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Towards a new approach to the
study of the Buddhist rock
monasteries of Kuča (Xinjiang)

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CONVENTIONS

Chinese characters are given in the text right after the pinyin transcription (without tones) and are followed by the English translation in brackets, when necessary.

Sanskrit words are spelled without diacritical marks.

With regard to illustrations, the references are given in “List of illustration”. The number of the illustrations, given in brackets, is preceded by the number of the chapter.

The charts, unless otherwise stated, are of the author. They are numbered with the number of the chapter followed by a letter.

In the case that a source is written, edited or translated by more than two authors, only the first one is cited in text, followed by *et al.* All the authors are listed in the reference list. As for Chinese names, just the surname is given. In case of ambiguities, the first letter of the name or, alternatively, the full name is reported. When the source was compiled by an institution or a association, the title of the work is cited in text, while all the references can be found in the bibliographical list.

SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

¶	chapter or paragraph
∫	table
¹⁴ C	radio-carbon method
b.	born
BCE	Before Common Era
CE	Common Era
c. n.	current number
CSSN	Chinese Social Sciences Net
ELISA	Cross-section analysis, enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay
fig.	figure
GC-MS	Gas chromatography–mass spectrometry
IABS	International Association of Buddhist Studies
IDP	International Dunhuang Project
n/a	non applicable/unknown
n. d.	no date
s. n.	<i>sine nomine</i> , no publisher/no publishing house
s. l.	<i>sine loco</i> , no place of publication
MAE	Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography in St. Petersburg
PLM	Polarized Light Microscope
PRC	People's Republic of China
ref.	reference
TBCC	Dicopper chloride trihydroxide
XRD	X-ray Diffraction

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前言

克孜尔石窟寺院的重新发现，已经过去一百多年时间了。自从 1906 年大谷光瑞他 (K. Otani) 考古队把克孜尔石窟寺院的存在公诸于世后，引起了全学术界的重视，至今对它的学术研究也从未能停止。2015 年 10 月 25 日，由中国美术学院、阿克苏地委宣传部、新疆龟兹研究院联合主办的《丝路·思路——2015 年克孜尔石窟壁画国际学术研讨会》在中国杭州市举办，国内外名家高度关注。¹此外，近年来，不少有慕名前往克孜尔石窟观光旅行。

近一个世纪以来，关于龟兹国的遗址——尤其是克孜尔石窟——的文献繁多，经过梳理，发现这些文献研究的性质与特色。研究前辈试图通过较为全面的解释，以理解与龟兹国有关的研究成果。这些文献可以给我们许多启示，对于确定好未来的研究趋势有积极作用。本作品试图通过历史学的研究方法来进行龟兹国石窟寺院的研究。

本论文第一节简地介绍了有关龟兹国相关信息，并说明了龟兹佛教的渊源，着重研究了佛教传播、丝绸之路与中亚的在佛教历史上发挥的作用。关于克孜尔石窟时代与阶段划分的问题是论文中的重要内容。笔者阐明格伦威德尔先生 (A. Grünwedel)、勒考克先生 (A. von Le Coq)、瓦尔德施密特先生 (E. Waldschmidt)、阎文儒先生、宿百先生、霍旭初先生、魏正中先生、李崇峰先生等学者的克孜尔石窟寺年表。通过参考中国历史文献与僧侣相关的朝圣记录，比如唐朝著名玄奘法师 (602—664 年) 的相关记述，阐明古龟兹国对佛教传播过程的重要作用。由于本论文的研究以克孜尔石窟寺为主，所以此石窟组的全面状态和情况被介绍下来。笔者介绍了克孜尔石窟的四部分石窟，即谷西、谷东、谷内及后山，说明了此部分石窟的位置、数目与分类。

¹ 谢，2015 年。

本论文第二节，着重介绍学术界对于龟兹国石窟寺院的一百多年研究情况合历程。通过对现有的研究成果全面梳理，在充掌握先研究成果的同时，了解目前的研究动向和进展，以便把握好前沿问题的研究，确定好研究未来方向。

为了确定好问题的历史与研究方向，笔者着重分析了檜山智美女士(S. Hiyama)和 I. Konczak 女士编辑的书目。²这本书目包括八百多本与中亚、龟兹的佛教、历史、艺术、考古等内容密切相关的刊物和参考资料。通过对这些文献出版年代、研究内容的梳理研究，明确了前辈研究的具体方向、不同国家之间不同的研究方法和特色。通过对这些问题的综合分析，笔者总结出对龟兹国石窟寺院的四个研究阶段：

1-第一阶段，探索队时代（1895 年至 1931 年）

2-第二阶段，调整与处理资料（二十世纪五十年代至七十年代）

3-第三阶段，巩固各自定位（二十世纪八十年代至九十年代）

4-第四阶段，向往研究里的双方调和（九十年代后期至现在）

第一阶段以考察龟兹区域的考古队为主。有四次团队值得重视。第一，德国吐鲁番考察队 1901—1914 年期间，在格伦威德尔先生和勒考克先生的领导下，考古团队四次到达了塔克拉玛干沙漠的背边界，部分洞窟壁画、手稿以及许多文物被发掘出来了，并拿到了当代德国柏林印度艺术博物馆（Museum für Asiatische Kunst）。第二，保罗·伯希和先生(P. Pelliot) 1906—1909 年探索了中国突厥故地，特别勘测了都勒都尔·阿护尔（Duldur Aqur）和苏巴什这两座古城遗迹。第三，1909—1910 年奥尔登伯格先生(S. F. Oldenburg)的考古队沿着丝绸之路北线行走了，除龟兹区域进行探寻外，还对吐鲁番地区、阿克苏、喀什进行了走访探寻。第四，1928—1931 年在徐旭生先生和斯文·赫定先生（S. Hedin）的领导下，中国瑞典联合科学考察队勘测了内蒙古与塔里木盆地北区域。

第二次世界大战后，一方面欧洲经济越来越发达，另一方面中国陷入了第三次革命战争。终于中华人民共和国于 1949 年成立了。这一阶段，欧洲学者初步整

² 檜山智美与 Konczak, 2014 年。

理和研考在新疆塔里木盆地所发掘的、所记录的等资料，他们特别概述了取回的壁画和写本作。另外，在中国，韩乐然先生，常书鸿先生，阎文儒先生，黄文弼先生进行了塔里木盆地遗址的初步探索。然而，二十世纪六十年代中期文化大革命发生了，只得一阶段停止了中国学术研究发展。

二十世纪八十年代开始，欧洲和中国对这一问题都进入了集中研究阶段，研究成果也越来越多。从目前可见的研究来看，八十年代研究方向大致形成。在欧洲和中国与龟兹国有关的最主要研究方向有两个方面：一是语言学方面，对古写本进行整理和翻译。另一方面，则是石窟艺术。³同时，从中国 1979 年开始，北京大学历史系与拜城县克孜尔千佛洞文物保管所合作，开始了克孜尔石窟寺院和其它龟兹国石窟寺院的考察调查。⁴从考古观点来探索龟兹遗址资料来看，是只有中国学者具有的观点。

最近几年，随着中国改革开放政策的不断深入，有关龟兹国石窟的研究成果逐步增多，尤其是壁画内容与风格的研究。对于考古学来说，魏正中先生著作尤为著名。近来学术界出现了一种把两种研究方法试图调和在一起的趋向：比如阿恩之（A.Howard）女士和魏正中先生最近的著作就是典型的例子。

本论文第三节论述研究方法。对研究历程的梳理之后，笔者将艺术史和考古学当作主研究范围。以方法学这个题目导向，分析了从二十世纪八十年代到目前为止的经典文献。笔者查阅了有关克孜尔石窟寺谷东洞组的研究文献。讨论在谷东开凿洞窟的研究成果并不多，以谷东洞窟当作整体来研究的作品更少。不过，对于内容与研究方法来说，阐述谷东洞窟的刊物则繁多：有艺术历史、考古学、语言学、历史学的这一些方面。这些文献的研究重点大部分放在了壁画的风格与内容上。实际上，从文献来看，一些最有分析的洞窟都属于谷东这个地区，譬如 171 号、172 号、163 号、198 号等洞窟。

³ 晁华山，1997 年，141 页。

⁴ 宿百，1997 年，153 页。

此外，还有一些著作通过讨论壁画来分析画题，比如雅尔迪兹女士(M. Yaldiz, 1992年)、M. Zin女士(2013年)、马世长先生(2006年)。这样研究的目的是为考释壁画题材、挑出佛经版本。把画题与版本题材连接起来之后，壁画里佛教派所存在的影响被认出来。艺术历史研究者、语言学研究者与佛教研究者都非常注重发挥各自专业优势来集中研究。

对于考古学来说，北京大学二十世纪八十、九十年代的田野考察和宿百先生研究成果之后，在考古学角度下分析整石窟地点的尝试少一些。结果，目前许多研究成果忽视了不画壁画洞窟的存在。笔者在论文中分析了魏正中先生的研究方法，来介绍他使用的考古观点。

近年来，随着科技不断发展，在研究过程中，通过借助许多科学技术创新研究方法，比如采用偏光显微镜、X-射线衍射谱，对颜料的试验也越来越重要。碳十四年代学也特别重要。

通过这些研究方法的梳理，明确指出了各种研究方法的优缺点。并提出，要以全方位的方法学来深入研究龟兹国石窟寺院问题。“全方位”包括以下两层含义。首先，从不同学科的方法和技术来研究同样问题。其次，使用人类学的角度与基本方法学的含义来分析龟兹文化体系里岩崖仪式区域——包括石窟寺院与岩崖艺术——有何结构上的角色。

阿恩之女士与魏正中先生的研究成果为榜样，并给予我们许多启示。他们用全方位观点，把洞窟所有特点作为一体。洞窟的布局与寺院的结构无疑反映出了一组僧人的两个需求：一是生活需求，二是祭祀需求。存储窟与僧房窟代表了生活需求，中心柱窟、大象窟、方形窟以及禅窟代表了祭祀需求——不论这些祭祀活动是个人还是集体的。壁画和雕塑都是佛窟的一部分，因此我们也必须在这样的语境当中去理解创造这些洞窟及其艺术背后的原因。为了顾及整体的语境，艺术史研究者需要竭尽全力让壁画回归到最原初的含义，也就是：壁画是洞窟的一个基本组成部分。

至今，克孜尔石窟以及其它古龟兹国的石窟寺院与古城的研究一直具有一些关键问题，譬如确定好开凿石窟的年表以及确定好龟兹国及其它绕着塔克拉玛干

沙漠边境的王国在佛教传播的过程中的角色。另外，壁画风格的年代以及壁画外在和对外的影响也是较重要的议题。今后年时间里，这些问题很可能不会解决了，但是通过新观点来处理此同样内容，通常的问题很可能会得到创新解释与说明了。

Introduction

The academic interest in Kizil rock monastery is little more than a century long, but a great plethora of works have been written and published in different disciplines and on different topics. After the “discovery” of the site during Count Otani’s (1876-1948) expedition between 1902 and 1904, the complex has been attracting the international academic interest, the most prominent research centres being in Germany, China, Russia and Japan. The most recent event regarding Kizil took place in October 2015, when the International Conference on the Kizil Caves Paintings “Silk Road – Meditations” (“Silu – silu” Kezi’er shiku bihua guoji xueshu yantaohui “丝路·思路”克孜尔石窟壁画国际学术研讨会) was held in Hangzhou.

Over the years, the research bore many results and, at present, the scholarship on the rock monasteries of Kuča has quite a rich – albeit relatively short – tradition. Two appears to be the main paths followed in the analysis of the archaeological complexes: on the one hand, a large number of works deal with the artistic features found in the caves, mostly paintings. Publications of art history dealing with both the subject matter and the stylistic features of the murals retrieved in the Kučean area are several and widespread. On the other hand, caves are analysed from an archaeological point of view and, thus, the rock monasteries are interpreted, with all of their features, as archaeological units. The two disciplines of art history and archaeology are of course different, since their objects of interest and methodologies differ from one another. Nevertheless, although they should be complementing and enriching each other, in the case of Kučean studies, the two disciplines appear quite detached. This trend has been developing from the 1980s, when the scholarship took the form that still retains today. While the research on paintings – together with the surge in the linguistic interest – became widespread in the international academic world, it

was only in China that archaeology could be carried out. This situation created a detachment between the two disciplines that is still going on today.

As a matter of fact, while art history works are many, the contribute of archaeology – both in terms of fieldwork and of publications – is statistically quite small, if compared with other disciplines. After the fieldwork conducted by the Archaeology Department of Peking University during the 1980s, at present, the archaeological approach is carried out virtually only by prof. Vignato of Peking University. The imbalance stemmed not only from historical vicissitudes, but also from the fact that fieldwork can only be carried out on Chinese soil: the region of Xinjiang has always been a problematic area for the Chinese governments, more so in the past few years. It appears difficult that new fieldwork will be conducted in the area of Kuča.

