would appear that it was ascribed to an unspecified location originally, and only later became associated with a specific place on the Yangzi in eastern Sichuan: 四川|. Cf. Chenivresse, "Fengdu". For a translation of the relevant passage, see, Kohn, *Taoist Experience*, 265–267. A study of the concept of grotto-heavens (*dongtian* 洞天), which directly concerns the development of the Daoist netherworld, see Verellen, "The Beyond Within".

33 For a full translation see, Verellen/Schipper/Sivin, "Daoist religion," 404–406.

dragged through the three smears (*sanmie* 三塗)³⁴ and eight hardships (*ba nan* 八難³⁵).³⁶

From this source it is evident that the netherworld, i.e. the ‘Yamen of the Long Night’ consisted of nine compartments or judicial units where the souls of the dead, here described with a mix of Indian Buddhist and Chinese concepts, were undergoing punishment. This scripture would appear to be directly related to another text, the *Taishang dongxuan lingbao zhihui zuigen shangpin dajie jing* 太上洞玄靈寶智慧罪根上品大戒經 (*Lingbao Scripture of Highest Cavern-Mystery on the Supreme Great Rules of Wisdom Concerning the Roots of Guilt*),³⁷ where there is a correlation between the numbering of sins and their punishments in the netherworld. Interestingly that work refers to a group of ‘Ten heavenly Spirit Kings (*shi tianshen wang* 十天神王),’ a Daoist group of netherworld officials, which may be seen as a forerunner of the Ten Kings of the later Buddhist *Scripture of the Ten Kings*.³⁸ While the precise psychical lay-out of the netherworld is somewhat oblique in these scriptures, we learn that the punishments meted out to the souls of the condemned owe much to Buddhist descriptions. These include the tree of swords, the boiling cauldron, the plowing of the tongue, etc. as already seen.³⁹ Moreover, *pretas* or hungry ghosts (*egui* 餓鬼) appear. What is most important in this scripture, is its clear definition of the netherworld as a place of judgement and subsequent punishment. As well as its interest in setting up different categories of punishment. We may say that as far as the hells go, the *Dongxuan lingbao changye zhifu jiuyou yugui mingzhen ke* would therefore appear as being among the earliest Daoist scriptures to promote a more well-defined, structural framework for the Daoist netherworld.

34 A Buddhist term which usually refers to the three unwholesome modes of rebirth (Skr. *gati*) 1) in hell, 2) as a *preta*, and 3) as an animal. Cf. *Foguang da cidian* (Comprehensive Dictionary of Foguang; hereafter FDC), vol. 1, 636a.

35 Also a Buddhist term indicating situations in which it is hard to see the Buddha or hear his teaching: 1) in hell, 2) as a *preta*, 3) an animal, 4) in the northern continent of Uttarakuru, where Buddhism is not found, 5) in the heavens where existence is overly pleasant, 6) when deaf, blind or dumb, 7) as a worldly thinker, and 8) in the period in a *kalpa* where no Buddha appears. Cf. FDC, vol. 1, 318c. Both this and the above concept were taken over by the Daoists, who adapted them to their own doctrinal systems.

36 DZ 1411.34, 379b.

37 DZ 457.6.

38 Cf. DZ 457.6, 887a, etc.

39 DZ 1411.34, 380a.

As far as the primary elements of tortures go, we find a full listing in the *Taiqing wushiba yuanwen* 太清五十八願文 (*Fifty-eight Prayer Texts of the Greatest Purity*).⁴⁰ This text provides us with a full picture of the horrors visited upon those who are reborn in the Daoist hell as follows:

People like this become long-term dwellers of hell, stepping among the five poisons, the mountain of swords, the tree of knives, the boiling cauldron, and the fiery furnace. As their five limbs are scorched and soaked, they wish for death but cannot find it. When hungry, all they get to eat is iron; when thirsty, all they get to drink is fire. Released from this, they are cast into cold and ice, which harm their flesh and break their bones. Eventually they are transferred to the Three Bureaus (*sanguan* 三官) who may decide to create a new mountain or ocean and have them lug heavy loads of earth and stones, whipping and flogging them in punishment. Thus they pass through the three bad rebirths and five realms of suffering, continuously going back and forth between the ten sufferings and eight difficult conditions.⁴¹

The description of the tortures here are of the standard kind already encountered and does not deviate significantly from the Buddhist version(s) on which they were based. It also shows that by this time, the Daoists had adopted the general Buddhist concept of transmigration through many lives. The 'Three Bureaus' of the text refers to the offices of the *Sanguan/Sanyuan* 三元, the officials of the departments of heaven, earth, and the subterranean water, which shows the high degree of bureaucratic integration of the Daoist pantheon in this relatively early text.

What the material in these texts shows is that by the 4–5th centuries Daoism had assimilated various salient aspects of the current Buddhist vision of the hells, and integrated them into their own beliefs concerning the after-life. Already at this time, it is clear that a Chinese netherworld staffed with a judicial bureaucracy and its instruments of punishments was emerging as a combined conceptual construct of both religions.

40 DZ 187.3.

41 Quoted with minor modifications from Kohn, *Cosmos and Community*, 201.

5 The 'New' Netherworld as a Compromise between Buddhism and Daoism

Having reviewed the Daoist view on the netherworld after the arrival of Buddhism in China, let us now turn to the developments which led to a conflation of the manner in which the two conceived of it. It goes without saying that the Daoist imprint on this development is considerable and may to some extent be seen in the expanding bureaucracy of the netherworld. The conflation of Buddhist and Daoist visions of the netherworld and its judicial proceedings *vis-à-vis* the souls of the dead took place on the backdrop of a rapidly expanding hell-literature which in a reciprocal manner was both shaped and at the same time shaping current beliefs and practices. While the majority of the pre-Buddhist concepts concerning the after-life and subsequent judgment of the souls of the dead underwent considerable changes and redefinitions, the Buddhist influence was never so strong as to abrogate earlier, indigenous belief-systems integrated into the Daoist nether-worldly imaginations from early on. Rather what the sources show us, especially from the 6th century onwards, is a heightened sense of conceptual compromises between the Buddhist and Daoist imaginations and beliefs in regard to the netherworld.

The manner in which this compromise unfolded is highlighted in a number of important Buddhist and Daoist scriptures as well as in the growing compilations of popular stories dealing with the extraordinary, then a new genre of traditional Chinese literature.⁴² Out of this rather abundant material emerges certain 'fix points' or structural models which throw light on how the 'new' netherworld was conceptualized in its conflated forms.

Recent work by Friederike Assandri in collaboration with Wang Ping on stele material reflecting on Buddhism and Daoism during the Nanbeichao period reveals that the traditional pre-Buddhist concept on the dual souls and related ancestral beliefs were still thriving towards the end of the 5th and early 6th centuries.⁴³ Moreover, belief in the *hun* and *po* souls is even frequently encountered in inscriptions which are otherwise mainly Buddhist in their conception and focus. This raises important questions as regards the development of belief in the after-life and may indicate that strict adherence and demarcations between the religions did not always apply, at least not on the level of lay-belief and worship. Of course we cannot rule out that the persistence of such

42 For a highly informative study on the role of ghosts and the unquiet dead in early medieval China, see Campany, "Ghosts Matter". See also Dien, "The Yüan-hun Chih" (Accounts of Ghosts with Grievances).

43 See Assandri and Ping, "Multiple Souls and Destinations".

references need not necessarily be proof of an existing integration of Buddhist and traditional Chinese beliefs regarding the dual soul and the after-life. It could simply reflect literary formality, i.e. an epitaph for the dead should include such-and-such tropes, rather than be taken as evidence for the continued existence of such beliefs. Nevertheless, the prevalence and persistence for this concept could indicate a long-lived pattern of belief, one which can also be seen as having infiltrated popular Buddhism.

Interestingly we find evidence that the Buddhists adapted rather quickly to the beliefs adhered to by the local traditions – also in relation to the netherworld – something which is increasingly apparent in the translations from the first half of the 3rd century, such as in the *Sumāgadhāvadāna sūtra*,⁴⁴ translated in 230 CE, and in the *Liudu jijing* 六度集經 (*Compiled Scriptures on the Six Perfections [Pāramitā]*),⁴⁵ translated slightly later in 251 CE. The latter contains the following statement:

After the end of one's life, the *hun* soul (*hunling* 魂靈) enters the hells of Mt. Tai, where they are burned and boiled [and subjected to] ten-thousand cruelties.⁴⁶

The idea that the spirits of the dead return to Mt. Tai where they are convicted and sent to their respective punishments, is of course rather similar to traditional Buddhist concepts concerning Yāma and his purgatory hells. The Buddhists can also be seen to have left out any mentioning of the *po* soul in their translations, logically enough, so as to avoid further, doctrinal inconsistencies. In any case these examples indicate that when Buddhism entered into deeper contact with Chinese culture, a development which was accelerated by the rapidly growing number of local adherents, there was a conscious effort to adapt Buddhist teachings and beliefs to indigenous religious traditions beyond the mere 'matching of meaning.' By incorporating Mt. Tai and its god into Buddhist cosmology, specifically in regard to netherworld beliefs, Buddhism

44 T. 129.2.

45 Translated in 251 CE by Kang Senghui 康僧會 (?–280).

46 T. 152.3, 24b. See also *ibid.*, 13b, etc. This scripture has essentially replaced Yāma's netherworld with Mt. Tai. The presence of this data is corroborated by the *Weisheng yuan jing* 未生冤經 (*Scripture on the Grievances of Those who are Not Yet Reborn*), a translation from 223–253 CE which has been attributed to Zhi Qian 支謙 (fl. 222–252). Cf. T. 507.14, 774c. See also T. 582.14, 966c. In the slightly later *Foshuo xiaozijing* 佛說孝子經 (*Scripture Spoken by the Buddha on the Filial Son*), the same sentence has been transliterated into colloquial Chinese. Cf. T. 687.16, 780b.

opened itself to both religious and cultural subversion. While this trend gradually made the religion more Chinese, and therefore also more successful, at the same time it caused it to deviate significantly from its Indian origins: a process which became more pronounced as time wore on.

In the material that developed under Daoist influence there were chiefly two centers or localities which became associated with the netherworld, Mt. Fengdu, which as we have seen, first became important in relation to the Shangqing 上清 tradition,⁴⁷ and Mt. Tai, the time-honored stage for imperial worship of Heaven under the Han, under its own tutelary deity, Taishan Fujun.⁴⁸ In the course of the Nanbeichao a religious literature for both sites developed side by side. The idea of Mt. Tai as the *de facto* gate to the netherworld reflects the transposition and conflation between real and imagined localities and spaces, a characteristic feature of Chinese religion.

Mt. Fengdu's rise to prominence in late 5th century Daoism is illustrated in the important *Zhen'gao* 真誥 (Declarations of the Perfected), ca. 450 CE,⁴⁹ with its detailed description of cave-heavens and subterranean palaces on Mt. Luodu/Fengdu 羅酆山.⁵⁰ In this scripture, where the distinction between the cave-heavens, their palaces and the netherworld is somewhat blurred, the Buddhist Yāma makes his entry as a major divinity and lord over Xuanwu 玄武, the Daoist Sovereign of the North (*bei dadi* 北大帝).⁵¹ Moreover, in this anthology we find a series of primary and secondary officials and their functions enumerated. One of them, Yan Qingjia 炎慶甲 is cast in the scripture as the fearsome ox-headed demon guardian of the Buddhist hells.⁵² In a certain way

47 An account of the rise Shangqing tradition has been dealt with in detail by Strickmann, "The Mao Shan Revelations". See also the comprehensive study by Xiao Dengfu, *Liuchao daojiao Shangqing pai yanjiu* (Daoism during the Six Dynasties: A Study of the Shangqing School).

48 As the Lord of Mt. Tai figures among various deities in the *Taiping jing*, it is possible that his cult had already been absorbed into early Daoism. More research will have to be made to establish the extent and time when this took place.

49 DZ 1016.20. For a discussion of this work, see *The Taoist Canon*, vol. 1, 198–200.

50 DZ 1016.20, 579a–588a. The fifth section concerns Fengdu 豐都, the world of the dead. One of its sources appears to have been a work known as the *Fengdu ji* 豐都記 (*Records of Fengdu*), evidently a pseudo-geographical chronicle on the netherworld. It has now been lost.

51 DZ 1016.20, 579b.

52 DZ 1016.20, 580b. While this shows considerable knowledge of Buddhist beliefs and practices on the part of the compiler/author, it also reveals that by this time, a certain symbiotic relationship between the two religious traditions prevailed. Not necessarily on the practical, every-day level, but certainly on the textual and conceptual levels.

this listing may be taken as an early attempt at structuring the bureaucracy of the netherworld, thereby anticipating the later rise of the Ten Kings which eventually became fixtures in the combined Buddhō-Daoist hells. Interestingly, we here find Mt. Tai, with its god Lord Taishan, as constituting a neighboring, subterranean territory to Fengdu. Moreover, this other location constitutes a sort of ‘front office’ where the spirits of the dead must first go to ‘be processed.’⁵³

The implications of this data is, that around 500 CE we begin to see how Daoist and Buddhist beliefs and concepts were becoming increasingly conflated, resulting in the emergence of a netherworld reflecting elements from both religions, i.e. the Buddhist hells and the Daoist cave-heavens. In accordance with earlier Chinese concepts and beliefs, the netherworld appeared as a sort of inverted world of the humans, complete with territories, special jurisdictions, palaces and courts. It also shows the Buddhist Yāma cast as a Daoist god within a textual context which was otherwise representative of a newly developed Daoist orthodoxy, based on the vision of Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536),⁵⁴ the important and influential Daoist prelate and author.

From the Buddhist side the Buddhō-Daoist compromise concerning the netherworld comes to the fore in a variety of scriptures, including the apocryphal *Yanluo wang dong Taishan jing* 閻羅王東泰山經 (*Scripture on Yāmarāja of the Eastern Mt. Tai*), which was evidently produced in a Buddhist context during the second half of the 6th century.⁵⁵ The conflation of the two figures can be reasonably well-documented in contemporary Buddhist sources belonging to the Tiantai School 天台宗. One of the earliest Buddhist references in which King Yāma and Taishan Fujun occur together with the entire retinue of minor hell-officials and other subterranean functionaries is in the *Shou pusa jie yi* 受菩薩戒儀 (*Ritual for Receiving the Bodhisattva Precepts*),⁵⁶ a ritual text ascribed to the monk Huisi 惠思 (515–577), traditionally considered the founder of the

53 DZ 1016.20, 579c.

54 Additional information on him may be found in Strickmann, “On the Alchemy of T’ao Hung-ching”.

55 It is mentioned among the apocryphal scriptures in both the *Zhongjing mulu*, cf. T. 2146. 55, 138c; as well as in the *Da Zhou kanding zhongjing mulu* 大周刊定眾經目錄 from the reign of Empress Wu 武 (690–704). Cf. T. 2153. 55, 473b. One, fragmented manuscript in the Stein Collection may be related to or derived from this text. See S. 1924. For some reason Osabe Kazuo failed to note the existence of this significant, apocryphal scripture in his otherwise important, pioneering study, Yoshitoyo and Soymie, “Tōdai mikkyō ni okeru Emma Ō to Taisan fukun” (Yāmarāja and the Lord of Mt. Tai in Esoteric Buddhism during the Tang).

56 See ZZ 1085.59.

Tiantai School.⁵⁷ In this source all the divinities of the netherworld are to be invoked including Yāma, the Heavenly Prince, Taishan Fujun, the god of the subterranean prefectures, Siming 司命, Silu 司祿, the Lads of Evil and Good Fortune, the lesser officials of the netherworld, the General of the Five Paths as well as the Messengers of Disease.⁵⁸ Moreover, a highly interesting piece of evidence occurs in the *Fahua jing chuanji* 法華經傳記 (*Records of the Transmission of the Lotus Sutra*),⁵⁹ compiled during the mid-Tang, but evidently containing earlier material. Here we read how the god, i.e. Taishan Fujun, introduces himself by boldly stating, 'I am Taishan Fujun, Yāmarāja.'⁶⁰

This trend is also corroborated by Buddhist apocrypha, such as the *Foshuo jingdu sanmei jing* 佛說淨度三昧經 (*Scripture on the Samādhi of Pure Salvation Spoken by the Buddha*),⁶¹ dating from the middle of the Nanbeichao, in which the order of command in hell is given. Having enumerated the various hells and their respective tortures. The text states:

These things fall under the Five Officials (*wuguan* 五官), who in turn fall under Yāma, who [again] fall under the resort of the Buddha. . . . The dead belong under hell with its Five Officials, who are in charge of the controllers of the records of life-span (*si lu ming* 司錄命). [All] resort under the god of hell, who is called Yāma.⁶²

The Five Officials we encounter here are not originally Buddhist, but would appear to have been developed from a minor Daoist god, the Spirit general of the Five Paths (Wudao shenjiangjun 五道神將軍), and so are the controllers of the netherworld's records, Siming 司命 and Silu 司祿.⁶³ These examples afford us a good insight into the way the staff of the netherworld grew as the result of Buddhο-daoist interaction.

57 It is in my view debatable whether Huisi was actually the author of the text in question due to certain internal features. However, it certainly appears to pre-date the *Scripture on the Ten Kings*, and may conceivably have been written around 600 CE or shortly thereafter, i.e. between the death of Zhiyi 智顛, (538–597) and before the Tiantai fell out of grace with imperial powers at the time of the founding of the Tang in 618 CE.

58 ZZ 1085.59, 351a.

59 T. 2068. 51.

60 T. 2068. 74b.

61 ZZ 15.1. Attributed to Baoyun 寶雲 of Yangzhou 楊州 in the Sui catalogue, *Zhongjing mulu* 眾經目錄 (*Catalogue of All the [Buddhist] Scriptures*). Cf. T. 2148.55, 213a.

62 T. 2148.55, 370a–b.

63 For a now somewhat outmoded study of this pair of minor god-officials, see Soymié, "Notes d'iconographie chinoise".

Interestingly there are also Buddhist accounts, such as the story about the Sui 隋 (581–617) monk Xingjian 行堅 (fl. early 7th cent.) who enters the netherworld of Taishan, where he beholds the judicial courts there and their horrors. Apart from the changed location, and the fact that we have a Buddhist monk in the Daoist or rather Chinese netherworld, the over-all concepts governing the manner in which the proceedings of the hells are envisaged are essentially the same as found in the traditional accounts associated with King Yāma.⁶⁴

These examples reveal that at least in the Buddhist context, there was a phase in the development of the netherworld and its tribunals, where Yāma and Lord Taishan occur as one and the same Buddho-Daoist character. Moreover, as we have seen previously, their respective territories in the netherworld, tend to blend in the popular imagination.

One important factor leading to the full-fledged conflation of the Buddhist and Daoist netherworlds, the emergence of a more or less unified vision, was the impact of Buddhist apocryphal literature. I have already signaled the importance of this material, but would like to stress its singular importance for bridging the Indian Buddhist conceptual world with that of the local traditions. The Buddhist apocrypha in Chinese should, at least partly, be understood as a sort of ‘tailor-made’ religious literature: something which was designed to convey certain religious themes and issues of special relevance to the lives of the people, and which at the same time reflected their primary, spiritual concerns. It should therefore come as no surprise that apocryphal scriptures dealing with *karma* and how to avoid rebirth in the three evil states of existence, including rebirth in the hells, are especially prominent. Moreover, many of these constructed texts reflect a hybrid Buddho-Daoist value system. As we have already seen, a good many of the Daoist scriptures dealing with the netherworld that appeared towards the end of the Nanbeichao increasingly address Buddhist issues. Directly or indirectly, these texts, which were already influenced by Buddhist concepts and imagery, in turn informed the production of the growing Buddhist apocrypha. The presence of Buddhist scriptures during the late Nanbeichao pertaining to the netherworld and karmic retribution is evident in the Buddhist catalogues. Here we find references to a number of scriptures that are no longer extant, including the *Lunzhuan wudao zuifu baoying jing* 輪轉五道罪福報應經 (*Scripture on the Retributions in the Turning Wheel of the Five Destinies’ Punishments and Blessings*),⁶⁵ the *Zhu da diyu guobao jing*

64 Cf. *Song gaoseng zhuan* (*The Song Accounts of Famous Monks*), T. 2061.50, 862a-b.

65 It is not extant, and was probably an apocryphal scripture. It is referred to in the Sui dynasty compilation *Lidai sanbao ji* 曆代三寶記 (*Record of the History of the Three Jewels*), T. 2034.49, 117b.

諸大地獄果報經 (*Scripture on the Fruits of Retribution in All the Great Hells*),⁶⁶ and the *Feiye baoying jiaohua diyu jing* 罪業報應教化地獄經 (*Scripture on the Retribution for Evil Karma and Instructions in Transforming the Hells*)⁶⁷ just to mention a few. While some of these may have been translations from some form of Sanskrit, it is almost self-so that many were apocryphal in nature.

6 Early Imagery of Yāma's Netherworld in China

Although there is not much evidence to be gleaned from among the extant examples of material culture concerning the way Yāmarāja's netherworld was imagined, we are nevertheless graced by a few interesting cases worth looking at in closer detail. This is not the place to go into a more comprehensive discussion of this material, but for good measure let us review what it may tell us.

The first example to interest us here, is a fragmented engraving on a stele, namely the *Fan nuzi zaoxiang bei* 樊奴子造像碑 (Image Stele made by the Slave Woman Fan) from 532 CE of the Northern Wei (fig. 8.1).⁶⁸ The engraved illustration shows Yāma seated in a pavillion on the right, flanked by two attendants. He wears the regalia of a bodhisattva or god. To his right a demon-like figure is engaged in the torture of a suspended soul. The left part of the illustration shows the Great Spirit of the Five Paths seated on a high stool holding a rod in his right hand. The scene in front of the official is partly rubbed away, but it would appear that five rays (the Five Paths?) shoot out from beneath him. The inscription clearly refers to both Yāmarāja as the main figure in the illustration as well as the Great Spirit of the Five Paths.⁶⁹ In doing so it of course unites both Buddhist and Daoist imagery and concepts concerning the netherworld.

The second example is a wall-painting, found in cave no. 127 at the Buddhist cave-complex of Mt. Maiji 麥積山 in eastern Gansu 甘肅 province.⁷⁰ Although the interpretation of the motif of this wall-painting is open to discussion, it

66 Not extant. See *T.* 2034.49, 117c.

67 *T.* 2034.49, 117b.

68 See Zheng Wen and Zhang Fang, "Diyu guannian de bentu hua yu cao de diyu jingbian tu" (Views on the Netherworld in Chinese Culture and Early Representations of Hell in Scriptural Tableaux).

69 For a brief discussion of the text of the stele, see Liu Shufen, "Wu zhi liushi ji Huabei cun de fojiao xinyang" (Buddhist Beliefs as Reflected in Inscriptions from Huabei xianguan during the 5th to 6th Centuries), 521.

70 A detailed description of this cave can be found in *Maiji shan shiku*, 201–218. However, the painting is not identified here as being a representation of the netherworld. Cf. *ibid.*, 202–204.

does appear to represent a stylized prospect of the netherworld with the hall of Yāma in the center surrounded by the customary wall with towers and gates (fig. 8.2) through which runners come and go.⁷¹ As the cave itself has been dated to the Western Wei 魏 (535–556), it is logical to conclude that the same dating applies for the painting in question. Whether or not the wall-painting in question was in fact meant as a representation of the courts of the netherworld, structurally and conceptually it tallies rather well with the descriptions we have reviewed previously. The netherworld as depicted here is essentially a duplicate of the yamen of a district magistrate in the human world, and much of what goes on there, i.e. the judicial proceedings, including the arrests effectuated by police in the form of runners, as well as the tortures, are not much different.

The third example, and also the most detailed so far, is an engraved illustration from the base of a shrine, the rubbing of which is presently kept in the collection of the Beijing University library.⁷² It depicts the tribunal of Yāma with the king presiding behind a table under a canopy. He is assisted by a pair of minor figures, one on either side. Before Yāma we see the images of the unfortunate ones reborn in hell wearing the characteristic cangue and fetters. Below them are depictions of real as well as imagined animals, including dragons and unicorns (*qilin* 麒麟), probably indicating the various, unfortunate modes of rebirth (fig. 8.3). As has been discussed above, the obvious judicial nature of Yāma's court is clearly underscored by the way in which the scene has been composed with the souls arranged in order before the king's table.

Contemporary Daoist representations in material culture of the netherworld are scarce, and virtually non-existing until well into the Song period.⁷³

When taken together these examples not only reveal a certain progression in the way the netherworld was conceptualized during the mid-6th to mid-7th centuries, but it also indicates how relatively close the imagery based on the written sources was being followed up by the production of religious art. That being said it is also abundantly clear that the hell imagery with the tribunal of

71 The identification of this wall-painting with the tribunal of Yāma can be found in Zheng Wen and Zhang Fang, "Diyu guannian de bentu hua yu cao de diyu jingbian tu," 14.

72 For one of the first studies on this material, see Zhang Zong, "Chu Tang Yanluo tuxiang ji kejing: yi Qi Shiyuan Xianling zaoxiang bei tuoben wei zhongxin" (Concerning the Image of Yāma and Scripture Carving of the Early Tang dynasty: With Focus on the Stele Rubbing of Qi Shiyuan's Inscription at the Xianling Mausoleum).

73 See Karetzky, "A Scene of the Taoist Afterlife". It should be noted that this article does not really concern itself with the netherworld, but rather with ideals concerning immortality.

the netherworld reflects a cultural compromise between Indian Buddhism and Chinese culture, most notably represented by Daoist concepts.

7 The Role of Popular Stories in the Construction of the Netherworld in China

Towards the end of the Nanbeichao period we find rebirth in the hells, and in particular those dealing with returning souls from hell, as a major theme of popular tales.⁷⁴ One of the earliest such accounts can be found in the *Luoyang qielan ji* 洛陽伽藍記 (*Records of Luoyang's Monasteries*)⁷⁵ written around 550 CE. It features a story about the Buddhist monk Huiyi 慧嶷 (n.d.), who returns from the dead with an account of the court of King Yāma and the officials of the netherworld. From the information provided by this story, we learn that Yāma is the only sovereign or hell-king mentioned. Moreover, the over-all picture given is that of a Chinese judicial court rather than one based on Indian concepts. Among other things the text mentions that the houses in the netherworld are all black and that demon-runners were escorting the sinners condemned by Yāma through a black gate leading to the prisons and torture. The black gate in the wall surrounding the hells would appear to be the same structural fixture which we have encountered in the standard Buddhist accounts. One which later appears frequently in the hell-iconography of the late Tang and onwards. This example shows that by the mid-6th century, the hell was increasingly taking shape in accordance with Chinese cultural norms. In fact the only Indian element still preserved in the story, is that of King Yāma himself.

By the beginning of the Tang dynasty, when a combined Buddho-Daoist conceptualization of the netherworld had become standard, related stories began to proliferate. Probably the most important collection of such stories is

74 There are a number of important studies on this interesting genre of traditional, Chinese literature including Company, "Return-from-Death Narratives" and Gjertson, "Rebirth as an Animal"; idem, "The Early Buddhist Miracle Tale"; idem, *Miraculous Retribution*. For later perspective see also Bai Huawen, "Taishan dongyue – Diyu – Fengdu cheng" (Mt. Tai of the Eastern Peak – Hell – the City of Fengdu). The issue of the netherworld in China and its role in popular literature is dealt with in albeit rather journalistic in style, the author demonstrates a good understanding of the relationship between Buddhist and Daoist imaginations for the construction of the netherworld. Moreover, the article points to a number of useful, primary sources not encountered elsewhere.

75 T. 2092.51. See also Jenner, *Memories of Loyang*. Note that Jenner has misread the name of Huiyi as 'Huining'.

the *Mingbao ji* 冥報記 (*Records of Retribution in the Netherworld*),⁷⁶ by Tang Lin 唐臨 (600–659), which contains a whole array of accounts of the netherworld.⁷⁷ Not only do these stories show how the hell was being transformed into a Chinese bureaucratic tribunal of the netherworld, they also reveals to what extent King Yāma himself underwent a radical transformation from an Indian god into a Chinese judge similar to the manner in which he appears in the story from *Luoyang qielan ji*.⁷⁸

The judicial halls of Mt. Tai are also described in a story about a certain Sui Renqian 陸仁禱 found in the *Mingbao ji*. Here it is told how this man, who did not believe in ghosts and spirits, used to meet an official accompanied by fifty retainers on the road in the course of a ten-year period. One day the official addresses Sui and informs him of his identity. It turns out that he is in fact the ghost of a man, who lived under the Western Qin 秦 (385–432) kingdom, but that he now serves as a *changshi* 長吏, i.e. a senior official, in the ghostly state of Linhu 臨胡國, a netherworld realm under the administration of Mt. Tai. Again we find the idea of the netherworld as a mirror image of the conditions on earth.

Later in the account when Mr. Sui is sick and about to die, he learns from a spirit that the reason for his untimely death is because he is wanted on the staff of the prefectural office beneath Mt. Tai. Since Mr. Sui does not want to give up his earthly life he is told that he must journey to Mt. Tai to plead his case in front of Taishan Fujun. In order to go there he is told to go to the temple at the earthly Mt. Tai, turn to the east and cross over a small mountain range. On the level ground beneath this range is the capital of Taishan Fujun. However, he is also told that the documents connected with his post on the staff of the bureaucracy are almost drawn up, and only if he accepts to pay for the painting of a Buddha image on the wall of a named temple, will the documents will destroy themselves. Sui has this done, the documents are destroyed and he thus escapes being promoted on the ghostly staff beneath Mt. Tai.

Here we are told how the more qualified among the dead, are being selected to serve in the Heavenly Bureaucracy (*tiancao* 天曹), and sometimes even have to die prematurely in order to fill a vacant post. The conceptual proximity

76 T. 2082.51.

77 As many of these stories take place during the Nanbeichao period, we must surmise that they – at least partly – reflect beliefs from that period. For a comprehensive study of this work, see Gjertson, *Miraculous Retribution*.

