

Monumental Stone Sūtra Carvings in China and Indian Pilgrim Sites

Claudia Wenzel

Research project “Buddhist Stone Sūtras in North China,” Heidelberg
Academy of Sciences and Humanities

Abstract

This article proposes that the giant *Diamond Sūtra* (*Vajracchedikā-prājñāpāramitā-sūtra* 金剛般若波羅蜜經) carved in Sūtra Stone Valley 經石峪 at Mount Tai 泰山 might be understood as a Chinese replica of Indian pilgrim sites associated with the place where the Buddha dried his *kasāya* robe in the sun after washing it. Accounts of these sites in the famous *Da Tang xiyouji* 大唐西域記 by Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664), repeatedly described them as “shining and distinct like a carving” 明徹皎如彫刻. At the Indian sites, the traces of the Buddha’s *kasāya* imprinted in stone were understood as *paribhogika* relics, relics of touch, emanating efficacious and apotropaic powers. Supporting evidence for this view is found in a wall painting in Dunhuang, in Mogao Cave 323, where an episode relating to the Vārānasī site of sunning the Buddha’s robe was illustrated. The author proposes that, when creating a replica of such Indian sites at Mount Tai, the pattern or lines of the Buddha’s robe 衣文 were transformed into sūtra script 經文. Expanding on a general tendency for multiplication of pilgrim sites and Buddha relics as reflected in various travelogues by Chinese monks from the fifth to seventh centuries, as well as on the general significance of bodily traces in stone left behind by sacred Buddhist beings, the author concludes that Mount Tai’s sūtra carving might be understood as a stone relic.

Keywords:

Stone sūtras, Mount Tai, pilgrim sites, *Xiyou ji*, Buddha’s robe, Buddhist relics, Chinese script

中國與印度聖地的刻經石

溫狄婭

德國海德堡科學與人文學院「華北佛教石經」研究計畫

摘要

本文提出泰山經石峪的《金剛經》摩崖石刻，可以理解為是模仿印度的如來曬袈裟聖地。在玄奘（602–664）的《大唐西域記》中，屢次描寫這些遺跡為「明徹皎如彫刻」。在印度聖地，如來袈裟印在石頭上的衣痕，被認為是具有靈驗與避邪作用的聖跡。可以支持此觀點的一個證據是敦煌莫高窟 323 窟的壁畫，其中有佛陀在波羅奈斯曬衣的情節。作者認為當年在泰山複製這樣的印度聖跡之時，用經文來顯示袈裟的衣文。從第五到七世紀時的中國僧人遊記中，可見到聖地與佛舍利擴增的傾向，同時重視聖人在石頭上遺留的痕跡，因此作者推論泰山的經文石刻可以視為石舍利。

關鍵詞：

石經、泰山、聖地、西域記、如來袈裟、舍利子、漢語經文

Introduction

Chinese monumental rock carvings of Buddhist scriptures emerged first during the time of the Northern Qi dynasty (550–577) in the territory corresponding mainly to modern day Shandong province. Here, selected passages from sūtras were carved on cliffs and rocks under the open sky. Since 2005, these Shandong inscription sites have been documented and analyzed in a research project headed by Lothar Ledderose under the auspices of the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (HAW) in Germany.¹

The twenty-one inscription sites vary in size and spatial grouping; some of them assemble several excerpts from a number of sūtras in one place, while others confine themselves to just one larger passage taken from a single sūtra, or a few Buddha names. Not all sites are dated; it is assumed that some may have been created slightly later than the Northern Qi dynasty, under the following Sui (581–618) or Early Tang (618–712) dynasties.

The smaller sites lie hidden in remote mountains, and were probably only visited by monks living in cloisters nearby. But the larger sites, executed as monumental carving projects, must have attracted many visitors. These impressive carvings sanctify the surrounding topography by embedding Buddhist texts into it; and some of the sites can be understood as sites for pilgrimage.

At least one Shandong site was clearly designed as a pilgrims' path. At Mount Gang 崗山 to the north of the city of Zoucheng 鄒城, the introductory chapter of Bodhiruci's (?–527) translation of the *Lankāvatāra-sūtra* (*Ru lengqie jing* 入楞伽經, T 671, 16: 514c) was carved in 580 along a pilgrim route. The opening lines of the carved text—

Thus I heard at one time. The bhagavat dwelt in the city of Lankā at the peak of Mt. Malaya, by the shore of the great ocean²

¹ Two out of five planned volumes on Buddhist stone sūtras in Shandong have been published so far; see Wang Yongbo and Ledderose; Wang Yongbo and Wenzel.

² T 671, 16: 514c7–8: 如是我聞：一時婆伽婆住大海畔摩羅耶山頂上楞伽城中。 Until indicated otherwise, all translations quoted are the result of a series of workshops held at the HAW from 2006 to 2011. The main participants include Prof. Lothar Ledderose, Prof. Funayama Tōru 船山徹 of the Institute for Humanistic Studies in Kyōto, Prof. Paul Copp of the University of Chicago, Dr. Ryan Richard Overbey from Harvard, Dr. Kuramoto Shotoku 倉本尚德 of the

transfer the pilgrim back to the Indian place, Mount Malaya, where the Buddha was said to have originally preached this sūtra. The carved text is furthermore divided into sections of various lengths and distributed over rock-faces and boulders of different sizes, to the effect that it can only be read when the visitor proceeds up the eastern gorge of Mount Gang, and reaches the top of a plateau to the west. The text segments end deliberately in the middle of a sentence, thus encouraging the pilgrim to follow the route uphill, causing him to seek the continuation of the passage on the next rock. The ascending section of the path describes the idyllic landscape of Lankā, where the Buddha gave his sermon; and the text passage carved on the top of the plateau portrays an assembly-place with sages and saints, to which bodhisattvas descend from the Buddha-lands of the Ten Directions, to instruct and convert all beings. In this way, the embedded text segments interlock closely with the Chinese topography, and bring about the identification of Mount Gang with Mount Malaya in India. In a process of *translatio loci*, Mount Gang transforms into the very place where the Buddha preached.³

Ascending the mountain, the pilgrim suddenly faces a steep rock formation known today as Chicken Beak Rock (*Jizuishi* 雞嘴石) on which the opening passage of the *Sūtra on the Contemplation of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life* (*Guan wuliangshoufo jing* 觀無量壽佛經 T 365, 12: 340c–341a) was carved around 580. The similarity of the Chicken Beak Rock with a bird's head and beak induced associations with the sacred Vulture Mountain Gr̥dhra-kūṭa in India where the Buddha was said to have preached the *Contemplation Sūtra*. Therefore, Mount Gang relates to two ancient sacred sites in India.⁴

Topography is of fundamental importance for understanding the creation of the Shandong sūtra carvings. Not only do topographical particularities allow a categorization of the inscription sites in certain groups; the sites are also part of a network of numinous places that communicate with each other. Mount Gang, for example, is one of six mountains with stone scriptures that enclose the city of Zoucheng in the shape of a fan, with the pivot at Mount Yi 嶧山 (dated 564), and with Mount Yang 陽山 (undated), Mount Tie 鐵山

University of Tōkyō, Dr. Ho Waiming 何偉明 of the Chinese University of Hongkong, Dr. Tsai Suey-ling 蔡穗玲, HAW, and Dr. Claudia Wenzel, HAW.

³ Ledderose, “Gangshan: Fotuo shuofa zhi shan,” 11; Wang Yongbo and Wenzel, 238–244 and 251–253.

⁴ Tsai and Wenzel, 35; Wang Yongbo and Wenzel, 238–244 and 253–255.

(dated 579), Mount Jian 尖山 (dated 575), Mount Gang, and Mount Ge 葛山 (dated 580) forming an arch further to the north.⁵

The votive inscription of one of these six mountains, namely that of Mount Tie, shows that the sites were even incorporated into transregional networks. In an inscription entitled *Stone Hymn* (*Shi song* 石頌), the donors of the nearby colossal stele text describe the surroundings of Mount Tie as follows:

Ahead, one can see Mount Zhuyi⁶ rising majestically, and make out its peak reaching the Milky Way. Turning around, one can look into the distance at the looming magnificence of Mount Dai and gaze toward that sacred mountain parting the clouds. Furthermore, to the left, the Chang Cliff⁷ comes into view, and, to the right, one overlooks the post road...⁸

When standing at the inscription site of Mount Tie, one can actually see Mount Yi mentioned in the *Stone Hymn*. The Chang Cliff, today's Mount Jian, is also very close, although not in one's sight, because Mount Gang blocks the view. The only mountain that is too far removed from a visitor to Mount Tie is Mount Tai 泰山, which lies more than 100 km to the north. Still, the mention of this mythical mountain, which has been venerated for centuries as the eastern of the Five Sacred Mountains 五岳, connects the Buddhist inscription sites of Zoucheng with one of the holiest places in all of China. Robert Harrist pointed out that "the donors of the Mt. Tie sūtra were well aware of the epigraphic pedigree of these mountains [Tai and Yi]..."⁹ At the same time, the *Stone Hymn* that accompanies a sūtra text cut on the rock face in the shape of a stele, stands in the tradition of votive inscriptions to free-standing image stelae explicitly placed in numinous natural settings. As the colossal stele at Mount Tie shows, the Zoucheng inscriptions not only were part of a network

⁵ Tsai and Wenzel, 32.