Given these premises, in order to trace new paths in the research, one shall turn to the past scholarship. If no new discoveries can provide new clues, then a different methodology shall possibly give new insights. By compiling a history of research, a historical perspective on the reasons why a new approach is needed will also give an exhaustive outline of the perks and limits of the traditional approaches. In order to single out trends in the research and to historicise them, publications from the beginning of the 20th century up to the present, as they are listed in the bibliography compiled by Hiyama and Konczak (2014), have been analysed. To limit the amount of material that should be taken into consideration (overall more than 800 titles, if one considers the aforementioned bibliographical list by Hiyama and Konczak), Kizil rock monastery has been chosen as the case study and some exemplary works dealing with caves there hewn have been analysed in detail.

The recent publication by Howard and Vignato *Archaeological and visual sources of meditation in the ancient monasteries of Kuča* (2014) has been identified as the example of a new approach. The new methodology makes use of a comprehensive point of view, which takes the archaeological interpretation of the whole site as the starting point in the analysis of the murals. Moreover, by employing paleographical sources in Tocharian and/or stemming from Central Asia, Howard is able to single out meditation as one of the main

forces behind the creation of such paintings. Consequently, she interprets part of the iconography of central pillar caves and of monumental caves as celebrating the powers of mental concentration rather than being only representations of episodes of Buddha's life.

This work is thus in support of this new methodology, which shall be defined by contextualisation and multidisciplinary approach. The history of research gives a historical perspective on the current scholarship and highlights, through the definition of phases, the development of the Kučean studies up to date. The analysis of exemplary works as case studies gives a general understanding of the methodologies employed until now, in the fields of art history and archaeology. Moreover, the employment of scientific testing in the analysis of the murals is also singled out as one of the main innovation of the past years.

By employing this new approach it should be possible to get a new understanding of the Kučean sites as a whole, of their functions and of the reasons why they were created in the first instance, even if some of the traditional issues – *i.e.* absolute chronology, styles periodization, *etc.* – will not probably find a definite solution in the next few years.

THE KINGDOM OF KUČA AND BUDDHISM

1.1 THE KINGDOM OF KUČA AND THE WESTERN REGIONS: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Lying along the northern branch of the Silk Road, the ancient kingdom of Kuča was one among the oases of the Taklamakan desert's northern border, in present-day Xinjiang 新疆. Historical sources on Kuča are in several different languages, and the information are sometimes contradictory. The people who inhabited the kingdom are called Tocharians, and for a long time they have been identified with the *tocharoi* named in the Greek sources. Nevertheless, nowadays this identification is deemed mistaken (Peyrot, 2015; cf. Narain, 1990, p. 153). However, the designation has been kept for practical reasons (Peyrot, 2015). They spoke Indo-European languages belonging to the “centum” group (Tocharian A, possibly a liturgical language present in Turfan and Karashahr, and Tocharian B, especially spoken in Kuča), though the influence of non Indo-European idioms appears strong (Narain, 1990, pp. 150-151). The relationship of the Tocharians with the Tarim mummies (1800 BCE to 1st century BCE), whom they apparently shared Europoid features with, is unclear (Mallory and Mair, 2000; Liu X., 2010, pp. 1-19). The Tocharians of the Tarim Basin are often identified with the Yuezhi 月氏 cited in the Chinese sources, due to the latter's apparent origins in Xinjiang.⁵ Nevertheless, this identification is not fully accepted since, as Mallory notes, “the

⁵ The Yuezhi were pushed in Bactria around 130 BCE (the region between Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Pakistan) after the Xiongnu 匈奴 had defeated them. During the 4th century BCE, Bactria had been part of the Empire of Alexander the Great and, at the time the Yuezhi settled, Hellenistic cities still prospered there. The Yuezhi party had split up during the migration, and part of them had settled down in the East of the Tianshan range 天山, and in Ferghana (present-day Uzbekistan). In the early 1st century, the Yuezhi of the Greco-Bactrian territories founded the Kushan Empire (30-375), which was then conquered in the 4th century CE by the Hephthalites (Liu, 2010; Narain, 1990, p. 153).

Yuezhi might indeed be related with the historical Tocharians of Afghanistan, but there is no evidence that they spoke Tocharian or that there is any connection between the speakers of Tocharian and the Yuezhi in the Tarim Basin” (Mallory, cited in Peyrot, 2015).

The Tocharian geographical names for the different archaeological sites present in the territory of the ancient kingdom and even the Tocharian name of Kuča are still more or less unknown, while the Uyghur ones are many and diverse, and are pronounced and interpreted in just as many ways. This is why the very name of the reign appears different in virtually every source, and the transcriptions in both Latin alphabet and Chinese are not unequivocal.⁶

In Chinese sources, the name Qiuci 龟兹 is recorded for Kuča in several different texts. The earliest mention can be found in the *Hanshu* 汉书 [Book of the former Han], where Qiuci is described as a kingdom with 6970 households and 81317 individuals (21076 of them able to bear arms). Its capital Yan 延 is 7480 *li* far from Chang’an 长安 (present-day Xi’an 西安).⁷ A number of officials is then listed, and its borders are defined.⁸ The turbulent

⁶ In Chinese sources, both historical and religious, the kingdom of Kuča is known as Qiuci 龟兹, Kuche 库车, Kucha 苦叉, Kuxian 苦先, Dianxian 典先, Guizi 归兹, Quci 屈茨, Juyi 拘夷, Juzhina 俱支那 or Juzhinang 俱志囊, Quzhi 屈支, Qiuci 邱慈 or Qiuci 丘慈, among others (Wang, Zhu, 2013, pp. 4-5). As for present times, Kuča is spelled alternatively as Kucha, Kuqa, Kuca, Kuča, Kucina. The current Uyghur name is كۇچار, which can be transcribed as ‘Kuchar’. I use the transcription Kuča, following the latest publication by Howard and Vignato (2014).

⁷ Between 3246 km and 3360 km (the estimate is based on Schniz, 1996, p. 421).

⁸ “[There are the following officials:] the supreme commandant, the assistant, the noble Fu-kuo (support of the state), the noble of An-kuo (peace of the state), the noble of Chi-hu (assault on the nomad), the commandant of Ch’üe-hu (resistance to the nomad), the commandant of Chi Chü-shih (assault on Chü-shih), the leaders of the left and the right, the commanders of the left and the right, the masters of Li-fu (strong support) of the left and the right, two chiefs of thousands respectively for the divisions of the east, west, south and north, three masters of Ch’üe-hu (resistance to the nomad) and four interpreters-in-chief. It adjoins Ching-chüeh [精绝 Niya] in the south, Ch’ieh mo [且末 Cherchen] in the south-east, Wu-mi [扞弥 identified either with Uzun-tati or Khema, in the Keriya valley near Khotan] in the south-west, Wu-sun [乌孙 a region near the Issyk-kul lake,

relationship with the nomadic powers in the area is well highlighted by another passage in the same book, where it is recorded that princess Jieyou 解憂 of the Han court, who had married the king of Wusun 乌孙, repeatedly asked for help against the Xiongnu 匈奴. She reported that the Xiongnu had taken the lands of Juyan 居延, which De Groot also identifies as Kuča (De Groot, cited in Hulsewe, ed. and tr., 1979, p. 150). After that, in 72 BCE the Han sent military forces in the area, crushed the Xiongnu, took control of Cheshi 車師 [Turfan] and brought Kuča into their sphere of influence. A daughter of Jieyou was then sent off to marry the king of Kuča. (Hulsewe, ed. and tr. 1979, p. 150). After the establishment of the Protectorate of the Western Regions (Xiyu duhufu 西域都護府) in 60 BCE, the relationship between Kuča, the other oases in the Taklamakan and the Han court became stronger, at least until the rise of Wang Mang 王莽 (r. 8-23 CE). During his reign, in fact, Han control over those areas weakened and the Xiongnu took possession of those territories again. After some years of impasse at Kučean court, a period of great military expansion soon occurred, thanks to the support of the Xiongnu, and Kuča conquered most of the oases along the border of the Taklamakan (Theobald, n.d.). Nevertheless, when general Ban Chao 班超 (32-102 CE) was sent to the regions, Kuča fell again under Han control, and in 91 CE Ban Chao was made protector general of the Western Regions.

After the Later Han Dynasty's downfall in 220 CE, the kingdom met with alternating fortune, switching alliances between the several different dynasties succeeding to power during the Three Kingdoms (220-280) (San guo 三國), under the Jin Dynasty 晉 (265-420), during the Sixteen Kingdoms (304-439) (Shiliu guo 十六國) and the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420-589) (Nanbeichao 南北朝). During the 4th and the 5th and at the beginning of the 6th centuries, Kuča also suffered domination from both the Rouran Khanate 柔然 and the Yeda 嚙噠, usually identified with the Hephthalites.⁹ During the 6th century, the Uyghurs

today in Russia, or Urumqi] in the north and Ku-mo [姑墨 near Aksu] in the west. [The people] are capable of casting iron, and there is lead." (Hulsewe, ed. and tr. 1979, pp. 163-165).

⁹ The issue of the identification of the Hephthalites and their origin is quite complex and far from settled. They are variously identified with the Chionites, with the White Huns and with the Xiongnu on the basis of linguistic

took control of the area and of the city-states along the Silk Road, but their supremacy was short-lived, as in 615 Kuča is recorded to have sent envoys and tributes to the Sui court 隋 (581-618). After Tang 唐 (618-907) military campaigns in the West between 647 and 648, a series of Turkish rebellions affected those regions until 657, when the western Turks were defeated and Kuča was made seat of Western Regions' governors (Dudufu 都督府), thus effectively becoming an administrative centre of the Tang Dynasty.¹⁰

During the late 7th century the western Turks strove again, when they allied with the Tibetans (Tubo 吐蕃) and conquered all the city-states of the Taklamakan. Until An Lushan's Rebellion (755-763), the Tang Dynasty and the Tubo empire struggled for supremacy over the Western Regions, but the situation changed after the troops there allocated were retrieved in order to subdue the rebels. The Tubo regained control for little time while a handful of Chinese and Uyghur troops stood against them. In 790 Kuča became a federal kingdom of the Uyghur khanate (744-840) (Sinor, ed. 1990, pp. 118-150; Theobald, n. d.). Uyghurs were active in the area at least until the 11th century (Vignato, forthcoming).

1.2 BUDDHISM IN KUČA: CHRONOLOGICAL ISSUES

The first evidence of Buddhism in Kuča is in the *Jinshu* 晉書 [*History of the Jin Dynasty*], where it is written that, in the 3rd century, in the kingdom there were a thousand Buddhist *stupa* and temples.¹¹ Other references are in Faxian's 法顯 (ca. 337-422) *A record of the Buddhist kingdoms* (*Foguoji* 佛國記). In 399 CE, the monk Faxian set off from Chang'an, travelled across the Taklamakan, and reached India through the Pamir range. He recorded

affinities (Wolfgang, 1991; Bivar, 2003). They are generally considered either of Iranian or Turkic origin. Their relation to the Yuezhi's culture is not clear ("The White Huns-The Hephthalites", n.d.).

¹⁰ This information can be found in later Chinese histories, i.e. *Houhanshu* 後漢書 [*History of the Later Han*], *Sanguozhi* 三國志 [*Records of the Three Kingdoms*], *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 [*History of the Later Tang*], etc. For a short list of the historical Chinese sources mentioning Kuča, cf. Wang and Zhu, 2013, pp. 4-8. There are mentions of the kingdom even in later stories, from the Yuan Dynasty 元 (1271-1368) on, but they lie beyond the scope of the present investigation, therefore they will not be taken into consideration.

¹¹ "中有佛塔廟千所。" *Jinshu*, ch. 97 (Fang, 1974, p. 2543).

that, around 400 CE, he visited the kingdom of Woo-e (also Yanyi 焉夷): although the site has not been identified for sure, it must have lied in the Kučean area. As a matter of fact, Faxian and his companion travelled north-west for fifteen days from Shan-shan 鄯鄯 – known as Loulan 樓蘭 before the Chinese conquered the area around the Lop Desert in 77 BCE (Hulsewe, ed. and tr. 1979, p. 89)¹² – and this distance is consistent with the traditional locations of ancient cities in the Kučean area and in the neighbouring kingdoms. It is traditionally placed in present-day Karashahr, but any city between Karashahr and Kuča would be a reasonable guess (Watters, cited in Legge, ed. and tr. 1886, p. 14). In Woo-e “there were more than four thousand monks, all students of the *hinayana*. They were very strict in their rules, so that *sramans* [monk] from the territory of Ts’in [Chang’an] were all unprepared for their regulations. Fa-hien [Faxian], through the management of Foo Kung-sun [...]”¹³ was able to remain (with his company in the monastery where they were received) for more than two months [...]” (Legge, ed. and tr. 1886, pp. 14-15).