78 See Fan Jun, “Tang dai xiaoshuo zhong de Yanluo wang” (Yāmarāja in Short Stories from the Tang Period: The Chinese Transformation of an Indian Hell Spirit).

between the functioning of the otherworldly bureaucracy and that on the worldly plane is of course evident throughout the text.

Later in the story the spirit official Jing, explains to Mr. Sui the details concerning rebirth in the Six Destinies (*liudao* 六道). According to the spirit not one in ten thousand men attains rebirth in heaven, however several tens will attain rebirth in the realm of men. Likewise those who go for rebirth in hell also constitute several tens. However, rebirth as animals and ghosts/demons⁷⁹ would seem to account for the largest proportion of those who are reborn, although the text is not specific here. The staff in the bureaucracy of Mt. Tai consists of ghosts, of which there are many kinds organized according to some sort of graded system.⁸⁰

Following the imparting of this information Mr. Sui asks Jing, the ghostly official:

The memorials and sacrifices [carried out] by Daoists, do they have effect or not?" Jing answered, "As for the Daoists, the Emperor of Heaven (*tiandi* 天帝) is in charge of the administration of the Six Destinies, and they are called the Heavenly Bureaucracy. King Yāma is like a god, and the Lord of Taishan is [like] a Secretary of State [in the human world]. The Recording Spirits of the Five Ways are like all the officials of the [six] ministries. Likewise, the kingdom in which I serve, is like the great prefectures [in China]. Each time somebody is entangled in some problem, the Daoists sends petitions (*zhang* 章) asking for blessings, which are received in the Heavenly Bureaucracy. It sends the document down to king Yāma saying: "On such and such a day, in such and such a month, we received such and such [a petition] stating such and such. [Make certain] that it correctly exhausts the principle without allowing excessive wrong to be committed." Yāma then receives the [document] and respectfully carries out [its order] in the same way one would respect an [official] decree. [If the petition] is unprincipled (*wuli* 無理), then there will be no escape [from punishment], but if injustice has been done then a correction of it will certainly be given.⁸¹

This story contains several points to merit our interest. First of all it is interesting to encounter the Emperor of Heaven. It shows that already prior to

79 They are referred to as *gui*. Undoubtedly they are thought of as a kind of *preta*, or "hungry ghosts".

80 *T.* 2082.51, 792c–93b.

81 *T.* 2082.51, 93b.

the Tang a well-defined concept of a heavenly bureaucracy lorded over by a superior god was in place. Of course this type of belief is more reflecting of Daoist and popular notions than by those of Buddhism. Secondly, the story unities both traditions in so far as we have here Yāma serving as an official in the netherworld together with the Lord of Taishan under the command of the Heavenly Bureaucracy. Moreover, Yāma's role is similar to that of a lower-ranking official in the Heavenly Bureaucracy, a function even susceptible to influence from Daoist petitions. Interestingly the account also allows for mistakes in the transmission of bureaucratic documents, whereby the operation of the law of *karma* in the traditional Buddhist sense becomes suspended.

8 New Development of the Hells and the Rise of the Cult of Kṣitigarbha

The rise of the cult of the bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha signals the beginning of a new phase in beliefs concerning the netherworld in China. While the figure of Kṣitigarbha is encountered relatively early in the corpus of Buddhist scriptures translated into Chinese, where he appears as one among the group of Eight Great Bodhisattvas, i.e. as a secondary interlocutor, and not with a scripture and or a specialized teaching of his own. However, towards the end of the Nanbeichao period and the early Sui dynasty (581–617) this situation changed dramatically.⁸² In the following centuries Kṣitigarbha would rise as a major Buddhist savior on a par with Avalokiteśvara, and compete with him for the position of the primary savior of those who are reborn in the hells.⁸³

As far as is known, the first Buddhist scripture to focus on the cult of Kṣitigarbha, is the *Daśacakrakṣitigarbha sūtra*,⁸⁴ or perhaps better, the *Dacheng daji Dizang shi lun jing* 大乘大集地藏十輪經 (*Mahāyāna Great Collection of the Ten Wheels Scripture of Kṣitigarbha*), said to have been translated by an unknown person in eight rolls during the Nanbeichao period, but which may

82 For a detailed study of the Kṣitigarbha cult in Tang China, see Ng Zhiru, *The Making of a Saviour Bodhisattva Dizang*.

83 There can be little doubt that the popular story of Buddha's disciple Maudgalāyana descending into the hells to save his mother had a considerable impact on the creation of Kṣitigarbha as a savior for those undergoing torments in the netherworld. Cf. Teiser, *Scripture of the Ten Kings*, 112–143. Moreover, it should not be overlooked that Kṣitigarbha is also cast as a Buddhist monk rather than a bodhisattva, something which in my opinion reflects directly on the close thematic relationship between the two figures.

84 T. 410.13 and T. 411.13. A synopsis of the scripture can be found in Ng Zhiru, *The Making of a Saviour Bodhisattva Dizang*, 29–35.

actually date from the Sui dynasty, and a redacted and expanded version in ten rolls ascribed to Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664) from the middle of the 7th century.⁸⁵ While this scripture has Kṣitigarbha as its hero, it does not concern itself overly much with the hells *per se*, which may therefore indicate that the bodhisattva's role as a liberator from the torments of the netherworld had not been fully developed at this stage in his career.⁸⁶

Perhaps the most significant scripture of the Kṣitigarbha cult is the *Dizang pusa benyuan jing* 地藏菩薩本願經 (*Scripture on the Original Vows of the Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha*).⁸⁷ Because of its great importance in Chinese Buddhism and seminal influence on the development of the lore surrounding the Buddhist hell in China, it makes sense to dwell on this scripture here. The *Dizang pusa benyuan jing* does not include any information on the later so important Ten Kings (*shiwang* 十王), but has a series of twenty, named demon kings (*guiwang* 鬼王) as attendants to Yāma, the King of the Netherworld. In fact this scripture is the first of the Chinese Buddhist apocrypha which provides a more detailed description of the staff in the bureaucracy of the netherworld. Only some of these demon-kings can be found in the earlier canonical literature, others are clearly of Chinese origin.⁸⁸ In any case, their appearance in the text would seem to reflect the contents of earlier scriptures with information on the netherworld, including apocrypha such as the *Foshuo jingtu sanmei jing* 佛說淨土三昧經 (*Buddha Speaks the Scripture on the Pure Land Samādhi*).⁸⁹ The *Scripture on the Original Vows* refers to the 'Six Paths (*liudao* 六道)' of rebirth, rather than the earlier and more common usage, *wudao* 五道, i.e. Five Paths.⁹⁰ This alone indicates that the scripture post-dates the Nanbeichao.

85 For a discussion of the date and possible provenance of this scripture, see Ng Zhiru, *The Making of a Saviour Bodhisattva Dizang*, 225–228. Although the author does not commit herself fully, she indicates that the scripture may be a Chinese forgery of the late 6th century.

86 Kṣitigarbha also appears in the *Mahāvaiṣṭyasamṅgīyā sūtra* T. 397.13, 384a. However, also here the connection with the netherworld and its torments are only mentioned in passing. For a synopsis of this scripture, see Ng Zhiru, *The Making of a Saviour Bodhisattva Dizang*, 36–41.

87 T. 412.13. Translation falsely attributed to Śikṣānanda (fl. late 7th –early 8th cent.), 29–35. A brief discussion including a summary of the scripture can be found in Wang-Toutain, *Le Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha en Chine*.

88 T. 412.13, 784c–785a.

89 No longer extant. Fragments in the form of quotes can be found in a variety of texts. Cf. e.g. T. 2123.54, 177c; T. 1770.38, 261c; ZZ 1658.88, 435c, etc.

90 T. 412.13, 778b, 779b, 780b, etc.

Despite the prominent appearance of both Kṣitigarbha and Yāma in the scripture, there is not much information on the topography of the hell, beyond what we have already learned from earlier Buddhist scriptures describing the various forms of torment. The primary objective of the *Scripture on the Original Vows* appears to instill fear and trepidation in the hearts of the believers, so as to prevent them from committing evil *karma*. In addition, it features discourses on various forms of karmic expiation including filial piety, the cultivation of good morals, the transference of merit (*huihuan gongde* 迴環功德), i.e. how relatives of the dead may perform good deeds on their behalf and through a ritual transfer the karmic merit to them as a means of aiding in their salvation.⁹¹

The opening and closing sections of the *Scripture on the Original Vows* are slightly odd, i.e. they do not conform to those we encounter in standard translations of Sanskrit *sūtras* into Chinese. *Hun* souls 魂神 appear more than once in the *Scripture on the Original Vows*. Moreover, the discussion of filial piety in the scripture would seem to reflect Chinese norms rather than Indian ones. Both indicate that we are not dealing with a *bona fide* Indian *sūtra*, in the sense that it does not transmit Indian beliefs, but rather those common to Chinese culture.

What is perhaps most important as regards questions of authenticity, the *Scripture on the Original Vows* does not appear in any of the Tang Buddhist catalogues.⁹² To this we may add that all the fragmentary manuscript-copies of the scripture as found at Dunhuang date from the 10th century according to recent research.⁹³

The fact that the *Scripture on the Ten Kings* is neither mentioned nor is its contents directly referred to in the *Scripture on the Original Vows*, would seem to indicate that it was composed later. Given the great popularity and importance of the *Scripture on the Ten Kings*, it would indeed be strange – even incredulous – if it would not have been somehow reflected in the material found in the *Scripture on the Original Vows* had it been composed earlier. Hence, it is in my view rather unlikely that the latter should be the more recent of the two apocryphal scriptures.

In addition to the major texts in the cult of Kṣitigarbha, there are several other ones which are of less importance from the perspective of the netherworld. They include the *Foshuo Dizang pusa tuoluoni jing* 佛說地藏菩薩陀羅尼經 (*Scripture Spoken by the Buddha on the Dhāraṇī of the Bodhisattva*

91 On the transference of merit, see Sørensen, “Optional Causality”.

92 Nor is it to be found in the *Koryō Tripitaka*.

93 Cf. Wang-Toutain, *Le Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha en Chine*, 79–80.

Kṣitigarbha),⁹⁴ a spell scripture which does not provide much information on neither Yāma nor any of his co-judges. There are also a number of *Kṣitigarbha*-related scriptures and ritual texts among the Dunhuang manuscripts.⁹⁵ They include the apocryphal scripture *Foshuo Dizang pusa jing* 佛說地藏菩薩經 (*Scripture on the Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha Spoken by the Buddha*)⁹⁶ and a ritual text, the *Dizang pusa shizhai ri* 地藏菩薩十齋日 (*The Ten Fast days of the Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha*).⁹⁷ Most of this material dates from the end of the Tang.

There are also a number of miracle tales, mostly post-dating the Tang, of which the *Dizang pusa xiang lingyan ji* 地藏菩薩像靈驗記 (*Records of Numinous Responses from Images of the Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha*)⁹⁸ is the most important. The fact that it only contains one story set in the pre-Tang period, indicates that the cult of *Kṣitigarbha* did not come under way until well into the Tang.

Interestingly and despite *Kṣitigarbha*'s prominent appearance in the popular apocryphal scripture, the *Dizang pusa faxin yinyuan shiwang jing* 地藏菩薩發心因緣十王經 (*Scripture on Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva Giving Rise to the Circumstances of the Ten Kings*),⁹⁹ i.e. the *Scripture of the Ten Kings*, his role here would seem to be more of a symbolic icon than a major player. It is evident that the main characters/themes are the Ten Kings, the punishments they dispense and the techniques to avoid them including the various forms of 'bribes' recommended in the text (fig. 8.4). *Kṣitigarbha* remains strangely 'behind' the scene, something which may indicate that the scripture was composed before the cult of the bodhisattva was being grafted onto it. As the *Scripture of the Ten Kings* has been fully studied by Stephen Teiser, there is no reason to repeat what he has already done so well, except to add that there is nowadays a slightly better understanding of the sources and concepts, especially the apocrypha, on which it was based.¹⁰⁰

An important novel development in the formulation of the Buddhist netherworld, is marked by the sanctification of a fixed, mountain as the abode of *Kṣitigarbha*, namely Mt. Jiuhua 九華山 in present-day Anhui 安徽 province.

94 T. 1159B.20.

95 For the Dunhuang manuscripts relating to *Kṣitigarbha*, see Wang-Toutain, *Le Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha en Chine*, 307–310.

96 T. 2909.85.

97 T. 2850.85.

98 ZZ 1638.87.

99 ZZ 20.1.

100 See Kominami Ichirō, "Jū Ō kyō no keisei to Zui Tō no minshū shinkō" (The Formation of the *Scripture on the Ten Kings* and Popular Beliefs in the Sui and Tang Dynasties).

The exact, historical circumstances leading to this are lost in the mists of time, but the event has traditionally been associated with the legend of the Silla prince Chijang 地藏 (the Korean name for Kṣitigarbha) of the Kim 金 family, who is said to have arrived at the mountain during the first half of the 8th century.¹⁰¹

There can be little doubt that the creation of Mt. Jiuhua as the holy abode of Kṣitigarbha was part of the establishment of holy Buddhist mountains as pilgrim centers during the medieval period, and as such they constituted a Buddhist answer to the Five Holy March Mounts of Daoism. The outcome of this was, that with his own holy mountain as the center of his cult, Kṣitigarbha as salvific lord of the netherworld, would also imply that access to the hells would also be afforded – directly or indirectly – through the sanctuaries on Mt. Jiuhua. The concretization of the Buddhist netherworld as an actual, physical place made Mt. Jiuhua functionally similar to Mt. Fengdu. Whether it was actually the latter which gave rise to the concepts surrounding the former is not known. However, it is obvious that the belief systems governing them both were related, and perhaps more closely so than we shall ever know. In any case, the original India beliefs placing the netherworld below Mt. was gradually receding, making way for the new Buddhist hell.

9 Concepts of the Netherworld in Chinese Esoteric Buddhism

Although the phenomena commonly referred to as Esoteric Buddhism in China has a long history extending back to the early Nanbeichao, it is not until the 7th century that this form of Mahāyana takes shape in earnest as a distinct tradition.¹⁰² Moreover, not until the early part of the 8th century does Esoteric Buddhism manifest as a distinct school of Buddhism with its own institutions, own lineages of transmission and official recognition. Given the nature of Esoteric Buddhism with its emphasis on ritual strategies for spiritual achievement and salvation, it seems obvious that this tradition should also produce its own texts and methods for liberating the unfortunate spirits suffering in the netherworld. Although Esoteric Buddhism in its mature phase from the

101 The connection between Kim and Mt. Jiuhua is briefly mentioned in Ng Zhiru, *The Making of a Saviour Bodhisattva Dizang*, 216–219. Moreover, she believes that the establishing of the mountain as a cult site of Kṣitigarbha reflects developments that took place during the Ming dynasty. For an alternative account, which places this development earlier, see Yin Fu, *Zhongguo Dizang xinyang yanjiu yanjiu* (A Study of Ksitigarbha faith in China).

102 See Sørensen, “On Esoteric Buddhism in China”.

middle of the Tang was in many ways more faithful to its Indian origins than the by then more domesticated schools of Chinese Buddhism such as the Tiantai 天台, Jingtu 淨土 and Chan 禪, it did not prevent its proponents from adopting salient elements from the indigenous traditions, Daoism in particular. In fact, when dealing with concepts of the netherworld, we find that Esoteric Buddhism liberally appropriated elements from already current beliefs, which it integrated into its ritual system. Given the relatively extensive lore on the netherworld we find in Esoteric Buddhist texts, I shall here limit myself to one example, and let that serve as an introduction to this specific material.

The scripture in question is the *Yanluo wang gongxing fa cideng* 閻羅王供行法此等 (*Method of Making Offerings to King Yāma, Etc.*),¹⁰³ attributed to Amoghavajra (705–774), the great paragon of Esoteric Buddhism during the Tang.¹⁰⁴ In this ritual work we encounter the Lord of Taishan together with the Martial King of the Five Destinies 五道將軍王,¹⁰⁵ as well as the host of lesser officials and runners inhabiting the bureaucracy of heaven and earth (曹百司官, 官使 etc.).¹⁰⁶ There is also an interesting and early reference in the text to the use of *zhibi* 紙幣, i.e. paper money, found as part of the copious list of offerings to be used in the ritual.¹⁰⁷ Despite of being a minor scripture, the *Yanluo wang gongxing fa cideng* is an important example of how the cult of King Yāma and the medieval Chinese conception of the netherworld appear in an Esoteric Buddhist context. The scripture opens with the following:

The practitioner who wishes to cultivate this method should first know the conditions for the coming into being of the body of this King of Five Transformations¹⁰⁸ and his palace. As regards the five transformations they are, 1) Yāma, the Dharma King, which is his original name, 2) King of Death, 3) Shanheluo, King of the Land of the Yellow Sources,¹⁰⁹ 4) Duane,

103 *T.* 1290.21. Since the standard edition is based on a late Japanese manuscript copy, its date and authenticity remains uncertain. For further information, see *Mikkyō daijiten* (Comprehensive Dictionary of Esoteric Buddhism; hereafter *MDJ*), vol. 1, 174a.

104 For the life and achievements of this important monk, see Orzech, *Esoteric Buddhism in the Tang*.

105 *T.* 1290.21, 374a.

106 Cf. *T.* 1290.21, 375b.

107 *T.* 1290.21, 374a.

108 Probably referring to his ability to send of the spirits of sentient beings for new rebirths in the five destinies. Hence 'transformations'.

109 This of course recalls the classical Chinese, pre-Buddhist concept of the netherworld.

the Wrathful King,¹¹⁰ and 5) Daṇḍasa, the Wrathful King.¹¹¹ His original palace is located in the ground to the north of Mt. Cakravāla,¹¹² which is [identical] with the palace of the netherworld, and it is surrounded by fifty-thousand households. In the central hall of the palace is the Daṇḍa Standard,¹¹³ on the top of which there is a small wrathful face. The King (i.e. Yāma) always looks at its face in order to know whether peoples' in transgressions are light or heavy, or [whether they are] good or evil. When people have made heavy transgressions, a bright flame comes out of [the head's] mouth and in its brightness a black ruler gushes forth as a warning. When seeing this wooden tablet, he (i.e. Yāma) will know the family name and personal name [of the sinner-spirit], and having them recorded. And for those who have done good, a white lotus flower in bloom comes out of [the head's] mouth, its fragrance extending to and surrounding Taishan Fujun and the Martial King of the Five Destinies. Constantly it offers the King its advice so that he is able to determine good and evil [of those brought before him].¹¹⁴

There are several things to note here. First of all we learn that the netherworld is to the north of the ring of mountains surrounding Jambudvīpa. Furthermore it is described as an underground world complete with palaces and inhabitants. The latter description seems to be a recapitulation of the traditional Chinese concepts of the netherworld as a mirror of the human world. Then there is the Daṇḍa Standard, which informs Yāma of the *karma* of those spirits under

110 I.e. "Wrathful King Judging Sins".

111 I.e. the Wrathful, Staff-holding King. A direct reference to the *daṇḍa* staff, which in traditional Esoteric Buddhist iconography is Yāma's attribute. See below for further explanation.

112 This is the ring of mountains surrounding the continents of our world system according to traditional Indian Buddhist mythology. Cf. FDC, vol. 4, 3561a.

113 Cf. MDJ, vol. 3, 1572a–b; FDC, vol. 7, 6443. Interestingly the *daṇḍa* staff as an attribute of Yāma occurs prominently in the material relating to the *Mahāvairocana sūtra*, i.e. in the Esoteric Buddhist context. Cf. *T.* 853.18, 150a; *T.* 852A.18, 113c; *T.* 881.18, 340a, etc. Hence, it would appear that it found its way into Chinese Buddhist iconography via Esoteric Buddhism. In the *Yiqie jing yinyi* 一切經音義 (*The Meaning of the Sounds of all the Scriptures*), we read the following: "Daṇḍa pole [surmounted] with a human head. The commentary reads: Daṇḍa is Sanskrit. In Chinese it is called a 'pole' (*bang* 棒), or a 'staff' (*zhang* 杖). In the following it means the particular kind [of staff] held by Yāma." *T.* 2128.54, 545c. Incidentally this work was compiled by a monk affiliated with Esoteric Buddhism.

114 *T.* 1290.21, 374a.

interrogation, is a new and interesting addition to the lore of the netherworld which we have not encountered previously. The Daṇḍa Standard may be seen as a supplement to the magic mirror, as a new element which was introduced into the imaginations surrounding the netherworld with Esoteric Buddhism. Interestingly, this new feature did not gain a foothold in later Chinese representations of the netherworld, whereas it became a fixture in the Shingon Buddhist art of Japan.¹¹⁵

The only other primary divinities in the netherworld besides Yāma, are the Lord of Taishan and the King of the Five Destinies. These two latter gods, well-known from earlier scriptures of both Buddhist and Daoist provenance, as we have already seen. It is also noteworthy that this ritual text does not contain any reference to the Ten Kings, but retains a vision of the netherworld, which is more or less similar to those examples we have from the early Tang. However, it does feature Kṣitigarbha, albeit as a secondary figure, and moreover, provides numerous mantras and spells characteristic of Esoteric Buddhism. The absence of the Ten Kings as a group, would seem a strong indication that the *Yanluo wang gongxing fa cideng* was not written much later than the mid-to late 8th century.

The co-association of Taishan and Yāma, which we have seen before, is also evident in other Esoteric Buddhist material from the Tang. One example is provided by the *Azhaboju Yuanshuai da jiang shangfo tuoluoni jing xiuxing yigui* 阿吒薄俱元帥大將上佛陀羅尼經修行儀軌 (*Practice and Ritual Proceedings of the Great General Ātāvaka Yuanshuai Highest Buddha Dhāraṇī Sūtra*),¹¹⁶ a ritual text belonging to the cult of the important demon-general Ātāvaka. Both Yāma and Taishan are mentioned here in connection with a general description of the deities controlled by *dhāraṇīs* expounded in the *Ātāvaka sūtra*¹¹⁷ itself.¹¹⁸

The fact that the Ten Kings are not mentioned in the otherwise extensive list of deities and spirits contained in this scripture, which is said to be a translation by the important *ācārya* Śubhākarasimha (637–735), is another strong indication that they had not yet arisen as a fixed group by the first quarter of the 8th century.

115 Cf. e.g. representations of Yāma in the Dharmadhātu Maṇḍala and related paintings. See *Tenbu no shoson*, 83, 87, 121.

116 *T.* 1239.21.

117 *T.* 1239.21.

118 *T.* 1239.21, 195a.

10 Staffing the Netherworld: Yāma, Lord Taishan and the Ten Kings

As we have seen previously there were essentially two competing versions of the netherworld in China during most of the Nanbeichao period, a Daoist one and a Buddhist one. The former identified the netherworld mainly with Mt. Fengdu and only later did it appear as a sort of double or complementary world of Mt. Tai under the control of the Taishan Fujun. The Buddhist version had from the outset absorbed the cult of Mt. Tai as the abode of Yāma, to which in added concepts on the basis of beliefs and images evident in a number of canonical *sūtras* transmitted from India. This was later augmented by information, much of it influenced by Daoism, from a number of non-canonical scriptures. During the early Tang the Buddhist and Daoist visions of the netherworld became increasingly mixed-up and informed by mutual, conceptual borrowings.

Prayer-texts and prayer-spells concerning the netherworld and how to escape rebirth in the hells have been found in considerable numbers among the manuscripts from Dunhuang and includes a variety of material ranging from prayers, invocations, panegyrics and spells.¹¹⁹ In one category of such prayer-texts the entire Buddhist pantheon is invoked including Buddhas, bodhisattvas, *vidyārājas*, guardian-deities and lesser spirits. In at least two such prayer-texts, we find several gods associated with Daoism as part of the invoked deities. They include the Lads of Good and Evil, The Lord of Taishan, and even individually named demon-guardians of the Netherworld. Interestingly we find the Lads of Good and Evil duplicated in the two officials entitled Chaming/Siming 察明/司命¹²⁰ and Silu 司錄 respectively, and whom we have met with in earlier incarnations.¹²¹ In the listing of divinities in these texts, the Lord of Taishan appears right after Yāma, indicating the close conceptual affinity between them. At the time of the rise of the *Scripture on the Ten Kings*, both the Buddhist god of the dead, Yāma, as well as the Daoist Lord Taishan were included in the group of Ten Kings. Although variations exist, Yāma is in most cases still seen as the leader of the Ten Kings and Lord Taishan as simply one of the group.

Even though a combined Buddho-Daoist vision of the netherworld and its hells had already come about by the early Tang, this did not make the more

119 See *Dunhuang yuanwen ji* (Collected Prayer-Texts from Dunhuang; hereafter *Yuanwen ji*). Note that the way many of the prayer-texts are categorized and divided in this compilation is arbitrary and illogical.

120 'Investigator'. Obviously a variation of Siming.

121 Cf. *Yuanwen ji*, 407–408, 416–417, 563, 568, 574, 582.

distinct Buddhist or Daoist versions obsolete. Both continued to thrive alongside the increasingly common, unified visions. One Daoist example of this can be found in the *Yuanshi tianzun shuo Fengdu miezui jing* 元始天尊說酆都滅罪經 (*Scripture of Redemption from Sins in the Netherworld of Fengdu, Pronounced by the Heavenly Worthy of Primordial Beginning*).¹²² This work contains many similarities with the Buddhist *Scripture of the Ten Kings*, as well as material lifted from the cycle of Kṣitigarbha scriptures discussed above. Although its exact dating has eluded us so far, the scripture probably dates from the end of the Tang or early Five Dynasties Period.¹²³ However, it represents a vision of the hells which is by and large stripped of their more overt Buddhist trappings, although some vestiges, such as the Four Heavenly Kings as protectors, can still be found. The same can be said about the *Taishang yuanshi tianzun shuo Beidi fumo shenzhou miao jing* 太上元始天尊說北帝伏魔神咒妙經 (*Wondrous Scripture Spoken by the Heavenly Worthy of the Highest Commencement on the Divine Spells of the Northern Emperor for the Exorcism of Malignant Spirits*),¹²⁴ part of which deals with the exorcism of the demons from the Six Palatial Heavens of Fengdu.

By the late Tang the hellish departments under the Ten Kings were conceptualized in both sculptural art, in votive paintings, frescoes and illustrated manuscripts. Each department had its own distinct features and punishments, but they all centered on their respective king, who sat in a chair behind a high table surrounded by his impish and demonic minions. Evidence from this period indicate that hell-scenes were highly popular and were commissioned for temple buildings of both Daoism and Buddhism throughout the empire.¹²⁵

Graphic and detailed descriptions of the torments in the hells are also found in the *Kāraṇḍavyūha sūtra*,¹²⁶ a traditional Mahāyāna scripture which represents a relatively late dispensation of traditional Buddhist lore into China.

122 DZ 73.2. See also *The Taoist Canon*, vol. 1, 544–545.

123 This assessment is based on the fact that it, at least on the surface, appears to replicate certain elements of the *Scripture on the Ten Kings* which we know did not come about much earlier than 800 CE.

124 DZ 1412.34. Although this text is in all likelihood the product of the late Northern Song, certain parts can be documented as far back as the Tang. For additional information on this important work, see Andersen's entry in the *The Taoist Canon*, vol. 2, 1189–1191.

125 See for example, Ogawa Kan'ichi, "Emma ō engi kyō" (The Illustrated Sūtra of Yāmarāja); Michihata Yoshihide, "Tonkō bunkan ni miero shigo no sekai" (The Dunhuang Litterature and Its Vision of the World of the After-life); and Shi Shouqian, "Youguan Diyu Shiwang tu yu qi dongchuan Riben de jige wenti" (Some Questions Relating to the Tableaux of the Ten Kings of the Netherworld and their Eastern Transmission to Japan).

126 T. 1050.20. Translated in 983 CE during the early, Northern Song.

Since this scripture transmits what may be referred to as the standard Indian Buddhist model of the hells, a comparison with the earlier Chinese material affords us a clear idea of the extent to which the conceptions of the netherworld had been changed and modified in China. The *Kāraṇḍavyūha* provides us with few details on Yāma himself, as do the early Indian Buddhist sūtras, and also does not mention any other judicial figures except the assistant, minions of hell. There are also no structural elements of the netherworld to be found in this source. When seen in comparison with the elaborate netherworld with its ten tribunals and many officers, etc. we find when looking at the Chinese concepts of hell from the late Tang, it is clear just how much the latter has evolved and how much it had changed away from the original Indian model(s).

In the *Yanluo wang gongxing fa cideng* discussed above, we found the curious Daṇḍa Standard assisting Yāma in passing the correct verdict on those who appear before him. Other regalia or objects associated with the tribunal of hell is the Mirror of Karma (*yejing* 業鏡, alt. *yejing* 孽鏡¹²⁷),¹²⁸ which may have originated as a regalia or precious object of the gods inhabiting the Buddhist heavens (fig. 8.5).¹²⁹ In the context of the Buddhist hells it is described in one text as follows:

In the hall inside the court of the Wise King (*guangming wang* 光明王, i.e. Yāma), there is a great mirror on a stand. The mirror of the Wise King is called, 'Mirror of Purity, Rejecting Partiality.'¹³⁰

In the *Scripture of the Ten Kings* it is referred to directly as the 'Mirror of Karma (*yejing* 業鏡).' Here, however, the Daṇḍa Standard is not mentioned.¹³¹

Another instrument from the judicial chambers of the netherworld, which seems to have become a standard item for both Buddhist and Daoist

127 This latter term only occurs in the Chinese Buddhist material from the pre-modern period and its usage may therefore reflect a late development. Cf. eg. ZZ 1193.62, 520a, and ZZ 1173.62, 114a.

128 For a highly informative study of the Mirror of Karma with special focus on imagery, see Jiang Shoucheng, "Yejing xiao kao (A Brief Discussion of the 'Mirror of Karma')". Contains references to both Buddhist and Daoist primary sources.

129 The Mirror of Karma as a concept may have originated with the *Saddharmasmṛtyupasthāna sūtra*, in which it is said to be a precious object in the god Indra's possession, wherein the karma of all the gods may be seen. Cf. T. 721.17, 177c, 179a, etc.