⁶ The old name of Mount Yi, which is situated about 14 km to the southeast of Mount Tie.

⁷ These are the former inscriptions of Mount Jian, situated 4.5 km to the east northeast; see Wang Yongbo and Wenzel, 161.

⁸ 前觀邾嶧峨峨，覩拂漢之峯；却瞻岱嶽魏魏，眺排雲之嶽。兼復左顧昌巖，右臨傳駟。Harrist, 191, also translates this passage, but he does not associate the Chang Cliffs with the former inscriptions at Mount Jian. For a complete transcription and translation of the *Stone Hymn*, see Wang Yongbo and Wenzel, 149–166.

⁹ Harrist, 191.

of regional Buddhist sites, but were even linked to a national network of numinous sites in China's sacred geography.

Famous Mount Tai, the Sacred Mountain of the East, has its own Buddhist rock cut scripture which is located at Sūtra Stone Valley 經石峪 halfway up the mountain, in a vale east of the main pilgrims' route leading to the summit. Despite the scarcity of information available on-site, this article will argue for Sūtra Stone Valley as a site modeled after Indian places of worship of the Buddha's traces that he left behind while still walking the earth. Monks travelling to India had brought back to their native soil various accounts on these Indian sites, viewed with the eyes of a Chinese observer, and described in a manner considered adequate for literati monks. While it is not always easy to sort out the facts on the Indian sites in narratives from the Chinese perspective, these travelogues provide evidence that the Buddhist monumental rock carvings in Shandong were aimed at connecting with the homeland of the Buddha and aspired to be established within a Buddhist *geographia sacra*.

Mount Tai's Sūtra Stone Valley as a replica of Indian pilgrimage sites

The site today

On a surface of about 1800 square meters, fifteen out of thirty-two sections of the *Diamond Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra* (*Vajracchedikā-prājñāpāramitā-sūtra* 金剛般若波羅蜜經, T 235, 8: 748c–750c) as translated by Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (344–413) were carved at 450 meters above sea level, on a rocky slope in a vale east of the main pilgrims' route leading to the summit. This vale is commonly called Sūtra Stone Valley (*Jingshiyu* 經石峪). Even though the monumental carving itself is not dated, it fits well into the context of other rock carving projects in Shandong from the middle to the end of the sixth century.

The western part of the carved *Diamond Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra* has already disappeared, or was left unfinished. The outline on the east side is irregular; perhaps because a pagoda-shaped frame was originally planned for this immense surface.¹⁰ Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927) once observed about the impressive calligraphy that the engraved characters are “the forefathers of calligraphy on tablets [for buildings] 榜書之宗”.¹¹

¹⁰ Ledderose, “Buddhist Stone Sūtras in Shandong,” 42.

¹¹ Guang yizhou shuangji, 474.

Epigraphers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have mostly dated the *Diamond Sūtra* carving to the Northern Qi dynasty, while more recent scholarship points at the Northern Zhou dynasty. Be that as it may, all dating is based on calligraphic style only, as not a single colophon or votive inscription from the time of its creation has been found. Primary sources like gazetteers or travelogues are equally silent about the original Buddhist significance of Stone Sutra Valley.

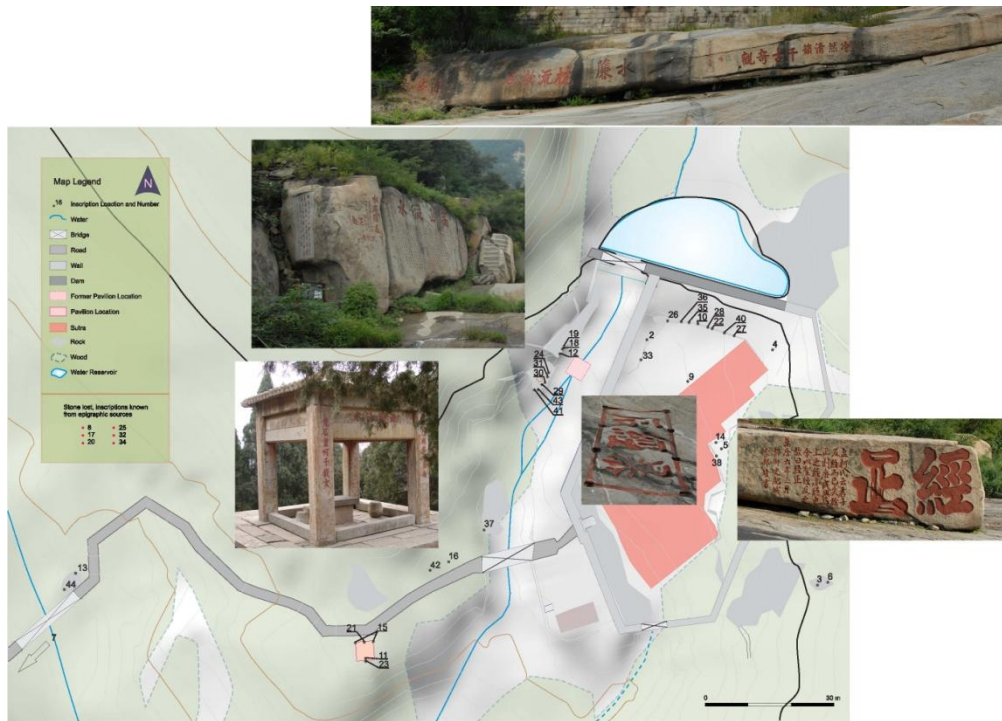
This total lack of information is due to a rededication of the site to Confucian standards. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, forty-seven commentary inscriptions were carved onto surrounding cliffs, rocks and boulders, encircling the ancient sūtra carving. This Confucian appropriation was initiated by Wan Gong 萬恭 (1515–1591), Left Vice Minister of the Ministry of War, who in 1572 constructed a “Lofty Mountain and Flowing Water Pavilion”¹² next to the sūtra, and inscribed a large cliff to its rear with a lengthy poem.¹³ He even had three oversized characters¹⁴ reading “Rock for Sunning the Sūtra” (*Pujingshi* 暴經石) carved directly across the sūtra text. Wan overrode the spatial layout of the original carving with his inscription, and, for the convenience of wine-drinking poets, even had a platform erected, of which the post-holes drilled on each of the horizontal sides of the inscription’s framing rectangle testify. The rededication of the once sacred Buddhist site was completed with another rock-cut commentary by Li Bangzhen 李邦珍 (1515–1593) from 1579, which was entitled “Scripture Corrected” and which quoted Mengzi (372–289 BC) to state that the scripture on the rock opposes the standard and needs to be corrected.¹⁵

¹² This stone pavilion was moved to a spot further away rather recently. An old photograph, published by Sekino Tadashi 関野貞 and Tokiwa Daijō 常盤大定 (73 [1]), shows its original position to the left of the inscribed boulder.

¹³ Ledderose, “Commentary on the Rock Bridges to Heaven,” 455–59; and SSYB and HAW, 49–50.

¹⁴ Measuring 254 cm in height, and 603 cm in width, SSYB and HAW, 49 (no. 9).

¹⁵ Dott, 219–21.



**Fig. 1: Map of rock cut inscriptions in Sūtra Stone Valley, Mount Tai.
HAW, 2008, modified 2012.**

More Ming literati left elaborated poems praising the natural beauty of the sacred mountain, and thus inscribed the valley's landscape in a way comparable to a pilgrimage site; but this time not for the pious Buddhist believer, but instead for Confucian literati employed in or retired from official positions. As Brian Dott proposed with reference to Victor Turner's theory about pilgrimage, the Ming literati might even be considered no mere visitors, but true pilgrims who sought personal cultivation among the sacred landscape and nature of Mount Tai.¹⁶ Be that as it may, at the latest since the Ming dynasty, the foundational legend of Sūtra Stone Valley as a Buddhist site was lost.