More than two centuries later, Xuanzang’s travel to India and his account on the Western Regions would prove to be another valuable source for Buddhism in the Western Regions. About Kuča, which he visited around 630, the monk reported:

“There are about one hundred convents [...] in this country, with five thousands and more disciples. These belong to the Little Vehicle of the school of the Sarvastivas [...] Their doctrine (*teaching of the Sutras*) and their rules of discipline (*principles of the Vinaya*) are like those of India, and those who read them use the same (*originals*). They especially hold to the custom of the “gradual doctrine”, and partake only of the three pure kinds of food. They live purely, and provoke others (*by their conduct*) to a religious life [...]. Outside the western gate of the chief city, on the right and on the left side of the road, there are (*two*) erect figures of Buddha, about 90 feet high. In the space in front of these statues there is a place erected for the quinquennial assembly. Every year at the autumnal

¹² “復西北行十五日，到焉夷國。”(Legge, ed. and tr. 1886, Chinese text, ch. 2, p. n/a).

¹³ The Chinese text reads Fu Gongsun 富公孫. Legge refers it to *uddesika* [overseer] (1886, p. 15).

equinox, during ten several days, the priests assemble from all the country in this place.”⁴⁴ (Beal, 1906, pp. 19-21).

The monk noticed also that the kingdom was rich in minerals, such as gold and tin, and that the Kučéans were well versed in playing the lute and the pipe. They dressed in rich garments of silk and embroidery. Their language script was similar to the one used in India, with some differences, but Xuanzang is not more specific about it (Beal, 1906, p. 19). Besides, the two monumental sculptures of the Buddha, mentioned in the passage before, were not the only ones in the kingdom: according to the Chinese monk, another one, “richly adorned and carved with skills that surpassing that of men” (Beal, 1906, p. 21), must have lied on the slope of a mountain near the eastern border of the reign. There, two convents faced each other, separated by the stream of water flowing in the valley. The eastern monastery was said to hold a stone jade with the imprint of the Buddha’s foot. In all the convents there were images of the Buddha, adorned with silken garments, which were the ones carried around during what the Kučéans called “processions of images” (Beal, 1906, p. 22). Kučéan Buddhism’s involvement with politics is highlighted by another passage, stating that on the fifteenth and last day of every month, the king and his ministers convened together to discuss the state’s affairs, but it was only after consultation with the chief monks that the decrees were published (Beal, 1906, p. 22).

What appears from the reports is that, by the time Faxian crossed paths with Kučéans in 400, Buddhism was already well established in the kingdom, and when Xuanzang arrived there, around 630, the monk community was large and Buddhism was flourishing. This is consistent with the traditional chronology: Vignato has recently demonstrated that the phase of major carving activity in Kuča can be placed between 550 and 650 CE, and additionally, according to Chinese sources, the presence of Buddhism

⁴⁴ The assembly, called *Panchavarsha* or *Panchavarshika* (Beal, 1906, p. 21), *Pancha Parishad* or *Moksha Parishad* (Prem, 1997, p. 42) was instituted by emperor Asoka (r. 268-237 BCE) of the Maurya Dynasty (322-185 BCE). It is interesting to report that the same quinquennial assembly was also reported by Faxian, but it took place in another kingdom, called K’eeh-ch’a (Jiecha 竭叉), tentatively identified with present-day Skardu in Pakistan (Legge, ed. and tr. 1886, p. 22).

predates that period by at least three hundred years (Vignato, forthcoming). As Howard points out, “it is generally accepted that Buddhism entered Kuča between the first and the second centuries CE” (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 106), while Liu Mau-Tsai, reconstructing Kučean history on the basis of Chinese sources, dates the presence of Buddhism in the kingdom before the 1st century CE (Liu M., 1969, p. 21). The first evidence of Buddhism in China can be traced back at least to the 1st century CE, when it was imported by Central Asian merchants. Zürcher is of the opinion that Central Asia must have served as a mere transit area for Buddhism from India to Gandhara and then to China (Zürcher, 1990; cf. Celli, 2009). He supports this idea by saying that the Tarim Basin, between the 1st and the 3rd century CE (that is, the early stage of development of Buddhism in China), actually lacked the necessary economical conditions to sustain a large community of monks and therefore was a “Buddhological vacuum” (Zürcher, 1990, p. 112). Only after the 3rd century, when military colonies were set up and irrigation systems were built by the Chinese, the agriculture could have developed to an extent that would have supported a monastic community. His reasoning assumes that all the monastic communities – and the Kučean was no exception – are parasitic, since they are formed by “mendicant monks who live from gifts” (Zürcher, 1990, p. 109).

What we can infer from the very sources, though, is that monasteries appear to be important outposts along the commercial routes of the northern Taklakan: their location is strategic, near mountain passes or near water routes. This is highlighted by the presence of military posts in the nearby of some monasteries, the beacon tower near Kizil-gaha being the most prominent example. By their very presence in these locations, situated along the Silk Road, rock monasteries might have possibly been fundamental transit places for merchants trading their goods in China and in the West. Additionally, the rock monasteries must have been important pilgrimage spots, while the kingdom was a learning center for those interested in Buddhist teachings, and royal members of noble families were sent there to learn the way of the Buddha (Howard and Vignato, 2014, pp. 103-105). Kumarajiva’s history is enough proof of that: “reading Kumarajiva’s biographies, we become aware of the degree of maturity of the Buddhist faith and its doctrines, how the kingdom teemed with learned

clerics who represented different denominations. The time of such religious fervor and achievements corresponds to about 350, indeed an epoch when Buddhism had long surpassed its initial stage [...], not to mention the intellectual gifts and degree of doctrinal preparation of Kumarajiva himself.” (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 108; *cf.* Yang, 2004). The ties that Buddhism bound with politics, trade and economy clearly appear to be extremely tight. Moreover, if we stand by what is recorded in the annals of Jin, Buddhism was already flourishing in Kuča during the 3rd century, and therefore there must have been a development stage prior to that time. That is to say, Buddhist presence in the kingdom may have reached its peak during the mid 6th century (being the kingdom’s official religion?) but that does not rule out the possibility that Buddhism had been present in the area long before. Furthermore, in Tocharian preserved documents, Kučean Buddhist terms were already in use at the beginning of the 2nd century CE (Lévi, cited in Howard, 1991, p. 68). The issue is far from being settled, as a fully accepted absolute chronology for the Kučean archaeological sites has yet to be produced.

With regard to Kizil caves, several chronologies have been proposed over the years. The traditional chronology dates back to Grünwedel, who visited the area at the beginning of the 20th century. Grünwedel took into consideration only decorated caves and classified the murals on the basis of stylistic features, thus distinguishing three painting styles: the First Style, based on Gandharan models, was marked by the use of dark cinnabar backgrounds and associated with domed square caves; the Second Style, was characterized by green and blue pigments and associated with central pillar caves; the Third Style, heavily influenced by Chinese models, was – in Grünwedel’s opinion – poorly represented in Kizil, as he noticed only one unfinished cave that could be ascribed to it (Grünwedel, 1912, pp. 5-6 and p. 43).¹⁵ The German scholar drew the conclusion that the Second Style paintings present in Kizil dated no later than the 8th century (Grünwedel, cited in Zhao, 2006, p. 80).

¹⁵ In Kizil, another style was present, albeit rare. It was named “Sonderstil” (Special Style) by Waldschmidt (cited in Hiyama, 2015, p. 28). It can be recognised in murals from Cave 83 and Cave 84. The figures in the paintings have “delicate colours, subtle facial expressions and slit eyes which protrude slightly beyond the lines

Le Coq and Waldschmidt later adjusted Grünwedel's dating of the First Style (Gandharan) to the 6th century and of the Second Style (Indo-Iranian) to the 7th-8th century (Howard, 1991, p. 68). Scholars have been generally complying with Waldschmidt's proposed dating, adjusting it from time to time but never radically changing it.¹⁶

Klimburg, in 1969, proposed a new chronology which overturned the traditional periodization of the painting styles: he stated that the First Style was a later development of the Second Style. Furthermore, he identified two different phases within the same Second Style, namely, an Iranian phase (500-575 CE) and an Indian phase (575-650 CE). According to him, Kizil was abandoned around the 8th century (Klimburg, cited in Liao, 2006, pp. 105-106).

Yan Wenru 阎文儒 (1962), by analyzing both the architecture and the paintings' stylistic features in the caves, divided the development in four stages:

- 1- first phase: later Han Dynasty (from the end of 2nd century to the beginning of 3rd century);
- 2- second phase: Jin Dynasties (from the mid 3rd century to the beginning of 5th century);
- 3- third phase: Northern and Southern Dynasties to Sui Dynasty (from the beginning of 5th century to the beginning of 7th century);
- 4- fourth phase: Tang and Song Dynasties (from the beginning of 7th century to the end of 12th century).

of the face. Depicting eyes in such a manner is very unusual in the pictorial tradition of Kucha, and this style of expression bears strong resemblance to the painting tradition of India" (Hiyama, 2015, pp. 28-29). Grünwedel interpreted this peculiar style as the personal style of a certain painter, while Waldschmidt considered it to be a prototype of some of the paintings of the Second Indo-Iranian Style. (Grünwedel and Waldschmidt, cited in Hiyama, 2015, p. 28).

¹⁶ A list of scholars going by the traditional chronology can be found in Howard, 1991, pp. 68-69.

A new proposal came with the studies by Su Bai 宿白. Using architectural and structural criteria, rather than relying on stylistic features, and combining them with the results of the ¹⁴C investigation, Su Bai (1997) stated that the development of Kizil happened in three phases, defined as follows:

- 1- first phase: from 310±80 to 350±60 C.E;
- 2- second phase: from 395±65 to 465±64 C.E;
- 3- third phase: from 545±75 to 685±65 and later.

Huo Xuchu 霍旭初 and Wang Jianlin 王健林 (2006, first published in 1993) advanced another chronology, based on historical sources, the paintings' style and subject, the caves' layout and ¹⁴C analysis:

- 1- early phase: from the end of the 3rd century to the mid 4th century;
- 2- development phase: from the mid 4th century to to the end of 5th century;
- 3- flourishing phase: 6th to 7th century;
- 4- decline phase: 8th to 9th century.

With regard to the painting styles, they identified a Gandharan Style during the early phase, an Indo-Mathuran Style in the development phase, while during the 6th and the 7th centuries a typical Kučean style appeared and flourished, along with the permanence of earlier ones (Huo and Wang, 2006, pp. 61-73).

Chang Shuhong's 常书鸿 chronology (1996) is similar to Huo and Wang's, but extends the development of the site until at least the end of the 11th century.

Li Chongfeng 李崇峰 (2003) proposed another periodization, dividing the development of the site in four phases:

- 1- first phase: from the end of the 3rd century to the mid 4th century;
- 2- second phase: from the mid 4th century to the end of the 5th century;

- 3- third phase: from the end of the 5th century to the mid 7th century;
- 4- fourth phase: from the mid 7th century to the second half of the 8th century.

Recently, Vignato has proposed a new chronological framework, which I briefly mentioned before (forthcoming). He assumes the period between 550 and 660 CE as the peak of carving activity in Kuča, dividing the whole activity in six phases. Relying on the traditional stylistic divisions for the paintings, already brought about by Grünwedel, he then proceeds to enclose them in his archaeological framework. Overall, the six phases he identifies are:

- 1- first phase: unpainted caves;
- 2- second phase: First Indo-Iranian Style;
- 3- third phase: co-existence of the First and the Second Indo-Iranian Style;
- 4- fourth phase: Second Indo-Iranian Style;
- 5- fifth phase: Chinese Tang Style;
- 6- sixth phase: Uyghur Style.

The last two phases are not applicable to the Kizil cave complex, since after the fourth phase little to no construction activity was carried out at the site: some decorated niches were hewn and some unfinished caves were painted. Only in Kumtura North Monastery all the phases can be traced. Simsim shows Uyghur features, datable no earlier than the 9th century (Vignato, forthcoming). Abiding by these directions then, the earliest carving activity in Kizil dates back to the 3rd century, and reached its peak during the 5th and 6th centuries. After the Tang conquest, in the 7th century, the Buddhist activity in Kizil began to decrease progressively, until it ceased before the beginning of the 8th century. By the time the Uyghurs took control of the area, most of the building activity had stopped, resuming for a brief period just in Kumtura and Simsim (Vignato, forthcoming).