130 ZZ 20.1, 405b.

131 ZZ 21.1, 408b.

representations of the netherworld, is the Karma Scales (*yecheng* 業秤).¹³² This is used to weigh the severity of the *karma* of those who appear before the judges of hell. As such is similar to the Mirror of Karma as a tool for establishing merit and de-merit. It first makes its appearance in the Scripture of the Ten Kings, where it is chiefly associated with the fifth king.¹³³ One tale found in the Tang compilation, *Hongzan Fahua zhuan* 弘贊法華傳 (*Widely Praising the Transmission of the Lotus Sūtra*),¹³⁴ similar in nature to the earlier ones referred to above, recounts how the dead appearing before King Yāma would have their *karma* weighed against two volumes of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra*.¹³⁵ While Yāma's Daṇḍa Standard in all likelihood reflects an Indian tradition, and in any case only occurs in the context of Esoteric Buddhism, both the Mirror of Karma and the Karma Scales would appear to have been Chinese inventions.

11 Later Buddhist and Daoist Developments Reflected in Material Culture

The conflation of the Buddhist and Daoist visions of the netherworld continued unabated into the Song and Ming periods with increasing vigor. This process finds its vivid expressions in the development of an elaborate 'hell literature' within both religions including lengthy, ritual manuals in some cases accompanied by visual representations. Important, representative ritual traditions in Buddhism and Daoism that arose during this period, are the 'Water and Land' (*shuilu* 水陸)¹³⁶ and the 'Universal Salvation' (*pudu* 普度)¹³⁷ respectively.

Even if the manner in which the netherworld and its hellish courts represents a marriage between traditional Buddhist ideas and concepts and that of Chinese culture broadly speaking, it is also clear that both Buddhism and Daoism maintained each their own version(s). In other words, while Buddhist and Daoist concepts were blended and mutually integrated as far as the overall imagery of the hells are concerned, both religions formulated their own,

132 For a study of this, in particular how it appears in representations of the netherworld, see Jiang Shoucheng, "Yecheng xiao kao" (A Brief Discussion of the 'Karma Scales'). Here is listed both Buddhist as well as Daoist primary sources.

133 Cf. ZZ 21.1, 409b; ZZ 20.1, 405a.

134 T. 2067.51. At least two Buddhist accounts of the netherworld of Mt. Tai can be found in this monumental work; one concerning Daochao 道超, cf. *ibid.*, 42c–43b, and that of a nameless monk, cf. *ibid.*, 44b–45a.

135 T. 2067.51, 42b.

136 See Stevenson, "Text, Image, and Transformation".

137 For a discussion of these rites, see Orzech, "Fang Yankou and Pudu".

related scriptures in which their respective, conceptual and structural language are in evidence.

During the Northern Song, the Daoist netherworld 'split' into two separate, yet mutually associated, traditions. The old one centering on Mt. Tai, which, as we have seen, had already become amalgamated with Buddhism during the Tang, and the hitherto mythical Mt. Fengdu, which was now trans-located to a concrete site in Sichuan province: a site which has remained more specifically Daoist in its religious context, although the physical imagery we find there obviously shares many similarities with standard Buddhist depictions of the tortures in hell.¹³⁸ The latter, in contradistinction to prevailing Buddhist notions, was conceptualized as a *de facto* city of the underworld, for which even pseudo-geographical maps were produced (fig. 8.6).¹³⁹

By the time the *Scripture on the Ten Kings* was composed and took its final form during the second half of the Tang, Buddho-Daoist concepts concerning the physical organization of the netherworld were already more or less in place. Despite the fact that traditional Buddhist literature, including the translations into Chinese, provides us with a detailed and structured layout of the physical dimensions of the netherworld, it would appear that these were rarely adhered to in Chinese culture *per se*. Certainly these sources were well-known to learned monks and lay-Buddhists with scholarly inclinations, and references to these occasionally appear in their writings. However, it was neither the traditional Buddhist format nor its associated conceptual structures, which made it to the mainstream of medieval Chinese beliefs concerning the netherworld. The 'finalized' netherworld consisting of ten departments, each of which was headed by a judge-king, and under whose authority a variety of punishments and sentences were meted out to the souls of those reborn here, represents a complete and full-scale compromise between salient features of Chinese judicial culture, and ancient concepts of the netherworld as the abode of the *hun* souls in combination with Buddhist concepts of karmic punishment in the hells. We may rightly speak of the existence of a netherworld which was both an expanded or augmented representation of earlier Buddhist, Daoist and Buddho-Daoist versions, and at the same time one which had become formalized but in certain ways one that had become greatly reduced. The stereotyped physicality of this developed netherworld is borne out in surviving examples of religious art from the Tang and later periods in particular in the illustrated books of the *Scripture of the Ten Kings* as found at Dunhuang.

138 See Chenivesse, "Fengdu".

139 *Wushang huanglu dazhai licheng yi* 無上黃籙大齋立成儀 (*Ritual Proceedings for Establishing Completion of the Highest, Yellow Register Great Feast*), *DZ* 508.9, 609c.

Daoist scriptures reflecting the influence of the *Scripture of the Ten Kings*, or perhaps better the unified vision of the netherworld as facilitated by that scripture, include, the *Yuanshi tianzun shuo Fengdu miezui jing* 元始天尊說酆都滅罪經 (*Scripture of Redemption from Sins in the Netherworld of Fengdu, Pronounced by the Heavenly Worthy of Primordial Beginning*),¹⁴⁰ where the dead person is brought before the Ten Kings and is having himself reflected in the Mirror of Karma.¹⁴¹ The Buddhist influence on this short scripture is apparent throughout and also features the period of seven-seven (*qiqi* 七七), forty-nine days, Yāma as the fifth king, etc. Another text, obviously a Daoist version of the *Scripture of the Ten Kings* is the *Difu shiwang badu yi* 地府十王拔度儀 (*Ritual for the Liberation of Those in the Subterranean Courter of the Ten Kings*),¹⁴² a *pudu*-type text, which features the entire conceptual imagery and system of belief similar to that of the Buddhist scripture down to the smallest detail.

In Sichuan, where the *Scripture of the Ten Kings* originated, we find numerous examples of sculptural groups with this iconographical theme in the post-Tang material.¹⁴³ In one example, sculptural group no. 84 at the site of Yuanjuedong 圓覺洞 in Anyue 安岳 county in Sichuan, shows a tableaux of the Ten Kings placed in two registers on either side of a central image of the savior bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha (fig. 8.7).¹⁴⁴ At the bottom, front of the group is a scene in which the Mirror of Karma is apparent. This scene in fact belongs to the department of Fifth King and shows the spirit of a dead person placed in front of the magic mirror which reflects his previous, evil deeds as a butcher of cattle. In this case the ten departments of the netherworld have been reduced to the barest structural and didactic elements; the images of Kṣitigarbha, the Ten Kings and the sinner reflected in the magic mirror. However, this minimalistic presentation nevertheless succeeds in conveying the essential message concerning the netherworld: Kṣitigarbha is the savior to whom one's payers may be directed, the Ten Kings preside and judge justly and the karma mirror reveals all impartially. Take care!

140 DZ 73.2.

141 Cf. DZ 73.2, 41a.

142 DZ 215.3.

143 See Zhang Zong, "Sichuan Mianyang Beishanyuan Dizang Shiwang kanxiang" (Niche Images of Kṣitigarbha and the Ten Kings at Beishan Temple in Mianyang, Sichuan). The Sichuan connection is also dealt with superficially in Ng Zhiru, *The Making of a Saviour Bodhisattva*, 147–157. For unknown reasons she fails to make use of the most recent studies on these sites.

144 For a more detailed discussion of this group and the context in which it is found, see Sørensen, *The Buddhist Sculptures at Yuanjuedong*.

A slightly later group at Mt. Shizhuan 石篆山 in Dazu 大足 depicts the same theme, but rendered in a manner that lacks the narrative element and is more monumental in scope.¹⁴⁵ Here Kṣītigarbha appears seated centrally in the sculptural group flanked by the Ten Kings, five to a side (fig. 8.8). There are no additional representations of the netherworld, and no overt references to the gods' judicial function beyond their formalized robes and accoutrements.

12 The Netherworld and Its Torments as Seen at Dafowan on Mt. Baoding

Before ending this excursion in the Buddho-Daoist netherworld I would like to discuss the concept of space as we see it unfolding in the sculptural tableaux of group no. 20 found at Dafowan 大佛灣 at the Buddhist cult site of Mt. Baoding 寶頂山 in Dazu (fig. 8.9).¹⁴⁶

In this formalized version of the netherworld, which focuses on the tortures, the bodhisattva Kṣītigarbha, thrones in the center of the upper level of the tableaux flanked on either side by the Ten Kings (fig. 8.10) each of which is seated behind his desk. Below this level are the vivid scenes of the punishments in the hells as a general place of torture disassociated physically from the departmental concepts relating to each of the Ten Kings. What links each king with a specific punishment associated with his office, is the dense, textual narrative carefully engraved into square, flattened areas on the cliff side.

The middle and lower registers of the tableaux are devoted to scenes depicting the various torments in the hells as well as scenes concerning what types of karmic behavior to avoid. All the scenes in the tableaux are accompanied by engraved tablets placed among the individual sculptural groups, a feature that is characteristic for nearly all the tableaux at Mt. Baoding.¹⁴⁷ An analysis of the text accompanying the hell tableaux reveals that it consists of passages from the apocryphal *Da fangguang huayan shi e pin jing* 大方廣華嚴十

145 For a description of the group, see Hu Wenhe, *Sichuan dao jiao fo jiao shiku yishu*, 101–102.

146 This site, which was recently added to UNESCO's list of world-heritage sites, has been the subject of many studies over the past two decades. A photographic survey of the sculptural groups dominating the site can be found in *Dazu shike diaosu quanji* (Complete Collection of the Stone-carved Sculptures of Dazu). For a study of the narrative and pedagogical aspects of the site, see Kucera, "Cliff Notes".

147 All the textual material at the site has been edited in *Dazu shike mingwen lu* (A Record of the Inscribed Texts in the Stone Carvings of Dazu; hereafter DSML), 150.

惡品經 (*Scripture with the Chapter on the Ten Evils of the Great and Extensive Avatamsaka*).¹⁴⁸

Despite the dominant position this scripture takes in the textualization of the tableaux, structurally and conceptually, group no. 18 represents a compromise between the vision of the *Scripture of the Ten Kings* on the one hand, and the *Da fangguang huayan shi e pin* on the other hand. The former provides the over-all, structural arrangement of the group while the latter is used to describe the individual sculptural groups in the lower section with their more intricate details of torments as well as the overt didactical dimension of the sculptures as such.

The didactic feature, which may be taken as the primary focus and purport of the tableaux, can be referred to as ‘pedagogics of horror,’ a phenomenon also known from depictions of hell in medieval Christianity. Not only do the images and their associated texts explain the cruel details of the punishments and endless tortures awaiting the soul of the sinner reborn in the hells, they also explain which acts of *karma* which lead to them, so that the spectator of the sculptures may be able avoid committing them (fig. 8.11). Thereby group no. 20 stands out as a two-fold inter-active space: Firstly as the space wherein graphic, punishment takes place, i.e. the physically structured hell placed in ascending tiers above and on face-level with the spectator. Secondly the group functions as a pedagogical space, a veritable classroom for Buddhist morals. The educational aspect of the lower strata of the group is further underscored by the image of a standing monk, thought to represent Zhao Zhifeng 趙智風 (1159–c. 1249),¹⁴⁹ the founder and master-mind behind the cult site. He is depicted standing in the midst of the tableaux (fig. 8.12). Zhao is depicted with his finger pointing in warning to the hells scenes around him. The text on either side of the monk’s image reads:

148 T. 2875. 85. Also known as the *Shi e jing* 十惡經 (*Scripture on the Ten Evils*). Although he did not investigate this scripture as such, Makita Tairyō did signal its existence in his pioneer study, *Gikyō kenkyū* (A Study of Apocryphal Scriptures), 388. For a recent study of the *Da fangguang huayan shi e pin jing*, see Hu Wenhe, *Sichuan dao jiao fo jiao shiku yishu* (The Art of the Daoist and Buddhist Stone Caves in Sichuan; hereafter SDFS), 307–315. See also Kucera, “Lessons in Stone”. A more complete and extended version can be found in her dissertation, *Cliff Notes*, 106–164.

149 Chen Mingguang, *Dazu shike kaogu yu yanjiu* (Studies in the Archaeology of the Stone Carvings in Dazu), 162–183.

Heaven's halls are vast, yet hell is [equally] wide;
 If one does not believe in the Buddha's words,
 How the mind is bound to suffer the consequences!

My path is to seek pleasure in the midst of suffering
 [In contrast], all sentient beings seek pain in the midst of pleasure.¹⁵⁰

The highly structured and visually detailed manner in which the sculptures of group no. 18 are presented makes the Baoding rendering of the Buddhist hells a showcase for Buddhist ethics in which text, image and pedagogics are merged into a single, powerful space. Although it certainly bears a Buddhist, conceptual stamp on it, chiefly due to the presence of Kṣitigarbha as its main image. Nevertheless, group no. 18 is essentially a non-sectarian tableaux in the sense that its message has a universal address beyond the narrow confines of traditional Buddhist ethics and doctrines. Any Chinese in the Southern Song, whether Buddhist, Daoist or Confucian, would surely recognize the intended over-all message to lead a life of goodness by avoiding doing evil and thereby appreciate the underlying moral implications of the tableaux. Even if the specific injunctions against the consumption of meat and alcohol are of course Buddhist.

One may argue that in the Baoding Hell tableaux, the topography of the netherworld has been reduced to structural elements or rather compositional unities, while at the same time letting the moral injunctions to take precedence in deciding the individual scenes. On the one hand this was most likely done in order to stress the horrific nature of the tortures there, i.e. by letting the sculptural groups function as a form of negative propaganda, and on the other it was the result of the heightened sense of textuality which pervades the entire tableaux. of the law of *karma* in the traditional Buddhist sense becomes suspended.

13 Conclusion

An explanation of the conflation of the Buddhist, Daoist and earlier Chinese conceptions of the netherworld into a unified vision, a shared, infernal space, can not be explained by the idea of 'family resemblance,' at least not at the outset. The original discrepancy between the two (or three systems, depending on

150 DSML, 150.

how one reads the rise of Daoism in relation to earlier formations of Chinese religion), both in terms of cosmology, doctrine and more general patterns of belief, was in fact so sharp that it is rather surprising that the two would ever meet, influence each other and eventually merge along the lines we have been reviewing here. No, something else must have been at work in order for this to have happened. Now, what could that have been?

When seen from the socio-religious perspective, the Chinese netherworld does indeed reflect a unified vision. In other words, it is at the same time an example of shared culture as well as a shared sense of culture. With this follows shared signs and therefore shared images. As far as it is possible to distinguish Buddhist, Daoist and pre-Buddhist Chinese elements from each other, something which I have tried to do here mainly on the basis of textual analysis, we find that the combination of these overlapping systems of belief, document a gradual collapse of their respective schemata, even of schematic grids, templates, even spaces. Something which was not only a necessity in order for the belief system to achieve success in medieval China, but something which was destined to happen. Given the universal, trans-religious dimension of death in human societies, and its over-riding import in traditional Chinese society in particular, the netherworld could never become the province of one religious tradition only. Hence, the Chinese netherworld with its complex, multifarious hells and evolving, complex after-life beliefs, emerged as a conceptual compromise between religious beliefs current in pre-Buddhist China, those of Indian Buddhism, which were rather rapidly modified to match the local tradition, and finally Daoism, in which bureaucratic and imperial metaphors played such a persuasive role.

The lore concerning Mt. Tai is of special significance in relation to the Buddhist conception of hell from early on. In the light of what we have endeavored to show in the preceding, belief in the mountain as the place of the netherworld entered Chinese Buddhism well before we find solid, textual evidence for the existence of a matching cult in Daoism. It is even possible that the replacement of Yāma's netherworld with that of Mt. Tai, as evident in the early Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures, may indicate that Daoism borrowed these beliefs from Buddhism, or at least may have been heavily influenced by them in the creation of their own version(s) of the netherworld. Certainly, the Buddhist claim to Mt. Tai as hell, precedes that found in any Daoist scripture.

In order for the Chinese Buddhists to arrive at the type of hell we have described as being in place by the early Tang, they would have had to skip certain Indian concepts and imagery, which did not conform so well with Chinese culture. Indeed, this is what they did, and on several levels at that.

The presentation of the netherworld and its tribunals mirrors the worldly judicial system in medieval China, with its focus on punishment rather than justice is more than obvious in the sources we have presented here. It also offers a clear example of how Indian Buddhist concepts and imaginations were modified in order for the religion to accommodate certain traditional, Chinese institutions and their related concepts. In other words, standard Buddhist beliefs relating to the netherworld underwent a considerable bureaucratization as part of the religion's inculturation in China. That being said, it does not mean that severe punishment including torture were not part of traditional Indian culture. It certainly was, and there can be little doubt that the on-goings in the Buddhist hells, to some extent reflect a traditional treatment of prisoners and criminals. However, most of the Buddhist scriptures of Indian origin which discuss the netherworld and its hells, are primarily concerned with karmic retribution and Buddhist morals in a wider sense, whereas the Chinese hell is a bureaucratic nightmare, a place of punishment and torture as an expression of the power of the heavenly bureaucracy. Cause and effect which operates as something akin to a natural law in traditional Buddhism, is here replaced with punishment as a means of political control. Moreover, while the law of *karma* is often invoked as an excuse for the punishments in the courts of hell, as we have seen, it is often suspended in practice pending bureaucratic foul-up and judicial complications.

Here I have not gone into the discussion of bribery or ways of influencing the bureaucracy on behalf of deceased relatives, as is a common practice in the Chinese relationship with the officials of the netherworld. It is almost self-evident that the creation of a special currency for the netherworld, i.e. the so-called hell-money, came about as a way of bribing the officialdom there. Above we have seen how this currency already came about during the second half of the Tang. Also it is documented in the illustrations of the *Scripture of the Ten Kings* as recovered from Dunhuang. Likewise I have only touched briefly on the otherwise interesting and tell-tale issue of bureaucratic obstruction and mismanagement in the tribunals of the netherworld. The very concepts that officials in hell may bureaucratically delay the progression of a soul in the netherworld, not mention loosing a vital document pertaining to an individual's correct rebirth, speak their own clear language.

In a recent article Niel Schmied has argued that a radical shift took place in regard to eschatology towards the end of the Tang dynasty, especially regarding the understanding of *karma* and rebirth.¹⁵¹ In the light of the material I have presented here, I am not so certain that such a view can be easily maintained.

151 Schmid, "Revisioning the Buddhist Cosmos".

The development leading towards a well-defined Sinitic concept of the after-life, especially the speculations focusing on the netherworld as the primary, albeit temporary, destination for the spirits of the dead, reflects a long and protracted, cultural and religious process lasting almost half a millennium before a standard, if not universal model was in place as evidenced with the creation of *The Scripture of the Ten Kings* and its derived texts. It certainly did not come about suddenly or abruptly, as in the case of something reaching critical mass, but was the result of a carefully, crafted development, which not only crossed formal religious boundaries, but certainly also cultural ones. Moreover, the congealing of the imagery of the netherworld into something akin to a shared vision, did not end with the Tang or Five Dynasties period, but continued well into the Song and beyond as documented by the rise of the *Shuilu* complex of ritual texts and the proliferation of *collectana* of popular narratives. Added to this were the continued development of netherworld imagery and pictorial representations, of which numerous examples can be found in both Buddhist and Daoist contexts from the early pre-modern period.

As far as the location of the netherworld goes, whether conceptualized as a physical reality or an imagined one, both Daoism and Buddhism subscribed to descriptions and functions which not only overlapped, but which also subscribed (and still subscribes) to the essentially same imagery and patterns of belief. Moreover, the role played by the netherworld and its bureaucracy within the larger, structural frameworks of both religions, in particular as they relate to one of the most important and enduring problematics in Chinese culture, namely how to deal with death, meant that the two traditions were traversing much the same path. Hence, on the over-all conceptual level the two religions were partaking of and operating within a space that was more or less identical and which addressed similar concerns, even though their respective spiritual frameworks and deeper doctrinal structures were in many cases far apart.

References

Abbreviations

BMFEA	<i>Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Art</i>
CEA	<i>Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie</i>
DSML	<i>Dazu shike mingwen lu</i>
DY	<i>Dunhuang yanjiu</i>
DZ	<i>Zhengtong Daozang</i> (36 vols., <i>Wenwu</i> edition)
EBTEA	<i>Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia</i>
FDC	<i>Foguang da cidian</i> , 8 vols.

MDJ	<i>Mikkyō daijiten</i>
SDFSY	<i>Sichuan dao jiao fo jiao shiku yishu</i>
T.	<i>Taishō shinshu daizōkyō</i>
ZFWF	<i>Zangwai fo jiao wenjian</i>
ZZ.	<i>Dainihōn zokuzōkyō (90 vols., modern edition)</i>

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Figures



FIGURE 8.1 Fan nuzi zaoxiang bei. After Zheng Wen and Zhang Fang.

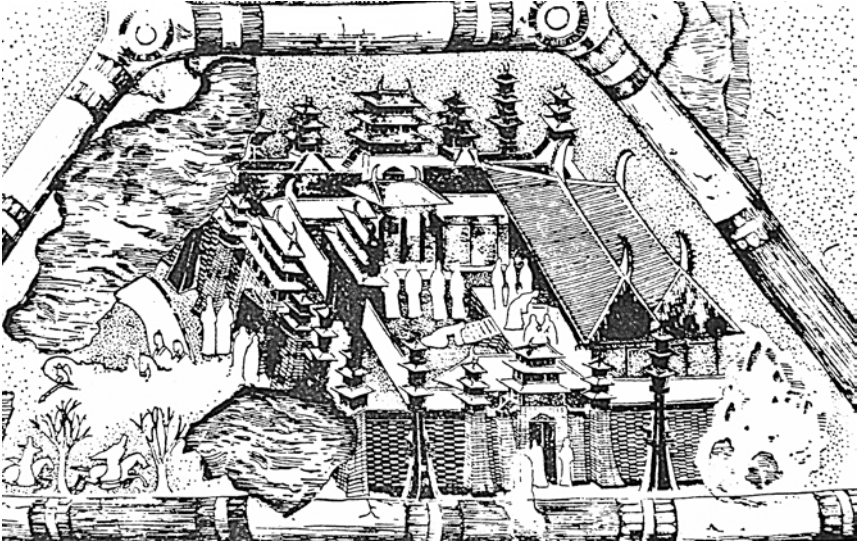


FIGURE 8.2 Wall-painting of Yāma's court. Mt. Maiji, Cave no. 127. After Maiji shan shiku.



FIGURE 8.3 Qi Shiyuan zaoxiang bei. After Zheng Wen and Zhang Fang.



FIGURE 8.4 *Ransoming the spirits from hell.* Illustrated Ten Kings Scripture, Mogao Caves, P. 2003R^o. COURTESY BIBLIOTHEQUE NATIONALE, PARIS/IDP.



FIGURE 8.5 *Yāma as Daṇḍasa the Wrathful King.*



FIGURE 8.6 *Magic Chart of Mt. Fengdu. DZ 508.9, 609.*



FIGURE 8.7 *Group no. 84. Yuanjuedong, Anyue, Sichuan.*

PHOTO: HHS.



FIGURE 8.8 *Group no. 9. Kṣitigarbha and the Ten Kings. Mt. Shizhuan, Dazu.*

PHOTO: HHS.



FIGURE 8.9 *Group no. 20. Tableaux of the Netherworld. Mt. Baoding, Dazu, Sichuan. Photo.*



FIGURE 8.10
Detail of group no. 20, Mt. Baoding.
PHOTO: HHS.



FIGURE 8.11 *Detail of group no. 18, Mt. Baoding.*
PHOTO: HHS.



FIGURE 8.12 *Detail of group no. 20, Mt. Baoding.*
PHOTO: HHS.

Locating the Dialogue: On the Topology of the Setting in Medieval Religious Colloquies

Knut Martin Stünkel

1 Introduction

The following paper deals with the topological aspect of religious contact within medieval religious dialogues. With reference to the works of Nicholas of Cusa, Ramon Llull, and Gilbert Crispin I intend to clarify the importance of settings of the dialogues for the process of philosophical notion-building. These notions as general concepts are the philosophical reaction to a challenge that is made by the experience of diversity of religious traditions.¹ They are produced by and reproduce a contact situation. As such, they gain overall importance for the KHK's approach to the Dynamics of the History of Religion which intends "to see contact as a constitutive process in which cultural units in general and religious formations in particular form."²

In order to underline the importance of the general concept's place, the authors discussed here take great care to elaborate a suitable setting for the dialogue. This topology is a specific praxis of developing religious language, respectively a language of 'religion'. There is a wide variety of settings with reference to the levels of intellectual dignity imaginable and executed by authors in both late antiquity and medieval times. The dialogue might take place in

1 Concerning the role of the experience of diversity, and especially the diversity of truth-claims, for the emergence of medieval religious dialogues Hildebrandt, "Mittelalterliche Religionsdialoge," 33 states: "Alle diese Dialoge sind aus der Erfahrung von Religions- und Kulturbegegnungen hervorgegangen, die im Falle des Islam immer einen kriegerischen Charakter hatten, im Falle des Judentums zwar zumeist friedlich verliefen, aber ebenfalls als Bedrohung wahrgenommen wurden. Bedrohlich war nicht allein die militärische Gefahr, sondern die konkurrierenden Wahrheitsansprüche, die nicht nur die eigene Religion (religio), den eigenen Glauben (fides), sondern auch die eigene Gesetzesordnung (lex) und damit die eigene Lebensform (vita) bedrohten. Letztlich stand in diesen Religionsgesprächen nichts geringeres als die Legitimität der mittelalterlichen politischen Ordnung zur Disposition, wenn die eigene Theologie nicht als wahr erwiesen, oder zumindest gegen Kritik verteidigt werden konnte."

2 Krech, "Dynamics in the History," 70.

a garden promenade on the way to a harbor (in Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*), on a visionary crossroads (in Abelard's *Collationes sive dialogus inter philosophum, iudaeum et christianum*), in some paradise-like garden inhabited by personified intelligence, it might even be led to a conclusion "in caelo rationis", but it may also take place at some pub for example, not to forget the elaborated beautiful beach scenery in Minucius Felix's *Octavius*.

The process of locating in the field of philosophy claims for a certain logic, i.e. a topology which is developed in the course of the colloquy. This topology I shall define as follows: The experience of diversity in a situation of contact requires a theoretical answer that is basically a philosophy of language. This philosophy consists of the formation of general concepts that may serve as medium, respectively a model form of mutual understanding (*logos*). To achieve this goal the medieval thinkers reflect on the place of such concepts within the process of understanding that is, the intellectual level, where such concepts might function in a unifying way (*topos*). Now the setting of a dialogue gives hints to the level of reflection, the problems of the real world might be solved by means of philosophy.³ In short, locating religion(s) is a three-dimensional enterprise, containing not only horizontal, but also vertical and intensifying processes.

2 **Nicholas of Cusa: *De pace fidei***

The topological process of notion-building can be most suitably observed in the philosophical works of Nicholas of Cusa.⁴ With regard to religion, his work *De Pace Fidei* from 1453 is of course the most fruitful source. *De Pace Fidei*, if not in the purest sense a dialogue, is at least a colloquy where representatives of different religious traditions are participating and are given voice to a certain extent.⁵

Now what can be learned from the setting of this work? In my opinion, Nicholas is stage-managing the introduction of a certain general notion of religion which is characterized by its mandatory qualities. He does so by means of

3 Borgolte, "Christen und Juden," 373, accordingly describes the topology of religious dialogues as part of the 'spatial turn' in Religious Studies respectively as the identification of hidden structures behind the given places and spaces, which can be analyzed by means of communication theory.

4 For a more detailed discussion of Cusanus' as well as of Llull's ideas see my monograph: Stünkel, *Una sit religio*.

5 In the following, I quote the edition by Klibansky and Bascour, Nicolai de Cusa, *De pace fidei*.

a certain topology, which is indicated in the dialogue's setting. Therefore, the setting of *De pace fidei* is definitely worth a closer examination.

So as to analyze this topology I shall concentrate on the 'paratextual' elements that frame the 'real' philosophical discussion in the introduction and the end of the text, where the setting as such is exposed. As it becomes clear, the prevailing dialogical passages of the work are only possible under a certain precondition that is given in the framing sentences, which serve as a setting.

With regard to mere quantity of words, this emphasis on the setting might slightly seem exaggerated. In order to get to the philosophical considerations as soon as possible, the setting is treated very cursorily both by literature and seemingly also by Cusanus himself: A man hears of the cruelties performed during the Conquest of Constantinople, relates them to the diverse religious rites and has a certain vision how to achieve a lasting peace among religious traditions. This vision is related in the following. In fact, the introductory lines are very condensed, but, nevertheless, worthwhile of being studied in some detail. The work starts as follows:

Fuit ex hiis, quae apud Constantinopolim proxime saevissime acta per Turkorum regem divulgabantur, quidam vir zelo Dei accensus, qui loca illarum regionum aliquando viderat, ut pluribus gemitibus oraret omnium creatorem quod persecutionem, quae ob diversum ritum religionum plus solito saevit, sua pietate moderaretur.⁶ (Because of the cruel deeds just recently performed by the Turkish ruler in Constantinople, some man, who had visited the place some time before, inflamed with favour to God, begged the Creator of All in his clemency to ease the persecution that because of the diverse religious rites, raged more than ever.)