The Rock for Sunning the Sūtra

The only clue to an understanding of the original significance of the site is found in the designation "Rock for Sunning the Sūtra" preserved in literati

¹⁶ Dott, 224.

inscriptions from the Ming dynasty. In Chinese, “Rock for Sunning the Sūtra” is either *pujingshi* 暴經石 or *shaijingshi* 曬經石. Three commentary stones in today’s Sūtra Stone Valley testify to this designation: The first inscription includes the already mentioned three large characters “Rock for Sunning the Sūtra” 暴經石 by Wan Gong. They were written across the sūtra text itself, thus altering substantially the appearance of the original inscription.

Li Sancai 李三才 (?–1623) left another inscription in 1588¹⁷ in which he praised The Water Curtain of the Valley for Sunning the Sūtra (*Pujingyu shuilian* 暴經峪水簾) with the words:

Close to the Rock for Sunning the Sūtra
the murmuring water.
For a whole day, all alone,
leaning against a tree, I listened;
this meaning is, by ordinary people,
not at all understood.
After half a day I raise my head;
green are the ten-thousand mountains.¹⁸

Three years later, in 1591, Cui Yingqi 崔應麒 (*jinshi* 1571) had his poem chiseled in cursive script on the most prominent boulder next to the sūtra inscription. Entitled *Inscribing the Water Curtain of the Rock for Sunning the Sūtra* (*Ti shaijingsji shuilian* 題曬經石水簾)¹⁹, part of it reads:

On the Rock for Sunning the Sūtra,
A water-curtain spring.
Who has drawn down the Silver River²⁰
And let fall half of heaven?²¹

Apart from the inscriptions actually preserved on the site, there have formerly existed at least two more known from other sources that also use the name Rock for Sunning the Sūtra or allude to it. An inscription left behind by Zhao Xian 趙賢 (*jinshi* 1556) from Ruyang 汝陽 was transcribed by Zhai Suogan

17 SSYB and HAW 2009, 50–51 (no. 16).

18 暴經石傍水泠泠，鎮日獨來倚樹聽。此意世人渾未解，半天矯首萬山青。

19 SSYB and HAW 2009, 51 (no.19).

20 I.e., the Milky Way.

21 曬經石上水簾泉，誰挽銀河落半天。

翟所塗 during the last century.²² However, its exact location was not recorded. The inscription supposedly read:

Zhao Xian from Ruyang travelled to Mount Tai to look at the Rock for Sunning the Sūtra. [He] wrote at the Lofty Mountain and Flowing Water Pavilion. On the eleventh day of the second month in spring of the sixth year of Wanli era (March 18, 1578), Yuan Cang from Tai'an sub-prefecture in Ji'nan prefecture erected the stone.²³

Furthermore, the *Visits to Mount Tai, first part* (*Dailan shang* 岱覽上), by Tang Zhongmian 唐仲冕 (1753–1827) records an inscription by Zhang Youguang 張有光 (dates unknown)²⁴ originally carved in Sūtra Stone Valley that says:

When no one nods his head, the Law is set up in vain; when the rock can sun his belly, the sūtra is transmitted as well.²⁵

²² According to an interview given by Zhai Suogan on December 18, 2008, to Zhang Shaohua. See Zhang Shaohua, 29.

²³ 汝陽趙賢游泰山，觀暴經石，書于高山流水之亭。萬曆六年春二月十有一日濟南府泰安州袁滄立石。

²⁴ *Taishan wenxian jicheng* 泰山文獻集成 vol. 3, 263. Zhang Youguang was in all likelihood the father-in-law of Zhu Yihai 朱以海 (1618–1662), Prince of Lu 魯王. See SSYB and HAW, 58, note 26.

²⁵ 人不點頭空設法，石能暴腹也傳經。This may be an allusion to the well-known story about the founder of the Nirvāṇa school, Daosheng 道生 (355–434), preaching to stones. The *Donglin shiba gaoxian zhuan* 東林十八高賢傳 (Biographies of the Eighteen Worthies of Donglin) reports that he “returned to Mount Huqiu (in Suzhou), where he piled up stones for his disciples to preach the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*. When he came to the passage about the *icchantika*, teaching the existence of Buddha-nature, he asked: ‘Considering what I have taught, do you agree with [the doctrine of] the Buddha-mind [inherent in all beings]?’ Thereupon the stones all nodded their heads.” R 135, 10a13–14: 還入虎丘山，聚石為徒，講涅槃經。至闡提處，則說有佛性，且曰：如我所說，契佛心否？群石皆為點頭。



Fig. 2: Characters reading “Rock for Sunning the Sūtra” 暴經石 carved across the stone sūtra, by Wan Gong from 1572. HAW, 2006.

In writing their poems, the Ming literati might have been inspired by the famous novel *Journey to the West* (*Xiyouji* 西遊記) by Wu Cheng'en 吳承恩 (1501–1582), which narrates in chapter 99 how, on their way back from India to China, monk Xuanzang 玄奘, a literary figure modeled after the historical Tang dynasty monk, and his companions passed the “Attaining Heaven River” (*Tongtianhe* 通天河), and got wet. However,

In a short while, the sun was shining high in the sky, and they moved to a high cliff and open the bundles to have them dry in the sun. Up to this very day, this place, the Rock for Sunning the Sūtra, still exists.²⁶

²⁶ 少頃，太陽高照，卻移經于高崖上，開包曬暎。至今彼處曬經之石尚存。
On the relationship between the Mount Tai inscription site as the Rock for

But was it really the novel which inspired the literati to create the name of “Rock for Sunning the Sūtra”? Or had this name already been transmitted for a long time, and, vice versa, it was the site of Mount Tai that inspired the author of the *Journey to the West*? Du Guichen 杜贵晨 argues that the name “Rock for Sunning the Sūtra” is already documented in the Ming *History of Mount Tai* (*Daishi* 岱史) by Zha Zhilong 查志隆 (*jinshi* 1559), and that this *History of Mount Tai* might have been written earlier than the novel.²⁷

The Ming literati who left their commentary inscriptions close to the ancient Buddhist scripture were officials and politicians with a strong Confucian educational background. Not a single word in their commentaries leads us to believe that they had any kind of knowledge about, or interest in, Buddhist teachings. For them, the Rock for Sunning the Sūtra was no more than a metaphor for an ancient Buddhist inscription at Mount Tai. By the time of the Ming dynasty, the Buddhist tradition at Mount Tai’s Sūtra Stone Valley had long since ceased to be. However, if we want to get any closer to the function of the rock sūtra site at the time of creation, it is helpful to assume that the name “Rock for Sunning the Sūtra” was indeed an old designation, that has no more been transmitted in written form than have the names of donors or carvers.

The numinous *Diamond Sūtra* on the Rock for Sunning the Sūtra

The donors who created Sūtra Stone Valley in the second half of the sixth century had to cope with the task of establishing a Buddhist site amidst the sacred geography of Mount Tai that was already layered with Daoist gods and imperial rites. The carving of a giant sūtra on the natural rock bed of the mountain seemed an adequate response to the long established practice of inscribing the landscape at Mount Tai, and furthermore held out the prospect of leaving behind a landmark that would last for a long time, if not forever.

Sunning the Sūtra and the Ming novel *Xiyouji*, see Zhou Ying, 88–89, and Du Guichen, 57–58.

²⁷ Du Guichen, 57.



Fig. 3: Boulder with *Diamond Sūtra* in Sūtra Stone Valley, Mount Tai. HAW, 2006.

Such a monumental undertaking surely consumed both money and manpower, and it is self-evident that the text to be carved had to be selected carefully, and not in the least bit arbitrarily. The choice fell on the *Diamond Sūtra*, which was to be carved in its entirety. However, the carving could not be completed, as there are only very few characters or traces thereof left in the last columns of the text; in the end, close to two-thirds of Kumārajiva's text as contained in today's *Taishō* edition was finished.

The words of the *Diamond Sūtra* recommended themselves for such an ambitious undertaking.²⁸ In the passage that was carved, the Buddha states six times that the merit attained by hearing, teaching, reciting, memorizing, copying, chanting, and explaining the sūtra, or even just a four line verse of it, is countless, and the Buddha furthermore assigns special qualities to the place where the sūtra is kept or recited.

Thus, in column 32 of the carved text we read:

Furthermore, Subhūti, if someone were to recite this sūtra, or only as much as its four line verse, you should know that this place shall be

²⁸ Gjertson, 132.

venerated by all heavenly beings, human beings, and *asuras* in all worlds as a shrine dedicated to the Buddha.²⁹

And the closing line of the text carved at Mount Tai repeats this claim, and states:

Subhūti, all heavenly beings, human beings, and *asuras* in all worlds will come and make offerings at any place where this sūtra is present. You should know that such a place is equivalent to a shrine, where all should worship, venerate, and circumambulate while scattering flowers and incense around the place.³⁰

The place where the sūtra is present is “equivalent to a shrine 如佛塔廟,” and a shrine or stūpa is probably the most apparent marker for holy places. In this respect alone the sūtra carving turned the valley into a place worthy of worship, but it was able to achieve much more.