The chronologies and periodizations described are summarised in the chart hereafter [f 1.a].

COMPARATIVE CHART OF THE PROPOSED CHRONOLOGIES OF KIZIL

Century	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th
Grünwedel			1 st style	2 nd style			(3 rd style)				
Le Coq	Early phase			1 st style	2 nd style						
Waldschmidt			1 st style	2 nd style							
Klimburg				2 nd style	2 nd st.	1 st st.					
Yan Wenru		1	2	3		4					
Su Bai		1		2	3						
		1 st and 2 nd style									
Huo Xuchu			1 Gan dhar an	2 Mathura n	3 Kuĉean		4				
Chang Shuhong		1		2			3				
Li Chongfeng		1	2	3	4						
Vignato		1	2 1 st style	3 1 st and 2 nd st.	4 2 nd style	(5 Chines e style)	(6 Uyghur st.)				

[1.a] The colours mark the painting styles' phases in the different chronologies, where applicable. The phases in brackets do not apply to the Kizil complex (modified from Zhang, 2015, p. 13 and Zhao, 2006, pp. 80-84).

1.3 A NETWORK OF ROCK MONASTERIES

The Kuĉean archaeological, artistic and paleographical remains sketch a lively and multifaceted portrait of a kingdom which, at a certain point in history, was a Buddhist one. Rock cave monasteries were not the only places where Buddhism was carried out. One can wonder about what had not survived, like surface structures – were they temples or palaces. A great number of *stupas* and other religious structures are recorded in the written histories, but scarce vestiges remain today. Not only the religious, but also the secular activity, and what it may have left, needs to be taken into consideration. Remains of the old capital, of citadels and of military outposts show that Buddhism was an important part of the kingdom's life (at a certain point in time and with alternate fortune in different phases) but

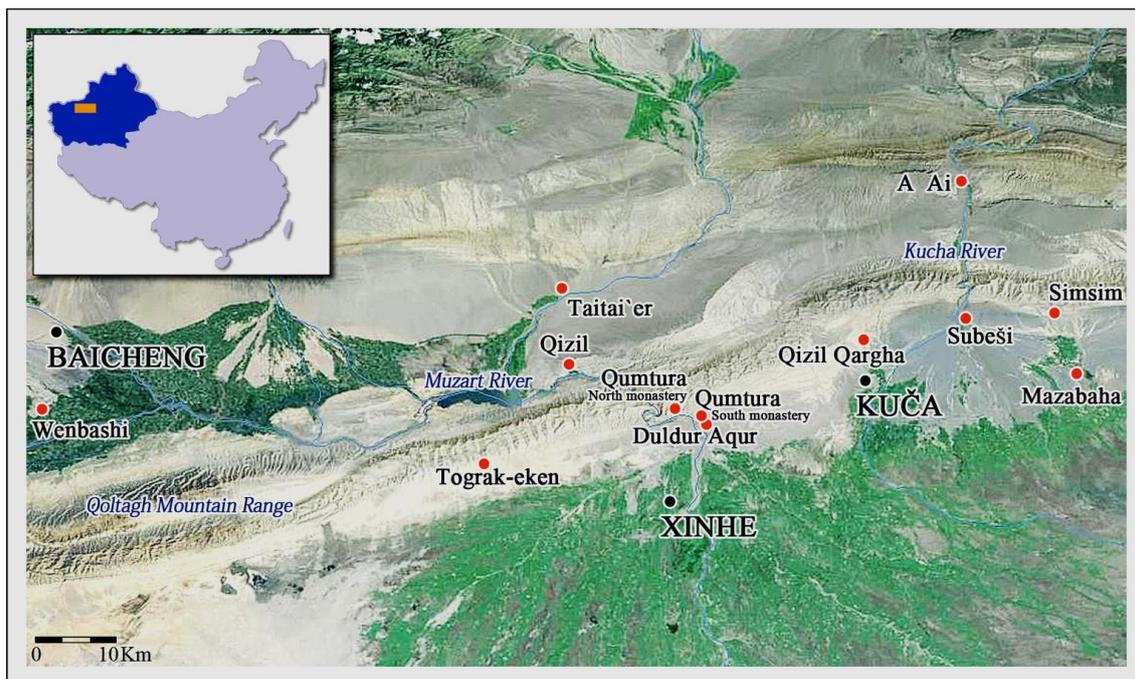
it was just a part of the whole picture. In this context, rock monasteries are *one* of the outward forms that Buddhism took in Kuča. Given their shared features they were seemingly the result of a greater plan, which possibly happened at court level. Kizil is thus to be comprised and to be understood within a greater “network of rock monasteries”, whose main sites are described hereafter [fig. 1.1].¹⁷

The site of Kizil-gaha, also Qizil Qargha and Kizil Gaha (Keziergaha 克孜尔尕哈), comprises a total of 64 caves. It stood between the Queletage Range and the ancient capital of the kingdom. The strategic location of this monastery made it one of the most important rock-site of Kuča. This is underlined by both the presence of a Han Dynasty beacon tower in the proximities, and by the fact that in its largest cave, Cave 23, a colossal image of the Buddha stared directly at the capital, gazing at it through the deep valley. The entire range of caves typologies are present in Kizil-gaha: the limited number of repairs and its uniform stylistic features hint at the short span of time it took to hew the site.

Simsim, also Sim-sim (Senmusaimu 森木塞姆), located south of the Queletage Range, includes 53 numbered caves. It clearly shows traces of large surface buildings and of a *stupa* at the center of the site: since this monastery lacks monastic cells, part of the surface structures may have served this purpose. Many of the rock-carved caves are of a cultic purpose and are therefore decorated.

Mazabaha (Mazhaboha 玛扎伯哈) is situated at the easternmost part of the ancient kingdom. It comprises 44 numbered caves. The carving of said caves was made difficult by the nature of the rock, which easily collapsed under its own weight: a great amount of plaster was needed to keep the walls up, and in some cases, bricks and wooden grooves were employed to secure the structures. The few decorated caves and the great number of undecorated ones make it a special site, whose caves probably served as residential spaces for a large community of monks.

¹⁷ For a thorough account of all the sites here briefly mentioned, see Howard and Vignato, 2014, pp. 3-55.



[1.1] The map shows the main archaeological sites in the Kučan area.

Tograk-eken (Tuohulakeaiken 托乎拉克艾肯), south of the Qoiltagh Range, in the western part of the ancient reign. At the top of the central hill, an imposing surface structure must have once stayed, and the remaining perimetral walls are evidence enough. Outer stairways led the way up to the top of the hill. In the surrounding hills, worship caves were cut in such a way as to face the central structure on top of the central mound. The caves are little more than 20, but there others are probably hidden by debris or buried in the ground.

The prominent feature of Wenbashi 温巴什 is a central area where a surface structure once stood. A great amount of materials like splintered ceramic, wood and gesso can still be seen on the ground where the structure was probably erected. There are 25 numbered caves, but since the preservation state of the site is extremely poor, it is likely that other caves have since disappeared.

Tai tai'er 台台尔 comprises 20 caves in a poor state of conservation. A surface structure, enclosed by thick walls, once stood in the highest point of the site, overlooking the valley of the Kizil River. It is located in a strategic position close to the pass across the Tianshan Mountains.

The archaeological area of Kumtura, also spelled Qumtura (Kumutula 库木吐喇), actually comprises different sites: the two surface sites, facing one another on opposite banks of the Muzart river, were named Duldur-Aqur by Pelliot; the rock-cut monasteries are named South Monastery and North Monastery. Kumtura South Monastery comprises 33 numbered caves, while North Monastery includes 80 caves.¹⁸

Other sites of a different nature exist in the area, such as Subashi 苏巴什 (also spelled Subeši) and the afore-mentioned Duldur-Aqur: both surface sites were investigated by Otani and Pelliot at the beginning of 20th century, but a new scientific analysis is still awaited (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 3). At last, the peculiar site of A’Ai 阿艾 must be mentioned: it comprises just one decorated cave, and is situated in a strategic location near the Kuča river pass south of the Tianshan Mountains.

1.3.1 KIZIL: GENERAL FEATURES

The rock monastery of Kizil lies on the steep cliffs along the Muzart River, on the northern border of the Taklmakan desert [fig. 1.2]. It is seventy kilometers far from the present-day city of Kuche 库车, in Baicheng county 拜城县 in Xinjiang Autonomous region of China. The whole site comprises 236 numbered caves, but the total number is probably far greater.¹⁹ Kizil is one of the most famous Buddhist site on the Northern Taklamakan border

¹⁸ I will not deal in detail with the differences between these two sites and their relationship with surface buildings. Suffice to say, Vignato is of the opinion that the two sites must be analysed separately, as independent from each other, given their differences in layout, typology of caves and décor. He believes that the South Monastery was complementary to Duldur-Aqur, since there were no residential spaces set up in the rock-monastery. The main feature of Kumtura North Monastery is the great amount of decorated caves, whose paintings are extremely rich and varied. The South Monastery predates the North Monastery (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 46-55).

¹⁹ The last numbered cave is 235, in Gudong. Another small cave was discovered in 1973 in Guxi and it was named Xin 1 [New 1]. According to estimates, the total number of the caves could be around 270 and 300 (*Xinjiang Kezier shiku kaogu baogao*, 1997, p.4). Vignato states that they are probably more than 400. (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 26).

because of its rich and diverse paintings and its relatively good state of conservation. It is also among the biggest rock monastery of the ancient area of Kuča.

In the Kučean sites, different types of caves can be appreciated and in Kizil most of them can be found.²⁰ Monastic cells represent the largest group. A monastic cell (*sengfang ku* 僧房窟) is normally formed by three spaces: the antechamber, the entrance area (formed by the corridor and the doorway leading to the internal chamber) and the main room.²¹ Most of times, the antechamber is communal with other cells, while at the end of the corridor there can be a small storage room. In the main room there can be a space set up for the fireplace, a platform for the brick bed, and a window in the wall hewn in the cliff façade. Usually they



[1.2] Kizil rock monastery.

²⁰ In describing the typologies of caves, I rely on the traditional terminology, since it is the one still used today. Nevertheless, it is important to say that the criteria employed in the classification are not unequivocal, giving way to some issues. For example, square caves are named after the layout, monastic cells after the function, central pillar caves after an architectural feature, monumental image caves after an artistic feature, *etc.* This problem is further revealed when we are dealing with square caves: as a matter of fact, several different types of caves, with different features and functions, are named “square caves” without distinction. For an account of the typologies of the caves, *cf.* Ma, 2014, pp. 8-18.

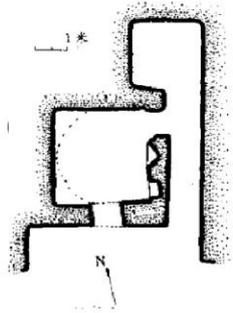
²¹ Most of the antechambers did not survive to this day. An example of a partially extant antechamber in Gudong is the one of Caves 162-163: Cave 162 is a monastic cell and Cave 163 is a central pillar cave.

were not decorated, but some of them are plastered and whitewashed. Square caves (*fangxing ku* 方形窟) are named after their layout and can have different functions: they can serve as a place for worship, and/or assembly, as lecture halls, or as storage spaces. In some of these cases, they are decorated. The smallest ones are used as niches. A special type of square caves are the meditation cells, where the monks could meditate either by themselves or in groups. The tunneled caves (*changtiaoxing xiaoxing ku* 长条形小型窟), most likely used for meditation (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 47), can also be included in this typology. In Kizil caves of a similar layout are present, but they are decorated, while the standard tunneled caves are not. These elongated caves in Kizil are most likely to be the result of a transformation of a cave.²² At last, central pillar caves (*zhongxinzhu ku* 中心柱窟) and monumental image caves (*daxiang ku* 大像窟) are named after the main ritual object in the central room, namely the central pillar and the clay modelled figure of the Buddha. Behind the central pillar or the feet of the Buddha there is a rear chamber or a corridor, usually with a low ceiling, that allows the *pradaksina*. Both types of caves used to have antechambers. Central pillar caves were mostly painted, while in the monumental image caves, although murals are present, sculpture was seemingly preferred [fig. 1.3].²³ The architectural features of all these caves are extremely rich and diverse in nature. Apart from the caves cut in the rock, in Kizil there could have been a surface building, like in other sites in the region (Howard and Vignato, 2014, pp. 14-46).