It is quite important to notice that Nicholas takes his point of departure from every-day life, but not in the sense that a story is told that might happen just anywhere, that is a story with many unspecified and mere topical descriptions. His point of reference is temporally and spatially (and thus unambiguously) qualified by a historical event. At the beginning of the text the topological method is introduced by reference to a certain concrete place ("apud Constantinopolim"), which is the reason for the following considerations. The location contains two aspects, which in interrelation characterize the following discussion. Nicholas, on the one hand, deals with the conquest of Constantinople and the cruelty of the Sultan of the Turks there and, on the other hand, the related experiences of an unnamed man who is especially agitated by this event for he has

6 Nicolai de Cusa, *De pace fidei*, h VII, 3, 3–8.

been in the city some time before. This man is usually identified as Nicholas himself, who had been to Constantinople in 1437/1438 in order to guide the Byzantine delegation to the council at Ferrara, which aimed at the unification of the Greek and the Latin Churches. This journey as well contained the birthplace of his main philosophical idea of the *coincidentia oppositorum*.⁷ The concrete place that serves as a reason for the following discussion is therefore emotionally qualified in a threefold and intensifying way: first as the bulwark of Christianity being conquered, second by the extraordinary cruelty of the Conqueror (lacking the clemency of a proper victor), and third by the fact that the visionary himself has a personal (if not a philosophical) relation to the place where these agitating things happen.⁸

The events now are in fact e-motional: they set the place in motion by means of a vision. Right from the beginning, it is taken for granted that the concrete event had its reason in the different religious traditions (“ob diversum ritum religionum”). So the theme of diversity is explicitly mentioned by Cusanus in his text as a main source of the philosophical challenge: for God himself knows that a multitude cannot exist without diversity: “Sed nosti, Domine, quod magna multitudo non potest esse sine multa diversitate.”⁹ The concrete place as an emotional one is thus qualified by diversity, and what is more, by a diversity where the elements are considered to be contrary and therefore tend

7 That places have high significance to Cusanus becomes clear in his report on his philosophical awakening experiences as it is related in his *Epistola auctoris ad dominum Iulianum cardinalem*, which concludes his major work *De docta ignorantia*, h 1, 163, 263, 6–11: “Accipe nunc, pater metuende, quae iam dudum attingere variis doctrinarum viis concupivi, sed prius non potui, quousque in mari me ex Graecia redeunte, credo superno dono a patre luminum, a quo omne datum optimum, ad hoc ductus sum, ut incomprehensibilia incomprehensibiliter amplecterer in docta ignorantia per transcendens veritatum incorruptibilium humaniter scibilium.” (Receive now, Reverend Father, the things which I have long desired to attain by various doctrinal-approaches but could not – until, while I was at sea en route back from Greece, I was led (by, as I believe, a heavenly gift from the Father of lights, from whom comes every excellent gift) to embrace – in learned ignorance and through a transcending of the incorruptible truths which are humanly knowable – incomprehensible things incomprehensibly.) All English translations of Cusanus' works in the following are by Jasper Hopkins (*Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Nicholas of Cusa*).

8 For a closer examination of the challenge the Conquest of Constantinople provides for Cusanus see Stünkel, “Provozierte ‚Religion“

9 Nicolai de Cusa, *De pace fidei*, h VII, 5, 11–12. (But you know, O Lord, that there cannot be a great multitude without much diversity.).

to fight each other: diversity that turns against itself and seeks to unify on the basis of its prevailing standpoint, that is, by eliminating the other.¹⁰

This is the state of affairs made painfully obvious by the conquest. Here, no satisfying solution seems to be possible. So Nicholas turns the reader's attention in a different direction. The place of visible agonal diversity and intensifying affection now is left by a certain sudden rupture, which happens to the unnamed visionary and, as such, changes his viewpoint dramatically. Accordingly, the precondition for the following considerations is a severe topological shift:

Raptus est enim ad quondam intellectualem altitudinem, ubi quasi inter eos qui vita excesserunt examen huiusce rei in condilio excelsorum, praesidente Cunctipotenti, ita habitum est.¹¹

Now this rupture produces an important spatial difference of the self-destructive diversity manifested by the cruel conquest of a well-known city. As a consequence, the description, *whence* the visionary is taken, seemingly remains in the thereabouts: *ad quondam intellectualem altitudinem*. But regarded from the philosophical perspective, the location is, however, very precisely determined: it is the realm of the intellect, where the following events in literal sense *take* (their proper) *place*. But this visionary shift is by no means exclusively achieved by the visionary, but rather happens to others as well who are somehow qualified for it. It is not only the unnamed visionary who is shifted

10 Biechler, *The Religious Language*, 81, describes Cusanus' intense encounter with diversity with regard to *De pace fidei* and opposed to his earlier work *De concordantia catholica* as follows: "Cusanus' age was the first since classical times to be confronted so dramatically with the reality of cultural and historical diversity and it was thus challenged not only to account for that diversity but also to respond to it in some constructive way. *De concordantia catholica* is a remarkable early expression of Nicholas' awareness of historical and cultural differences but it was an awareness not yet tempered by the maturing experiences of Basel's later days, the trip to Greece, the realism of the legation year. The naïve Neoplatonic 'hierarchy of being', that legacy of an earlier, simpler culture, seemed to furnish suitable symbols of order especially when coupled with the practical skills of an active lawyer-politician. Cusanus' abandonment of his *De concordantia catholica* signified a simultaneous surrender of its neatly structured cosmos and its comfortable religious certitudes."

11 Nicolai de Cusa, *De pace fidei*, h VII, 4, 8–10. (For he had been caught up to an intellectual height where, as it were, in the presence of those who have departed from life a hearing on this matter – [a hearing] in the council of the loftiest beings and und the presiding direction of the Almighty was being held.)

to the intellectual level but also the representatives of the different religious traditions, who later are transferred by means of a rupture from the realm of diversity to this location: “Et mox in conspectus Verbi comparuerunt, scilicet viri graviores mundi huius, quasi in extatim rapti [...]”¹² The prevailing scholars of religion are suddenly shifted to the higher level of understanding due to their quality as experts of their own prevailing tradition.

Accordingly, this place, the location proper of the dialogue, is characterized by certain dynamics, above all by the suddenness of the rapturous shift. In the case of the visionary himself, it is reached by the emotional force of concrete knowledge, which leads to the intellectual scenery. This dynamic is strongly stressed by the shortness of the description and the urgency to react to a dangerous challenge suggested by the reference to the Conquest of Constantinople. One might even think that the reported rapidity of the production of the text – it is claimed that Cusanus has begun it the very moment the news of the fall of the City reached Western Europe – underlines the dynamics that characterizes the location of the discussion.

But there are other aspects of this dynamic movement which Cusanus puts into place here, that have to be mentioned. The rupture necessary to take the unnamed visionary to the location ‘it is not at last the place of the deceased’ underlines the difference of levels of intellectual experiences. By rupture his mind is directed towards some intellectual height leaving the level of diversity and the prevailing logic behind. But contact is not altogether lost and this is guaranteed by the visionary himself. So, nevertheless, his mind relates the two levels to each other. This relation is necessary, for the problem discussed on this intellectual level seems to be the same as on the level of diversity: the heavenly conference is held because ‘for reason of religion’ weapons are drawn and others are forced to convert: “[...] ob religionem plerosque in invicem arma movere et sua potentia homines aut ad renegationem diu observatae sectae cogere aut mortem inferre.”¹³ So the problem of diversity is (mentally) transferred to an intellectual level which is, on the one hand, supervised by the *cunctipotens*, that is the One as a unifying force (*cunctus/potens*) and where, on the other hand, the problem is discussed by guardians and messengers who are quite different from human beings existing on the level of diversity. Nicholas

12 Nicolai de Cusa, *De pace fidei*, h VII, 10, 9–10. (And straightway there appeared in the presence of the Word the most judicious men of this world – as if caught up into ecstasy.)

13 Nicolai de Cusa, *De pace fidei*, h VII, 4, 12–14. ([...] that for the sake of religion very many [men] were in armed conflict with one another, and that by physical force men were either compelling [their fellow men] to renounce their long-adherent-to religious sect or were inflicting [upon their fellow men] death.)

describes them as follows: “non enim habitu ut homines sed intellectuales virtutes comparebant.”¹⁴ It becomes apparent that the names and descriptions are carefully chosen by Cusanus in order to clarify his topology. It is not simply God and angels who are present, but more specifically: On this level, intellectual powers/virtues are discussing under the guidance of (processual, i.e. unifying) unity. The human mind is drawn to this discussion and is transcending its way of dealing with diversity on the lower level.

Now, indeed, for a naïve realistic view, this location of the discussion with angels, the holy dead and even God himself present, seems to be rather a matter of exalted vision than a matter of relevance on the level of diversity and concrete human suffering. It is therefore not by chance that Nicholas describes it that way. But the location to him is far from being irrelevant.¹⁵ This is made clear by the address of the first (archangel) speaker in his invocation of the *rex universitatis*. Man is capable of understanding on this higher level because of a certain quality of his: “[...] possit aliquando ad te omnium creatorem oculos mentis attollere [...]”¹⁶ So understanding is indeed a matter of vision that is, whether man can use the eyes of his mind – his intellectual capacities – in a proper way or not, and this proper way is directed towards the unifying force as the creator of all things. It must be mentioned that at the same time *De pace fidei* was written, Nicholas composed another work that deals precisely with these topics, eyes and seeing, titled *De visione Dei*. This title conveys a double meaning which fits to the topology in *De pace fidei*. To direct one’s eyes to God intellectually means to be seen by God as the unifying One.

This gives us a hint to answer the question how the intellectual capacities are used properly. In Nicholas’ philosophy, human reason is not more, but also not less than a reflection of divine action in creating things. This reflective potential makes his dignity. In his work *Idiota de mente* Cusanus states: “Conceptio divinae mentis est rerum productio; conceptio nostrae mentis

14 Nicolai de Cusa, *De pace fidei*, h VII, 4, 18–19. (For, in form, they did not appear to be men but to be intellectual powers.)

15 Flasch, *Nikolaus von Kues*, 340, points at the philosophical relevance of the scene despite its mystic flavor: “Der Autor macht uns zu Ohrenzeugen der Reden Gottes, des Vaters, des göttlichen Wortes und des Wortführers der Völkerengel. Doch die mystisch-traditionelle Sprache darf uns nicht täuschen. Es sind die *Philosophen* der Völker, die ‚entrückt‘ werden. Und ihr Auftrag besteht darin, argumentativ die Einheit der Religion in der Vielfalt der Religionen reduktiv herzustellen, eine Übereinstimmung nicht nur der mystisch Begnadeten, nicht nur der Christen, sondern aller Menschen, *omnium hominum*.”

16 Nicolai de Cusa, *De pace fidei*, h VII, 5, 7–8. ([...] can at some time raise the eyes of the mind unto You, the Creator of all [...]).

est rerum notio.¹⁷ Being a *deus secundus*,¹⁸ man analogously creates notions which approximate the truth by transcending themselves. Creating notions, therefore, is operatively enabling transcendence. Reasonable action is working with and on notions in order to create a new basic system of notions.

So in *De pace fidei*, the famous and notorious formula *una religio in rituum varietate*, which is considered to be the key phrase of the whole work, has a certain precondition. The idea of the one religion in the diverse rites shows the basic notion 'religion' as a sign of the basic unity of creation at work in object language. In the key passage of *De pace fidei* the archangelic speaker articulates the most urgent claim for a unified notion of religion which does not unify the diverse rites but unites them to concordance. Thus, the archangel states conditions for a scientific method of religious studies: "saltem ut sicut tu unus es, una sit religio et unus patriae cultus."¹⁹ The notion of religion itself is, therefore, a sign of the divine unity and a means where divine unity can be represented by the reflective human mind. The notion, gained upon this intellectual level, has a jussive function.

The topology of the notion thus becomes important for the dialogue guided by this notion. For the communication of the several participants of the great assembly is not a direct and unmediated dialogue among the different religious traditions, which is likely to become self-destructive on the level of diversity, but between 'The Word' (*verbum*), Peter and Paul on the one side and the representatives of the different traditions on the other. Accordingly, the different traditions communicate indirectly, i.e. mediated by a paramount level of reflection. The prevailing ideas of the different traditions are firstly

17 Nicolai de Cusa, *Idiota de mente*, h v, 109, 72, 6–7. (The Divine Mind's conceiving is a producing of things, our mind's conceiving is a conceptualization of things.).

18 In his *De beryllo*, h x1/1, 9, 7, 1–6, Cusanus relies on Hermes Trismegistus as the main witness of this idea: "Quarto adverte Hermetem Trismegistum dicere hominem esse secundum deum. Nam sicut deus est creator entium realium et naturalium formarum, ita homo rationalium entium et formarum artificialium, quae non sunt nisi sui intellectus similitudines sicut creaturae dei divini intellectus similitudines. Ideo homo habet intellectum, qui est similitudo divini intellectus in creando." (Fourthly note that Hermes Trismegistus states that man is a second god. For just as God is the Creator of real beings and of natural forms, so man is the creator of conceptual beings and of artificial forms that are only likenesses of his intellect, even as God's creatures are likenesses of the Divine Intellect. And so, man has an intellect that is a likeness of the Divine Intellect, with respect to creating.).

19 Nicolai de Cusa, *De pace fidei*, h VII, 7, 14–15. (If so, then at least let there be one religion – just as You are one – and one true worship of You as Sovereign.).

transcended by the dialogue with the three persons and then unified by means of the general notion. It is, thus, a communicated communication.

The notion of religion appears on the higher level of intellectual insight. This is made perfectly clear by Cusanus in his concluding remarks of the whole work, which is a vision of the future guided by the intellectual vision. It is the heaven of reason where the notion of religion is relevant: "Conclusa est in caelo rationis concordantia religionum modo quo praemittitur."²⁰ So it is not religion that can be found on the level of diversity but different rites. Moreover, it would be a striking example of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness²¹, mistaking the abstract for the concrete, to search for religion on a different than the intellectual level, which is characterized by the rational activity of general notions. Religion is the intellectually reflected, that is conceptual, unity of God that transcends diversity. This idea provides the general notion with a mandatory quality that is also characterized by Cusanus at the end of his work: "Et mandatum est per Regem regum ut sapientes redeant et ad unitatem veri cultus nationis inducant, et quod administratorii spiritus illos ducant et eis assistant."²² At least for the *sapientes*, i.e. the scholars of religion, the jussive mood of the notion of the one religion is mandatory.²³ To spread this idea, the scholars are guided by those who at the beginning of the text are called the intellectual powers, that is the reminders of the location the discussion has taken place.

20 Nicolai de Cusa, *De pace fidei*, h VII, 62, 19–20. (Therefore, in the loftiest domain of reason a harmony among the religious was reached, in the aforesaid manner).

21 I use this term in the sense of Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 51.

22 Nicolai de Cusa, *De pace fidei*, h VII, 62/63, 20–1. (And the King of kings commanded that the wise [men] return and lead their nations unto a oneness of true worship and that administering spirits guide and assist them [in this undertaking]).

23 According to Flasch, *Nikolaus von Kues*, 373–374, this is something like the birthplace of proper Religious Studies resp. the study of the history of religion. On a second working stage, the scholars use the notion of religion in order to illuminate the history of the diverse traditions: "Denn die Weisen der Völker machen sich gemeinsam an das Studium der Religionsgeschichte. Sie schaffen Bücher herbei, in denen die Religionsgebräuche der Völkerbeschreiben sind. Sie studieren die religionsgeschichtlichen Klassiker aller Völker – Varro für das antike Rom, Eusebius für die Griechen – unter dem Gesichtspunkt, wie sich die tatsächlich vorfindbaren historischen Religionen sich zu der einen Vernunftreligion faktisch verhalten. Cusanus gibt nur das Ergebnis dieser empirischen Erforschung der Religionen im Lichte der einen Vernunftreligion wieder: Die Verschiedenheiten der Religionen beziehen sich auf die äußeren Rituale."

3 Ramon Llull: *Llibre del Gentil i dels tres savis*

The second of the four great medieval religious dialogues discussed here (the ones missing are Abelard's *Collationes*²⁴ and Jehuda Halevi's *Kuzari*) is Ramon Llull's *Llibre del Gentil i dels tres savis* (*Liber de gentili et tribus sapientibus*). The work, Llull's earliest dialogue, does not only internally, but also externally bears strong topological reference. One of Llull's main philosophical aims is the establishment of certain schools where the prevailing languages of those peoples that are still subject of a mission to come (above all the Muslim world) could be studied and learned for the sake of mission. His greatest success here was the establishment of the monastery-school at Miramar in 1276. Some scholars argue that the *Liber de gentili* (supposedly written between 1274 and 1276) might have been used as a lecture-book for this school.

In his work and especially in the exposition or rather, the setting of the discussions of the gentile and the three wise men, Llull proves to be an artist and a narrator of some rank.²⁵ It is this artistic craftsmanship that allows us to point at the differences in topology that exist between his text and *De pace fidei* about two hundred years later. Contrary to Cusanus, Llull takes his time to relate the framing story in full detail. He even does so in a twofold way. Here, he also starts from everyday life, but rather remains on a very unspecific level of narration: "In a certain land there lived a gentile"²⁶, who, though having no knowledge of God but as being learned in philosophy, began to worry about death and the nothingness thereafter. It is not an event that causes the urgency of the work but rather a timeless problem of human beings in general.²⁷ Unable to console himself the gentile decides to leave his home in order to seek remedy

24 For a topological discussion of this work see Stünkel, "Towards a Theory".

25 Roger Friedlein, *Der Dialog bei Ramon Llull*, 59–60, characterizes Llull's ability with regard to the scholarly literature as follows: "Daneben hat insbesondere das Setting des Dialogs die Forschung immer wieder angeregt und gelegentlich zu enthusiastischen Kommentaren herausgefordert. Tatsächlich bietet sich das Gespräch über die Religion zwischen einem Heiden, Juden, Christen und Muslim dazu an Parallelen zu anderen Bearbeitungen dieses Motivs zu ziehen und den L. del gentil daraufhin als Beispiel religiöser Toleranz im Mittelalter zu loben."

26 In the following I quote from the English translation by Anthony Bonner, *Ramon Llull, The Book of the Gentile*, 1: 111.

27 This makes a difference to Cusanus' personal involvement in *De pace fidei*: "When Cusanus begins his work ‚Fuit es hiis quae apud Constantinopolim . . . quidem vir . . . he plants it solidly in the world of events as they touch him and at the same time promises a lesson for life – as if to say ‘in illo tempore . . .’ or ‘es war einmal . . .’", Biechler, *The Religious Language*, 68.

in foreign countries. He then comes to a beautiful forest (which is described most poetically by Lull) but all this beauty only makes the threat of death and nothingness more painful to him. In a moving invocation he laments the misery of human existence and leaves the place. It is already obvious that the theme of the right place of remedy is dominant in Lull's description: the merely philosophical home, as well as the beautiful place that almost aggressively appeals to the senses, are not the right locations to console the haunted Gentile's mind.²⁸

Of course, this painful path is one way to reach the right location, but in reality (that is regarding the possible readers of the work), there are others. Lull's narrative art integrates the affective and the intellectual approach. For now the scenery switches to the three wise man, a Jew, a Christian and a Saracen, who meet outside an again unspecified city. Meeting on friendly terms they decide to refresh "their spirits overtaxed by studying"²⁹ in a nearby forest, by chance the same the unhappy gentile is wandering in. Here they come to "a lovely meadow with a lovely spring watering five trees."³⁰ This paradise-garden-like setting is completed by a "very beautiful lady",³¹ who rides a handsome horse currently drinking from the spring. The Lady's name is *Intelligentia* and as such she explains the nature of the trees and their 'flowers' representing combinatory elements that allow the performance of Lull's philosophy, which he considers to be the *ars inveniendi veritatem*. After that, Intelligence disappears from the scenery, leaving the following dialogue without her direct presence. Nevertheless, the wise men at once acknowledge the religious relevance of the place in a situation of diversity:

What a great good fortune it would be if, by means of these trees, we could all – every man on earth – be under one religion and belief, so that there will be no more rancor or ill will among men, who hate each other because of diversity and contrariness of beliefs and of sects.³²

Unifying thinking to moderate diversity is topologically bound. Just as there is only one God, they say, there could be only one people on one path of salvation

28 Cp. Ruiz and Soler, "Ramon Lull," 56: "The main character, the Gentile, is unique in Lull's universe: he represents a man who has not experienced revelation and is guided by natural reason alone."

29 Lull, *The Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men*, 113.

30 Lull, *The Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men*, 113.

31 Lull, *The Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men*, 113.

32 Lull, *The Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men*, 116.

under the guidance of one faith and one religion. So the place of the trees and the spring is the location where this future unity could be achieved, and, accordingly, the wise men take seat under the trees to discuss these matters by using the combinatory elements provided there and – above all – “by means of demonstrative and necessary reasons.”³³ A place has to be established for the use of reasonable thinking. The topology presented by Llull here can be characterized as a certain *locus amoenus*³⁴ with a pleasant meadow, trees and a spring (inhabited by a beautiful lady on a horse), but that place is furthermore qualified by the instruments of rational thought, the *logos* that is to be used by human beings as their main dignity. Place/*topos* and means/*logos* as such contribute to the establishment of the one religion which guides one people on the way to salvation.

Now this hope- and peaceful scenery is disturbed by the arrival of the gentile, who is both mentally and physically in a very bad condition. Being driven by the “great anguish of his suffering”,³⁵ he drinks (as *Intelligentia*’s horse – thus being somehow associated to intelligence’s vehicle) from the spring before he is able to greet the three wise ones. By the gentile’s suffering the place is emotionally qualified as a goal of some profound human longing. The wise men greet him with the wish that God would help him in his suffering. About this and about the place, the gentile expresses his astonishment and asks for explanation. The wise men do so by means of the place, that is the method of the Lady *Intelligentia*, as such proving with necessary reasons the existence and the dignities of God. Now this is the easy part of the discussion, at least to Llull, for everyone agrees here. It becomes more difficult – and even more frustrating to the gentile – when it comes to the point where the three wise men differ according to their religious tradition, on the question which of these traditions is the best way to salvation, or rather which religion is the true one. “What! cried the gentile, ‘Are the three of you not of a single religion and belief? [...] now you have plunged me into much greater ire and grief than before, for then I had no fear of enduring infinite suffering after death.”³⁶ In the following chapters, the Gentile discusses with the prevailing representatives of the religious traditions thus functioning as a mediator between the religious positions.³⁷ Fortunately, the following discussions have a relieving result:

33 Llull, *The Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men*, 116.

34 See Friedlein, *Der Dialog bei Ramon Llull*, 92.

35 Llull, *The Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men*, 117.

36 Llull, *The Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men*, 148.

37 Friedlein, *Der Dialog bei Ramon Llull*, 69, describes the gentile’s position as follows: “Im Gegensatz dazu sprechen im *L. del gentil* die Weisen nur außerhalb ihrer eigentlichen

“The Gentile stood up and his understanding was illuminated by the path of salvation.”³⁸ In this condition the gentile is able to worship the five trees with their prevailing flowers and is honouring the place of the discussion by kissing the ground and washing his face and hands in the spring from his former tears of sorrow. Interestingly enough, the three wise men take leave before the gentile proclaims the religion of his choice, on the one hand knowing that guided by the topology of the location, the choice would be the right one, on the other hand, leaving a subject to discuss for themselves. They, nevertheless, decide to make the conference on the one religion permanent by meeting under the guidance of the location until the one religion is found. This structure strongly resembles Cusanus’ idea of the intellectual powers discussing under the guidance of unity. Llull makes perfectly clear that the special place is needed in order to deal with religious diversity. So peace is a matter of topology again. If the aim of the one religion can be found, this would only be possible in the discussion on the level the Lady *Intelligentia* has shown, that is by proper combination and by necessary reasons.

4 Gilbert Crispin: *Disputatio christiani cum gentili de fide Christi*

Again almost two hundred years before Llull’s work, topology had already become an important element in a religious dialogue. Gilbert Crispin, the Abbot of Westminster, pupil and friend of Anselm of Canterbury,³⁹ wrote between 1090 and 1095 a series of two closely related religious dialogues, the

argumentativen Beiträge miteinander: in den Begrüßungs- und Abschiedsszenen, bei der Verabredung der Disputationsmodalitäten und beim Sprecherwechsel zwischen den Teilbüchern. Auf die inhaltlichen Aussagen ihrer Gesprächspartner gehen sie nicht ein, so daß das für die Religionspolemik wesentliche Element des direkten, häufig im streitenden Ton gehaltenen Austauschs hier fehlt und durch einen indirekten Vergleich der Positionen ersetzt wird, die dem Heiden einzeln vorgetragen werden, wobei die jeweils zwei anderen Weisen kein Interventionsrecht haben.”

38 Llull, *The Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men*, 294.

39 The editors of his work characterize Gilbert with regard to his teacher as follows: “None of Anselm of Canterbury’s pupils did such credit to his friendship and his teaching as Gilbert. Despite the disparity of intellectual endowment which made Gilbert, for all excellencies of mind, a far more pedestrian thinker than Anselm, he was a very able man; his treatises preserve for us a number of arguments on the classical problems of theology which are not touched upon in Anselm’s works.” (Abulafia and Evans, “Preface,” VII). It is right this pedestrianism, which proves to be relevant in Gilbert’s topology of his dialogue.

*Disputatio judaei et christiani*⁴⁰ and the *Disputatio christiani cum gentili de fide Christi*. In the *Disputatio judaei et christiani* topology is characterized by the shift of the discussion from a hermeneutical level to a philosophical one in the course of the text, but without indicating that by means of a special setting.⁴¹ So, for us, the latter disputation is of more interest because here the author uses manifold literary means to deliver his topological message.⁴² It is a repetition of the dialogue with the Jew on a more general level, where different religions, as Karl Werner Wilhelm states, become positions within the same dialogue.⁴³ The significance of the dialogue therefore consists of the way Gilbert reaches the more general level. It is argued by some scholars that the Gentile in this dialogue might be a Muslim, for here, Gilbert fulfils the claim

40 Robinson, *Gilbert Crispin* 61–62, describes this dialogue as “a controversial work of exceptional fairness, dedicated by Gilbert to his old master Archbishop Anselm, and in temper at any rate not unworthy of his school. [...] The whole treatment is eminently fair; the difficulties propounded by the Jew are genuine difficulties, and to some of them a fully satisfactorily reply cannot easily be given. There is no loss of temper on either side, and at the end there is no token of surrender and no note of triumph.”

41 Cp. Wilhelm, “Einleitung,” 13. In the following I quote from this edition of Gilbert’s *Disputatio christiani cum gentili de fide Christi*. Fidora, “Das philosophische Religionsgespräch,” 72, stresses the meta-communicative element in Gilbert’s *Disputatio judaei et christiani* by stating: “Das Verdienst dieses Dialogs ist mithin weniger in seiner Bestimmung des Verhältnisses von Glauben und Vernunft zu suchen, vielmehr besteht es in den prozeduralen bzw. verfahrenstechnischen Ausführungen, wie etwa die Bitte des Juden zu Beginn des Gesprächs, eine Diskussion ‚toleranti animo‘ zu führen, wobei die Vernunft bezeichnenderweise nicht als Gegenpart zum Glauben fungiert, sondern als Gegensatz des Streits und der Polemik definiert wird.”

42 So what Abulafia thinks to be the secret of the success of the *Disputatio judaei et christiani* is true for the *Disputatio christiani cum gentili de fide Christi* as well: “The cause for the disputation’s success should, I believe, be sought not so much in its contents as in the way it was written. [...] The significance of the disputation lies especially in its structure and presentation.” (Abulafia, “The ars disputandi”, VI/140.).

43 Jacobi, “Gilbert Crispin”, 133: “Der Heide andererseits führt seine Angriffe zum größeren Teil so, wie sie auch ein Jude führen könnte. Über weite Strecken wird der Disput zwischen Christ und Heide dann auch zu einer Neuauflage der Dispute zwischen Christ und Jude. Alle Streitpunkte kehren wieder – bis hin zu dem Vorwurf willkürlicher Schriftauslegung.” Under a more topological perspective, Wilhelm, “Einleitung,” 20–21, writes on the same subject: “Vielmehr wiederholen die Argumentationsverläufe jene des Gesprächs mit dem Juden, jedoch in einer generalisierenden Form. Gilbert läßt beide Gesprächspartner als Philosophen auftreten. Die interreligiöse Problematik wird so auf eine neue, philosophische Ebene gehoben, sodass die verschiedenen Religionen zu Positionen innerhalb ein und desselben Diskurses werden.”

of Islamic thinkers to discuss the interreligious problem not on the level of authorities but on the level of philosophical argumentation.⁴⁴

However, we have to concentrate on the topology of the text which is represented in the setting. In the framing narration Gilbert deals with the difficulty of the location. According to Robinson, this is “so curious a scene”⁴⁵ that it deserves a closer examination. Gilbert describes a concrete, but, nevertheless, with regard to names, unspecified situation as the starting point of the whole work. Not surprisingly, the problem of locality is connected with the philosophy of unity and it is as well described as Gilbert’s personal problem: “A duobus philosophis sumpta erat disputatio de unius dei cultu et vera fidei unitate. Noveram locum, sed non praesuebam ire, quia multuserat et varius exitus viae.”⁴⁶ The place of the philosophical discussion about unity of belief is hard to reach, so hard at least that the author, being somehow acquainted with but not really familiar with the place, does not intend to get there. It takes the casual force of an acquaintance, which literally drags Gilbert, who claims to be sick and afraid of the difficult way, to reach the location. This location is a pub (*diversorium*) or, quite more apt to symbolic understanding, an accommodation. Some authors argue that his friend is no other than Anselm of Canterbury (to whom the earlier *Disputatio judaei et christiani* is dedicated) himself, who introduces Gilbert to the location.⁴⁷ Though there is obviously a road to the place so that it might be reached by everyone, there are, nevertheless, several obstacles to an easy

44 Cp. Gauss, “Anselm von Canterbury,” 297.

45 Robinson, *Gilbert Crispin*, 73.

46 Gilbert Crispin, *Disputatio christiani cum gentili de fide Christi*, 136. (Two philosophers had begun a discussion on the worship of the One God and on the unity of true faith. I knew the place, but had decided not to go there because the long way was too arduous.)