As is known from Buddhist miracle stories, already in the sixth century the *Diamond Sūtra* was considered a most efficacious text of salvific powers.³¹ It was purportedly capable of magically protecting one from demons and evil influences, and could impel the quest for enlightenment. According to Gjertson, its apotropaic powers were in this respect only contested by those of the *Lotus Sūtra*.³² But since the *Lotus* was much longer

²⁹ T 235, 8: 750a6–8, with characters unfinished on the rock in square brackets: 復〔次〕須菩〔提，隨說是經，乃至四句偈等，當知〕此處一切世間天、人、阿脩羅，〔皆〕應供〔養，如佛塔〕廟。Translation by the author.

³⁰ T 235, 8: 750c20–23, with characters unfinished on the rock in square brackets: 〔須菩提，在在處處，若有此經，一切〕世〔間天、人、阿脩羅所應供養，當知此處則為是塔，皆應恭敬，作禮圍繞，以諸華香，而散其處。〕 Translation by the author.

³¹ Gjertson, 28–34, mentions three accounts of wondrous incidents caused by the *Diamond Sūtra*. The earliest among these is the *Jingyi ji* 旌異記 (Records of Unusual Manifestations), which was written by Hou Bo 侯白 (courtesy name Junsu 君素) at the imperial command of Emperor Wen 文帝 (reigned 581–604) of the Sui dynasty. Xiao Yu 蕭瑀, who served under the first two Tang emperors, compiled the *Jingang bore jing lingyan ji* 金剛般若經靈驗記 (Records of Miracles Concerning the *Diamond Wisdom Sūtra*), and Tang Lin 唐臨 (?–659) completed his *Mingbaoji* 冥報記 (Records of Miraculous Retribution) between 653 and 655.

³² Gjertson, 14–15.

and comprised of seven scrolls, the *Diamond Sūtra* in one scroll was more suitable for the space at Mount Tai.

Among the miracle stories related to the *Diamond Sūtra*, that of “The Temple of the God of Pavilion Lake” (*Tinghu shenmiao* 亭湖神廟), later included into the collection of the *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 (Pearl Grove in the Dharma Garden), is rather generic. It narrates how an unnamed, pious monk subdues the most ferocious god of a lake only by relying on the *Diamond Sūtra* while two other monks, specialists in exorcism with spells, lost their lives in unsuccessful attempts.³³

Many more miracle stories praise the sūtra’s potency for compelling demons and protecting from all kinds of dangers. One of them, a story reported in the *Ji shenzhou sanbao gantong lu* 集神州三寶感通錄 (Record of Miraculous Responses to the Three Jewels in China; T 2106, 52: 428a25–b8) as well as in *Fayuan zhulin* (T 2122, 53: 421a27–b10),³⁴ can be related to the donation of the text of a *Diamond Sūtra* carved inside Guanyin Hall 觀音殿 of Bishui Temple 碧水寺 in the city of Mianyang 綿陽, Sichuan. At this place, altogether twenty-five smaller and larger niches stretch along a section of natural cliff close to the bank of River Fu 涪江. In front of this natural cliff, a wooden hall has been erected, today’s Guanyin Hall. The *Diamond Sūtra* carving is located in niche number 10 (120 cm high and 273 cm wide), and it is dated in the last column to the eighth day of the fourth month of the first year of Zhenguan 貞觀 era (627 CE). From the chapter on Buddhist and Taoist temples in the 1933 edition of the *Mianyang xianzhi* 綿陽縣志 (Gazetteers of Mianyang) it is further known that in the beginning of the Daguan era 大觀 of the Song dynasty (1107–1110), a certain Li Tongshu 李同叔 erected waterside buildings (*shuige yuan* 水閣院) to protect the niches and the sūtra carved by a certain Linghu Wengui 令狐文軌.

On the basis of the above mentioned versions of the miracle story, Yu Chun and Wang Ting noted that the gazetteer’s reading of this donor’s name must be incorrect, and should read “Linghu Yuanguai” 令狐元軌 instead.³⁵ This historical person served as county magistrate in Baxi County 巴西縣, today’s Mianyang, between 627 and 636. The miracle story narrates that

³³ T 2122, 53: 909b25–c23; Gjertson, 29–30.

³⁴ Slightly deviating versions of this story are found in the *Da Tang neidian lu* 大唐內典錄 (T 2149, 55: 340a18–b1) and the *Fahua chuanji* 法華傳記 (Biographies and Accounts [of people and events related to] the *Lotus Sūtra*, T 2068, 51: 83b23–c7) by Sengxiang 僧詳.

³⁵ Yu Chun and Wang Ting, 74.

Linghu Yuanguì commissioned a certain meditation master Kang from abroad to copy several sūtras, among them the *Diamond Sūtra*. When Linghu later on returned to his home in today's Shaanxi province (Qi prefecture 岐州, today's Yiwubao 义乌堡 in Fengxiang County 凤翔县), he took the handwritten copies with him, and

...he kept the sūtra there, together with the five thousand words by Laozi (i.e. the *Daode jing*) in the same place. Now, a fire spread from the outside, and the thatched hall was turned to ashes in a short while. Someone from [Linghu's] house poked in the ashes to get the gilded bronze rod. When he removed the outer ashes, the sūtras inside were just like they had been before. The decoration had not changed. Only the box and the cloth case had turned into ashes. He searched for the Laozi [*Daode jing*], [but] it had been consumed by the fire....³⁶

Although the miracle account itself does not mention the actual carving of the *Diamond Sūtra* at a cliff next to River Fu by Linghu Yuanguì, it is very clear about this sūtra's protective powers against fire, and its superior efficacy compared to the rival teachings of Laozi.

As the carved *Diamond Sūtra* in Bishui Temple shows, the miraculous power of this scripture was a matter of highest significance for donors of the early Tang dynasty. The strong belief in the sūtra's efficacy has definitely also influenced the decision to carve it in Sūtra Stone Valley. The text's promise of immeasurable merit provided additional incentive, but even more important was its power to sanctify the space into which it was placed.

Reconstructing the original significance of the place

At Mount Tai, the numinous *Diamond Sūtra* was carved on a huge sunlit boulder surrounded by the lush vegetation of a valley running sideways to the main pilgrimage route. This long-stretched boulder looks like the perfect place for basking in the sun; thus the topographical situation already provides an adequate explanation for the meaning of "Rock for Sunning the Sūtra." In former times, large parts of the inscription were covered with water, as a mountain rivulet flowed downwards across the sloping boulder. In the 1960s, the construction of a dam at the northern edge of the boulder changed this situation entirely; the water now drains off to the west side of the rock

³⁶ Translating here the version of the story as contained in the *Ji shenzhou sanbao gantong lu*, T 2106, 52: 428a28–b4.

surface.³⁷ Nevertheless, even now large sections of the inscription's western part may stay wet for a long time after a heavy rainfall. But on clear days, the Rock for Sunning the Sūtra is a sunny place close to a murmuring creek whose natural beauty is praised in many poems.

A Chinese Buddhist pilgrim of the Tang dynasty, however, would have associated the sunning of something close to a river not necessarily with scriptures, but with narratives about the Buddha's *kaṣāya* that had to be dried after washing. Narratives about the circumstances surrounding the Buddha washing and drying his robe are found not only in textual sources, but also in visual representations.

The paintings on the north wall of the Early Tang Mogao Cave 323 at Dunhuang are dedicated, according to the book where they are published, to “famous incidents during the transmission of the Buddhist Dharma to the east 佛教东传故事,”³⁸ often illustrating heavenly responses to the requests of saintly monks. One group of pictorial scenes in the middle part of the north wall is related to the story of the Buddha sunning his robe; nearby, four cartouches with short commenting texts are found. One of these cartouches has either become illegible with time, or, as is often the case with this sort of Dunhuang paintings, was never filled in.

³⁷ The construction probably took place in the summer of 1966, see Zhang Shaohua, 34–46.

³⁸ Sun Xiushen.