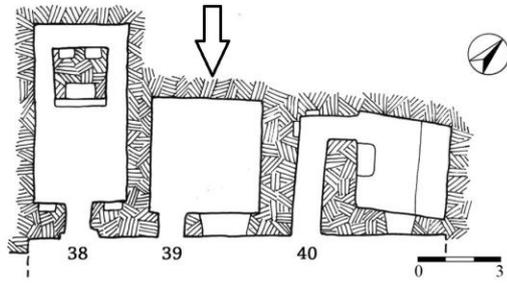
The whole site has been divided in four areas, according to its morphological features. A deep valley cuts through the cliff, effectively dividing it in two main parts: Guxi

²² For example, see Cave 172. It was transformed from a monastic cell into a central pillar cave, and the corridor was cut out from the main chamber by closing off its end, effectively making it a tunneled cave.

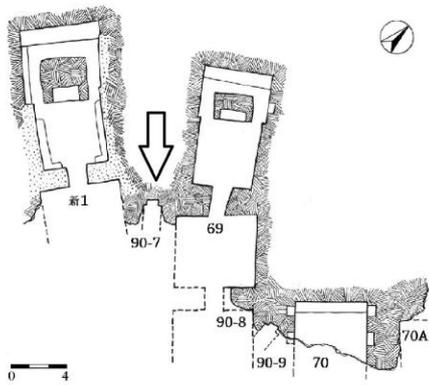
²³ Cf. for example the proposed reconstruction of monumental Cave 47, where the lateral walls enclosing the colossus were supposedly decorated with five rows of seven statues, probably topped by a row of *devas* busts. Howard and Vignato, 2014, pp. 77-87.



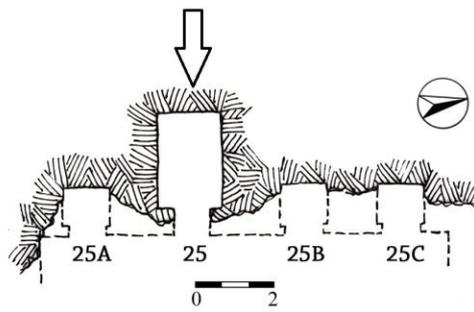
a.



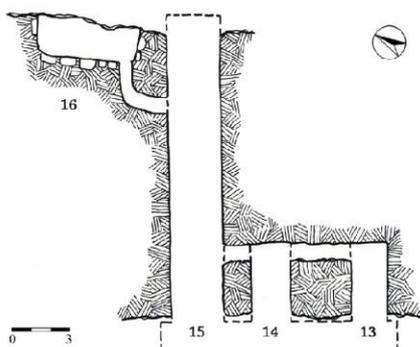
b.



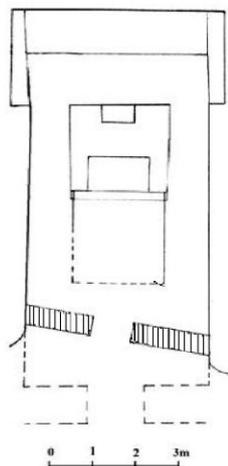
c.



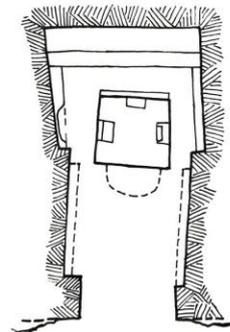
d.



e.



f.



g.

[1.3] a. Kizil, Cave 162, monastic cell; b. Kizil, Cave 9, square cave; c. Kizil, Cave 90-7, niche; d. Kizil, Cave 25, meditation cell; e. Subashi, Cave 15, tunneled cave; f. Kizil, Cave 218, central pillar cave; g. Kizil, Cave 47, monumental image cave.

谷西 [west of the valley] and Gudong 谷东 [east of the valley]. Hidden within the deep end of the valley lies the section called Gunei 谷内 [inner valley]. At last, in a remote part, far from the main *corpus* of the site, is the area of Houshan 后山 [behind the mountain], which comprises two cliffs. This division was first used by Su Bai and is neither typological nor chronological: it is merely a geographical one, used for the sake of clarity.

The western part of the monastery is called Guxi. If one traces an imaginary line at the mouth of the valley, the caves that are to be comprised within Guxi are from Cave 1 to Cave 81 and from Cave 89-1 to 90-23 (*Xinjiang Kezi'er shiku kaogu baogao*, 1997, p. 4). Overall, several different cave types can be found in this area. Caves from 2 to 36 superimpose in the westernmost end of the cliff (Vignato, 2005, p. 122). As seen in the chart hereafter [f 1.b], in Guxi storage caves are numerous, and they are mostly located in the central part of the cliff, between Caves 44 and 90-10. In the other parts of Kizil deposit caves are scarce, if not present at all (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 39).

CAVES IN GUXI

Types of caves	Number of caves	Total
Square caves	1, 3, 9, 12, 14, 16, 28, 31, 33, 39, 60, 67, 76, 69, 81, 89-10?, 90-13, 90-14, 90-15, 90-18, 90-19.	21
Central pillar caves	4, 7, 8, 13, 17, 20a, 23, 27, 32, 34, 38, 43, 58, 63, Xin 1?, 69, 80.	17
Monastic cells	2, 5, 6, 10, 15, 18, 19, 20, 22, 24, 26b, 26, 29, 30, 34, 35, 36, 40, 42, 51+52, 57, 62, 64, 66, 68, 71a, 75, 79, 80, 90-12, 90-16, 90-17, 90-20, 90-21, 90-23, 90-24.	36
Niches/small square caves	1a, 1b, 1c, 38a, 90-7, 90-9.	6
Monumental image caves	47, 48, 60, 70, 77.	5
Storage caves	11, 26a, 37, 41, 44, 45, 46, 46a, 50, 53, 54, 54a, 54b, 55, 55a, 55b, 55c, 55d, 56, 59, 61, 61a, 66, 71, 71a, 72, 72a, 74, 78, 89-1, 89-2, 89-3, 89-5, 89-6, 89-7, 89-8, 89-9, 90-1, 90-2, 90-3, 90-5, 90-6, 90-10, 90-11.	44
Other/Unclear	2a, 9a, 20b, 21, 23a, 30a, 30b, 34a, 49, 65, Xin 1a, 70a, 70b, 75a, 75b, 75c, 75d, 75e, 89-4, 90-22, 89, 90.	22
Meditation cells	25, 25a, 25b, 25c.	4
Unfinished caves	20a, 23, 43.	3
Total number		158

[1.b] Types of caves in Guxi (modified from Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 39). The cave typology is identified after the present situation, without taking into consideration any cave transformation. In case of dubious identification, a question mark is put after the cave number.

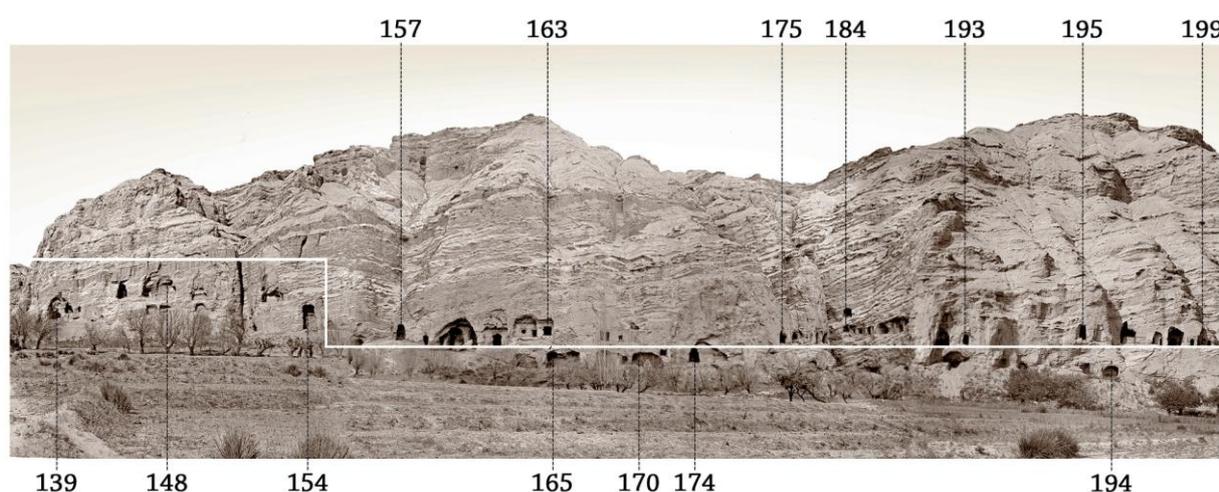
Vignato interprets this high concentration of deposit caves as evidence of the original intended function of the district, that is, an area used for the storage of goods (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 31). Furthermore, since storage areas were supposedly located outside the main corpus of the monastery, this set of caves would indicate the original limits of the monastery (Vignato, 2006, pp. 385-386). The later transformation of caves and the adding of worshipping and residential spaces would show either the relaxation of the monastic rules and the expansion of the monastery itself (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 31).

Gudong is the eastern part of the site, stretching from the mouth of the valley to the deep end of the cliff. In front of it there is a large flat area, which narrows little by little as the cliff itself slopes towards the river. Vignato suggests that a surface structure could have been built in this place (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 35). Su Bai includes in Gudong Caves from 135 to 137, which are located on the cliff sloping towards the inner valley, thus facing the bank of the river (*Xinjiang Kezi'er shiku kaogu baogao*, 1997, p. 4). Vignato prefers to talk about districts (*i.e.* super-clusters of caves, *cf.* ¶ 2.4.2) and includes in Gudong Caves from 130 to 235, with the exception of Caves from 202 to 231, hewn in Houshan (Vignato, 2006, p. 382). According to Ma Shichang (2014, p. 32), the caves to be included in Gudong proper are Caves from 136 to 200.

Overall, in Gudong there are less than one hundred numbered caves, and their disposition is peculiar, albeit not unique.²⁴ For a part of the cliff caves were hewn in superimposed rows, one closer to the ground and one above in the cliff's façade. Another row of caves can be seen at ground level, partially hidden under the ground. They have not been excavated and therefore remain unnumbered. In this case, the nature of the sandstone allowed such layout, which would have not been possible, for example, in Mazabaha, where the breccia would have collapsed under the weight of mudstone above (Howard and Vignato, 2014, pp. 21-22). Even in those parts where caves do not actually superimpose, a difference in

²⁴ Superimposed rows of caves are quite common. For example, in the same Kizil, they are found also in Guxi, between Caves 2 to 36. They are present also in other sites in Afghanistan – *i.e.* Bamiyan, Ghar-e Shah (Verardi and Paparatti, 2004, pp. 56-60) – and in China – *i.e.* Dunhuang.

level can still be noticed: the distinction is so clear that it is possible to trace an imaginary line between the two, thus effectively dividing caves carved at a lower level and the ones carved higher in the cliff façade (Vignato, 2006, p. 391) [fig. 1.4]. What makes the distinction between the two levels worth noticing are the different types of caves and of groups of caves that can be found in there: while in the lower level no central pillar caves are found, they are many in the upper level. Different group of caves mean different functions and this is the reason why the two levels can be clearly set apart: apparently, the rituals carried out in the area below were different from the ones carried out in the caves above.



[1.4] Caves in Gudong. The white line divides District Three (below) from District Five (above).

Following the criteria listed above for the identification of different types of caves, Gudong presents a great variety, as summarised in the chart hereafter [1.c]. Truth to be said, the classification of caves in this area is not easy. Given the poor state of preservation of the whole cliff, caves typologies are sometimes difficult to identify. In some cases, it is possible to infer their typology given the proximity to other caves, drawing conclusions based on the observation of similar groups of caves, but unfortunately, in others, the situation is indeed unclear. This is, for example, the case of Cave 147, of which just two walls remain, or Cave 150b, of which just a wall and a small portion of the roof can still be seen today. The same situation of poor preservation also occur in other sections of the site.

CAVES IN GUDONG

Types of caves	Number of caves	Total
Square caves	145, 148a, 149a, 149, 152?, 156, 161, 165, 166, 167, 173, 174, 174b, 188, 189, 194, 200, 234, 235.	19
Central pillar caves	155, 159, 160, 163, 171, 172, 175, 176, 178, 179, 180, 181, 184, 186, 192, 193, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 201.	22
Monastic cells	140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 146, 147?, 153?, 158, 162, 164, 169?, 174a, 232.	14
Niches/small square caves	150b?, 168, 177, 182, 183, 185?, 187.	7
Tunneled caves	190, 172a, 198a.	3
Monumental image caves	139, 148, 154, 157.	4
Other/Unclear	139a, 150, 151?, 170, 191, 194a, 195b, 233.	8
Meditation cells	138?, 150a?.	2
Total number		79

[1.c] Types of caves in Gudong (modified from Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 39).