47 The most prominent of these authors is Richard W. Southern, “St. Anselm and Gilbert Crispin,” 96. Just recently, Bernd Goebel has introduced an important modification to this general idea: “Steht schließlich der Freund, von dem Gilbert gedrängt wird, dem Gespräch des Christen mit dem Heiden im Gasthaus beizuwohnen, tatsächlich für den Anselm der Wintergespräche von 1092/93, der einen vernunftkritischen Gilbert für die Religionsgespräche erwärmen will? Dieser Vermutung wird man sich nicht anschließen wollen. Denn der Freund steht zwar, wenn nicht für Lafranc, so für Anselm. Doch dürfte er eher für jenen Anselm stehen, bei dem Gilbert in Le Bec zur Schule ging und der ihn dort in die Freien Künste und philosophische Theologie einführte.” (“Vernunft und Autorität,” 63). For Goebel, the *Disputatio christiani cum gentili de fide Christi* as a discussion between two philosophers strongly proves Gilbert’s use of Anselm’s philosophical principles: “Mit anderen Worten sie [i.e. the discussing philosophers, KMS] akzeptieren zentrale Teile der im *Monologion* und *Proslogion* entwickelten philosophischen Theologie Anselms, nämlich ihrer rationalen Gotteslehre und ihrer theologischen, nicht minder rationalen Anthropologie.” (“Vernunft und Autorität,” 32–33.).

approach. For this place is qualitatively differentiated: the friend, as a regular customer of the house, may enter, but Gilbert has to stay outside, near the gate. Here, some philosophical discussion takes place among some students on an Aristotelian thesis concerning an eminent ontological problem, and the question whether grammar belongs to logic or not. But shortly hereafter, another change of location takes place. The outsiders are invited to join the discussion inside, even Gilbert, who does so in a somewhat Caesarean fashion: “Propius accessi, intro aspexi, et introii.”⁴⁸ Then the dialogue of the two philosophers, one of them a gentile, characterized as a smart opponent of the Christian faith, the other a defender of the faith and only committed to the truth, begins. It takes place in front of a properly prepared, i.e. scientifically educated public, which has successfully passed the gates of philosophical logic.⁴⁹

This special setting, of course, conveys topological meaning.⁵⁰ One has to make efforts to join the discussion, efforts that are likely to be avoided, so that one needs some special guidance from insiders, particularly with regard to the fact that a visitor is not at once allowed entrance to the final location of the dialogue. One has to pass the gate of Aristotelian thinking in order to get to the real place of the discussion on God’s unity. So the audience of the dialogue might be characterized as some scientific public that is able to evaluate the participant’s arguments and find a solution to the problem due to their educated level of understanding.⁵¹ For Gilbert, this location is new, though

48 Gilbert Crispin, *Disputatio christiani cum gentili de fide Christi*, 138. (I approached, gazed inside, and entered.)

49 Hildebrandt, *Mittelalterliche Religionsdialoge*, 41, identifies this special public as follows: “Auch dieses Gespräch findet öffentlich statt, allerdings in einer anderen Umgebung. Es ist in einem Gasthaus lokalisiert, das hauptsächlich von gebildeten Leuten und Studenten der sieben freien Künste frequentiert wird und damit die neue Welt der Dom- und Kathedralschulen symbolisiert, aus denen in der Folgezeit die mittelalterlichen Universitäten hervorgehen sollen.”

50 Jacobi, “Gilbert Crispin,” 135, clearly gives this topological setting too little attention by simply stating: “Die Rahmenerzählung des Ich-Erzählers wird nicht abgeschlossen. Sie hatte Einleitungsfunktion. Für die folgende fingierte Rede sollte Aufmerksamkeit geweckt werden. Die Geschichte von Zuhörer braucht nicht wieder aufgenommen zu werden.”

51 Wilhelm, “Einleitung,” 23, states correctly the importance of this setting for manifold reasons: “Wer die Inszenierung Gilberts mit Aufmerksamkeit betrachtet, wird darin bemerkenswerte Reflexionen zum Selbstverständnis christlicher Theologie und den Möglichkeiten ihrer Außerdarstellung finden. [...] Erstens findet die Auseinandersetzung zwischen dem Christen und dem Heiden an einem Ort statt, den Gilbert so beschreibt, wie man in späterer Zeit Öffentlichkeit beschrieben hätte. Der Disput ist jedenfalls außerhalb des Machtbereiches sowohl der Kirche als auch des englischen Königshauses angesiedelt. Es ist dies ein Ort, zu dem Gilbert sich eigens hinbegeben muß und der ihm

he has heard about it. Thus, the setting describes something like his personal *Bildungsroman*, which depicts his process in becoming philosophical or reaching the philosophical level, but without losing contact to the (inter-)religious problem.⁵² So the whole location may be characterized as some ‘philosophers’ club’, which is likely to provide some “unsuspected side of the London life of Abbot Gilbert’s day.”⁵³ Of course, the scene takes place in London in the sense that it is set there.⁵⁴

Interestingly enough, it is rather the unity and the ever crucial question of trinity within unity, the discussants cannot reach rational agreement about, so that the gentile leaves the discussion without being philosophically convinced. The question is further elaborated by the Christian philosopher and a certain pupil (“quis sedens circa illum”⁵⁵) in order not to leave the argumentative field to the departing gentile. Despite this seemingly philosophically unsatisfying development,⁵⁶ the stage-managing of the setting allows the better analysis of

nicht vertraut ist. Zweitens handelt es sich um eine wissenschaftliche Öffentlichkeit, deren Zugang durch die Pforte eines Grundstudiums der *artes liberales*, geregelt zu sein scheint. Drittens macht Gilberts Inszenierung Aussagen darüber, wie viel vom christlichen Glauben in einem allgemeinen Diskurs erklärt und verteidigt werden kann.”

52 Wilhelm, “Einleitung,” 21: “Das Philosophischwerden des Disputs – der Übergang von einer an hermeneutischen Fragen orientierten Auseinandersetzung in eine Diskussion des Gottesbegriffs – und die Reflexion des interreligiösen Diskurses sind also im Gespräch mit dem Heiden identisch. Das bedeutet umgekehrt für die philosophische Reflexion, wie sie bei Gilbert zum Einsatz kommt, dass sie auf die Nöte interreligiöser Verständigung bezogen bleibt.”

53 Robinson, *Gilbert Crispin*, 74.

54 See Goebel, “Vernunft und Autorität,” 32.

55 Gilbert Crispin, *Disputatio christiani cum gentili de fide Christi*, 182. ([...] who sat nearby [...]).

56 In his lucid interpretation of this scene, Bernd Goebel makes clear that the scene does not – as it is often suggested by certain scholars following Southern’s interpretation – prove Gilbert’s philosophical inability, but rather shows that Gilbert quite intensely mediated upon the difficulties of the religious dialogue with other traditions, especially when it comes to the problem of salvation. Accordingly, the Christian philosopher states: “quando de talibus fidei nostrae sacramentis loquimur coram infidelibus, debemus cavere ne causa quarendae veritatis non credentes mittamus in laqueos falsitatis.” (Gilbert Crispin, *Disputatio christiani cum gentili de fide Christi*, 182) (If we talk about such mysteries of our faith in the presence of infidels we have to take care that we do not lead them into the pitfalls of error in search for truth.) The Gentile leaving the scenery formally indicates these difficulties, Gilbert did not want to pass over too easily: “Wieso verläßt der Heide in Gilberts zweitem Dialog den Saal, und wieso wird er durch einen der christlichen Zuhörer ersetzt? Nicht weil der christliche Philosoph, wie es die überkommenen Interpretation will, ihm die Trinität nicht erläutern wollte – das hat er ausdrücklich

the level, religious or theological disagreement takes place. It is as well part of the message itself.

5 Conclusion

The spatial setting of a religious dialogue organizes religious diversity as a question of topology. Religions translocate their prevailing setting to another level by means of a philosophy of language, which process is considered to be a common enterprise of the diverse traditions involved.

As a short conclusion, one might say that the analysis of the settings of the three dialogues in question shows certain continuity, but also some important development concerning the topology of interreligious dialogue.

On the one hand, there is agreement on the idea that for a fruitful dialogue a special level of the discussion is needed, which is illustrated by the prevailing settings. All authors additionally agree on the fact that this level is to be characterized as a scholarly level, or, to be more precise, a level of a scholarly public, where both the discussants and the audience are scholars. It is right here, in a situation of a scholarly conference, where the notions developed in the discussion are valid.⁵⁷ With regard to the proposed rationality of the discussion, one

vor [...] Im Übrigen geht es nicht in erster Linie um die vernünftigen Gründe für den Glauben an die Trinität, sondern um die vernünftigen Gründe für die Heilsnotwendigkeit des Trinitätsglaubens. Diese Frage sei, wie der christliche Philosoph einräumt, auch unter Christen nicht unumstritten. [...] Wenn man dies bedenkt, wird das Unbehagen des Christen bei der Aussicht, das Thema mit einem Nicht-Christen zu besprechen, etwas verständlicher. Er könnte den Heiden gegen sich aufbringen. Damit würde er ihm die Erkenntnis erschweren, wenn nicht verunmöglichen. Das Zögern des Christen reflektiert die Schwierigkeiten vieler Menschen, sich wegen der Brisanz aller das Heil betreffenden Fragen auf ein wahrheitsorientiertes Religionsgespräch einzulassen (und es nicht vorzeitig zu verlassen) [...]” (Goebel, “Vernunft und Autorität,” 54–55).

57 Borgolte, *Christen und Juden im Disput*, 391–392, even calls Gilbert’s work “[...] ein exklusiver Gelehrtdialog, der andere Interessierte zu Statisten macht. [...] Auch wenn das Philosophengespräch im Gasthaus, also an einem öffentlichen Ort, stattfindet, ist das gelehrte Arkanum hier im Vergleich zum Judendisput noch gesteigert: Das Haus wird anschaulich außerhalb der menschlichen Siedlung (außerhalb Westminsters?) plaziert, Studenten und Gelehrte müssen sich auf eine Ausfallstraße begeben, um zu ihm zu gelangen, und erhalten nur auf Einladung Zutritt. Über die Ungelehrten äußern sich in den Disputationen der Jude bzw. ‚Heide‘ geradezu abfällig.”

might even say that the emergence of this new level of understanding shows the explorative function of reason within the colloquies.⁵⁸

On the other hand, with regard to the differences, the level in question is described in an increasingly sophisticated way, leading from a though difficult to reach, but nevertheless reachable place here on earth (in London or less profane, the common frame of understanding characterized by rational and not authoritative arguments), over an ideal earthly situation of pure rationality (perhaps at an ideal Miramar abbey) to a total revolution of understanding that might be reached only on a certain intellectual height (and therefore likely to be related to a heavenly Jerusalem as the *centrum commune*⁵⁹ of the diverse religious traditions). In the course of time, it becomes clear that agreement on questions of religious diversity can only be reached on a meta-level that transcends the immediate object-level. This development shows that the criticism of a general notion of religion as not to be found on a material level is a good example of a fallacy of misplaced concreteness or over-hasty objectification.

There are other results to be mentioned here. One concerns the question of media or mediation. With regard to that, the examination of the prevailing dialogues provides the following picture: The higher the level of understanding, the more mediate is the dialogue. This development can be witnessed from the direct confrontation in an every-day situation in Gilbert Crispin's work⁶⁰ to the discussion mediated by the philosophical gentile at an extraordinary place in Lull's *Llibre*, up to mediation by divine participants or the Word itself on a heavenly-intellectual platform in Cusanus' work *De pace fidei*. Perhaps one might even say that the beginning mediation is introduced in form of the

58 With regard to Lull, Fidora, "Das philosophische Religionsgespräch im Mittelalter," 76–77, describes the philosophical reaction to the problem of religious and cultural diversity as follows: "Lulls philosophisch-theologische Antwort auf die Herausforderung religiöser und kultureller Verschiedenheit ist demzufolge konzipiert als eine Art offener und kontinuierlicher Diskurs, der auf ein permanentes Forum der Religionen hinausläuft, in dem Diskussionen nicht mit partikularen Kompromissen enden sollen, sondern so lange fortgeführt werden müssen, bis die verschiedenen Wahrheitsansprüche im Licht eines generell akzeptierten rationalen Verfahrens – welches für Lull identisch ist mit seiner *Ars* – entschieden sind und so eine vollkommene Schlussübereinkunft unter den Teilnehmern erreicht worden ist."

59 Nicolai de Cusa, *De pace fidei*, h VII, 62, 2.

60 According to Goebel, Vernunft und Autorität," 69, this is in fact Gilbert Crispin's innovation if compared to his teacher Anselm: "Neu bei Gilbert ist vielmehr die Inszenierung unmittelbarer Konfrontationen zwischen Christen und Nicht-Christen in Dialogen, in denen die fremde Position nicht länger durch einen Glaubensgenossen – durch einen Boso – repräsentiert wird."

pupil taking over the gentile's position in the *Disputatio christiani cum gentili de Fide Christi*.

Therefore, given the meta-linguistic character of 'religion' it is not by chance that the participants of the discussion in Gilbert Crispin do not come to an agreement, that the agreement in Llull is moved to some later future (after a scientific discussion which seems to become a goal-in-itself) and the decision of the Gentile not revealed and that, finally, the participants in *De pace fidei* in fact do come to an agreement, but which is not named according to the religions present on the level of diversity which is our world, but which, nevertheless, provides a model form of prevailing solution.

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Space, Entanglement and Decentralisation: On How to Narrate the Transcultural History of Christianity (550 to 1350 CE)

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1 Introduction

While it is important to criticise and to deconstruct traditional conceptions of historical writing, it is also obvious that only alternative constructions can change perceptions. The pressing challenge for the history of Christianity today is to overcome its strong Eurocentric bias and to develop models to represent Christianity as transcultural and as diverse as it was – and is.¹ Apart from comprising many linguistic and cultural traditions, medieval Christianity consisted of several denominations. Medieval Christianity also displays great internal variety in terms of establishment, stability and expansion. Christians were not only organised in the institutionalised churches but also in informal groups and even in more fluid movements.² In addition, Christians were in constant contact with other religions. They answered to contacts either by adapting or by opposing practices or teachings. These different currents fed the dynamic forces which drove the radical changes and turns in medieval Christianity.

The history of the Christianities was and is indeed studied intensively; many fundamental research projects produce new details. However, the existing comprehensive models fail to integrate the differences, the variety and the common ground between the individual strands. Therefore, the impressive results of more than hundred years of intensive research on churches, denominations, heretical groups and religious movements have had little influence on the overall perception of the history of medieval Christianity. Still, the Roman Church is seen as the only representative of Medieval Christianity. The orthodox and the Eastern traditions are cut out of the horizon of historical narrations as well as out of the cultural memory of the Western world in general.³

¹ Recently Koschorke, “Globale Perspektiven der Christentumsgeschichte”.

² Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter*; Coleman, “Church-Sect Typology”.

³ For programmatic approaches see also the references mentioned here, Pinggéra, “‘Ex Oriente Lux’”; Borgolte/Tischler, *Transkulturelle Verflechtungen*; Weltecke, *Jenseits des ‘Christlichen Abendlandes’*; Marx/Pahlitzsch/Weltecke, “Östliches Christentum”.

Thus, the existing narrative structures do not meet the demands of historical representation any longer. The aim here shall be to sketch some material for the debate on an innovative and inclusive history of transcultural Christianity. To that end, I would like to draw on some past examples of historiographical writing as well as recent empirical and theoretical approaches and suggest some new models.

2 The Eurocentric Narrative: The Pope-and-Emperor Model

Nobody would in earnest claim Christianity to be a Western religion. The practice of writing the history of Christians before the year 1500, however, traditionally favours Latin Christianity.⁴ In fact, the Roman Church represents the norm in all respects; it is synonymous with medieval Christianity. Thus, wherever “Christianity” is mentioned as a tradition, be it positive or negative, be it by Christians or Non-Christians, by theologians or non-theologians, in politics or religious studies, almost always it is the papal church alone that comes into mind. Consequently, Christianity is usually represented as centralised and highly hierarchical. Accordingly, Christian culture is synonymous with medieval European culture; Christian rule is equated with the Latin kings and knights. Georgian, Armenian, Nubian or Ethiopian kings and nobility are never mentioned in this respect, not to mention Christian cultures under Non-Christian rule.

On the contrary, Eastern Christianity, which would clearly disturb this simple image, has long been forgotten. Where it comes to the fore, it seems to be the deviance of or a mere residue from Ancient Christianity in a long process of eclipse since the 7th century – in short, it is “othered”. At most the Greek Orthodox tradition is included, often designated as the “Eastern Church”. Certainly, from the perspective of the Eastern Christians further away, the Greek Orthodox strand still represents the Western tradition, or, to be more precise, the church of the Roman Empire. The “Church of the East”, on the contrary, is the medieval and most appropriate designation for the church of Asia which is still called “Nestorian” by Western scholars.⁵ This at that time huge and influential institution plays no role in our reasoning on the nature of Christianity.

4 This chapter draws on Weltecke, *Jenseits des 'Christlichen Abendlandes'*, 8–9.

5 Baum/Winkler, *Die Apostolische Kirche des Ostens*; Winkler, *Ostsyrisches Christentum*.

Secular historiography even preserves traditional elements of writing about Eastern Christians, which, as a matter of fact, is outdated by research. Theological research dropped this traditional heresiological terminology for the Churches of the Syriac tradition decades ago, like “Jacobite” for the more appropriate “Syriac Orthodox”, or the already mentioned “Nestorian” for the more appropriate “Church of the East”.⁶ This development is mostly ignored outside the specialist circles. The inappropriate designations widely remain part of the historical language.

It is true, several more recent projects struggled to free themselves of the constraints of the dominant periodisation, of the historical horizon as well as of the traditional dichotomies between orthodox and heretical Christianity. In this respect, Bernard Hamilton should be mentioned, who is one of the very few medievalists experienced in the history of the Eastern Churches. He gathered all the different churches into one volume, yet refrained from constructing an overarching narration.⁷ The “Histoire du Christianisme des origines à nos jours”⁸ or the new “Cambridge History of Christianity” feature Eastern Christians.⁹ The respective articles are often outstanding as they were written by the leading experts of the field. Yet, they are excursions, often summarising large periods of time, digressing from the narrative line constructed according to a European periodisation, albeit a perforated one. The overarching structure of the “Histoire du Christianisme” for example still betrays the traditional periodisation. Descriptions of eras like “Apologée de la papauté et expansion de la chrétienté (1054–1274)” or “De la Réforme à la Réformation: 1450–1530” do not make sense for the history of the churches of Asia for example, where the period of expansion was earlier and the Pope had neither jurisdiction nor authority. This periodisation does not relate to the latter in the least.

When it comes to historical geography, we are provided with excellent atlases like the “Atlas zur Kirchengeschichte” revised by Jochen Martin.¹⁰ It comprises all the different churches and many important movements and (heretical) groups. However, they are represented as isolated monads. Here, another factor becomes apparent. As in the handbooks, Christian denominations are rarely presented on the same map even though they lived side by side

6 Hage, *Das orientalische Christentum*; Lange/Pinggéra, *Die altorientalischen Kirchen*.

7 Hamilton, *The Christian World*.

8 I would like to highlight Mayeurwhich, et al., *Histoire du Christianisme*.

9 Angold, *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, esp. vol. 5: Eastern Christianity.

10 Martin/Jedin, et al., *Atlas zur Kirchengeschichte*.

in most Middle Eastern cities of the Middle Ages. In fact, I am aware of only one example.¹¹

The Eurocentric history of Christianity has a long tradition with its roots deep in the European Middle Ages. In fact, Medieval Latin, Greek-Orthodox and Eastern Christians were largely aware of the existence of the other strands, and particularly the heretical movements in their close presence. The mutual knowledge was more or less present over the entire period, albeit not always of a particular importance, as will be explored in greater detail further down. Especially during and after the age of the crusades, monographic historical reports, accounts of journeys, missionary reports, diplomatic and ecumenical efforts and language studies gathered a substantial amount of material in the Latin world. Yet this information has never been integrated into the large historical picture, and neither were the path-breaking results of the philological studies in Eastern languages by the New Modern scholars.

The history of Christianity remained a history of the Latin Church and Europe. This horizon was motivated by the theological and political claims of the medieval popes and of the secular powers of Europe, especially the emperors.¹² These are their ideals of absolute spiritual and political rule, their competition with the East Roman Empire, their exclusive authority claims towards the ecclesiastical and secular powers in Europe itself. Needless to say, the claims remained a utopia, at least until the conquest of Constantinople 453. Yet these theories of power by pope and emperor structured historical thinking and resulted in the powerful model of the pope-and-emperor chronicles of the Latin Middle Ages. The pope-and-emperor chronicles, like the very influential example by Martin of Opava OP (d. 1278), written in the second half of the 13th century¹³ and extant in more than 500 manuscripts, explained no less than the history of the universe. They juxtaposed the two successions of the popes and of the Roman Emperors from Antiquity to the present as the backbone of history.

While similar models can be found in non-Latin chronicles, which might for example juxtapose the caliph and the Syriac Orthodox patriarch¹⁴ or the Roman Emperor and the Patriarch of Constantinople, nowhere else did the model

11 Pirker/Timm, *Vorderer Orient. Das Christentum vom 8. bis zum 14. Jahrhundert*, B VIII, 2. A first interreligious and interdenominational map for Asia was produced for Weltecke, "Zum syrisch-orthodoxen Leben," here: Appendix.

12 Leppin/Schneidmüller/Weinfurter, *Kaisertum im ersten Jahrtausend*.

13 Martinus Oppaviensis, *Chronicon pontificum et imperatorum*; Ikas, *Martin von Troppau*; Brincken, "Martin of Opava".

14 Abramowski, *Dionysius von Tellmahre*.

assume such a fundamental importance. Not only did this model represent the past of a region, but the salvific future of Christianity at all. It was based on the idea of the *translatio imperii*. By means of the *translatio imperii* the Roman Empire was conceived as the only heir of the ancient empires before the end of the world.¹⁵ Pope and Emperor led this Roman Empire until the day of salvation. They embodied the salvific instruments of the divine rule on earth. Clearly, within this model, there could be no lasting historical function for Non-Latin Christianity.¹⁶ Through all the modern waves of secularisation and scholarly professionalisation this horizon has never changed. Eastern Christianity has never become a general subject of secular historical research. It remained a specialised occupation of theologians and philologists. Thus, a historical model of Medieval Christianity as a whole has never been developed.

3 The Decentralised System of the Medieval Churches

In order to develop a new integrative narrative, some experiments with different levels of analysis, modelling tools and icons are required. The models I would like to suggest are intended to complement one another rather than being exclusive alternatives. They are preliminary and as yet untried. To start with, the focus shall be on the most striking element of medieval Christianity, its geographical and institutional decentralisation between Asia and Europe and its system of multiple denominations and churches.

But maybe these organisations were too diverse to include them into one model? On the contrary, the structures, which had crystallised by the mid 6th century,¹⁷ display similar features, many of which exist until today. They shall be sketched with broad strokes, as it were, with no concern for details

15 Brincken, *Studien zur lateinischen Weltchronistik*; Brincken, "Die lateinische Weltchronistik".

16 Goetz, *Translatio Imperii*; Goetz, "Die Theorie der Translatio Imperii"; Leppin/Schneidmüller/Weinfurter, *Kaisertum im ersten Jahrtausend*.

17 In the present paper I cannot engage in the recent debate around periodisations of Antiquity, Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Suffice it to say that important works have been published suggesting a continuity from Antiquity to the 8th century or even further on, for example McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*. On the other hand, it is clear that for the history of Christianity important changes took place in the century following the Council of Chalcedon 451, which are acknowledged even within this strand of thought, compare Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 143ff, who termed the new situation as "Divergent Legacies", which more or less comprises the situation from where I take my starting point.

or exceptions.¹⁸ The most striking common element is the highly organised structure of Christianity. By an advanced concept of office and through written regulations, institutions were formed with both communal and hierarchical elements which transcended ephemeral personal associations. The organisations were transferred to regions outside the Roman and the Persian empire throughout the Middle Ages, to the West as well as to the East. However, these social formations were in constant dialectic tension with each other, with secular powers, with more fluid and unstable religious movements as well as other religions, Judaism, Islam and Zoroastrianism being the obvious cases, yet Buddhism and Taoism also counting among them.¹⁹

On the level of cities and villages the church was organised in institution-alised groups or *communities*,²⁰ which assumed not only religious but also legal, economic and social functions. Above the clergy, the monarchic *bishop* ruled with competence to judge religious teaching, canonical and also civil and criminal matters, according to the context. Bishops would gather in synods to decide on teaching and legal matters as well as elect among them the *head* of their church. Beside sociological similarities the churches shared spiritual forms like organised monasticism and ascetical movements, a common body of texts, and a common concept of universal time and history. Hellenistic sciences and philosophy formed a common point of references for many. These systematic similarities and common elements justify and demand at the same time the necessity of studying the churches together as the specific transcultural medieval system of Christianity.

This paradigm is characterised by a key element that has not yet been investigated in a systematic manner due to Eurocentric preoccupations: Medieval Christianity is decentral in a geographical, administrative and spiritual sense. To start with the geographical perspective, it becomes apparent that there are of course useful maps for the different churches and their structures, but no synopses. And there is no map that would show the expansion of Christianity from 550 to 1350 in its entirety, from Europe to North Africa, down the Nile to Ethiopia, Russia, Bulgaria and Serbia, the Middle East, South Arabia, Armenia, Georgia, Central Asia to China and India. Historical maps usually provide only sectors with no attempt to connect them. In fact, they are efficiently

18 As the sketch is concerned with the broader structures, the empirical data used are accessible via the above mentioned handbooks (see Nr. 8, 9, 10) and shall not be documented in detail.

19 Winkler/Tan, *Hidden Treasures*; Deeg, "Die 'Leuchtende Lehre'".

20 On the term community see recently Stowers, "The concept of 'community'". The term here is understood as a socio-historical category, a group of people bound together by administrative rules and social networks rather than by a coherent set of propositions.

hampering the observation of the simple fact that, at least until the year 1000, neither Rome nor any other large metropolis qualifies as a centre.

It is true, the five late antique patriarchates, Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, apart from the latter, still were immense cities according to medieval standards. At the same time, they had ceased to be the unrivalled theological centres of Christianity. Concerning the 7th and the 8th century, this fact is beyond controversy. Yet even later, many important impulses within the churches and within Christianity at large were triggered not from the patriarchal metropolises but from elsewhere. Especially the monasteries and their output gained momentum, for example Iona off the coast of Scotland or Mar Saba close to Jerusalem in the 7th and 8th century, or Cluny from the 10th century onwards.

This decentralised structure correlated with the political conditions after the end of the West Roman and the Persian Empire. Throughout the Middle Ages, secular rulers were not able to maintain centralised power as efficiently as the ancient empires and their realms disintegrated sooner or later into smaller structures. This is true for the entire Western Eurasian area. The empire of the Carolingians and the Abbassid Caliphate disintegrated politically during the 9th century. Normans on one side and Bedouins on the other attacked old areas of settlement. Similar processes were at hand in the 12th and 13th century with the empire of the Hohenstaufen in the West and the Seljuqs in the East. This is also true for the areas conquered by the Mongols in the 13th and 14th century. Many more examples could be mentioned.²¹ While the patriarchal metropolises had been focuses of the ancient imperial political administration, they were deprived of this function during the Middle Ages with the exception of Constantinople. New and temporary political centres superseded them. Due to their new role as the hosts of secular patrons of ecclesiastical institutions, these places became also instrumental for the history of Christianity, for example Aix, Damascus or Baghdad.

The spiritual heads of the churches, be it the autocephalous metropolitan, the patriarch, the pope or the catholicos, represented the church to secular powers and to their own flock. As elected leaders they also claimed the ultimate spiritual, administrative and juridical authority within their institutions. In practice, however, the ability of these leaders to centralise command and jurisdiction in their hands varied greatly in time and circumstances.

21 The excellent concept of *The Times Atlas of World History* which Geoffrey Barraclough designed to have changing perspectives and centres for each of the major periods and cultures still is a very convincing experiment in visual world history: Overy, *The Times Complete History*.

One could even go as far as to suggest that this period of Christianity is indeed characterised by the fact that the spiritual and administrative midpoints of the churches themselves had repeatedly only limited control over their institutions. On the contrary, they faced at times massive opposition and had to compete for recognition in their practical policy as well as by theoretical tracts.²² The key force in the history of Christianity during the Middle Ages was often the bishop, the archbishop or the metropolitan. Timothy Reuter suggested the term “Europe of the bishops” for the period around the year 1000.²³ In fact, this phrase could be expanded, and one could speak about a “Medieval Christianity of the bishops.”

It would be worthwhile to study the office of the bishop in its transcultural setting. New common elements occur as the bishop established his role as a judge, be it in Europe or in the Middle East. The acquired judicial function supported the authority of the bishop in his community and vis à vis the secular power. At the same time their legal authority is a consequence of the reoccurring weakness of the secular structures of this period. This is true for the early Muslim period in Syria and Mesopotamia where both Roman and Persian administration had disintegrated and new structures had not yet been established. This is also true for the world of the Franks on the ruins of and beyond the Western Roman Empire. For centuries, bishops had taken the maintenance of order into their own hands. Their work as judges resulted in the production of comprehensive law books. On the Latin side, men like Burchard of Worms (965–1025) or Ivo of Chartres (1040–1115/16) should be mentioned. In the Church of the East the bishops Isho‘bokht of Rev Ardashir (fl. 8th c. CE) or Gabriel of Basra (fl. 9th c. CE) or ‘Abdisho‘ bar Brikha (d. 1318) stand out. Only some years earlier, the bishop and later maphrian Grigorios Bar ‘Ebroyo (1225/6–1286) compiled a law book which is still in use in the Syriac Orthodox Church.²⁴

22 Peter Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, in his seminal work all in all suggested a gradually uniting structure in the West as juxtaposed to a disintegrating and eventually declining structure in the East. In the face of the very slow construction of papal authority within Latin Christianity, which, at its peak, was faced with massive heretical movements during the 12th and 13th century before it itself again waned in power during the 14th c. – which are outside of the scope of his narrative – I tend to be sceptical of the accurateness of this image.

23 Reuter, “Ein Europa der Bischöfe”.

24 Kaufhold, “Richter in den syrischen Rechtsquellen”; Austin, *Shaping Church Law*; Weltecke, “Zum syrisch-orthodoxen Leben”.