This happened in the country of Vārāṇasī in Bactria, at the time when the Buddha was first awakened. A deva [...] *kaṣāya* [...]. Now all [...] are protecting.³⁹

In a scene to the left, a heavenly being approaches in a cloud. Where it touches the ground, a line of lotus buds appear, demarcating a pond or a rivulet thus created as a gift for the Buddha to clean his newly obtained robe. The cartouche explains:

This is the heavenly being from the Heaven of the Thirty-Three [gods] who, seeing that the Buddha wants to wash his robe, comes by and, as an offering to the Buddha, transforms the ordinary ground into a pond. Up to now, this pond is still extant at the monastery in Bactria.⁴⁰

These two scenes serve as a kind of prologue to what is shown further to the left: The washing of the robe in the lotus pond necessitated its drying in the sun to prepare it for wearing. For that end, the robe was spread out on a rock, where it left its imprints by means of its divine power as a *paribhogika* relic, a sacred object that received its supernatural powers from physical contact with the Enlightened One while he wore it or made use of it during his lifetime.⁴¹

The pictorial scene to the left no longer relates to an event from the Buddha's lifetime; it is solely concerned with the place consecrated by the divine robe while drying in the sun. We see two beings dressed in heavenly garments, one of them kneeling in front of a large square stone that actually looks manmade or artificially formed into a geometric shape. This is the place where the Buddha's robe was once spread out to dry. The heavenly beings seem to make some kind of offering at the site, as two basin-like containers stand in front of them. However, they are not alone. Close by, a demon-like figure in a short skirt is depicted three times: At first, he merely sits in front of the square boulder; then he is seen standing next to it, raising his right leg and stepping with his naked foot on its surface with a fierce gesture, thus intentionally violating the sanctuary. In a final scene, the same heretic is seen

³⁹ Transcription in simplified characters as published in *Dunhuang wenwu yanjiusuo*, vol. 3, 228: 此大夏波罗奈国，佛初成觉 / 时，天□□□袈裟訖今有诸□ / □护时。

⁴⁰ Transcription in simplified characters as published in *Dunhuang wenwu yanjiusuo*, vol. 3, 228: 此忉利天见佛欲洗衣，便来 / 化地为池，即以供养。至今池 / 在大夏寺时。

⁴¹ Deeg, 67 and 70.

lying dead on the ground, his body now much paler than before. From above, the god of thunder has appeared in a dark cloud, killing him with lightning. The details of this event may have once been narrated in the now empty cartouche to the right. However, the text in the cartouche right above the square stone is still legible. It says:

This square rock was created by a heavenly being, and presented to the Buddha for sunning his robe. On top of the Rock for Sunning [the robe] is the pattern of the lines [of the *kaṣāya*'s] twelve strips. Until this day, they have not faded, and are also protected by dragons. At times bodhisattvas come and wash it, and it is venerated by heavenly beings. Up to now, [the rock] is still seen in Bactria.⁴²

The main concern of the Dunhuang mural is not so much the depiction of an event from the Buddha's lifetime, but the narration of miraculous incidents testifying of the divine powers at work at Buddhist sites of pilgrimage. There are, of course, canonical sources narrating the story of the Buddha washing and drying his robe, like, for example, the *Fo benxing ji jing* 佛本行集經 (*Abhiniṣkramaṇa-sūtra*, Sutra of the Collection of the Past Activities of the Buddha, T 190, 3: 655a–932a). However, the narrative found in this sutra is not very close to the scenes depicted in Mogao Cave 323. According to the *Fo benxing ji jing* it was the god Indra (Śakra Devānām-Indra) who magically created a river with clear water to wash the “cloth that has been used for sweeping and cleaning feces” 糞掃之衣, and who further created three rocks, one to sit on, one for washing, and one for drying the cloth.⁴³

The closest parallel to the pictorial scenes in the Dunhuang mural is found in Xuanzang's 玄奘 (602–664) famous travel account, the *Da Tang xiyouji* 大唐西域記 (Great Tang Record of Travels to Western Lands, T 2087, 51: 868a–947c). In *juan* 7, he provides a description of the Buddha's vestiges in the precincts of the “deer park” *saṅghārāma* (modern Sārnāth) in Vārāṇasī:

By the side of the pool where the Buddha washed his robe is a large square stone, with traces of the tathāgata's *kaṣāya*. The lines [of the tissue] are shining and gleaming like an engraving. Those of pure faith frequently come to make their offerings here; but when the heretics

⁴² Transcription in simplified characters as published in *Dunhuang wenwu yanjiusuo*, vol. 3, 228: 此方石天所化，作奉佛晒衣。晒 / 石上有十二条文。至今不灭，龙亦 / 护之。时有菩萨来洗，天人所敬 / 至今见在大夏时。

⁴³ See T 190, 3: 804a11–18.

and men of evil mind tread on this stone disdainfully, the dragon king inhabiting the pool then causes the winds to rise and rain to fall.⁴⁴

The Dunhuang painting actually is a pictorial illustration of this part of Xuanzang’s travel account. All of the above mentioned details are depicted: “the pool where the Buddha washed his robe,” “a large square stone” indicating the place where the robe was dried; “those of pure faith frequently com[ing] to make their offerings,” and, finally, the “heretic” or “man of evil mind” who “treads on this stone disdainfully” and is being punished by the god of thunder, identified by the drums surrounding his appearance, a Chinese adaption of the protecting dragon-king. All this is caused by the “traces of the *kaṣāya*” 袈裟之迹, described in the cartouche text as “pattern or lines of twelve strips” 十二条文. The traces of the Buddha’s robe on the boulder are at the same time the cause for the sanctity of the place, and the cause for its protective qualities.



Fig. 5: Detail of Dunhuang Cave 323, north wall, showing heretic being punished for polluting the square boulder where the Buddha sunned his robe.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ T 2087, 51: 906a1–4: 浣衣池側，大方石上，有如來袈裟之迹。其文明微，煥如彫鏤。諸淨信者，每來供養。外道凶人，輕蹈此石，池中龍王，便興風雨。Samuel Beal originally translated Xuanzang’s travelogue. However, in this passage, his translation of 外道凶人，輕蹈此石 as “when the heretics and men of evil mind speak lightly of or insult the stone” (Beal, 2: 49 is not quite to the point; therefore it had to be altered.)

⁴⁵ Sun Xiushen, 32, fig. 16.

In Xuanzang's travelogue, these traces are explicitly compared to a shining and gleaming stone carving 其文明徹，煥如彫鏤。 In this respect, the square boulder protected by heavenly beings in the painting of Cave 323 might be seen as a representation of a place like the Rock for Sunning the Sūtra at Mount Tai. Here, the deeply carved characters of the *Diamond Sūtra* are not only exposed to the sun, but also revealed to the eye of the observer. The clear cut strokes of the Chinese script (*wen* 文) are highlighted in red to make them even more visible among the rock's natural fissures and cracks, reassuring their presence in the same way it had been important for visitors to Mogao Cave 323 to know that “on top of the Rock for Sunning [the Robe] is the pattern of the lines [of the *kaṣāya*'s] twelve strips. Until this day, they have not faded.”

In a way, the “pattern or lines of twelve strips” 十二条文—namely, the lines of the Buddha's robe 衣文—were transformed into sūtra script 經文 on their way from India to China, thus creating a replica at Mount Tai. The donors of the *Diamond Sūtra* in the sunlit vale not only responded to the particular situation at Mount Tai by choosing the carving of a seminal Buddhist text; they also did their best to link the Chinese site to the homeland of the Buddha, to connect with places where the Buddha was said to have left his historical bodily traces 迹。 Such traces testified to the Buddha's presence at places where he had once been, and were thus worshipped as relics of the Buddha (*śarīra* 舍利).⁴⁶ Among the kinds of traces that were left in stone, the marks of the cloth of the Buddha's robe seemed to have inspired the unknown donors at Mount Tai, as the lines of the pattern that the patched *kaṣāya* had imprinted on a rock could be readily transformed into the script of a holy text. In this way, the place where the Buddha sunned his robe became the place where a numinous Buddhist scripture was spread out for drying across the boulder in vertical columns.

Yet unsolved is the question of why Xuanzang compared the pattern of the Buddha's robe to stone carvings. Did he know of or had he even visited himself sites with sūtra texts carved in stone, such as that of the *Diamond Sūtra* in Sūtra Stone Valley? Or did he simply make use of a common metaphor for describing pilgrim sites?

⁴⁶ For a comprehensive study on Buddha relics see Strong. Strong seems to make use of “traces of the Buddha” as an equivalent to *śarīra* on p. 39, 43, and 86.

The rock where the Buddha dried his robe in Chinese travelogues

Xuanzang

Xuanzang, who travelled from 629 to 645, mentioned in his *Da Tang xiyouji* a total of five pilgrim sites claiming rocks or stones where the Buddha had washed or dried his robe. Besides Vārānasī, these were located in the kingdom of Udyāna⁴⁷ (Swat Valley), at Nagarahāra (northeastern Afghanistan), in the kingdom of Magadha at Gayā and at Mount Ḡḍhrakūṭa. Of these five sites, four are recorded as having divine imprints of the Buddha's robe, and at three of these five sites, the imprints are explicitly compared to carvings.