Gunei comprises caves that lie within the gorge of the valley, that is, from Cave 82 to Cave 137, except Caves 89-1 to 89-10 and 90-1 to 90-23, which are in Guxi. Su Bai takes Cave 135 as the easternmost limit of Gunei (*Xinjiang Kezi'er shiku kaogu baogao*, 1997, p. 4) and Ma Shichang complies with him (Ma, 2014, p. 32) [1.d]. Caves are clustered in two different areas: on the two sides of the cliff, Caves from 82 to 107 and Caves from 122 to 137 face each other; in the deep end of the valley a secluded place holds around twenty caves, which were carved close together and quite separated from the rest of the site (Howard and Vignato, 2014, pp. 32-35).

Houshan is an isolated and remote area of Kizil, located in the easternmost portion of the site. It comprises Caves from 202 to 231, carved on two cliffs of modest height (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 36). Ma Shichang groups together Caves from 201 to 219 and from 220 to 229 (Ma, 2014, p. 32) [1.e]. The isolation of these caves from the rest of the site, together with their carving in a modest portion of the rock and the apparent unfavourable conditions on the environment around (no water or vegetation) suggests a possible late development (Vignato, 2006, p. 394).

CAVES IN GUNEI

Types of caves	Number of caves	Total
Square caves	83, 84, 85, 88, 92, 93, 95, 96, 105, 108a, 109a, 109, 110, 116, 117, 118, 124, 129, 133, 135, 119.	21
Central pillar caves	87, 91, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 104, 107a, 107b, 114, 123, 126, 136.	14
Monastic cells	82, 86, 94, 103, 105 a, 106, 112, 115, 121, 125, 128, 130, 130a, 135.	14
Niches/small square caves	126a, 126b.	2
Other/Unclear	86a, 105b, 111, 111a, 113, 125a, 127, 137.	8
Meditation cells	109b, 112a?, 112b, 112c, 113a, 120.	6
Unfinished caves	102, 134.	2
Total number		67

[1.d] Types of caves in Gunei (modified from Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 39).

CAVES IN HOUSHAN

Types of caves	Number of caves	Total
Square caves	211, 212, 213, 214, 217, 222, 225.	7
Central pillar caves	205, 206, 207, 208, 219, 224, 227.	7
Monastic cells	203, 204, 209, 215, 216, 218, 221, 223, 225, 226, 231.	11
Niches/small square caves	210.	1
Other/Unclear	209, 215a, 220, 220a, 220b, 226, 230.	7
Meditation cells	216a, 216b, 217b, 223a, 228, 229.	6
Unfinished caves	200.	1
Total number		40

[1.e] Types of caves in Houshan (modified from Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 39).

As stated above, Kizil is the largest rock monastery in the ancient area of Kuča. Moreover, given its long period of development, it is quite a complex site, where caves were used, modified, repaired and redecorated for a long time before being eventually abandoned. Many issues still remain to be solved: besides the still dubious absolute chronology of the site, not all scholars agree on the periodization of the painting styles; the relationship between Kizil and the other sites in the same kingdom of Kuča is unclear, as its very role

within the socio-political and economical fabric of the kingdom during the different phases of its own development. These are only some of the questions that still remain to be answered. In order to trace new research paths, the past and current scholarship on Kizil and on the kingdom of Kuča should be assessed, since it is from the current knowledge that new developments will hopefully arise. In the next chapters, the scholarship will be analysed, first from an historical and then from a methodological point of view. In this way, both perks and shortcomings of the research, stemming from both historical conditions and from academic backgrounds, will be addressed and outlined.

Trends in the scholarship 1895 – today

This chapter focuses on the history of research on Kizil rock monastery since 1895, in an attempt to identify the historical tendencies in the scholarship. The historical perspective will possibly give an insight into the reasons why today the research is apparently moving on two somewhat detached paths – that is, an archaeological approach towards the sites and a museum-oriented type of studies – and why a progress towards reconciliation is advisable.

Chronological phases of development have been identified:

- 1- Exploration Era (1895-1931);
- 2- Adjustment Period (1950s-1970s);
- 3- Consolidation Period (1980s-1990s);
- 4- Moving towards reconciliation (late 1990s to date).

After Hedin's first venture in Turkestan in 1895, several explorations brought scholars and adventurers in what virtually was, up to then, the Central Asian *terra incognita*. I will focus especially on the expeditions that reached the Kučean area: the Four Turfan Expeditions (between 1902 and 1914, ¶ 2.1.1), led by Albert Grünwedel and Albert von Le Coq; the expedition led by Paul Pelliot (1906-1909, ¶ 2.1.2); the First Russian Expedition (1909-1910, ¶ 2.1.3), led by Sergei Oldenburg; the Sino-Swedish Expedition (1928-1931, ¶ 2.1.4), led by Xu Xusheng. After this first phase, a period of adjustment came (1950s-1970s), both in Europe and in China. In this phase, contacts between the two were virtually non-existent, since – given the poignant historical developments – China was closed to foreigners. While in Europe – and, to a certain extent, America – the collation, classification, organization and consequent interpretation of materials flourished well into the 1980s (¶ 2.2.1), in China, after

a first period of preliminary investigations to reassess control over the Western Regions (§ 2.2.2), progress was hindered by the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). After more than ten years of “silence”, finally during the 1980s the great era of reports began in China, thanks to the archaeological fieldworks carried out by the History and Archaeology Departments of Peking University (§ 2.3). In Europe, during the same years, two fields emerged in the scholarship as the main ones, namely philology and art history. During this phase (1980s-1990s), the scholarship reached its maturity both in China and Europe. The last twenty years (late 1990s-today) saw a sudden increase in publications on Kizil rock monastery, most of them concerning the classification and identification of the mural subjects, while the archaeological approach was developed mainly by scholars of Peking University. The introduction of scientific methods in the analysis of the caves has opened new paths that are still to be fully explored (§ 2.4).

2.1 EXPLORATIONS ERA (1895–1931)

Although the first reports on Central Asia²⁵ by British and Russian parties actually date back to the 1860s – 1880s,²⁶ they were conducted out of geographical (and military) interest rather than an archaeological one.²⁷ The year 1895 has been chosen as the starting point of this historical phase because in this year the exploration of Central Asia led by Sven Hedin (1865-1952) began. He is usually singled out as the pioneer – Hopkirk calls him “the Pathfinder” (1980, p. 54) – since his geographical journeys paved the way for a more thorough investigation of those areas, thanks to his extremely accurate maps and his

²⁵ For an expansion on the concept of “Central Asia”, cf. Mayor (1992) and Sinor (1990).

²⁶ Expeditions by British officials Thomas George Montgomerie (1830–1878), William Johnson (d. 1883), Thomas Douglas Forsyth (1827–1886), in the context of the Great Trigonometrical Survey, and Russian expeditions by geographer Nikolai Prejevalsky (1839 – 1888) and botanist Albert Regel (1845 – 1909) must be noted (Hopkirk, 1980; cf. IDP, 2010 a, 2010 b, 2010 c).

²⁷ The rivalry between the British and the Russian Empire for the control of Central Asia was at full play in those years, and the role of such explorations must be considered within this context of political and military tension. This struggle for power is known as “The Great Game”: the term was first introduced to the public by British novelist Kipling in his novel *Kim*.

accounts. From an archaeological point of view, although he was no archaeologist, he discovered the ruins of the ancient city of Loulan and he unearthed tablets and manuscripts in Chinese and in Kharosthi script.

2.1.1 THE GERMAN TURFAN EXPEDITIONS

Regarding Kizil, the most relevant expeditions were the German Expeditions (also known as Turfan Expeditions) carried out between 1902 and 1914, under the leadership of Albert Grünwedel (1856 – 1935) and Albert von Le Coq (1860 – 1930).²⁸

Professor Albert Grünwedel, the leader of the First and the Third Turfan Expeditions, was in charge of the Indian Department of the Ethnographical Museum of Berlin at the time of the first expedition and was also an important scholar and author in Buddhist art. His interest had been lying on Chinese Turkestan and its archaeological potential for a while when reports of the afore-mentioned Sven Hedin's and then Aurel Stein's (1862–1943) ventures caused a sensation in Europe.²⁹ During the XII International Congress of Orientalists held in Rome in 1899, discoveries made in Central Asia were presented and discussed: the Russian delegation presented the material brought back by Dmitri Aleksandrovich Klementz (1848–1914) – himself present in Rome – in the Turfan area in 1898.³⁰ The orientalist Augustus Rudolf Hoernle (1841–1918), representing the British

²⁸ The site of Kizil was discovered during the first Japanese exploration carried out between 1902 and 1904 under the leadership of count Kozui Otani (1876–1948), who also financed the expedition. Otani was a member of the British Royal Geographical Society, as well as a Buddhist devotee, who spent two years studying in London between 1900 and 1902. There he came in contact with other important scholars of the time, such as Hedin himself. A brief record of the Otani expeditions can be found in IDP (2010 a).

²⁹ Marc Aurel Stein, born in Hungary and naturalised British, carried out four expeditions in the Tarim Basin between 1900 and 1930: one of his greatest achievement was the purchase of written material from the Library Cave (Cave 17) in Dunhuang, during his second expedition (1906-1908). Although extremely important for the studies on Central Asia, his work is not here discussed in detail, for his explorations were mostly focused on the southern branch of the Silk Road around the Taklamakan desert, and therefore not directly linked with the kingdom of Kuča (IDP, 2010 b).

³⁰ For a detailed record of the proceedings, see Genovese (ed. 2006).

delegation, discussed the deciphering of manuscripts collected in the region. The most famous of them undoubtedly was the “Bower Manuscript”, obtained by the officer Hamilton Bower (1858–1940) around 1890, and which, according to Hoernle himself, “started the whole modern movement of the archaeological exploration of Eastern Turkestan” (Hopkirk, 1980, p. 46). Grünwedel had had contacts with the Russian scholars, both before and after the Congress, and these meetings strengthened his resolve to plan, as soon as possible, a venture in Central Asia. From Grünwedel’s accounts of the meetings, it appears that a cooperation between Germany (Prussian Empire at the time) and Russia was envisaged, but eventually it could not be made effective.³¹

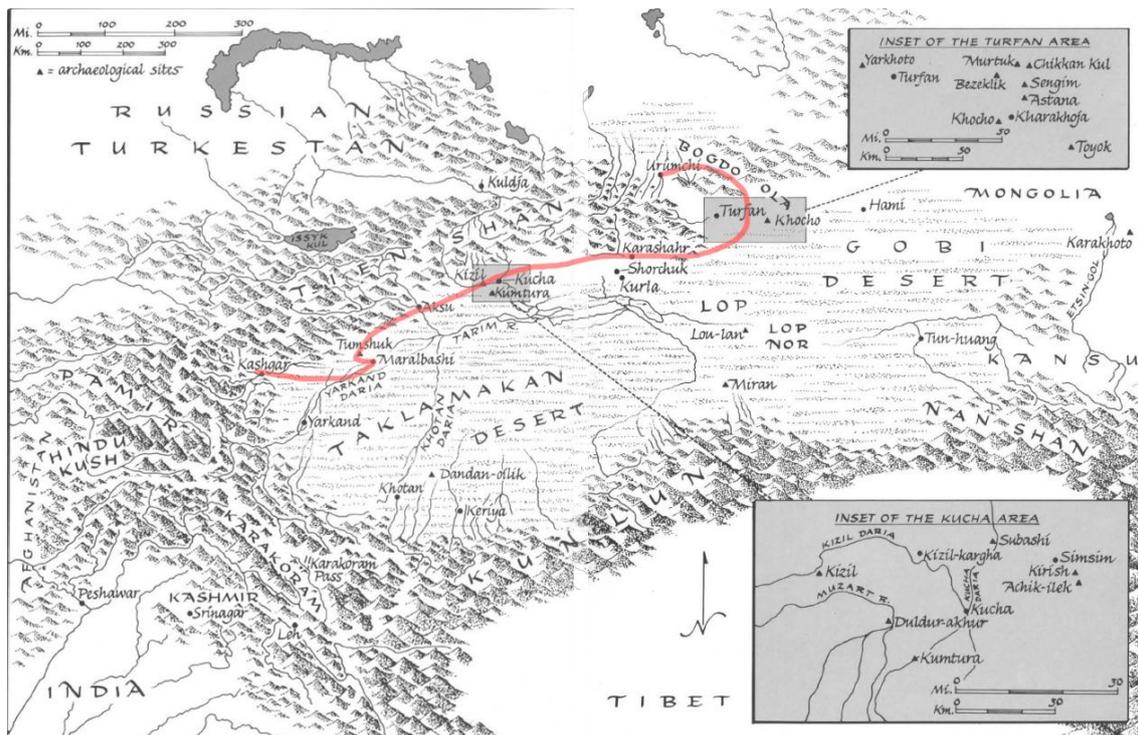
Notwithstanding the archaeological evidence displayed at the Congress in Rome and the consequent enthusiasm arisen in the academic circles, the arrangements for the first Turfan expedition proved to be somewhat of a difficulty for Grünwedel, since no institution seemed willing to fund it. After months of efforts, the expedition could be finally set in motion, and it was mostly funded by private donations and by a grant from the Berlin Committee for the Advancement in Ethnology (Härtel and Yaldiz, ed. 1982, p. 29). The first German Expedition was thus organized and Grünwedel, together with Dr. Georg Huth and Theodor Barthus, left for Central Asia, where they were to spend less than a year, bringing back forty-four crates [fig. 2.1]. The report of the expedition *Bericht über Archäologische Arbeiten in Idikutschari und Umgebung im Winter 1902-1903* [Report on archaeological work in Turkestan and surrounding areas in winter 1902-1903] was published in 1906. The findings brought back by Grünwedel and his men marked the definitive beginning of the race to

³¹ In a note dated September 26th 1899, Grünwedel wrote: “Yesterday Professors Radlov and Salemann [of the Russian delegation] brought to Berlin samples of the cave paintings found in Turfan (plus manuscripts and woodcuts) which they intend to present to the congress in Rome. They inquired whether the Prussian government would be prepared to cooperate in an expedition on a larger scale being planned by the Academy, and in the last resort were desirous of at least moral support for the project by our attestation of the scientific importance of the whole thing.” (Grünwedel, cited in Härtel and Yaldiz, ed. 1982, p. 25). In a note written after the Congress, he did not mention the possibility of a joint expedition, nevertheless he noted, with a certain amount of urgency on his part, that “any delay will increase the grave risk of losing for ever these priceless documents of the history of Central Asia.” (Grünwedel, cited in Härtel and Yaldiz, ed. 1982, p.27).