Bishops were also deeply entangled with the secular powers. On the one hand, they engaged in the secular administration and even in the military defence of cities and regions in the Latin World as well as in the Middle East. Their investiture by secular powers as loyal office bearers of the realm in the Latin world is well known. Lay investiture led to conflicts like the so-called Investiture Controversy during the later half of the 11th and the first decade of the 12th century. However, the same phenomena occurred not only under Byzantine²⁵ but also under Muslim law albeit on a less systematic scale. Secular powers invested bishops all the same. Here, too, the heads of the churches tried to impede this practise.²⁶

Above all, the decentralised structure correlated with the multiplicity of churches and denominations. In fact, it was a shared similarity that drove them apart: The churches claimed an exclusivist universal supremacy as the ecclesiological ideal against each other and in strong competition with each other. Yet, no single ecclesiastical institution could enforce an ultimate authority. They could only polemically argue for it all along. There was no uniting institution that connected the churches. As institutional bodies, only some of the churches were connected by means of mutual understandings as to Christology and ecclesiology, the denominations. With councils and papal letters there existed established forms of communication within the denominations. Official recognition by the fellow leaders of the same denomination usually followed the election of the heads of the churches. Denominations are usually seen as an element of the modern history of Christianity with the split of Catholics and Protestants. But surely, the first age of what was termed as “Konfessionalisierung” in German historical research,²⁷ had been the 5th to the 6th century.²⁸ The form that stabilised in the 6th century proved to be astonishingly resilient. Almost all of the denominations and churches have existed in their medieval constellation up to the present day. For the period until 1350 only one additional denominational process was set in motion, the separation

25 See Pennington, et al. “Bischof, Bischofsamt”.

26 The freedom of the church was one key element of the reform policy by the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Michael the Great, see Weltecke, *Die “Beschreibung der Zeiten”*.

27 Schilling, “Die Konfessionalisierung im Reich”; Reinhard, “Zwang zur Konfessionalisierung?”; Greyerz, et al., *Interkonfessionalität*.

28 On the question of periodisation see above Nr. 17. In the present contribution the lively debate on the appropriateness of the term “Konfessionalisierung” for Eastern Christianity cannot be addressed here. In my opinion this term best describes the various processes of differentiation from the 5th to the 6th century. It also reflects contemporary terms like the Syriac *tawditho* (avowal, denomination, church).

of the Latin and the Greek churches. Two hundred years after the schism of 1054, Latin and Greek Christians in one city were still gathered under the jurisdiction of one bishop; a second hierarchy only slowly emerged, starting in the Latin Crusader states.²⁹

4 Model 1: The Bamboo Forest

How could the medieval system of churches and denominations be visualised? Existing models which, unlike the pope-and-emperor model, actually comprise Eastern churches, are usually motivated by an image of parting ways or branches from a common trunk.³⁰ The resulting tree model is, in fact, a traditional model of Christianity in order to describe the succession of office and divine presence from Jesus to the apostles and in turn to their successors, the bishops and patriarchs. It obtained political importance in the ecclesiological model of the pentarchy, the ideal of universal Christian rule through the Roman imperial patriarchates of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem.³¹ With growing Latin aspirations, the pentarchy became a competing model for the Roman exclusive claim. With the emergence of new *catholicoi*, patriarchs and autocephalous churches in the 6th centuries and the time that followed, it became an ecclesiological claim like the ultimate supremacy of the pope that is still debated today.³²

The tree model had spiritual implications, too. The very idea of apostolic succession, which is perpetuated in the representatives of the apostles, the patriarchs, and from there in the bishops, naturally leads to a construction with one root and many branches. It can thus be found in early Christian church historiography, such as by Eusebius of Caesarea (260/4–339/40).³³ Eusebius wanted to show the progressive sacralisation of the world. Thus, he tried to track the several successions of the emerging patriarchates simultaneously. Others continued his work and strove to survey the different branches many centuries afterwards like the Melkite chronicler Agapius of Mabbug (Manbij in Syria) in about the year 940.³⁴ Here the tree model expresses not so much

29 Pahlitzsch, *Graeci und Suriani*.

30 This is also the case in Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*. See also for example http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Histoire_du_christianisme (accessed April 30, 2013).

31 Apart from the Handbooks mentioned above see also Brox, *Kirchengeschichte des Altertums*.

32 As an example Oeldemann, *Die Apostolizität der Kirche*.

33 Chesnut, *The First Christian Histories*; Timpe, "Was ist Kirchengeschichte?"

34 Agapius of Manbij, *Histoire universelle*.

a soteriological hope. Rather, it is used as a simple cognitive tool to organize Christian history as a coherent narrative, in this case from the point of view of the Chalcedonian denomination.

To solve the dilemma of representing simultaneous chronologies of several successions, chronicles in the tradition of Eusebius sometimes display impressive graphical structures. One of the most intricate systems was invented by the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Michael the Great (1126–1199). By organising the layout of the pages in three columns, he distinguished between the three successions of his own denomination on the right (Syriac Orthodox, Coptic, Armenian), the succession of the empires (at least three or four) in the middle column and a mixed column with information on other churches and regional rulers on the left.³⁵ In his appendix he enumerated all the simultaneous kings and patriarchs he had mentioned in his work.

In our age of ecumenical interaction the tree model has become very popular.³⁶ But it is also highly romantic and empirically unconvincing. It usually favours, again, the Western denominations, while the Eastern churches appear as deviances. What is more, the branches all seem to sprout from the one and only trunk, Jesus Christ, which was certainly not the case, historically speaking. Christianity has been shown to be a confluence from different sources. Additionally, research in ancient Christianity has pointed towards the fluidity and the diversity of the first phase of the history of Christianity, when rather different teachings coexisted and competed side by side. Rather than a parting of ways in the 5th and 6th century, diversity was reduced at that time when the institutions emerged, fixing dogmatic positions and organisational structures.³⁷ Furthermore, from the point of view of the philosophy of science the tree model has been criticised convincingly by Deleuze and Guattari long ago, whose arguments against the tree model may be also used here: The tree symbolises hierarchical relations and it does not allow for criss-crossings of influence and knowledge.³⁸

Given that I only want to describe the transcultural period of Christianity between the 6th and 14th century without producing teleological statements, I should like to cut the mythical trunk representing a primordial unity that had

35 Michel le Syrien, *Chronique*. For sources and studies see Hage, “Michael der Syrer”; Weltecke, “Michael the Great”.

36 See for example Lübking, *Kursbuch Konfirmation*.

37 See for example King, “Factions, Variety, Diversity, Multiplicity”; Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*.

38 I would like to thank Jörg Feuchter for this reference: Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix (2004), *Capitalism and Schizophrenia II. A thousand plateaus (=Mille plateaux, Paris 1980)*, transl. by Massumi, Brian (New York).

never existed. As a result, my visual suggestion could be not a tree, but a bamboo forest (figure 10.1) with a multiplicity of parallel trunks. The model serves the purpose of avoiding myths as well as teleologies and of deleting hierarchies between the churches in order to create new space to manoeuvre with constructive ideas. My diagram organises the medieval system in a synchronic way and displays organisational affiliation here by three different shades of grey. The main three denominations are from left to right by the Miaphysitic churches, by the Church of the East and the Imperial church. The latter eventually resulted in the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox denomination.

The bamboo forest raises the question of the before and the after, which cannot be dealt with in detail within the framework of the present paper. Two sentences may suffice: the bamboo trunks root in the same soil, where different currents and elements are on the go – ancient Christianity. Certainly, around the year 1350 radical shifts took place within Eastern Christianity. Timurid conquests and other backlashes turned the tide of Asian Christianity, while Western Christianity stumbled into a decisive phase of change itself.³⁹



FIGURE 10.1 *Bamboo model.*⁴⁰

39 See, however Richard, *La papauté*; Müller, *Die kirchliche Krise des Spätmittelalters*.

40 I would like to thank Tina Raddatz BA for sketching the models.

5 Model II: Local Christianities

The system of churches and denominations organises one level of Christian history. However, economic and social life conditions, positions of power, local modes of cohesion as well as rites, symbols and theological trends display local differences, which often cut through the denominational affiliation. Here, the anthropological concept of local religion could become a very useful tool for the transcultural history of Christianity.⁴¹ Local conditions can and should be described in their own right. This is especially helpful for specific regional modes of exchange with other religions, movements and denominations. For the research of medieval Latin Christianity, the anthropological concept of local religion has already played a stimulating role.⁴² As a result, anthropologists and scholars of religious studies have started to speak about the diverse local “Christianities” of medieval Europe, even about a pluralism, although these Christianities all belong to the same church.⁴³ Ultimately, local Christianities must be the building blocks of the history of Christianity at large. They would organise a horizontal transcultural narrative according to overlapping geographic-cultural areas. These spaces, too, prove to be astonishingly stable.

The Muslim overlords for example tolerated the co-existence of different churches and their hierarchies. In the large metropolises, the competition between the churches therefore led to an extreme multi-denominational situation as all the major churches sought to establish themselves with a metropolitan or a bishop.⁴⁴ The periphery of the vast area of Muslim rule was characterised by more mono-denominational structures, like Europe, Byzantium, Ethiopia and the Caucasus. Here, Christian kingdoms had been able to winter Muslim expansion or newly established themselves during the Middle Ages. Christian kings in connection with the ecclesiastical hierarchy, in turn, exerted a stronger albeit never entirely successful pressure of ecclesiastical standardisation in their realms.

The medieval contemporaries were acutely aware of this regionalisation of Christianity. While early Christian writers had invented the universal history of the one church in the apostolic succession, medieval historiographers took this frame to develop histories of specific sections. Mention could be made of “The Ecclesiastical History of the English People” by the English monk Bede

41 Taking the problem further: Tweed, “On Moving Across”.

42 Hoff, *Die ethnologische Konstruktion des Christentums*.

43 Auffahrt, “Das Ende des Pluralismus”.

44 Weltecke, “Zum syrisch-orthodoxen Leben”.

(672/3–735). To that end he designed a monograph on a landscape with specific climatic, economic, ethnic, social and religious conditions. Out of the specific interaction between pagans and Christians as well as between Christian Britons and Saxons grew – through divine leadership – an English Christian people.

Other examples focus on Syria, Iraq and Iran like the Syriac chronicles by the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Dionysius of Tel Mahre (died 843)⁴⁵ and the Syriac Orthodox Maphrian Bar ‘Ebroyo (1226–1286). The third section of Bar ‘Ebroyo’s universal chronicle is a history of the country east of the river Euphrates. He, too, was very interested in climate, language, culture and ethnicity. By expanding the scope of his work to the Armenian and the Church of the East, he also designed a Christian history of a landscape.⁴⁶

Beside the important spiritual, cultural and ethnic differences which come to light by studying local Christianities, further structural similarities become apparent. These again cut through denominational affiliations and even weaken their concrete local impact. The Arabic language was common between Christians in the cities of the Middle East. The language also connected Christians in Al-Andalus and in Iraq in common circles of scholarly communication. They also shared the same social conditions with the status of Dhimmis. The Christians in the multi-denominational metropolises of the Middle East also shared their culture, their tastes, their artistic motives and many other elements even with Jews and Muslims.⁴⁷ On the other hand, a comparable Christian warrior elite existed in Armenian Cilicia or France. The noble fighters recognized each other as relatives when they met in the Crusader period.⁴⁸

6 Model III: Networks

On a third level, I shall focus on the relations between the different Christianities. The universal perspective was never completely lost. However, the ways of

45 Abramowski, *Dionysius von Tellmahre*.

46 Pinggéra, “Christologischer Konsens und kirchliche Identität”; Witakowski, “The Ecclesiastical Chronicle of Gregory Bar ‘Ebroyo”; Weltecke, “Les trois grandes chroniques syro-orthodoxes”.

47 Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*; Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*; Snelders, *Identity and Christian-Muslim Interaction*.

48 Hamilton, *The Latin Church in the Crusader States*; Weitenberg, “Cultural Interaction in the Middle East”.

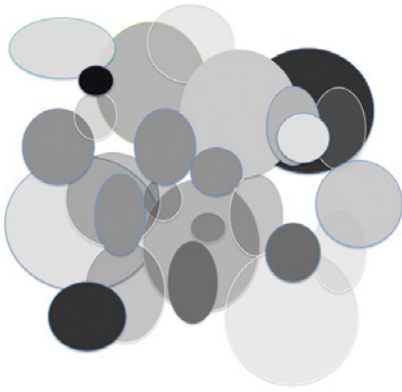


FIGURE 10.2
Circle model.

communication between the different Christianities and churches became precarious or even broke down entirely for a certain period of time. During the 10th century, the above-mentioned Melkite chronicler Bishop Agapius of Mabbug found it difficult to gather information on the Western parts of the Calcedonian denomination. The specific medieval media of cohesion within Christianity were different nets of communication, partly of an organised, partly of a spontaneous and informal nature. They could become precarious or even completely break down, not only due to deficient ecclesiastical cohesion, but also to political and economical circumstances.

Network theory provides a model as well as concrete methods to analyse social formations. One key element of network analysis is its focus on non-hierarchical, voluntary and informal links.⁴⁹ These unofficial connections seem to be surprising. The churches are largely seen as institutions which functioned through order and obedience. Yet, there are far more connections to explore. Through nets of communication, movements which were ousted as heretical could create connections between the East Roman Empire and the South of France or Italy in the 12th century. Here, hierarchies were the product and not the cause of networks.⁵⁰ The above-mentioned patriarchs who acknowledged each other's election saw each other on an equal level; they also communicated on a voluntary basis. Furthermore, as was seen, the medieval hierarchs themselves faced the fact that reality fell far short of the ideal of centralised administration. For them, too, networking with bishops and secular

49 Reuter, "Ein Europa der Bischöfe"; Collar, "Network Theory and Religious Innovation"; Vásquez, "Studying Religion in Motion".

50 Rottenwöhler, *Der Katharismus*; Barber, *Die Katharer*; Barber, *The Cathars*. However, some scholars doubt relations between Cathars and Bogomils, f.e. Pegg, *The Corruption of Angels*, Moore, *The War on Heresy*. As Jörg Feuchter thankfully tells me, this controversy reaches new peaks in current scholarly debates on Catharism.

powers was essential for the maintenance even of the basis of their authority, let alone for the instigation of reform measures or other modes of action. Pope Urban II (1088–1099) undertook intense networking during the summer and autumn of the year 1096 on journeys throughout France to convince bishops and magnates to attend his reform council in Clermont-Ferrand in November 1096. Without his careful preparation, his promulgation of the crusade would never have met with such enthusiasm. Parts of his flock, the emperor among them, preferred to abstain and be loyal to a competing anti-pope Clement III (d. 1100).⁵¹ Personal contact and personal consent was as essential to medieval ecclesiastical church rule as it was fragile, especially in areas of fierce religious competition. Thus, network theory is today seen as a useful tool for the history of the Latin church.⁵²

Its implementation for a transcultural history of Christianity seems to be the obvious next step. Networks become apparent which cross the borders of the affiliations. Artworks betray communication across the denominations. Verena Krebs has analysed traces of European influences in Ethiopian art as proof for continuing contacts for which written sources are lacking.⁵³ Iconographical elements and style also travelled intensively between the churches in the Middle East.⁵⁴

Nets of contact and communication even led to a diffusion of texts, traditions and practices on a transcultural scale. During the early medieval period the texts by the Syrian poet and church father Ephrem the Syrian (306–373) travelled to all the four corners of the Christian world. His work, not the books by the North African Saint Augustine, was translated into the many languages of Christianity, from Syriac to Greek, Latin, Ethiopic or Romanian.⁵⁵ The Syriac writings of the mystic Isaac of Ninive (fl. 7th century) likewise travelled to the West. Isaac was a member of the Church of the East, which was much polemicalised against by the Latin and the Greek Church. But these conflicts did not impede the translation of his texts into Greek, and from there into Russian as well as their use in orthodox monastic circles.⁵⁶ The transcultural popularity of the Saints Barbara and George are further obvious examples. The veneration

51 Jaspert, *Die Kreuzzüge*; Mayer, *Geschichte der Kreuzzüge*.

52 Drossbach/Schmidt, *Zentrum und Netzwerk*.

53 <http://www.geschichte.uni-konstanz.de/professuren/prof-dr-dorothea-weltecke/http-forschungsbetreuung/verena-krebs> (accessed May 2, 2013).

54 Immerzeel, *Identity Puzzles*; Snelders, *Identity and Christian-Muslim Interaction*.

55 Palmer, *The Influence of Saint Ephraim the Syrian*.

56 Kessel, *A bibliography of Syriac ascetic and mystical literature*; Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, 223–225; Janeras, “La diffusion d’Isaac de Ninive”.

for the saints, legends and iconographic elements travelled from Cappadocia, Palestine and Syria everywhere into the Christian world and therefore prove connections between the churches.⁵⁷ Likewise, networks diffused the use of frankincense in Christian service. For ancient Christianity frankincense had been a symbol for the cult for the emperor and anathema to them until the 4th century. However, during the early centuries of the Middle Ages frankincense became a key element of Christian liturgy everywhere.⁵⁸

The concrete ways of diffusion of texts, religious movements, saints, liturgical and artistic motives deserve systematic analysis to bring specific nets to light. More important for the present problem, however, is the fact itself. The necessary conditions for these processes of diffusion were contact zones between the local Christianities and the denominations. Some of these were commercial centres of exchange.⁵⁹ The multi-denominational metropolises in North Africa and Western Asia also were religious hubs. Here, material and immaterial elements of religious culture like the veneration of St. Barbara or St. George could transcend denominational borders and journey far distances on internal nets. Texts, rites and iconographical elements could be translated and adapted.

Sometimes links were intensified and included the hierarchy, especially during the 12th and 13th century. Political and religious interests fostered the diplomatic exchange between the churches. A council in Jerusalem in the year 1141 for example included Latin as well as Armenian hierarchs.⁶⁰ The Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Michael wrote a tract against dualistic movements, which he saw as a contribution to the 3rd Lateran Council where he had apparently been invited.⁶¹

However, the connections only exceptionally resulted in established official channels. They were usually maintained by merchants, pilgrims, neighbours, networks of religious orders⁶² and many other media as yet to be explored. For the present, I prefer the metaphor of the network to the model of current and

57 See for example Weyh, *Die syrische Barbara-Legende*; Eberhart, *Hl. Barbara*; Grishin, "Byzantine Iconographic Programmes in Cappadocia".

58 Atchley, *A History of the Use of Incense*; Reinicke/Feulner/Berger, "Weihrauch."; Tubach/Wünsche, "Weihrauch".

59 McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*, 716ff.

60 Schmidt/Halfter, "Der Brief Papst Innocenz' II".

61 Weltecke, *Die "Beschreibung der Zeiten"*, 92.

62 The networks of the religious orders, in this case the Knights Templar, were for example responsible for the transfer of the veneration of the holy icon of Saydnaya close to Damascus to as far away as France; see for example Kedar, "Convergences"; Immerzeel, "The Monastery of Our Lady".



FIGURE 10.3 *Network model. (Creative Commons Social Network Analysis Visualization. Published in Grandjean, Martin (2014). "La connaissance est un réseau". Les Cahiers du Numérique 10 (3): 37–54.)*

flow suggested by Thomas Tweed.⁶³ Networks as models are better adapted to the characteristics of medieval Christianity with its important limits to fluidity. The links connected groups with at times rigid borders, from far away and with fixed residences. It was not caused primarily by migration like Tweed's field of research but by (long distance) modes of communication, interaction and exchange.

7 Transcultural Connectivity through Rivalry and a Concept of Unity

The networks on different levels and in different forms indeed produced and sustained connectivity throughout the Christian worlds in spite of the churches and their claims for superiority and orthodoxy, as we have seen. The net was fragile, ever changing, depended on personal contacts⁶⁴ and had no centre. Above all, there is no reason to romanticise these contacts. On the contrary, as can be seen in detail research, they are often motivated and accelerated by

63 Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*. The rhizome model by Deleuze/Guattari, *Capitalism* is certainly better adapted, also because of its diachronical perspective. Yet, its deliberate chaotic structure again does not seem to fully represent the medieval ecclesiastical system.

64 For observations concerning personal contacts, see Pahlitzsch/Weltecke, "Konflikte zwischen nicht-lateinischen Kirchen".

competition and conflict, rather than by friendly coexistence or cooperation.⁶⁵ In reality, many exchanges probably were hostile takeovers. Because of competition, communities wanted their share of the power of a saint of a rival community; they wanted to be just as pious; they wanted to have liturgical services just as exquisite, they needed the same philosophical works for their dogmatic argumentation, etc.

An event from the time around the year 1000 illustrates the chaotic communication, which was spurred on by rivalry, authority claims and conflicting affiliations. Eduard Schwartz in his pioneer study⁶⁶ had shown that the calculation of the Easter date was a symbol of authority in the relations between the different Christianities. The date of Easter depended on cosmic events (the first full moon after the spring equinox) as well as on the Julian calendar. The fixing of the date was based on calculations and on rules rather than observation. The reckoning connected astronomical phenomena and the calendar and also kept the Jewish Passover in mind, either by relating the Easter date to the latter or making sure that it was not connected. As a result, different mathematical methods and diverse rules led to conflicting dates. Thus, the computations were not only a symbol but also a symptom indicating the existence of mutual relations and their quality. The disagreements affirm the “decentral” as well as the entangled character of medieval Christianity presented here.

It is well known how much pain it took the papal curia to enforce new methods of calculation against local Christianities in Ireland and England. Several centuries were needed.⁶⁷ Around the year 950 Christian scholars in Ireland finally started to adopt the calculation method by Bede the Venerable. In England the synod of Whitby 664 had officially recognized the new methods, however, disagreements flared up around the year 1000. Media of these reoccurring disputations were legates, tracts, letters and synods.⁶⁸

Still the churches observed each others’ calculations and communicated about them. The Melkite chronicler Yahya of Antioch (fl. 11th c. CE) reports a controversy about the Easter date in the year 1007. He explains that Christians traditionally celebrated Easter always after the Jewish Passover. Theoretically, Ecumenical Councils had un-linked these dates in principle, however, older

65 For the journey of a scientific object, the horoscope for the conjunction of planets in the year 1187, see Weltecke, “Die Konjunktion der Planeten im September 1186”.

66 Schwartz, *Christliche und jüdische Ostertafeln*.

67 Ginzel, *Handbuch der mathematischen und technischen Chronologie*.

68 Schmid, *Die Osterfestberechnung in der abendländischen Kirche*; Harrison, “The Synod of Whitby”; O’Neil, “The ‘scandal’ of the Dating of Easter”; Springsfeld, *Alkuins Einfluß auf die Komputistik*, 191; Warntjes, “A Newly Discovered Irish Computus”.

traditions apparently prevailed in practice in the Middle East.⁶⁹ As the Jewish sages could not agree on the date of Passover for the year 1007,⁷⁰ their disputes resulted in conflicts among the Christians as well between a promulgation of Easter for the 6th or the 13th of April. Fierce disputes arose. Yahya states that eventually in Syria and Egypt the different denominations, naming the Melkites, the Church of the East and the Miaphysite churches, agreed on the earlier date. The Melkite Patriarch of Alexandria approved of the decision. The Christians followed one of the two Jewish calculations.⁷¹ Only the (Melkite) diocese of Jerusalem, being vacant at the time, and a group of Copts in Upper Egypt at first chose to differ and consequently caused much tension. They still ate meat during the Holy Week, when all the others already prepared for Holy Friday. At last, they obeyed and started to fast, too.⁷²

Entirely independently from Yahya, the Armenian chronicler Mathew of Edessa (fl. 12th c. CE) confirms the conflict if not the details of Yahya's report. For the same year he narrates a fierce dispute between Armenians and Greeks on the Easter date. From his point of view, Greeks in Jerusalem had celebrated Easter at a wrong date. In this case they would have gone forth with their decision to celebrate the later date in contrast to Yahya's statement. Consequently, the miracle of the holy fire in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, always expected during the night of Easter, had failed to appear.⁷³ There had been Muslims in the church, waiting together with the Christians. This detail is historically accurate; Muslims relied on this miracle as an omen.⁷⁴ As the holy fire flopped the Muslims committed a massacre among the Christians. Following Mathew, even at the court of the East Roman Emperor in Constantinople the calculation was disputed in the presence of the emperor. Greeks, Armenians and Jews were heard; the Armenian scholars convinced the emperor of the accuracy of their reckoning.⁷⁵ No historical interpretation as to these conflicting

69 Bach, *Die Osterfest-Berechnung in alter und neuer Zeit*. Ritter, "Israel als Gegenüber der griechischen Kirche".

70 Several controversies on calendar computation disturbed the Jewish world, on the one hand within the Rabbanites, on the other hand between Rabbanites and Caraites. However, a controversy for the year 1007 has as yet not been identified. See Ankori, *Karaites in Byzantium*, 275ff.

71 Yahya of Antioch, *Chronicle*, 275.

72 Yahya of Antioch, *Chronicle*, 276.

73 Matthew of Edessa, *Chronicle*, 41–42.

74 For bibliographical references and sources see Canard, "La Destruction de l'Église"; Kedar, "Convergences"; Weltecke, "Die Zerstörung der Grabeskirche".

75 Matthew of Edessa, *Chronicle* 41–42.

details and some previous research on this event can be attempted here.⁷⁶ Unlike Matthew, Yaḥya was an eyewitness of these events and thus one would prefer his report. Some 150 years after this particular event the controversy was still worth retelling with an Armenian tendency. Suffice it again to stress the fact that no church was simply able to promulgate its Easter date for all the churches but that they indeed strove to do this and claimed to have the best calculation. Thus, they demonstrate that they still conceptualised Christianity as a religious formation overarching churches, denominations and local Christianities.

Even after Eastern Christianity had been weakened in the mid 14th century never to recover to its former glory, this concept of a common Christianity prevailed. Boccaccio (1313–1375) tells the story about a slave and prisoner of war, taken for a pagan and baptised as Peter. Although nominally a Christian, his sexual relationship with the daughter of his Italian mentor counted as fornication deserving the death penalty. Already on the way to the gallows, the young man was recognised as his son by one of three Armenian ambassadors who had come on a mission to the pope to negotiate a crusade. The young Armenian was now permitted to marry his girl, and they lived happily ever after.⁷⁷ At the sunset of the Middle Ages, renewed efforts to ecclesiastical union were disputed at the Council of Ferrara-Florence, where even non-Chalcedonian Eastern prelates had been invited one more time.⁷⁸ One could even find traces of the fact that the concept of a transcultural and ecumenical Christian religion had never entirely faded.

8 Conclusion: Transcultural Christianity as an Entangled History of a Religion without a Centre

A new model of the transcultural history of Christianity will have to show how differences, a missing centre and dialectic tensions characterised this religion between 550 and 1350 as well as its fragile and at the same time astonishingly resilient cohesion. A new periodisation will have to identify turning points, shifts of hubs, grades of connectivity and decisive moments of Christianity at large. To study them, close-up and a bird's-eye perspective obviously need to

76 Gil, *History of Palestine*, 373f rephrases Yaḥya's report and mentions the controversies between Rabbanites and Karaites; Brandes, "Endzeiterwartung im Jahre 1009 a.D.?" also mentions this report.

77 Boccaccio, *Decamerone*, v. 7.

78 Gill, *Konstanz und Basel-Florenz*; Schofield/Gill, "Basel-Ferrara-Florenz".

be combined. In order to tackle this task, the information comes handy that medieval Christians themselves had designed historical narratives which were an alternative to the Eurocentric and pope-centric models. We do not have to start from scratch. Much can also be learned from Jews and Muslims, who are likewise faced with the task of narrating religious histories without a centre. So there is no excuse to keep things as they are.

In the present essay, I have suggested three models, the decentral system of churches (the bamboo model), the local Christianities as horizontal and overlapping areas (the circle model), and the emergent criss-crossing networks (the network model). These are suggested as three analytical levels or perspectives of the narration. Each model stresses a specific aspect of the relations between the churches but they need be taken together for a full picture. Whichever shape a model will take on, its task will have to be to explain universal diffusion as well as local or denominational differences. I hope to have shown beyond doubt that this history is indeed an entangled one. "Christianity", at the moment an over-simplified scholarly trope, a popular code for Westernness, is not fully understood unless separation, influences, connectivity and dependencies across its borders are fully taken account of.

Post Scriptum

As this contribution was completed 2013 and edited 2014 the important recent publication by Klaus Koschorke can only be mentioned here. Koschorke suggests a similar approach: Koschorke, Klaus. "Polycentric Structures in the History of World Christianity (Inaugural Lecture)." In *Polycentric Structures in the History of World Christianity. Polyzentrische Strukturen in Der Geschichte Des Weltchristentums*, edited by Klaus Koschorke and Adrian Hermann, 15–27. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014.

Hartmut Leppin inaugurated the Leibniz research project "Polyphony of Late Antique Christianity" at the Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main in 2015, which pursues a related concept. See <http://www.geschichte.uni-frankfurt.de/58614833/Leibniz-Projekt> (Accessed June 10, 2016.)

Verena Krebs finished her study on relations between Ethiopia and Medieval Europe, *Windows onto the World: Culture Contact and Western Christian Art in Ethiopia, 1400–1550*, PhD thesis (manuscript), Konstanz 2014.