The site in the kingdom of Magadha at Gayā, for which Xuanzang did not explicitly claim divine imprints of the robe, was nevertheless connected to the story of how the Buddha received and washed his garments after his enlightenment:

Still to the south there is a tank; formerly, when Tathāgata had just acquired perfect enlightenment, he wished to bathe; then Śakra (Shi), king of Devas, for Buddha's sake, caused a pond to appear as a phantom. On the west is a great stone where Buddha washed his robes, and then wished to dry them; on this, Śakra, king of Devas, brought this rock from the great Snowy Mountains.⁴⁸ By the side of this is a stūpa; this is where Tathāgata put on (?) the old garments offered him. Still to the south in a wood is a stūpa; this is where the poor old woman gave the old garments which Tathāgata accepted.⁴⁹

Elements of this account are also reflected in the mural of Cave 323, which indicates “the time when the Buddha was first awakened” and stresses the fact that “this square boulder was created by heaven, and made as an offering for the Buddha to sun his robe,” even though it does not name the god Śakra specifically as creator of the pond for washing the robe.

⁴⁷ Deeg, 119, reconstructs the original Sanskrit name as *Udrāyana*.

⁴⁸ The canonical version of this event is found in the aforementioned *Fo benxingji jing*, T 190, 3: 804a.

⁴⁹ T 2087, 51: 917b8–12: 次南一池。在昔如來初成正覺，方欲浣濯，天帝釋為佛化成池。西有大石。佛浣衣已，方欲[曝>曝]曬，天帝釋自大雪山持來也。其側窳堵波，如來於此納故衣。次南林中窳堵波，如來受貧老母施故衣處。 Translation by Beal, 2: 127.

The kingdom of Magadha claimed another stone for drying the Buddha's robe. That stone was located at *Ḡḍhrakūṭa*, in the vicinity of other sacred traces like a footprint of the Buddha (*buddhapada* 脚迹) and the meditation cave where Ānanda was scared by a vulture. Xuanzang reports:

To the northeast of the *vihāra*, in the middle of a rocky stream, is a large and flat stone. This is the place where the *kaṣāya* was sunned. The traces [of the tissue] of the robe are shining and distinct like a carving.⁵⁰

At *Nagarahāra*, the pilgrim could not only visit the famous Cave of the Buddha's Shadow, but also several stone chambers, *stūpas*, and "a large boulder, on which the Tathāgata had once washed his *kaṣāya*. The shadows of the lines appear slightly."⁵¹

Another place associated with the spreading of the Buddha's robe was located in the kingdom of *Udyāna* in the *Swāt Valley* (located in modern day Pakistan), namely

...the stone where Tathāgata washed his robe. The [patterns of the] tissues of the *kaṣāya* are gleaming like engravings.⁵²

As these examples show, Xuanzang keeps referring back to the same metaphor when describing the sacred traces of the robe: The robe's imprints are "gleaming like engravings" (煥焉如鏤 at *Udyāna*), or "shining and distinct like a carving" (明徹皎如彫刻 at *Ḡḍhrakūṭa*), or "shining and gleaming like carvings" (明徹煥如彫鏤 at *Vārāṇasī*). Furthermore, the imprints are explicitly called the garment's or the *kaṣāya*'s lines or pattern, using the character *wen* 文 in Chinese. In the case of the *Nagarahāra kaṣāya* traces, they are called "the lines' or the pattern's shadow" in correlation to the nearby "Buddha's shadow" 佛影.

⁵⁰ T 2087, 51: 921b19–20: 精舍東北石澗中有大磐石。是曬袈裟之處。衣文明徹皎如彫刻。 Translation modified after Beal, 2: 155.

⁵¹ T 2087, 51: 879a23–25: 影窟西有大盤石。如來嘗於其上濯浣袈裟。文影微現。 Translation by the author.

⁵² T 2087, 51: 882c18–19: 至如來濯衣石。袈裟之文煥焉如鏤。 Translation modified after Beal, 1: 123.

Earlier travelogues by Song Yun, Huisheng, and Faxian

For the site with the rock where the Buddha's robe was sunned at Udyāna, two earlier travel accounts are available. The earliest account by Faxian 法顯 (320?–420?),⁵³ who reached the Swāt Valley probably in 403, is rather sober. He only states that

The stone...on which Buddha dried his clothes and the spot where he converted the wicked dragon may also still be seen. The stone is fourteen feet [4.5m?] in height by over twenty [6.6m?] in breadth, and one side of it is smooth.⁵⁴

When the emissaries of the Northern Wei dynasty, Song Yun 宋雲 and the monk Huisheng 惠生, whose travelogue is only partly preserved in Yang Xuanzhi's 楊銜之 *Luoyang qielan ji* 洛陽伽藍記 (A Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Luoyang, T 2092, 51: 999–1022), reached the Swāt Valley in January or February of 520, they went looking for the stone where the robe was dried:

Thereafter Sung Yün and Hui-sheng went out of the city to look for the sites where Tathāgata had preached. On the east of the river was a place where Buddha dried his garments. Previously, when Tathāgata came to Wu-ch'ang to convert [the populace], the dragon-king was so infuriated as to cause a violent rainstorm drenching the inside and outside of Buddha's *sanghātī* (*seng-chia-li*).⁵⁵ When the rain stopped, the Buddha was at the foot of a boulder facing east and drying his *kāsāya* (*chia-sha*). After the passage of so many years, the marks were sharp as new. Not only were the seams clearly visible, but also all the fine details were as if new. If one should go there for a quick look, he might not be able to get a clear view, but if he should scrape the spot,

⁵³ The problems of defining Faxian's biographical data were discussed in detail by Deeg, 22–30.

⁵⁴ T 2085, 51: 858a25–26: 及曬衣石、度惡龍處，悉亦現在。石高丈四尺，闊二丈許，一邊平。Translation by Giles, 11, and German translation by Deeg, 520–21.

⁵⁵ Wang Yi-t'ung, 230, seems to read *sengqieli* 僧伽梨 when he translates *sengjiali* 僧迦梨 as *samghātī*. This is the outer robe of the Buddha.

the patterns would become all the more vivid. There were stūpas at the sites where the Buddha had sat and where he dried his garments.⁵⁶

The story of the dragon-king who drenched the Buddha's clothes in anger is known as the conversion of the *nāga* Apalāla 阿波邏羅龍,⁵⁷ who is said to have lived close by in a fountain of the same name. Xuanzang narrates the legends surrounding this *nāga* in some detail, but he does not mention the drenching of the Buddha's robe. For him, the Buddha's garments were spread out for drying after they had been washed 濯衣 in the ordinary way, while the conversion of the wicked *nāga* was the occasion for the historical Buddha to visit this northwestern part of India and to leave his traces for future veneration. Most remarkable in Huisheng and Song Yun's report is the detailed description of the robe's sacred imprints, which were "sharp as new," with "all the fine details" of seams, strips and threads of cloth. Since scraping is recommended as a method of making the patterns more visible, one can almost imagine how pious pilgrims over the years scraped the traces of the robe deeper and deeper. Not only did the marks of the Buddha's robe look as new; the whole site was probably new in the sense of having gained importance rather recently.

When we compare the earliest account of the rock where the Buddha dried his robe in Udyāna by Faxian, who reached the site probably in 403, with that by Song Yun and Huisheng, we note Faxian's restriction to mere measurements and a mention of the stone's smoothness, but none of any imprints or lines. Such an impression on the rock had been formed by 520 at the latest, when Song Yun and Huisheng visited the kingdom of Udyāna. About 120 years after Faxian's travels, the place had gained importance as a pilgrim site, and was still expanding, as more stūpas had been erected.

Both ancient travelogues were also consulted by Marc Aurel Stein when he explored ancient sites in Swāt Valley in 1926. Stein happened to identify the actual rock which was venerated in former Udyāna as the place where the Buddha dried his robe, and he published a photograph of it lying on the right bank of Swāt River, opposite Jārē. He described the rock as a single granite

⁵⁶ T 2092, 51: 1020a17–24: 宋雲於是與惠生出城外，尋如來教跡。水東有佛晒衣處。初如來在烏場國行化，龍王瞋怒，興大風雨。佛僧迦梨表裏通濕。雨止，佛在石下東面，而坐晒袈裟。年歲雖久，彪炳若新。非直條縫明見，至於細縷亦新。乍往觀之，如似未徹。假令刮削其文轉明。佛坐處及晒衣所，並有塔記。Translation by Wang Yi-t'ung, 230–31.