Central Asia. As a matter of fact, the second expedition did not have financial problems (it was funded by the Kaiser himself) and the Prussian Parliament ratified that it was to be immediately followed by the third, without any delay. Since Grünwedel fell ill at the time the second venture was to set off, Albert von Le Coq was chosen in his place to lead it.

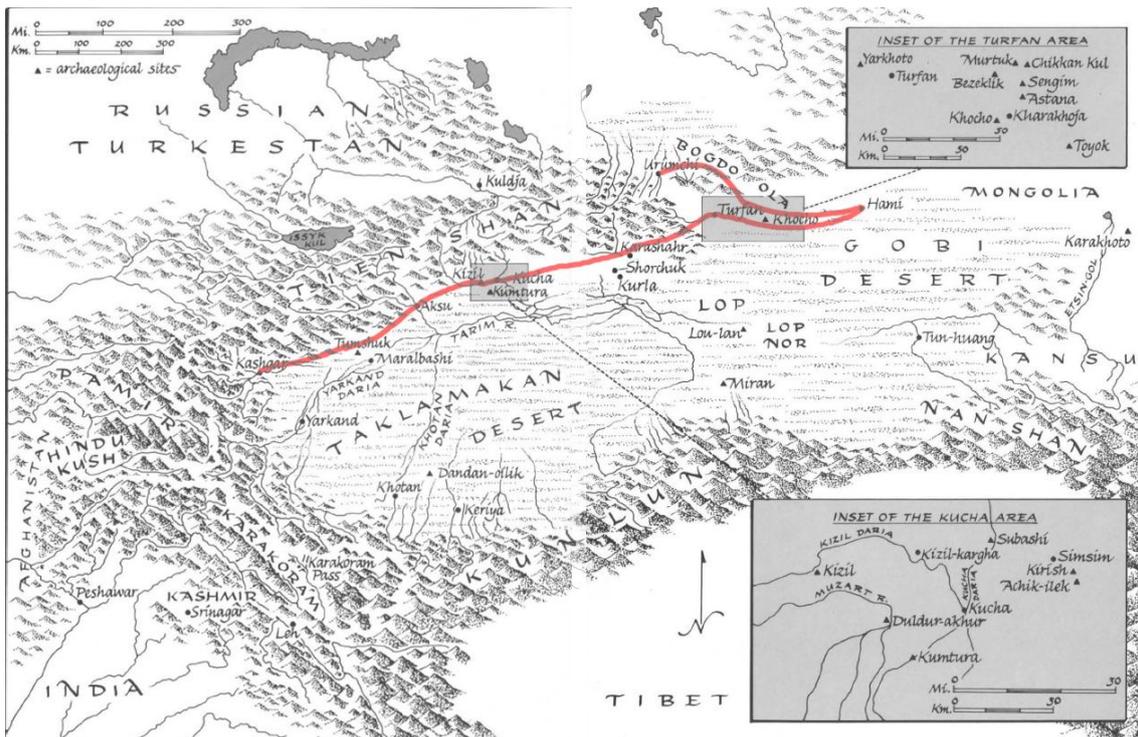
Le Coq was an honorary worker at the Ethnological Museum, which he had joined as a volunteer at the age of forty-two. (Hopkirk, 1980, p. 134). As Grünwedel's collaborator, he was appointed head of the Second German Expedition – also known as the first Prussian Expedition, given its remarkable financial supporter. Le Coq and Barthus travelled along the northern branch of the Silk Road again, setting off from Urumqi to the Turfan area, and then straight through Karashahr and Kuča to Kashgar [fig. 2.2], where they were to meet with Grünwedel, who had recovered and was thus ready (and so very willing) to be in charge of the archaeological exploration again.

Nevertheless since during the journey to Chinese Turkestan Grünwedel had fallen ill again, the third expedition could start only three weeks after the latter's arrival, in December 1905 (Hopkirk, 1980, p. 136). The three men took off for Kuča, where an extraordinary complex of caves was rumoured to have been visited by Japanese explorers earlier on (the Otani Expedition). Surely enough the three discovered “a marvellous settlement of many hundreds of temples in the steep cliffs of a mountain range”, as Le Coq himself described Kizil (Le Coq, cited in Hopkirk, 1980, pp. 137-138). Notwithstanding the clear success of the expedition, given the rich finds of the site, disagreement was to arise between Le Coq and Grünwedel, since the former (together with his companion Barthus) seemed to be more involved in collecting as many paintings and relics as possible to be brought back to Germany rather than recording them, while the latter was firmly against the indiscriminate removal of the wall paintings and was keenly interested in a more scientific approach to the analysis of the site. He firmly opposed the removal of at least two painted domes and a sculpture, nonetheless Le Coq managed to smuggle them away without Grünwedel's consent (Hopkirk, 1980, pp. 142-143). After Le Coq departed, heavily incapacitated by illness, Grünwedel and Barthus reached the Turfan oasis, where they undertook excavations at the

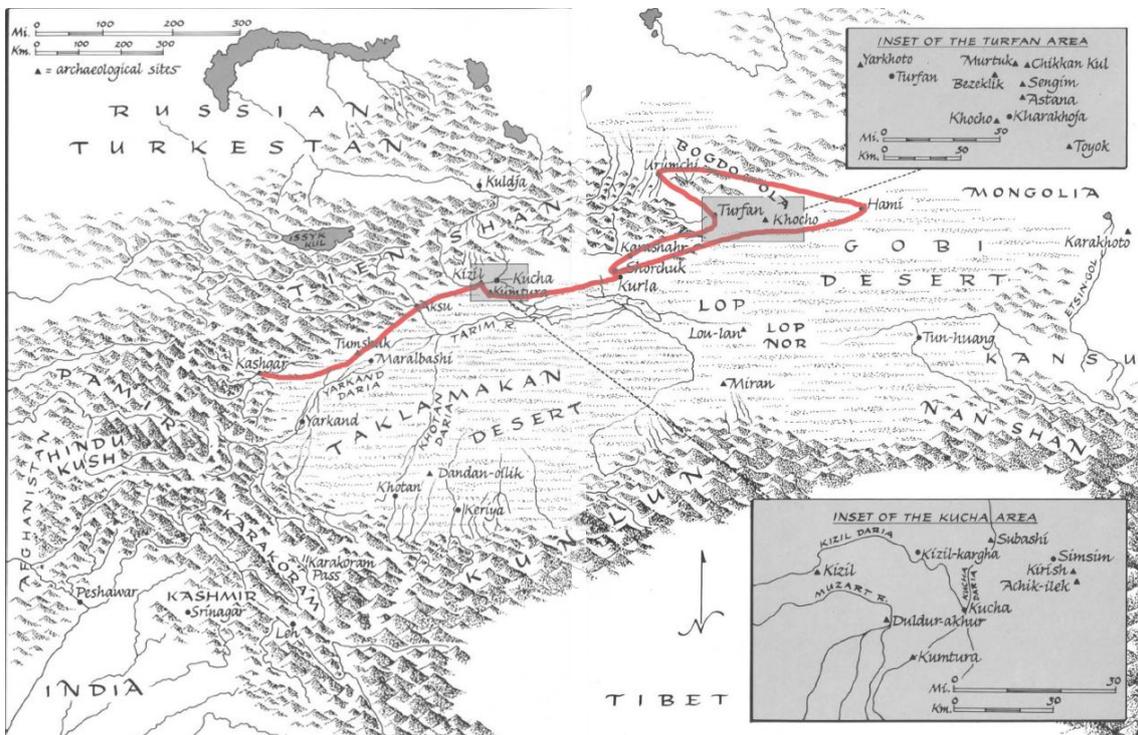


[2.1] Itinerary of the First Turfan Expedition.

sites of Hami, Toyuk and Shorchuk, until late April 1907 (IDP, 2010 d) [fig. 2.3]. Grünwedel and Le Coq brought back to Germany a total of 221 crates (103 in the Second Expedition and 118 in the Third) and the account of the explorations and the findings were published in Le Coq's two papers "A short account of the origin, journey, and results of the First Royal Prussian (Second German) Expedition to Turfan in Chinese Turkistan" (1909) and "Reise und Ergebnisse der zweiten Deutschen Turfan-Expedition" [Account on the journey and findings of the Second German Expedition] (1910), and in Grünwedel's *Altbuddhistische Kultstätten in Chinesisch – Turkistan* [Ancient Buddhist Temples in Chinese Turkestan] (1912). In 1913 Le Coq's *Chotscho. Facsimile-Wiedergaben der wichtigeren Funde der Ersten Königlich Preussischen Expedition nach Turfan in Ost-Turkistan* [Facsimile Reproduction of Important Findings of the First Royal Prussian Expedition to Turfan in East Turkestan] was also published in Berlin.



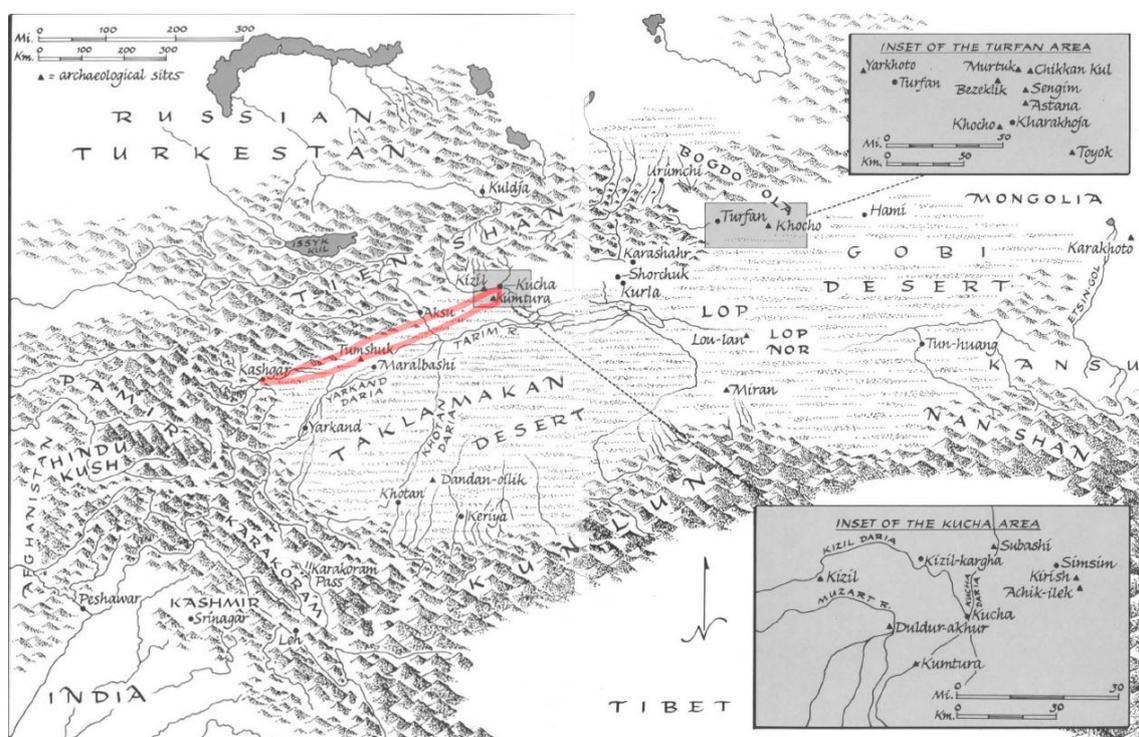
[2.2] Itinerary of the Second Turfan Expedition.