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Armlet of the Pinnacle of the Noble Victory Banner: Locating Traces of Imperial Tibet in a *Dhāraṇī* in the British Museum¹

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In the Schmitt-Meade Collection at the British Museum, there are several Tibetan prints and wood blocks with *dhāraṇī*-texts. The largest and most impressive example is the focus of the present article. A recent print made from the block is given here in fig. 11.1.² The block is not dated, but it is probably no older than the middle decades of the twentieth century. The purpose of this essay is to identify, translate and discuss the text on the wood block and to make some observations on the auspicious emblems that are placed in and around it. Our aim is to show that although the block itself is modern, the text and symbols are ancient, dating to the eighth century if not before. A study of the text and *mantras* also gives some indication of the religious and cultural context in which the *dhāraṇī* was created, while the instructions for the use of the text, given as an appendix in some printed editions, indicate of how these materials found ritual use in the Tibetan Buddhist milieu. The text on the block, the *Āryadhvajāgrakeyūranāma dhāraṇī*, is one of two that are favoured for prayer flags. A second *dhāraṇī*, generally known by its short name *Sitātapatra*, is also a popular choice for prayer flags. This a complicated text, transmitted in several conflated versions that merit separate critical study.³

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 - 2 The block proper is a single piece of wood, slightly bowed, and heavily blackened with ink. It measures 35.6 × 30.5 cm and is carved on one side with text and auspicious emblems. There are adze marks on the back. Also on the back is written 'Rs 120', indicating the piece was traded in India.
 - 3 *Āryatathāgatoṣṇīśasitātapatre aparajītamahāpratyamṅgiraparamasiddha nāma dhāraṇī* is the full name of this text. It is found in many prayer flags and in *dhāraṇī* text collections from at least the sixteenth century. Ngawang Samten and Janardan Pandey have prepared a

As a consequence this paper will focus on the *Āryadhvajāgrakeyūra*. Although a short text, it is not lacking in interest and historical importance.

1 The Eight Auspicious Emblems and the Seven Jewels

The wood block carrying this *dhāraṇī* is decorated with a number of auspicious emblems. These appear frequently in modern lists and study of them has been published by Béla Kelényi.⁴ In our wood block only seven of the eight emblems are shown. In the middle, where we might expect the ‘vase of plenty’ to complete the set, we see the ‘precious jewels’. These jewels are six in number and placed on a lotus pedestal surrounded by flames. The six jewels – rather than the customary three indicating the Buddha, Dharma and Saṅgha – are thought by Tibetan scholars to whom we have spoken to be symbols of the Buddha’s six perfections or *pāramitās*. Unfortunately, we have not traced a textual warrant for this interpretation. However, a second print, shown here in fig. 11.2, supports the interpretation, as will be discussed below. Aside from the jewels in the centre, the emblems in fig. 11.1 are: (1) parasol, (2) two fish, (3) lotus, (4) endless knot, (5) wheel, (6) conch-shell and (7) victory banner. As just mentioned, these belong to the standard set of ‘eight auspicious emblems’ or *aṣṭamaṅgala*, Tib. BKRA SHIS RTAGS BRGYAD. Despite the ubiquity of these symbols, the study of their history in the visual culture of Buddhism is at an early stage.⁵ The oldest textual reference in our readings comes from the DBA’ BZHED, a text compiled in the eleventh century.⁶ In that narrative it is said that the preceptor Padmasambhava had “a bird-shaped vase made of silver embossed with the eight auspicious emblems.”⁷ Somewhat earlier is the Dunhuang manuscript of *Noble Noose of Methods* (**Āryopāyapāśapadmamāl āsaṃgraha*[?]). In the 41st chapter, edited by Cantwell and Mayer, mention is made of the BKRA SHIS BRGYAD which the editors understand as the eight auspicious symbols. Here we give their translation of the passage:⁸

Sanskrit edition for *DHĪH* 33 (2002): 145–154, a digital version of which is available at <http://www.dsbproject.org>.http Meanwhile Tibor Porció has worked on the text extensively and published some studies, among them “On the Brāhmī Glosses of the Uyur Sitātapatrā Text” with further bibliography.

4 Kelényi, *A szél-paripa növekedjék*.

5 In addition to Kelényi, *A szél-paripa növekedjék*, see Espeset, “A Case Study on the Evolution of Chinese Religious Symbols,” and Cicuzza, *A Mirror reflecting the Entire World*.

6 Wangdu and Diemberger, *dBa’ bzhed*; Willis “From World Religion to World Dominion”.

7 Wangdu and Diemberger, *dBa’ bzhed*, folio 12v, lines 5–6.

8 Cathy Cantwell and Robert Mayer, *A Noble Noose of Methods, the Lotus Garland Synopsis*, 82.

The eight auspicious symbols signify captivating everyone. They show the auspiciousness of remaining unaffected by the bonds of *saṃsāra*, even while engaging with it, and of remaining unaffected by the *śrāvaka*'s bias towards peace, even while engaging with *nirvāṇa*. Thus, this is the auspiciousness of not being overawed by anything.

Earlier in date by several centuries is a group of six emblems carved on a pillar at the Jetavana *stūpa* in Anurādhapura. The most well known examples, however, are those on the stone parasol at Sārnāth that once sheltered the famous Bala Bodhisatva image. This can be placed in the first quarter of the second century CE.⁹ Painted versions appear at Dunhuang and, concurrently, sets were cast in bronze in Sri Lanka. In the British Museum there is a group from Sri Lanka acquired through Hugh Nevill. These belong to about the eighth century.¹⁰ Some of the emblems show remarkable durability, such as the pair of fish, while some are dropped from the group, like the elephant goad. Others undergo a transformation, like the *svastika*, which turns into the 'endless knot'. In contrast, the horse in the centre of the wood block comes from a different grouping, i.e. the 'seven jewels' of the Cakravartin or universal king. These seven are the wheel, elephant, horse, pearl, wife, minister and general. The homology of the king and the Buddha, through the ideal of the Cakravartin, means these are at once symbols of enlightenment and political dominion, the horse having special purchase because the Buddha rode out from the palace on horseback when he renounced the world. This is, in our view, why the horse in the centre carries the six jewels, as seen in fig. 11.2. If these are indeed the Buddha's six perfections, they are in many ways the essence of Buddhahood. The Buddha's perfections, through the medium of the prayer-flag and 'wind horse' (RLUNG RTA), are carried into the wider landscape, the sound of the flag fluttering in the wind emulating the trotting hooves of the horse.¹¹ Of course the 'wind horse' *per se* is not known in the Yarlung period. In the Tibetan context, as noted by Lewis Doney, the precious possessions of the lord

9 We are grateful to Osmund Boparachchi for his comments on this material. The Bala image inscription is given in Sircar, *Select inscriptions*, 136–138. The image itself is illustrated frequently. For the date we follow Falk, "The yuga of Sphujiddhvaja".

10 These items carry British Museum number Asia 1898,0702.97–104. Item number 102 in the set, a Śrīvatsa, has been dated wide of the mark: von Schroeder, *Indo-Tibetan Bronzes*, 1B, 1st millennium BCE; Bolon, *Forms of the Goddess Lajja Gauri*, figure 128, 1000 BCE. The fabric is comparable to seated Buddhas from Anurādhapura datable to about the eighth century CE.

11 The subject is taken up in Kelényi, *A szél-paripa növekedjék*.

(RJE'I CAN BRGYAD) – variously numbered eight or nine – were held by Tibetan factions in the early post-imperial period.¹² Brandon Dotson, basing himself on Geza Uray, has argued that RLUNG RTA is a post-imperial adaptation of the imperial administrative term SLUNGS RTA, meaning a ‘curvée or stage horse’.¹³ The ‘apotheosis’ of this term, to follow Dotson, was due to its ritual as well as administrative applications, something that also happened to the RU DAR or ‘military division banner’. As we will see in the following section, however, there is evidence for these in the Yarlung period, so they are helpful in understanding how elements were taken over and re-worked in the post-imperial setting.

2 The Four Animals

The animals in each corner are an important iconographic feature of the British Museum wood blocks. As can be seen in fig. 11.1, these consist of a tiger, lion, dragon and eagle (more correctly, Garuḍa with snake). In some examples, the animals are replaced by their names, written in words, thus: STAG, SENG, ‘BRUG and KHYUNG. This shows in fig. 11.2. In an exploration of the complex symbolism and associations of these creatures, Samten G. Karmay was obliged to note that “neither written nor oral explanations exist anywhere for these animal representations,” apart from a text that he assigns to the thirteenth century.¹⁴ The wider archaeological and art historical contexts suggest, however, that the four animals were drawn from the animals emblematic of the four directions in Tang China. In later times the significations that prevailed in the imperial period faded from memory and the connections charted by Karmay were developed and elaborated. Here our purpose is to excavate the archaeology of the symbols, that is to say, their proto-history not documented by later texts or traditions.

The four animals, in the first place, are found in Chinese tombs and on bronze mirrors. A good example of one such mirror is kept the British Museum (fig. 11.3). The tomb and the mirror are analogous because both place the noble person at the centre of a cosmological system. In essence, the four animals represent the four directions of the compass and so signal the entire world. The animals are: the green dragon (east), the white tiger (west), the dark tortoise encircled by a snake (north), and the red bird or phoenix (south). The mirror,

12 Lewis Doney, *The Zangs Gling Ma*, 9.

13 Brandon Dotson, “On the Old Tibetan term *khri*n in the legal and ritual lexicons,” 92.

14 Karmay, *The Arrow and the Spindle*, 418.

with its four animals, reflects the noble's face, placing that person at the centre of a world that he or she holds in their hand and thus controls. Similarly, the tomb is a model of the world, with the four directional animals on each side. In some examples, the constellations of the sky are painted on the ceiling. If the mirror gives a fleeting image of the noble person at the centre of a world system, the tomb provides an eternal home, placing the deceased at the centre of a microcosm for all time – at least until the archaeologists or tomb-robbers appear with their spades.

How the directional animals moved from dressing table and tomb into the wider landscape is indicated by evidence from early Japan. At Asuka, the old capital, directional animals derived from Tang prototypes are found in the tombs known as Takamatsuzuka and Kitora. Beyond these examples, there are records, preserved in fifteenth-century illustrated copies, that record how the four directional animals were placed on royal banners. These banners were used by emperor Mommu from 701 – a key year in Japanese history and chronology – as accessories in his royal enthronement ceremony. They were also used to celebrate the New Year.¹⁵ The connections between China and Nara-period Japan – with inauguration of a new era in 701 and the approval of a mission to the Tang court in the same year – show this practice was a Japanese adaptation of Tang ritual. This has important implications for the Tibetan material. While lacking the archaeological and historical clarity of the evidence from Japan, the raising of Tibetan prayer flags during the New Year festival and the use of four animal symbols provide notable parallels.

That the four Tibetan animals have directional associations can be inferred from their position at the four corners of the prayer flag design: the four corners of a page can be imagined as representing the four corners of the world. This is confirmed by a drawing from Dunhuang that shows a *maṇḍala* of Vairocana Buddha (fig. 11.4).¹⁶ On each side, as in most *maṇḍala* designs, there are T-shaped gates with guardians of the directions. Notable in this example are the animals at each gate. These animals do not conform exactly to those known from Japan and China, but they show, nonetheless, that animals had directional associations in the early esoteric context. This helps us understand the creative adaptation of animals in the mythic geography of old Tibet. In particular, the four animals can be connected with the 'four direction temples' built in the four divisions of the Yarlung kingdom. We will return to these temples shortly. For the moment, the main point is that the eastern temple in the set is called KHRA 'BRUG, literally 'falcon dragon'. The temple's name

15 Nara Bunkazai Kenkyūjo, *Asuka Fujiwara-kyō ten*, 166–167.

16 We are grateful to Sam van Schaik for bringing this drawing to our attention.

is popularly explained as referring to a bird that emperor SRONG BTSAN GAM PO conceived to subdue a malevolent dragon haunting the location. This is a variant of the more complex account found in late textual sources.¹⁷ The dragon finds its appropriate place in the east not simply because that is where it sits in the Chinese system, but because the dragon is a well-known symbol of the Chinese emperor who ruled territories east of Tibet. The bird can be explained as a reference to the red bird or phoenix (朱雀 Japanese: *suzaku*). As seen above, this creature presided over the southern quarter. What has happened in Tibet is that the eastern and southern animals have been conflated, and a story created to show Tibetan control of the dragon – the Chinese emperor – on the eastern flank of the Yarlung empire. This explanation is prompted by the Japanese material where the word ‘sparrow’ (雀) is used.¹⁸ And indeed the *suzaku* still presides over the south gate at Nara. This provides a cultural cognate for the connection.¹⁹

Once the sparrow had been moved to the eastern side, space was created in the south for the lion or SENG GE. This lion, to judge from print representations, was thought of as the snow leopard (fig. 11.5). The sparrow then disappeared from the visual arrangement, although we suspect that traces of it will be found in textual and visual sources. Some hints of this, and the fluidity of the system in the formative phase, are shown by the drawing already mentioned (fig. 11.4). The conflation of bird and dragon is also noted by Dan Martin who comments that the ‘BRUG is “rather strangely listed in the category of ‘bird’ in Pha-dam-pa dang Ma-cig.”²⁰ The remaining animals were taken over from the Chinese system with modification, the most notable transformation being the Tortoise and snake. This is turned into Garuḍa with a snake (KHYUNG). The characteristic treatment of this motif is shown in fig. 11.5. Subsequent connections with the KHYUNG PO clan, BON and the understanding reflected in Chinese sources have been explored by Hoong Teik Toh.²¹

The four animals in their Tibetan versions are found on prayer flags to this day. In some examples (fig. 11.5 providing a case in point), the whole design is reconceived as a picture with the flying animals in the sky and the quadrupeds in the landscape.²² However, the new arrangement did not displace the

17 Sørensen and Hazod, *Thundering Falcon*, 249–250.

18 Nara Bunkazai Kenkyūjo, *Asuka Fujiwara-kyō ten*, 166.

19 We are grateful to Akira Shimada for help with the linguistics and for other comments.

20 See ‘Brug in <http://www.thlib.org/reference/dictionaries/tibetan-dictionary/translate.php>.

21 Toh, “Ch. Qiong – Tib. Khyung; Taoism – Bonpo.”

22 Similar examples in Kelényi, *A szél-paripa növekedjék*, 33, 57.

older system shown in figs. 11.1–2. This coexistence of two systems is shown by an interesting example in the British Museum. This carries the animals in pictorial form with written names underneath.²³ What is noteworthy in this piece is the fact that the names do not match the images! At the top, the word ‘tiger’ is written below Garuḍa, and the word ‘lion’ below the dragon. At the bottom the words ‘dragon’ and ‘Garuḍa’ are written, but the animals there are the lion and tiger. This proves that there are two current systems and that the placement of the aerial creatures at the top and the earth-bound animals at the bottom represents an attempt to rationalize the arrangement. To put the matter more critically, subsequent arrangements show there was a significant disjunction of cultural understanding within the Tibetan tradition and that later configurations are retroactive attempts to lend some kind of order to symbols that have little meaning. In our informal discussion with Tibetans on the matter (monks and otherwise), nobody could offer an explanation of the animals. Our experience simply corroborates Karmay’s authoritative observation on the matter, quoted above.

However the animals were manipulated in different settings, their use on banners at royal enthronements in Japan represents a theme frequently encountered in Buddhist ritual kingship: as symbols of the four directions, the animals were deployed to indicate the king’s dominion over the four quarters, ratifying his status as a universal king or Cakravartin. Following the widely-read and translated *Mahāvairocana Tantra*, the power of the Cakravartin was homologized with Vairocana, the Buddha whose all-seeing dominion over the world is often signaled by his iconography with four heads.²⁴ Temples to this Buddha were made at a number of sites in Asia during the eighth century. In Tibet, the royal temple at BSAM YAS was dedicated to Vairocana and, following its layout, four temples to the same Buddha built in the four quarters of the Yarlung heartland.²⁵ The construction of these buildings is witnessed in the SKAR CUNG inscription which reports that “in the reign of our father KHRI SRONG LDE BRITSAN, temples were built at BSAM YAS in BRAG MAR and other places in the centre and outlying regions, establishing seats for the triple gem.”²⁶ This was recalled in the eleventh century DBA’ BZHED where the historical synopsis given at the opening of the text states: “Then during the reign

23 The item carries the British Museum number Asia 2003,0703.04.

24 For which Hodge, *Mahā-Vairocana-Abhisambodhi Tantra*.

25 Richardson, “The Cult of Vairocana in Early Tibet”; Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*: all of chapter 4 is relevant.

26 Kazushi Iwao, Nathan Hill, Tsuguhito Takeuchi, Izumi Hoshi and Yoshiro Imaeda, *Old Tibetan Inscriptions*, 22, line 12.

of his majesty KHRI SRONG BTSAN . . . the sanctuary of the RASA *vihāra* was built. Furthermore, the temples of the four administrative divisions were constructed at the king's behest. And the BRAG *devatā* was made."²⁷ This network of temples – which on this evidence we do regard as having existed in the early period, albeit re-envisaged in post-imperial times – created a circle of royal power, stamping, as it were, a Buddhist *maṇḍala* on the landscape.²⁸ This pattern of temples at the four points of the compass – with a main temple or temples at the centre – was obscured by later elaborations.²⁹

A tall standard decorated with flags is a feature in many temples, whether in the original system or its later elaborations. Related but slightly different are the standards raised before the construction of a temple, an action stipulated in the *Kriyāsaṃgraha*. This compendium of rituals, possibly as old as the ninth century, was circulating in Tibetan translation by the late thirteenth century.³⁰ In this work we read that the 'production of a protective amulet' is a requisite to building a shrine on a particular site. The preceptor guiding the process is required to draw an eight-spoked wheel on a piece of cloth and inscribe it with *mantras*. He then wraps this up in a piece of waxed cloth and places it on a very long bamboo pole, or on the top of a banner. This drives obstructive forces and *vināyakas* from the site, and makes the place ready for the construction of a *vihāra* and other buildings.³¹ While the ritual particulars may have been elaborated over time, the planting of a standard with *mantras* can be regarded as antique. This is made clear by the text of the *Āryadhvajāgrakeyūranāma dhāraṇī*. The text states the *dhāraṇī* should be raised on a standard and worn on the body. Doing this will grant victory and protect kings and heroic people. To quote from the full translation given below: "O king of the gods! By virtue of this *dhāraṇī* of Aparājita – named the 'Armlet of the Pinnacle of the Victory Banner' – you will be without fear and emerge victorious in every circumstance, whether engaging in war, a fight, an argument or a struggle – wheresoever you may go. If put round the neck or on the pinnacle of a victory banner, kings and heroic people shall all be protected." This *dhāraṇī* is not alone in

27 Wandgu and Diemberger, *dBa' bzhed the Royal narrative*, folio 1r, lines 6; here our translation.

28 Willis, "From World Religion to World Dominion".

29 An introduction to these problems can be explored through Aris, *Bhutan*, 12–20 and Sørensen and Hazod, *Thundering Falcon*.

30 Skorupski, *Kriyāsaṃgraha*.

31 Skorupski, *Kriyāsaṃgraha*, 25.

offering instructions for use. Among those published so far, attention can also be given to the *Mahāpratisarā Mahāvidyārājñī*.³²

The early date of the *Āryadhvajāgrakeyūranāma dhāraṇī* is documented by the colophon. This states that the translation was made by BANDE YE SHES SDE, the editor and translator, with the scholars Jinamitra and Dānaśīla from India. These are well known figures in Tibetan historiography who flourished around 800 CE during the campaign of translation at that time.³³ We see no reason to question the veracity of the colophon. The translation of *dhāraṇī*-texts during this time is recognized in the SBA BZHED. This reports, in a version of the text that was subject to interpolations after the *circa* fourteenth century, that the *dhāraṇī*-texts were translated in their entirety at royal behest.³⁴ The subsequent history of this literature is complex, but by the sixteenth century *dhāraṇī* collections were being made, a prominent example being that by Tārānātha. In our opinion, it is from these compilations or GZUNGS 'DUS that the text was and is drawn for prayer flags. It seems unlikely that reference would be made to canonical volumes when *dhāraṇī* compilations were available readily. This supposition is supported by the closeness of the text on the British Museum wood block to the GZUNGS 'DUS. Such a conclusion can only be regarded as tentative until other wood blocks and prints are found and compared. However that may be, the *Āryadhvajāgrakeyūranāma dhāraṇī* finds a place in a number of collections such as the STOG Palace BKA' 'GYUR and the SDE DGE BKA' 'GYUR. These are accessible online through the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center as scans of the relevant wood-block prints. In addition to the Tibetan translations, Sanskrit versions of the *dhāraṇī* are known, with an edition of one prepared by Paolo Giunta.³⁵ However, the relationship of the Sanskrit versions to each other, and how they correspond to the Tibetan translations, is presently unknown.

The multiple versions of our *dhāraṇī* raise the question of a critical edition. In our view, such an enterprise is based on number of assumptions about what the original should be in philological and textual terms. Difficulties are highlighted, in the first place, by the fact that these are translations produced by teams at the turn of the ninth century and subsequently redacted into more modern language. The canonical multiples and redactions tell us that there were parallel versions – as with most *dhāraṇī* texts – and that the tradition decided to maintain them. Approaching such texts, transmitted in printed

32 Hidas, *Mahāpratisarā-Mahāvidyārājñī*.

33 Pagel, "The *Dhāraṇīs* of *Mahāvīyutpatti* #748".

34 MGON PO RGAYL MTSHAN, *SBA BZHED*, 61.

35 Paolo Giunta, "The *Āryadhvajāgrakeyūra nāma dhāraṇī*".

form for several centuries and in Sanskrit manuscript as well, requires a cautious and non-reductive approach. Accordingly, we have decided to present here a translation based on the Tibetan in Tārānātha's GZUNGS 'DUS. This is offered as a point of entry into an extremely rich and complex phenomena, as the papers in the present volume readily attest. In this translation we have inserted the Sanskrit portions in italics and then given our understanding of them separately. In some places we have suggested readings or borrowed from parallel versions. While it may help our understanding to 'correct' the Sanskrit as a first step, we are not proposing that this is intended to initiate a text-critical approach. The small variations are important because the seeming errors point to the history of the versions, their transmission and the type of language being used. If we are interested in these histories, then a corrected and essentialized rendering is not a useful destination. One final note: our translation sacrifices literalism for readability, a choice justified by the presence of the Sanskrit for those who wish to develop their own understanding.

In the following section, we offer a translation of the *dhāraṇī*, retaining the Sanskrit portions in the Sanskrit language. This may seem peculiar at first glance, but this is how the text has worked in the Tibetan context.³⁶

3 Translation: Āryadhvajāgrakeyūra nāma dhāraṇī

In the language of India: *Āryadhvajāgrakeyūra nāma dhāraṇī*. In the language of Tibet: the *dhāraṇī* named the 'Armllet of the Pinnacle of the Noble Victory Banner'.

To all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, homage!

One time I heard thus: The Lord was sitting on a dais as white as the moon, in the presence of the gods of the thirty-third realm. Then, Śakra, the king of the gods, defeated by the demons – badly defeated – followed after the Lord in a frightened and hurried manner wherever he went, (and) bowing his head to the feet of the Lord, submitted these words to the Lord:

O Lord! Engaging in battle with the demons like that, I was defeated by the king of demons Vemacitra – badly defeated – and the gods of the

36 A translation in Dutch was given in Henk Blezer, *De verheven dharani genaamd Het armsieraad van de hoogste overwinningbanier* (Driehuis: Augustijn Pers, 1994), for which reference I am grateful to Lewis Doney. However, this work is not available to us.

thirty-third realm were defeated as well.³⁷ Since we were badly defeated, Lord, how shall we respond?

The Lord replied thus: “O king of the gods, you must carry Aparājita’s *dhāraṇī* named the ‘Armllet of the Pinnacle of the Noble Victory Banner’. Long ago when I attained the state of a Bodhisattva, I too received this (*dhāraṇī*) from the banner of Tathāgata Aparājita. After receiving it, I disseminated it accurately to others far and wide. I recall this vividly because ever since I have never faced fear, intimidation or hair-raising experiences – not even for a single moment have I suffered physical harm.”

O Lord! Pray tell what is that *dhāraṇī* of Aparājita which bears the name ‘Armllet of the Pinnacle of the Victory Banner’.

The Lord spoke these words, as follows (*tayathā*):

auṃ jaya jaya | vijaya vijaya | jayaprāhiṇi | śaṅkari śaṅkari | prabhadak-
are | sarvaśatrūṃ | jaṃbhaya jaṃbhaya | staṃbhaya staṃbhaya | mohaya
mohaya | bhagavate | jayavahini | mathā mathā | pramathā pramathā |
grasa grasa | hasa hasa | hūṃ hūṃ | lahūṃ lahūṃ | lambodhari | tre nte
tre³⁸ | caturvaktre³⁹ | caturdaṃstre | caturbhujē | asimusala | cakratriśūla
| vajrakavajradhāri |

Protect me from every harm, protect me!⁴⁰

bhagavati | hana hana | daha daha | paca paca | matha matha | pramatha
pramatha | dhuna dhuna | vidhuna vidhuna | hūṃ hūṃ phaṭ phaṭ | bhañja
bhañja | parasenyan vidhānasaya | sarvaśatrūṃ nāśaya | dhvajāgrakeyure
| tiṭa tiṭa tiṭa | bhiṭa bhiṭa | ulakāmukhe ulakādhāraṇi | trailaukyamathāṇi
| vidhvanasaya parasenyan |

37 Vemacitra is also known as Vaimacitra (Pāli Vepacitti), see Bhattacharyya, *Indian Demonology*, 69.

38 Understand: *trenetre*.

39 This from the STOG Palace version (vol. 104, no. 570). Tārānātha gives: *caturbhagadre*, for which probably understand: *caturbhagāgre* which we would render ‘graced with four heads’. The context points to a description of the upper part of the body.

40 This phrase inserted in Tibetan.

Protect me from every harm, protect me!⁴¹

cala cala | cili cili | culu culu | kaṃpa kaṃpa | kala kala | kili kili | kulu kulu
| muñja muñja | ataṭahāsam vidhvanasayaparasenyan |

Protect me from every fear, protect me!⁴²

trāsaya trāsaya | bhramaya bhramaya | buddhasatyena | dharmasatyena
| saṃghasatyena | satye vātinām | satye mabuddhāsaty matikrama
dharmasaty matikrama | saṃghasaty matikrama | satye bhatinām⁴³ |
satye matikrama | lamabhodhāri lamabhodhāri | kuṭa kuṭa | kuṭṭa kuṭṭa
kuṭṭa | kuṭṭapaya kuṭṭapaya | rudramanāya | viṣṇumanāya⁴⁴ | candrasū
ryabrahmatrailokyādhipatimanāya⁴⁵ sarvadevādhipamānāya | sarvā-
kṣarakāsaganadharva | kumabhanaṭe⁴⁶ | mahoragādhipatimānāya | vidh-
vansaya parasenām | raṅga raṅga | raṅgāpaya raṅgāpaya | jvāla jvāla⁴⁷ |
puṣpamālini | runadha runadha | riti riti | citi citi | dhiti dhiti | bhṛīkuti |
mukheparasena⁴⁸ | kulodsādhanikari | hala hala | hili hili | hulu hulu | he he
| rini riṇi | rinimati | jambhadhvaje | sarvabuddhayāvalokite |

Protect me, from every fear protect me!⁴⁹

sarvatathāgatāvalokite svāhā | guṇarājaprabhāsodtame⁵⁰ svāhā | sūryār-
kavimale svāhā | candrārkavimale svāhā | sarvagrahanakṣatradhemīkaraṇi⁵¹
svāhā |

Protect me from every fear, harm, infection and constitutional disturbance –
protect me! *svāhā!*⁵²

41 This phrase inserted in Tibetan.

42 This phrase inserted in Tibetan.

43 Perhaps understand: *bhaṭa*.

44 The STOG Palace reading (vol. 104, no. 570) here replaces *kudatapaya*, *rudadramnāya*, *viṣṇamanāya*.

45 The STOG Palace reading (vol. 104, no. 570) here replaces *candrasūryābāmana-*

46 The STOG Palace reading (vol. 104, no. 570) reads *sarvākṣarakṣasa* | *gandharva* | *kumbhaṇṭa*.

47 The STOG Palace reading (vol. 104, no. 570) here replaces *jāla*.

48 Here *mukha-* is perhaps a better reading.

49 This phrase inserted in Tibetan.

50 Understand: *-uttame*.

51 Understand: *-nakṣatra-*

52 This in Tibetan, as is the rest of the text.

O king of the gods! By virtue of this *dhāraṇī* of Aparāṅjita – named the ‘Armlet of the Pinnacle of the Victory Banner’ – you will be without fear and emerge victorious in every circumstance, whether engaging in war, a fight, an argument or a struggle – wheresoever you may go. If put round the neck or on the pinnacle of a victory banner, kings and heroic people shall all be protected. By transforming those confronting you as if into women, it will protect and grant fearlessness. Splendor shall be boosted; opposing forces shall be disheartened; auspiciousness, purity, fame, glory and abundance shall be maintained forever.

After the Lord spoke thus these words, the world – together with the celestials, demons, men, gods and Śakra, king of the gods – was delighted and wholeheartedly praised the precepts of the Lord.

So ends the *dhāraṇī* called the *The Armlet of the Pinnacle of the Noble Victory Banner*.

Having been translated by BANDE YE SHES SDE, the editor and translator, with the scholars Jinamitra and Dānaśīla from India, and having been corrected in accord with the new language system, it was duly approved. | maṅglaṃ |

4 Translation: Understanding the Sanskrit Portions

The Lord spoke these words, as follows (*tayathā*):

auṃ jaya jaya | vijaya vijaya | jayaprāhiṇi | śaṅkari śaṅkari | prabhadakare |

Oṃ Victory! Victory! Triumph! Triumph! O You who are not deprived of Victory! Śaṅkari, Śaṅkari! O Maker of Light!⁵³

sarvaśatrūṃ | jaṃbhaya jaṃbhaya | staṃbhaya staṃbhaya | mohaya mohaya | bhagavate | jayavahini | mathā mathā | pramathā pramathā | grasa grasa | hasa hasa | hūṃ hūṃ | lahūṃ lahūṃ | lambodhari | tre nte tre⁵⁴ | caturvaktre⁵⁵ | caturdaṃṣtre | caturbhujē | asimusala | cakratriśūla | vajrakavajradhāri |

53 *Prabhaṅkara* or ‘maker of light’, an epithet of the Buddha.

54 Understand: *trenetre*.

55 This from the STOG Palace version (vol. 104, no. 570). Tārānātha gives: *caturbhagadre*, for which probably understand: *caturbhagāgre* which we would render ‘graced with four heads’. The context points to a description of the upper part of the body.