⁵⁷ The legend of the *nāga* Apalāla is attested in Faxian's travelogue as well, see Deeg, 222–225.

boulder, much larger than the surrounding rubble, which “measures fully 30 feet [ca. 9 m] in length, 18 feet [ca. 5,5 m] across where widest and 12 feet [ca. 4 m] in height at its northwestern end.” The “gently slanting concave side facing southeast” is smooth and matches Faxian’s description. Stein assumed that “so great a mass of rock rendered conspicuous by its isolation should have attracted local worship from early times,” and he observes traces of such worship in numerous inscriptions covering the boulder’s smooth side, mainly in Brāhmī, but also in Arabic writing.⁵⁸ If Stein’s identification of the boulder is correct, it is quite remarkable that the Udyāna rock where the Buddha dried his clothes was used not only for re-tracing the lines and patterns of the Buddha’s *kaṣāya*, but also for carving inscriptions, even long after it had lost its importance as a Buddhist pilgrim site.

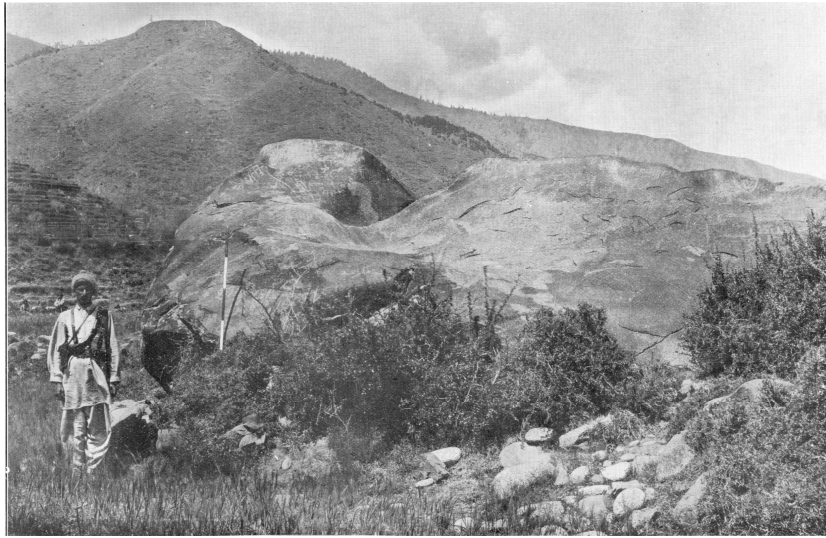


Fig. 6: Boulder marking spot of “Buddha’s clothes-drying” on the right bank of Swāt River, opposite Jārē.⁵⁹

Faxian mentioned in his travelogue only the stone in Udyāna as a site being venerated for the Buddha’s robe, even though he had also reached the major pilgrim sites in the Buddha’s homeland, while Xuanzang, more than two centuries later, visited four more sites where the robe is said to have been

⁵⁸ Stein, 55–56.

⁵⁹ Stein, 56.

spread out for drying.⁶⁰ Between the fifth and the seventh centuries, sacred sites associated with the Buddha's robe seem to have multiplied. The chronological gap between Faxian and Xuanzang can, however, not be filled in, as the sixth century account by Huisheng and Song Yun has been transmitted only in fragments, and as these pilgrims furthermore never reached the homeland of the Buddha.⁶¹ Apart from these practical problems of verifying the impression of a multiplication of sacred sites where the Buddha dried his robe, Deeg has noted a similar phenomenon of multiplication with regard to stūpa construction, as well as an ever increasing number of relics being worshipped, and their subsequent commercialization.⁶²

Summing up all the evidence provided by the travelogues, the "place where the Buddha dried his robe" probably evolved from a local narration about the conversion of the *nāga* Apalāla, and was thus an innovation from the northwest of ancient India.⁶³ As this region could not boast any historical sites connected to Gautama Siddhārtha and his bodily relics, it developed the legend of the Buddha's visit to subdue the *nāga*, and bolstered it with worship of secondary relics such as his robe. In the course of flourishing relic worship, the sacred vestiges of the Buddha's robe were not only taken into the Buddha's homeland, but also to faraway places like China. Somewhere along the way, the *kaṣāya*'s imprints on stone were then associated with inscription carving, causing Xuanzang to deploy the metaphor of "stone-carvings" every time he saw one of the places where the Buddha dried his robe in India.

⁶⁰ Among the other sites with stones for drying the robe, Nagarahrā was the only one visited by Xuanzang for which an earlier travel account is available. The fragmentary travelogue of monk Daorong 道榮, which is also preserved in the *Luoyang qielan ji* and thus datable to before 547, merely states that "in front of the [Buddha's Shadow] cave was a square rock on which were Buddha's [foot] prints. One hundred paces to the southwest of the cave was the site where Buddha had washed his garment." T 2092, 51: 1022a2–3: 窟前有方石，石上有佛跡。窟西南百步有佛浣衣處。 Translation by Wang Yi-t'ung 1984, 245. About one hundred years later Xuanzang added that "the lines' shadow are slightly showing" (文影微現; T 2087, 51: 879a24–25).

⁶¹ See the map in Wang Yi-t'ung, 216.

⁶² Deeg, 67–71.

⁶³ Deeg, 224, however, locates the origin of the *nāga* Apalāla conversion in Magadha.

Other Indian pilgrim sites with bodily imprints on natural rocks

Imprints of the Buddha's robe are only one group of sacred vestiges that have been left by the Buddha on natural rocks. Most widespread are the Buddha's footprints, or *buddhapadas*, that are found all over the Buddhist world, from India to Southeast Asia, as well as in China, Korea and Japan.⁶⁴ The ancient Indian pilgrim sites at Ḡṛdhṛakūṭa, Nagarahāra and Udyāna boasted *buddhapadas* in the immediate neighborhood of the sites where the Buddha's garment was washed. The rock with the Udyāna footprints has been preserved; it was identified by Stein⁶⁵ and also by Guiseppe Tucci,⁶⁶ and is kept today in the Swat Museum in Saidu Sharif.⁶⁷

In his account of these footprints, Faxian reflects the belief that such sacred imprints could indicate the spiritual progress of the visiting pilgrim.⁶⁸

Tradition says that when [the] Buddha came to Northern India he visited this country, and left behind him a footprint. The footprint appears to be long or short according to the faith in each particular person, and such remains the case up the present day.⁶⁹

Apart from his footprints, the Buddha left in one case an impression of his entire body on the rock wall of the Buddha's Shadow Cave 佛影窟, formerly located close to the city of Nagarahāra.⁷⁰ This cave is known from all of the aforementioned travelogues, and there are additional accounts in the *Wei shu*

⁶⁴ Quagliotti provides a catalog of *buddhapadas*. Strong, 85–97, counts the footprints as relics of the still-living Buddha and discusses the most renowned specimen in more detail.

⁶⁵ Stein, 60–61.

⁶⁶ Tucci, 302.

⁶⁷ Quagliotti, catalog no. I.21, *Buddhapada* from Tirat, Swat Museum, Saidu Sharif, 50–51, and 111–112, where she lists the accounts by Faxian, Song Yun and Xuanzang on this footprint, which was located close to the Rock for Sunning the Robe and the Nāga fountain of Apalāla. She quotes Tucci, 302, who identified the footprints on a rock from Tirat, on the right bank of the Swāt River.

⁶⁸ The same is true for other relics of the Buddha, see Deeg, 70–71.

⁶⁹ T 2085, 51: 858a23–25: 常傳言：佛至北天竺，即到此國也。佛遺足跡於此。或長或短，在人心念，至今猶爾。 Translation by Giles, 11.

⁷⁰ For an analysis of pilgrims' accounts on this cave see Soper, 265–68; Tsukamoto, vol. 2: 885–89; and Yamabe, 280–85. On the replica of the Nagarahāra cave at Mount Lu see Shinohara, 245–47. On the Buddha's Shadow as an *acheiropoietos* image see Wenzel, 279–82.

魏書 (History of the Wei Dynasty) and the *Fo shuo guanfo sanmeihai jing* 佛說觀佛三昧海經, (Sūtra on the Ocean-like Samādhi of Buddha Contemplation Spoken by the Buddha, T 643, 15: 645–697). According to the latter source, Śākyamuni’s

whole body [had] penetrated the rock; and just as in a bright mirror a man can see the image of his face, so the Nāgas all saw the Buddha within the rock while radiantly manifesting Himself on its exterior... The Tathāgata sat cross-legged within the rock wall, while everyone watched; although only those who looked from afar could see Him, for close by He was invisible. The various gods in their hundreds and thousands all adored the Buddha’s “shadow,” and the “shadow” also preached the Law.⁷¹

For visitors of the cave, this particular kind of image—resembling, according to Soper, more a “luminous reflection”⁷²—remains irritatingly intangible. Faxian recounts that the appearance is only to be seen clearly at a distance of about ten paces, blurring and even vanishing if one moves closer to the wall, or farther away from it.⁷³ The travelogue of Daorong gives a similar description, saying that

...when we took a closer look, they [i.e. the marks of the Buddha] were indistinct and invisible. If one touched it by hand, he could only feel the stone wall. But, as he slowly stepped back they would begin to appear.⁷⁴

At the time when Xuanzang visited the cave in the first half of the seventh century, the Buddha’s Shadow had already faded, and became visible only after ardent prayers, and only for a short while.⁷⁵

The Buddha’s shadow as well as his footprints were caused directly by his body; yet the Buddha was not the only being capable of leaving behind sacred

⁷¹ T 643, 15: 681a27–b4: 釋迦文佛躡身入石，猶如明鏡人見面像，諸龍皆見佛在石內，映現於外。……世尊結加趺坐在石壁內。眾生見時，遠望則見，近則不現。諸天百千供養佛影，影亦說法。Translation by Soper, 266.