All the enemies – of myself and of all sentient beings – Crush! Crush! Arrest! Arrest!⁵⁶ Bewilder! Bewilder! O Bhagavati – whose support is victory! Injure! Injure! Destroy! Destroy! Devour! Devour! Deride! Deride! *hūṃ, hūṃ, lahūṃ, lahūṃ*, O Lambodhari! Three-eyed, four-mouthed, four-fanged, four-armed (with) sword, club, wheel and trident – Oh Adamantine *vajra*-holder!⁵⁷

bhagavati | hana hana | daha daha | paca paca | matha matha | pramatha
pramatha | dhuna dhuna | vidhuna vidhuna | hūṃ hūṃ phaṭ phaṭ | bhañja
bhañja | parasenyan vidhānasaya | sarvaśatrūṃ nāśaya | dhvajāgrakeyure
| tiṭa tiṭa tiṭa | bhiṭa bhiṭa | ulakāmukhe ulakādhāraṇi | trailaukyamathāṇi
| vidhvanasaya parasenyan |

O Bhagavati! Kill! Kill! Burn! Burn! Boil! Boil! Injure! Injure! Destroy!
Destroy! Resist! Resist! Disperse! Disperse! *hūṃ, hūṃ, phaṭ, phaṭ!*
Devastate! Devastate! For the obliteration of the enemy warrior! Remove
all enemies! O Armlet of the Pinnacle of the Victory Banner! *tiṭa, tiṭa,*
tiṭa, bhiṭa, bhiṭa! O Ulakāmukha, O Ulakādhārin, O Destroyer of the three
worldly realms! For the obliteration of the enemy warrior!

cala cala | cili cili | culu culu | kaṃpa kaṃpa | kala kala | kili kili | kulu kulu
| muñja muñja | ataṭahāsam vidhvanasayaparasenyan |

For the obliteration, adorned with special hell named *aṭaṭa*, of the enemy
warrior: Tremble! Tremble! *cili, cili, culu, culu*, Shake! Shake! Persecute!
Persecute! *kili, kili, kulu, kulu*. Cleanse, cleanse!

trāsaya trāsaya | bhramaya bhramaya | buddhasatyena | dharmasatyena |
saṃghasatyena | satye vātināṃ | satye mabuddhāsatyē matikrama dhar-
masatyē matikrama | saṃghasatyē matikrama | satye bhatināṃ⁵⁸ | satye
matikrama | lamabhodhāri lamabhodhāri | kuṭa kuṭa | kuṭa kuṭa kuṭa |
kuṭṭapaya kuṭṭapaya |

56 The Tibetan phrase “of myself and all sentient beings” is inserted before *sarvaśatrūṃ*.

57 The word order suggests the goddess uses her four hands to hold a sword and club on one side, and a wheel and trident on the other.

58 Perhaps understand: *bhaṭa*.

rudramanāya | viṣṇumanāya⁵⁹ | candrasūryabrahmatrailokyādhip
atimanāya⁶⁰ sarvadevādhipamānāya | sarvākṣarakāsaganadharva |
kumabhanāṭe⁶¹ | mahoragādhipatimānāya | vidhvansaya parasenām |
raṅga raṅga | raṅgāpaya raṅgāpaya | jvāla jvāla⁶² | puṣpamālīni |

runadha runadha | *riti riti* | *citi citi* | *dhiti dhiti* | *bhrīkūti* | *mukheparasena*⁶³
| *kulodsādhanikari* |

hala hala | *hili hili* | *hulu hulu* | *he he* | *rini riṇi* | *rinimati* | *jambhadhvaje* |
sarvabuddhayāvalokite |

O Lambodhari! O Lambodhari! *kuṭa, kuṭa!* Grind, grind, grind! Protect from grinding, protect from grinding! For fear (and) for confusion from ill winds take refuge in the truth, in the truth take refuge before the untruth of the unawakened, (and do so) through the truth of the Buddha, through the truth of the Dharma (and) through the truth of the Saṅgha. Take refuge in the truth of the Dharma, take refuge in the truth of the Saṅgha, from mercenary warriors take refuge in the truth, take refuge in the truth!

O Puṣpamalini! Rule! Rule! Protect from rule! Protect from rule! Burn! Burn! For the annihilation of the enemy army, for the grace of Rudra, for the grace of Viṣṇu, for the grace of the sovereigns of the three worlds, Brahma, Sūrya and Candra, for the grace of all the sovereign lords, for the grace of the lords of passions, the Kumbhaṅṭas, the Gandharvas, and all Akṣarakṣāsas.

Oh Bhrīkūti! Restrain! Restrain! *riti, riti, citi, citi, dhiti, dhiti!* You who over- turns the vanguard of enemy armies!

O Rinimati! *hala hala* | *hili hili* | *hulu hulu* | *he he* | *rini riṇi* |

To the flagstaff of Jambha! To the gaze of all the Buddhas!

59 The STOG Palace reading (vol. 104, no. 570) here replaces *kudatāpaya*, *rudadrāmāya*, *viṣṇamanāya*.

60 The STOG Palace reading (vol. 104, no. 570) here replaces *candrasūryābāmana-*.

61 The STOG Palace reading (vol. 104, no. 570) reads *sarvākṣarakṣasa* | *gandharva* | *kumbhaṅṭa*.

62 The STOG Palace reading (vol. 104, no. 570) here replaces *jāla*.

63 Here *mukha-* is perhaps intended.

sarvatathāgatāvalokite svāhā | guṇarājaprabhāsodtame⁶⁴ svāhā |
 sūryārkaṅkavimale svāhā | candrārkaṅkavimale svāhā | sarvagrahanak-
 śatradhemikaraṇi⁶⁵ svāhā |

To the gaze of all the Tathāgatas, *svāhā!* To the highest eternal light of Guṇarāja, *svāhā!* To the pure light of the sun, *svāha!* To the pure light of the moon, *svāhā!* To the cause of the innumerable powers of all the planets, *svāhā!*

Protect me from every fear, harm, infection and constitutional disturbance – protect me! *svāhā!*⁶⁶

5 Conclusions

Like many commonplace things, prayer-flags are quotidian only in appearance. Their regional, directional and mythological symbolism transform them from mundane ethnographic phenomena into cosmological maps of old Tibet. In the centre of the map are the precious jewels of Buddhism are supported by the royal horse of good fortune; in the four corners are the regents of the directions, creatures whose role it was to protect the integrity of the Tibetan kingdom and the Buddhist dispensation. All space between is filled with writing: in this cartographic system the entire landscape is nothing but text. Tibet, it seems, is a palimpsest, a country totally overwritten with wishes for increased life, happiness, might, prosperity and good fortune. These wishes are granted by the compassionate Buddhist deities invoked by the Sanskrit *mantras* in the prayer-flag texts. So however simple prayer-flags may seem, compressed into their small squares is an all-embracing vision of a Buddhist land and much of its history.

64 Understand: *-uttame*.

65 Understand: *-nakṣatra-*

66 This in Tibetan, as is the rest of the text.



FIGURE 11.1 *Print from a wood-block with the text of the Āryadhvajāgrakeyūranāma dhāraṇī.*
 COLLECTION OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM, ASIA 1992,1214.103.



FIGURE 11.2 *Print from a wood-block with mantras and the 'Wind Horse' (RLUNG RTA).
COLLECTION OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM, ASIA 1992,1214.110.*



FIGURE 11.3 *Drawing of the design on a Chinese mirror, Tang dynasty, seventh century.*
COLLECTION OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM, ASIA 1936,1118.270.

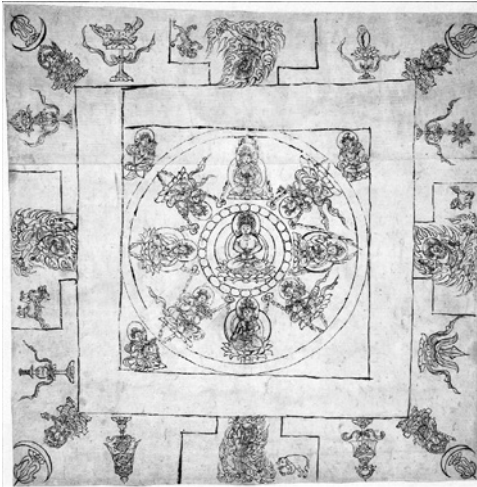


FIGURE 11.4 *Diagram showing a maṇḍala of Vairocana, with guardians and animals at the four gates, from Dunhuang, ninth century.*
COLLECTION OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM, ASIA 1919,0101.0.173.



FIGURE 11.5 *Contemporary print made from an old wood block in the eastern Himālayas.*
COLLECTION OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM,
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Index of Names and Places

- ‘Abd al-Rahmān I 98
‘Abd al-Rahmān II 100n19, 117n85
‘Abd-al-Rahman III 158
‘Abdisho’ bar Brikha 322
Abelard, Peter 294, 302
Abraham 30
Abraham b. Da’ūd 159
Abraham of Perugia 161
Abū l-Hasan ‘Alī b. Abī Tālib 25, 28
Abu l-Musāfir Muḥammad Afshin 209, 214
Abū Sa’īd Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Marwāzī
174
Adam 25, 28n31, 44, 217n136
Adamakert 174, 178, 194, 207n101
Adam’s Peak 41, 47
Agapius (Bishop of Cordoba) 104
Agapius of Mabbug 324, 329
Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn 102
Aix 321
Akiva 73, 74
Alau’-Din Ri’ayat Shah al-Kahar 163
Alexander the Great 9, 18–32, 162, 166, 186
Alexandria 18, 100, 183, 321, 324, 334
Almería 101n23
Aḥ‘amar 178, 186, 190, 193–196, 200–201, 207,
210n113, 213–223
Amida 40–41, 51, 175
Amid ‘Isā b. al-Shaykh al-Shaybani 208
Amitābha 40–41, 52, 126, 137, 140
Amoghavajra 264
Anahit 182
Anhui 262
Ānanda 132n26
Anav, Rachel 82–84, 86
al-Andalus 24, 99–102, 106, 109–118, 328
de Andrade, António 45, 50, 52–55
Ani 179
Anjirō 41
Anurādhapura 347
Anselm of Canterbury 305–307, 311n60
Antioch 97, 321, 324
Apahunik’ 175
Aparājita 352, 355, 357
Arakan 41–43
Arckē 175, 186n38
Aristotle 7, 31, 99
Armenia 173–223
Āryā Tārā 137
Ashkenaz 151, 156, 158
Aśoka 124
Ašot I Bagratuni 177, 180–181, 213
Ašot Arcruni (the Junior) 193, 195, 206,
208–209
Ašot Arcruni (the Senior) 174, 179–181,
184–186, 191–192, 203, 208
Asturias 99
Asuka 349
Ātāvaka 266
Atjeh 163–165
Atrpatakan 177
Augustine 96, 110, 330
Avalokiteśvara 124–125, 126n4, 133n30,
136–142, 259
al-Awzā’i 100
de Azevedo, Francisco 46
Bābak 28–29
Bāb al-Āmma 27
Babylon 21, 31, 158
Badajoz 101n23
Baetica 101n23, 102n25
Baeza 101n23
Bagarat Bagratuni 174–175
Baghdad 16–17, 27, 28n31, 66, 114, 118, 199,
321
al-Bakrī 17
Balaam 80
Balaac 80
Balkans 66
Banaras 5
Baoding (Mount) 273–275, 291–292
Baoyun 252n61
Barreto, Nunes 42, 43n26
Bartholomew (Apostle) 181–182, 184
Basil I 177, 199, 204, 213
Basil the Great 95–96, 109, 112
Bay of Bengal 41–42
Baza 101n23
Bede the Venerable 327–328, 333
Benjamin of Tudela 159
Berkri 176, 186
Bethlehem 94, 108n48,

- Bezalel and Oholiab 197
 Bhagavati 358
 Bhṛkūtī 142, 359
 Bhutan 45, 56
 Boccaccio, Giovanni 335
 Brahmā 140, 359
 Braulius of Zaragoza 96, 110
 Brazil 59
 Buddhaguhya 124
 Bugha al-Kabir 175
 Burchard of Bellevaux 115n77
 Burchard of Worms 322
 Burma 38, 41, 58
 Busfurrajān *see* Gagik Arcruni of Vaspurakan
 Butōn 140
 Byzantium 65, 96, 112–113, 199, 213, 327
- Cabra 101n23
 Cacula, Estêvão 45, 56
 Cádiz 95n7, 98, 118
 Caesarea 95
 Caesarius of Arles 96
 Caesarius of Nazianus (Pseudo-) 152n3
 Cakravāla (Mount) 265
 Cambodia 58
 Candia 75
 Candra 359
 Cape of Good Hope 40
 Cape Verde 37
 Carrión de los Condes 105n36
 Casian 96
 Castile 37
 Caucasus 21, 327
 Cercadilla 104
 Ceylon 43
 Chalcedon 95
 Charles the Bald 116
 Chijang *see* Kṣitigarbha
 China *passim*
 Chōzen, Paulo 41
 Cirilus of Alexandria 100
 Clement III 330
 Constans II 152
 Constantinople 3, 5, 163n56, 204, 211, 213,
 295–296, 298, 318, 321, 324, 334
 Cordoba 17, 97, 101–111, 113, 118
 do Couto, Diogo 41, 47, 53, 55
 Crete 66
- da Cruz, Gaspar 52
 Cush 156
 Cyprus 66, 99
 Cyrus the Great 22
- Dajjāl 74
 Damascus 24, 190n50, 321, 331n62,
 Dānaśīla 353
 Daṇḍasa 265, 289
 Daniel (Old Testament) 22n19
 Daochao 270n134
 Daoshi (monk) 240n19, 242n23
 al-Dāraqutnī 26
 Darius (Persian emperor) 22
 Datwan 175
 David 207, 211–212
 David ha-Reuveni 160, 165–166
 Dazu 273, 290–291
 Derenik Arcruni 180, 184–186, 192–195, 208
 Desideri, Ippolito 50
 Diponegara 164
 Dhū 'l-Qarnayn *see* Alexander the Great
 Dionysius of Tel Maḥre 328
 al-Djilliqī 101n23
 Donatus 95
 Drigum Tsenpo 135
 Dromtön Gyelwé Jungné 139
 Duane 264–265
 Dunhuang 138, 261–262, 267, 271, 277,
 346–347, 349, 363
 'Dus-srong 123
 Dwinn 176, 179, 181n28, 199
- Écija 101n23
 Egypt 64, 66, 71, 80, 83, 85, 96–98, 102, 107,
 112n67, 118, 138, 334
 Elchanan b. Joseph 158
 Elche 101n23
 Eldad ha-Dani 158–159, 166
 Elipandus of Toledo 99–100
 England 37, 161, 333
 Ephrem the Syrian 330
 Erucakra 164–165
 Estado da Índia 40, 59
 Ethiopia 66, 152, 154, 156–160, 320, 327
 Eulogius of Cordoba 101–108, 111, 113–114, 117
 Eusebius of Caesarea 324–325
 Eustathius of Antioch 112

- Faḍl b. Shādhān 29
 Farissol, Abraham 160
 Faustus 96, 104, 110
 Felix of Urgel 100, 114
 Fengdu (Mount) 245, 250–251, 263, 267–268,
 271, 289
 Ferdowsī 22, 30
 Fernandes, Valentim 154
 Fernando III 104
 al-Fihri 98n13
 Flavius Josephus 156
 France 37, 65, 108, 112, 117n85, 118, 328, 329,
 330, 331n62
 Freyre, Manoel 50n55, 56
 Fróis, Luís 39, 41, 44, 48–49, 54–56
 Fructuosus of Braga 95–98, 110, 112

 Gabriel 27–29
 Gabriel of Basra 322
 Gagik Apumrwan 193n58, 195, 197n70,
 208–209, 214
 Gagik Arcruni of Vaspurakan 173–174,
 177–178, 181, 186, 191–223
 Gagkakert 206
 Galicia 95n7, 96, 118
 Gansu 128n11, 254
 General of the Five Paths 252
 Georg (monk) 107
 Gerona 106n43
 Ğevaş 201n82
 Ghazna 159
 Gilbert Crispin 293, 305–310
 Girgis 71–72
 Goa 40–41, 57
 Gog and Magog 19, 21, 24, 29–31, 159
 Goiozo, Jacob 71–72, 74
 Gö Lotsaba Zhōn Nupel 140
 Gómez Díaz 105n36
 de Gouvea, António 55
 Greece 66, 151, 236, 296n7, 297n10
 Gregory of Narek 200, 205n98
 Gregory the Great 183
 Grigorios Bar 'Ebroyo 322
 Guṇarāja 360
 Gurgēn Arcruni 193, 194n60, 207, 215,
 221
 Gurgēn Apupelč 180–181, 184–185,
 202–203

 Hagia Sophia *see* Constantinople
 Haito of Basel 117
 al-Ḥakam I 100
 Ham 81n67
 Hasdai b. Shaprut 158
 Ḥayyim Vital 64, 68–70, 72, 74–79, 82–83
 Ḥazirah 72
 Hefinē 180
 Henry the Navigator 153
 Heraclius 190n50, 213
 Hermes Trismegistus 300n18
 Hijaz 4, 9, 16–18, 24, 158
 Hispania 94–96, 100
 Horsiesius 96, 109, 112n66
 Hostegesis of Malaga 112–113, 115, 117
 Houtu 237n9
 Hrip'simē 182n30, 183, 187, 189–192, 196, 213
 Huáng Dì *see* Yellow Emperor
 Huisi (monk) 251–252
 Huiyi (monk) 256

 Iberian Peninsula 9, 66, 94–100, 103, 107,
 109, 112–115
 Ibn Ayyub 68–70, 74–76, 83
 Ibn Hishām 23, 30
 Ibn Ishāq 23, 25n24
 Ibn Iyās 21
 Ibn Kathīr 30
 Ibn Marwanal-Djilliqī 101n23
 Ibn Sina 75
 India *passim*
 Indra 140
 Iran 22n18, 27, 328
 Iraq 16–17, 158, 328
 Ireland 333
 Isaac Abravanel 75
 Isaac b. Solomon Luria Ashkenazi 64, 79–80
 Isaac of Ninive 330
 Isa b. Mariam *see* Jesus
 Isho'bokht of Rev Ardashir 322
 Isidore of Badajoz 157
 Isidore of Sevilla 96, 104n33, 110, 117
 Isidore of Toledo 95
 Iskandar Muda 163
 Isrāfil 29
 al-Istakhri 176
 Italy 66, 96, 161, 329
 Ivo of Chartres 322

- Januarius 104
 Japan 38–39, 41–43, 47–48, 51–52, 55–56,
 58–59, 266, 349, 351
 Java 151, 164, 165n70
 Jehuda Halevi 157, 302
 Judah al-Barceloni 158
 Jerahmeel b. Solomon 158
 Jeremiah (monk) 105
 Jerome 96, 109
 Jerusalem *passim*
 Jesus 40, 47, 56, 72–74, 78, 156–157, 186, 204,
 211, 217, 220, 324, 325
 Jinamitra 353, 357
 Jiuhua (Mount) 262–263
 John of Biclaro 96
 John III of Portugal 155
 Jo.khang 139, 142–143
 Jordan 102
 Joseph b. Isaac Sambari 64, 71–72, 82–83
 Joseph b. Judah Sarko 159
 Joseph b. Solomon 160
 Joseph, Khazar Khan 159
 John of Seville 102n26
 Judea 98
 Justin Martyr 294

 Kaaba *see* Mecca
 Kang Senghui 249n45
 Kars 179
 Kastillion 98
 Khashabat Bābak 27–28
 al-Khiḍr 20, 23, 26, 30
 Khorasan 159
 Khotan 138n40, 142n45
 Khri srong lde brtsan 131n20
 al-Kindi (Pseudo-) 114
 King of the Five Destinies 264–266
 Kitora 349
 Kṣitigarbha 259–263, 266, 268, 272–275
 Kuan Yin 52
 Kuru 140
 Kuśinagar 132n26

 de La Loubère, Simon 39, 54n73
 Lancilotto, Nicolò 45
 Leander of Sevilla 96, 109–110
 Leo Africanus 84–85
 Leo the Wise 198–199
 Leovigild of Cordoba 115–116

 Lewond 188–190
 (Mount) lHa.ri Gyang.do 135
 Lhasa 124, 139–140, 142, 143
 Lha Totori Nyentsen 138
 Linhu 257
 Lisbon 57
 Llull, Ramon 293, 294n4, 302–305
 Loreto 5
 Lu Xiuqing 244n29

 Macau 58
 Macedonia 18
 Maghreb 84, 100
 Mahāśammata 132, 141n44
 Mahāsurdarśana 132n26
 al-Mahdi 72
 Maḥmūd b. al-Faraj al-Naysābūrī 27–29
 Majjī (Mount) 254, 287
 Malay Peninsula 151, 164
 Malik b. Anas 100
 Manazkert 175
 Mañjuśrī 131n20
 al-Manṣūr 28n31
 Manuel I of Portugal 154
 Maphrian Bar 'Ebroyo 328
 al-Maqrizī 30
 March (Hispanic) 99–101
 Marco Polo 154
 Mariam (daughter of Aśot I) 213n123
 Martial (martyr) 104
 Martin of Braga 112
 Martin of Dumio 95–96
 Martin of Opava 318
 Martin v (pope) 159
 Mary 45, 52, 78, 182
 Maštoc' (Catholicos) 197
 Mathew of Edessa 334–335
 Maudgalāyana 259n83
 Mazara 17
 Mecca 4, 5, 16–17, 30, 164n65
 Medina 5, 16–17, 24
 Mehmed III 163
 Mérida 95n7, 101, 107n44, 118
 Mesopotamia 16, 322
 Messiah b. Joseph 74
 Michael the Great 323, 325, 331
 Minucius Felix 294
 Miranda, Constantino de Sá de 42, 45,
 52, 57

- Mithras 191
 Mommu 349
 Morocco 66, 81, 84–85
 Moses 20, 22, 30, 45, 116, 156
 Moses ha-Cohen Ashkenazi 75
 Moses b. Ezra 159
 Movsēs Xorenac'ī 181–182, 207
 Muawiya I 188
 Muhammad 16–20, 22n19, 23–29, 32, 73–74,
 157
 Muhammad I of Cordoba 102, 106, 112
 Muḥriz b. Khalaf 84–85
 Muqātil b. Sulaymān 19
 al-Muqtadir (al-Muqtadir) 177, 215
 Musaylima 26
 Mušel of Anjewac'ik' 180
 al-Mu'tamid 177
 al-Mutanabbī 17
 al-Mutawakkil 27, 102, 175–176

 Nabal the Carmelite 78–79
 Nafta 17
 Nara 350
 Nasiri-i-Khusraw 202
 Naxčawan 179, 202, 214
 Nebuzaradan 197
 Needham, Joseph 146
 Nersēs III 189
 Nicholas of Cusa 293–301
 Nietzsche, Friedrich 126n6
 Nile 24, 94, 97n10, 320
 Nishapur 27–29
 Nizāmī 22
 de Nobili, Roberto 59
 Nurud-din ar-Raniri 163
 Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer 124n1
 Nyatri Tsenpo 135–136, 140n44

 Obadiah of Bertinoro 160
 Odo of Rheims 153n9
 Ordoño II 101
 Ostan 178–179, 186, 190, 198, 200–209
 'O-thang 141
 Oxus 24

 Pachomius 94, 95n7, 96–97, 105, 109–110
 Padmasambhava 137, 346
 Palermo 17
 Palestine *passim*

 Pande Ye Shes Sde 353
 Pāṇḍu 140
 Paris (Saint Germain-des-Près) 101n24,
 108n50
 Partaw 176, 179, 208, 214
 Pascasius 95n6
 Paul (Apostle) 116, 205, 220
 Paulo da Trindade 46
 Pegu 41–43, 53, 55
 Peñamelaria 106, 108, 113n69
 Penglai 238
 Pereira, Tomás 42, 57
 Persia 18, 138
 Persian Gulf 21
 Peter (Apostle) 116, 205
 Philip of Macedonia 30
 Plato 6
 Portugal 37–38, 56–57, 59, 65, 154–155
 Prester John 40, 44, 153–155, 159–160, 162,
 165–166
 Protonikē 187n39
 Pugyel 135
 Pythagoras 49

 Qastilyā 98
 al-Quds *see* Jerusalem
 de Queirós, Fernão 39, 42–43, 52–54, 57
 al-Qurṭubī 25, 29

 Rabāqīl (Raphael) 26, 29
 Raja Rum 162–166
 Raphael *see* Rabāqīl
 Ra-sa 'Phrul-snang 141–142
 Ratu Adil 164
 Ricci, Matteo 39, 43, 47, 50, 53, 59
 Rinimati 359
 Rodrigues Tçuzzu, João 54, 56
 Rome 5, 8, 57, 99, 100, 112, 117, 151, 153n9,
 154–155, 160, 182n30, 183, 213, 321,
 324
 Rudra 359
 Rūpati 140

 Sa'ad al-Din 72–73
 Sabbatai Zvi 161–162
 Safed 64n1, 66–67, 71, 76, 79–86
 Sahak Jorap'orec'i 189
 Saint Germain-des-Près *see* Paris
 Śakra 354

- Śakyamuni 131–133, 135n33, 142
 Samarra 27, 29, 31, 175–176, 180
 Samaw'al al-Maghribī 73
 Samson of Peñamelaria 112–117
 Samuel 73
 Samye 137
 Sanatruk 186
 de Sande, Duarte 53
 Sangermano, Vincenzo 58n95
 Sap'ī (eunuch) 209
 Sārnāth 347
 Sebēos 188, 195
 Segura, Joseph 70
 Selim II 163
 Semedo, Álvaro 39, 45–46, 49
 Semiramis 191
 Sennacherib 207
 Seville 17, 95n7, 102, 109, 110, 118
 Shanheluo 264
 Shizhuan (Mount) 273, 290
 Shukh-Khayl II 161
 Siam 41, 43, 54n73
 Sichuan 245n32, 271–272, 290–291
 Sicily 99
 Siddhārtha 125
 Silu 252, 267
 Siming 252, 267
 Śiva 141
 Siwa 25
 Smbat I Bagratuni 178, 193, 197–199,
 201n82, 204, 214–215
 sNang ba mTha 'yas 126
 Socrates 7
 Solomon 219
 Sönam Gyeltsen 137
 Songtsen Gampo 123–126, 131n20, 133n30,
 137n38, 138–146, 350
 Sop'ī 177, 180, 193–195
 Spain 65, 151, 156, 158–159
 Sri Lanka 39, 41–43, 45–47, 49, 53, 55, 57,
 58, 347
 Srin-mo 143
 Srong-btsan-sgam-po 123, 125, 140–141,
 143
 Step'anos Siwnec'ī 181n27
 Śubhākarasimha 266
 al-Suhaylī 26
 Sui Renqian 257–258
 Sukhāvati 126, 139
 Sumatra 151, 163–164
 Sūrya 359
 Syria 16–17, 100n19, 118, 157, 321, 322, 324,
 328, 331, 334
 al-Ṭabarī 27–28
 Tabennesis 94
 Tabuk 24
 Tai (Mount) 238, 243, 249–251, 257–258,
 267, 271, 276
 Taishan Fujun 243, 250–253, 257, 265–267
 Takamatsuzuka 349
 Tang Lin 257
 Tao Hongjing 251
 Tārā 45
 Tartary 42–43
 Tebaida Leonesa 97
 T'ēodoros (abbot of Hogeac' Vank) 180
 T'ēodoros Rštuni 187–190, 192, 195
 Teophilus of Byzantium 100m19
 Thailand 58
 Thebes (Egypt) 96
 Theophylactus Simocatta 152n3
 Thomas (Apostle) 44, 47, 52, 152–153
 Tibet 9, 10, 11, 21, 38–39, 42, 45, 50, 52–55, 58,
 123–146, 345–354
 T'odik (monk) 189, 192
 Tokharistan 138n40
 Toledo 97, 99–103, 109, 113, 118, 159
 Tönpa Shenrap 136n37
 T'ovma Arcruni 174, 175n5, 178, 180, 184, 186,
 190–191, 193–223
 Trdat III 183
 Trisong Détsen 124, 131n20, 135n32–33, 137,
 351–352
 Tubo 237
 Tunisia 17
 Tuscany 66
 'Umāra b. Zayd 30
 'Umar b. al-Chattāb 25
 Urban II 330
 Uttarakuru 246n35
 Vahan Arcruni 180
 Vairocana 349, 351, 363
 Vaḷaršapat 187
 Valignano, Alessandro 39, 41, 47, 51–53,
 57–59
 Van (Lake) 173–176, 178–180, 186, 190–191,
 198, 207–208, 212

- Varag (Mount) 187–193, 208, 212
 Vard the Patrician 187–190, 192, 203, 212–213
 Vasak Kovaker 202
 Vasco da Gama 37
 Vaspurakan 173–223
 Vemacitra 354
 Venice 66, 75
 Vietnam 58
 Viṣṇu 359
 Vital, Samuel 82–83

 Wabh b. Munabbih 23–24
 Wencheng 142
 Wilhelm of Rubruck 44
 Wistremirus of Toledo 102n26

 Xaca 40–41, 45, 50–51
 Xavier, Francis 45
 Xinjian (monk) 253
 Xinjiang 128n11
 Xlatʿ 175, 186n38
 Xuanwu 250
 Xuanzang 260

 Yahya of Antioch 333–335
 Yamā 234, 240–242, 249–270, 289
 Yan Qingjia 250
 Yar.lung 135
 Yehudah Ḥallewah 81, 86
 Yellow Emperor (Huang Di) 236
 Yemen 23, 161, 163n57
 Yitzhak b. Yakov 157
 Youdu 237
 Yovhannēs Draxanakercʿi, 175n5, 178, 197,
 199, 215
 Yovhannēs Kʿorepiskopos 189, 219n140
 Yuanjuedong 272, 290
 Yum.bu bla.mkhar 138n40
 Yūsuf b. Abuʿl-Sādj 177, 198, 201n82, 214–215,
 218

 Zeus 151
 Zhao Zhifeng 274
 Zhi Qian 249n46
 Zhiyi 252n57
 Zimri 197