⁷² Soper, 265.

⁷³ See T 2085, 51: 859a, and the translation by Soper, 266.

⁷⁴ T 2092, 51: 1021c26–1022a2: 近看，冥然不見。以手摩之，唯有石壁。漸漸却行，始見其相。Translation by Wang Yi-t’ung, 244.

⁷⁵ T 2053, 50: 229c–230a, and Soper, 267.

imprints. Chinese travel accounts contain stories of animal incarnations of heavenly beings who left behind traces that were venerated.

Huisheng and Song Yun reported on sites connected with the story of Prince Sudāna at Mount Shanchi 善持山 in Udyāna, where marks of the hair, tail, and claws of a lion were preserved, marking the spot where the lion, an “incarnation of the god Śakra, (*T’ien-ti shih-chia* 天帝釋迦), [had] crouched to prevent [Sudāna’s wife] Madrī (Man-ch’ü 嫚胙) [from reaching her children].”⁷⁶ Huisheng and Song Yun also mention the marks of fish scales of a giant *makara* on the western banks of the Indus. This fish, an incarnation of Śākyamuni, had left the water voluntarily to “offer its meat to help [the needy and sick].”⁷⁷

Xuanzang recorded the traces of a peacock’s feet on a rock to the north of the valley of Sanirājā 珊尼羅闍川 in Udyāna:

...the king of peacocks on one occasion...came to this place... [and] with his beak struck the rock, and forthwith there flowed out an abundant stream which now forms a lake.... On the rock are still seen the traces of the peacock’s feet.⁷⁸

In this story, the king of peacocks saved people from dying of thirst. Xuanzang also mentioned the traces of another bird, a vulture, on a stone at Mount Ġṛdhrakūṭa, where Ānanda once practiced meditation. In this case, the vulture traces themselves may not have been objects of worship, as this bird was said to have been a manifestation of Māra, doing his best to scare poor Ānanda out of his meditation. The vulture traces, rather, served as a reminder of the Buddha’s intervention, when he “pierced the stone wall and patted the head of Ānanda,” thus comforting his frightened disciple.⁷⁹

All of the above are examples of sacred imprints on natural rocks, left behind by extramundane, mostly divine beings, which are venerated as secondary relics by pilgrims. Rock or stone is an extremely hard and durable

⁷⁶ T 2092, 51: 1020b, translated by Wang Yi-t’ung, 233–34.

⁷⁷ T 2092, 51: 1021a12–13: 有如來作摩竭大魚，從河而出。十二年中以肉濟人處，起塔為記。石上猶有魚鱗紋。Translation by Wang Yi-t’ung, 237.

⁷⁸ T 2087, 51: 883a28–b2: 孔雀王，與其群而至此，……孔雀王以[此/束]啄崖，涌泉流注。今遂為池，……。石上猶有孔雀蹤迹。Because no unicode is yet available for [此/束], this character, which places the component 此 on top of 束, cannot be displayed here. Translation by Beal, 1: 126.

⁷⁹ 通過石壁，摩阿難頂; for the whole passage, see T 2087, 51: 921b8–15. Translated by Beal, 2: 154.

material that is able to preserve such traces for many generations of worshippers to come, yet this material solidness makes the original accomplishment of divine imprinting ever more wondrous.

Concluding remarks: Relic character of the Mount Tai carvings

Although no historical inscriptions or primary sources about the initiators or the motives for carving the giant *Diamond Sūtra* in Sūtra Stone Valley at Mount Tai have come down to us, the original Buddhist significance of the site might be reconstructed by assuming that it was planned and executed as a replica of comparable pilgrimage sites in India, or rather, as a site provided with everything conceived of as indispensable for Indian sites of pilgrimage. The choice of the text to be carved and the appropriate landscape setting for it can be seen as an immediate consequence of such an intention. Among the Indian rock-related sacred sites, the “place where the Buddha dried his robe” was chosen as model. The ancient kingdom of Udyāna boasted such a site that was located in Upper Swāt Valley. Here, a large, singularized boulder sitting close to a watercourse was associated with sacred imprints on its smooth surface, and over the course of time replenished with carved inscriptions. An analogous location was found in a side valley of Mount Tai dominated by a large inclining rock surface next to a rivulet.

Several sacred Indian sites claimed imprints of the robe’s patchwork in lines or patterns on the natural rock. Certainly, no such claims could be made in China proper, which also had never developed a legend like that of the visit of the historical Buddha, which was prevalent in the northwestern Indian border areas. Instead, the clearly visible lines or pattern 文 of Indian robe imprints were re-interpreted in China as imprints of a holy text 文 spread out on the rock. For the text carving, the *Diamond Sūtra* was chosen, a most efficacious scripture praising the place where it is present as “equivalent to a shrine.” In this way, the rock for sunning the Buddha’s robe was turned into Scripture Basking Rock. The basking *Diamond Sūtra* was held to possess magical protective powers equal to the Rocks for Sunning the Robe found at famous Indian pilgrimage sites, like the one in Vārāṇasī described by Xuanzang in his travelogue.

This site is portrayed in the annotated wall painting in Mogao Cave 323 in Dunhuang. It illustrates the wondrous powers exhibited by the Rock for Sunning the Robe, which are effected by the imprints of the Buddha’s robe on

the boulder. The robe received its miraculous powers from physical contact with the Enlightened One when he made use of it during his lifetime; therefore, it is counted among the *paribhogika* relics,⁸⁰ or relics of touch. Such secondary relics not only became efficacious by physical contact with the Buddha; in the same way, they are also able to transfer their powers to material matters by means of touch. Thus they imprint the stone not only with a particular form, but also with invisible spiritual potency. Such mechanisms of relic generation are known in Christianity as well.⁸¹ In the Buddhist context, bodily imprints of sacred beings on natural rocks have played a significant role. Particularly important in this respect have become the sacred *buddhapadas*, since the Buddha touching the ground with his feet has to be understood as an “act of grace,” and the footprints left behind are thus relics of touch.⁸²

Among the pilgrims’ sites that Faxian, Xuanzang, and others wrote about, places boasting the Buddha’s footprints are most numerous. The place where the Buddha dried his robe belongs to the same category of sites impregnated with sacredness by physical contact. When the Chinese created the giant sūtra carving at Mount Tai, they connected with the Indian pilgrimage sites of Rocks for Sunning the Robe to get as close to the historical Buddha as possible, and to partake in his divine powers and awakening. They did so by transforming the pattern or lines of the robe into the lines of the Chinese characters transmitting the *buddhavacana*. The Chinese custom of highlighting the engraved characters in red to render them even more visible enhances the effect of imprinting into the hard rock. A similar strategy was deployed at the Udyāna site, where the lines of the Buddha’s robe were scraped to make them stand out even more clearly. In this respect, it seems no longer surprising that Xuanzang repeatedly described the imprints of the Buddha’s robe as “shining and distinct like a carving” 明徹皎如彫刻, for this is a quite natural quality of a stone relic.

⁸⁰ Deeg, 67 and 70.

⁸¹ Barber, 13–37.

⁸² Quagliotti, 126–27, in quoting Brown, 95–96.

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Abbreviations

HAW = Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften (Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities)

MOAK = Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst, Köln (Museum of East Asian Art Cologne)

SSYB = Shandong shike yishu bowuguan 山东省石刻艺术博物馆 (The Shandong Stone Carving Art Museum)

R = *Wanzi xuzang jing* 卍續藏經 (Swastika Sequel to the Buddhist Canon). Reprint edition of the *Dainihon Zokuzōkyō* 大日本續藏經. Taipei: Xin wenfang chuban gongsi 新文豐出版公司, 1975.

T = *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 (Taishō Era Revised Tripiṭaka), Edited by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 (1866–1945) and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海 (1893–1978). Tōkyō: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai 大藏一切經刊行會, 1924–1932

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