[2.3] Itinerary of the Third Turfan Expedition.

The findings of the Second and of the Third Expeditions were plentiful and rich in variety: the two German scholars brought back not only magnificent wall paintings and artifacts from famous caves as the ones of Kizil and Bezeklik – which can still be seen at the Museum für Asiatische Kunst in Berlin – but also a plethora of manuscripts in several different languages and alphabets. These findings, however, were to be surpassed (at least in quantity) by the achievements of the Fourth Expedition, which was funded by the emperor and by private donors. From June 1913 to February 1914 Le Coq with his loyal companion Barthus, worked again in Central Asia, bringing back to the Museum 156 crates. The two men worked in the area between Kuča and Kashgar [fig. 2.4]. The report of this exploration was published in “Die vierte Deutsche Turfanexpedition” [The Fourth German Expedition] (1918).

During and after the Great War (1914 – 1918), the archaeological expeditions in Central Asia were obviously halted and the work of classification, collation and interpretation began. During the 1920s, Grünwedel and Le Coq, together with other scholars like Ernst Waldschmidt (1897-1985), were involved in the analysis of the material brought back to Germany (Chao, 1997, p. 140). Apart from the aforementioned “Die vierte Deutsche



[2.4] Itinerary of the Fourth Turfan Expedition.

Turfanexpedition" (1918), *Auf Hellas Spuren in Ostturkistan* (1926)³² and *Von Land und Leuten in Ostturkistan* [Land and People in East Turkestan] (1928) by Le Coq, in 1920 Grünwedel wrote *Alt-Kutscha, Archäologische und Religionsgeschichtliche Forschungen an Tempera-Gemälden aus Buddhistischen Höhlen der Ersten acht Jahrhunderte nach Christi Geburt* [Ancient Kuča, Archaeological and Religion-Historical Research for Wall Paintings in Buddhist Caves in the First 8 Centuries A.D.], on the Kizil grottoes. In this volume, Grünwedel described a number of caves, such as the Peacock Cave (Pfauenhöhle, current number 76), the Canyon Cave (Schlucht Höhle, c.n. 178), the Feet-washing Cave (Höhle mit der Fußwaschung, c.n. 206), the Treasure Caves (Schatzhöle A, B, C, D and E, c.n. 85, 84, 83, 82) and the Maya Cave (Mâyâhöhle, c.n. 224).³³ Waldschmidt wrote on the art and on the pictorial styles of the murals, in works like "Frühmittelalterliche Kunst in Chinesisch-Turkistan [Early Medieval Art in Chinese Turkestan]" (1925 a) and *Gandhara, Kutscha, Turfan* (1925 b), among others.

2.1.2 PAUL PELLIOT

The Germans were not the only ones working in the Kuča area at the beginning of the 20th century: apart from the Japanese expedition funded by Count Otani – which was responsible for the "discovery" of the site of Kizil – the linguist genius Paul Pelliot (1878-1945) was also in the area. Together with his companions Louis Vaillant (1874- ?) and Charles Nouette (1869-1910), Pelliot was in Chinese Turkestan between 1906 and 1908. The three-men party moved from Kashgar to Tumsuq, reaching Kuča in 1907. There they worked between January and September 1907 (IDP, 2010 e). Although no relevant material about what they did in Kizil was published, the archaeological excavations carried out in Duldur-Aqur and Subashi remain today of the utmost importance in the study of the surface citadels of Kuča.

³² An English version, *Buried Treasures of Chinese Turkestan*, appeared in 1928.

³³ One of the problems of later scholarship, namely, the issue with the proper naming of caves, can already be seen here: the Germans named them, mostly, on the basis of the main topic of the paintings inside the caves or, in some sporadic instances, on the basis of some prominent architectural features (such as niches, as in the case of Nischenhöhle, c.n. 27). This approach, notwithstanding the prompt efficiency, gives way to new problems, such as the omission of unpainted caves, which undeniably constitute the majority of caves in Kizil.

In Duldur-Aqur the expedition surveyed structures erected around a central yard and surrounded by walls, most of which were decorated with stucco Buddhist figures and paintings. A library with manuscripts and several inscriptions were also found (Litvinski, 1998). Linguistic material was also retrieved in Subashi, together with photographic evidence and annotations of surface structures among which *stupas* stand out, even today (IDP, 2010 e). In most cases, the photographs and notes he and his team took of said structures are today the only source of information on that matter. Moreover, it is precisely thanks to those pictures that a comparison can be drawn between the surface sites and the rock temples, especially as regards the décor.

Pelliot later focused on Dunhuang and spent five months there, working in the famous “Library Cave” (Cave 17). Checking through thousands of scrolls in Chinese, Tibetan, Sanskrit and Uighur, he chose several manuscripts of linguistic interest, which are now stored at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and at the Musée Guimet, together with the Central Asian materials he had retrieved in Turkestan (IDP, 2010 e). Apart from a concise travelogue presented at the Sorbonne in December 1909 (Pelliot, 1910), the reports of what Pelliot did in Kuča were published later by Hambis (1967) and Hallade *et. al.* (1982).

Just as Pelliot moved out from Central Asia to go back to France, where he was to painstakingly work on the materials collected, another actor joined the great game of archaeology: Sergei Fedorovich Oldenburg.

2.1.3 SERGEI OLDENBURG

Sergei Fedorovich Oldenburg (1863-1934) was an Orientalist from St. Petersburg University, where he majored in Indian studies and was later appointed professor (Dreyer, 2008).³⁴ In 1909, when he took off for his first expedition in Central Asia, the Russian government had already got control of some regions in the area, like Djungaria (northern Xinjiang) and Kashgaria (south-west Xinjiang), and had consulates in Chuguchak (Tacheng) and Kulja (Yining) (Fletcher, 1970). Oldenburg’s was not the first Russian expedition in

³⁴ Other biographical data about Oldenburg can be found at IDP (2010 c).

Central Asia: there had already been expeditions from the 1850s on, but these had been primarily of a reconnaissance nature.³⁵ In 1845, in fact, the Imperial Geographical Society was founded in St. Petersburg by the tsar Nicola I, in order to collect the data gathered by travelers and explorers and support further explorations of unknown regions, both with funds and technical aid (Dreyer, 2008, p. 63). These reconnaissance enterprises comprised army officers, and this is easily understood against the background of the Great Game and of the colonial powers challenging each other in order to get control of key areas. But at the time, the British were also involved in the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India, with similar underlying purposes, and they themselves instructed explorations of Asia to be undertaken by military officials at first. As Dreyer remarks, “while scientific interest included the languages, religions and customs of ethnic groups almost from the beginning, the exploration of archaeological remains of ancient cultures was the last field of research that developed in the 19th century” (Dreyer, 2008, p. 64).

Nevertheless, regarding Russia, at least three other expeditions were undertaken with somewhat an archaeological purpose before Oldenburg’s one, and one of them reached Kizil (IDP, 2010 c). Mikhail Mikhailovic Berezovsky (1848-1912) together with his relative Nikolai Matveyevich Berezovsky (dates n/a), who was an artist and an architect, were in Kuča from 1905 to 1908, at the same time of Pelliot. The Berezovskys visited the French scholar’s excavation in Kizil and reported the details to Oldenburg (Vorobyeva-Desyatovskaya, 2008, p. 70). Many of the objects found by the Russian brothers, now stored at the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, are very similar to the ones brought back to the Musée Guimet by Pelliot, so it is generally accepted that they must come from the same complex. The Russians took some fragments of the murals (currently at the Hermitage too) and manuscripts, and focused on mapping and drawing the wall paintings. In Kizil they found what seemed to be a ceramic laboratory, some moulds for Buddha heads, and a space which supposedly was a storage area, features which Pelliot himself similarly recorded during his

³⁵ The army officer Chokan Valikhanov (1835 – 1865), the geographer Nicolai Przhevalsky (1839 – 1888), and the botanist Johann Albert von Regel (1845 – 1909), were in the area before Oldenburg.

excavations (Vorobyeva-Desyatovskaya, 2008, p. 72). The archaeological interest in the area was in a way secured, and, even if until 1909 funds for Oldenburg's venture could not be found, plans and arrangements for the explorations were still being made.

The financial issues were eventually resolved and two journeys were organised. The first of them focused on the Kučean area. When, in 1909, this expedition was ready to take off, not much material had been published, namely Grünwedel's report of his First Expedition (1906) and Stein's ones (1907), together with few works – mainly travelogues – by British explorers.³⁶ What Le Coq and Pelliot had done in the area was still more or less unknown, as their publications were to come out later. It is impossible to say whether Oldenburg knew of these reports by British officials, or if he had read them, but given the friendship between him and Stein, which dated back at least to 1884, it would be peculiar if information about the explorations had not transpired between them.³⁷

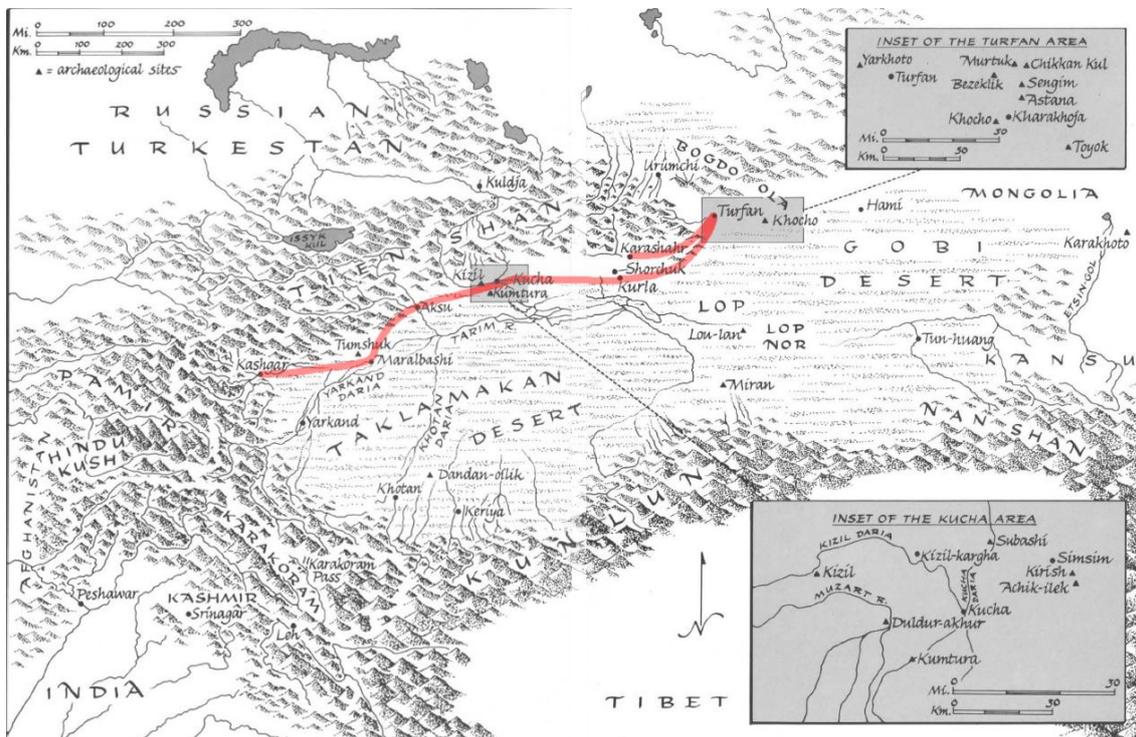
Well-equipped with cartographic evidence from earlier expeditions and with Grünwedel's and Pelliot's personal advice, Oldenburg and his party, which consisted of ethnographer and photographer Samuil Martynovich Dudin (1863–1929) and engineer Dmitri Arsenievich Smirnov (dates n/a), left St. Petersburg in June 1909 and arrived in Urumqi in July.³⁸ From there, the itinerary of the party had thus been set: they were to focus first on the Turfan area (from Karahsahr to Turfan and back to Karashahr) and then they moved along the Silk Route through Korla, the Kučean area, Aksu, Tumshuk and coming at last to Kashgar [fig. 2.5]. Archaeological work was undertaken on the architectural features and remaining structures, mostly *stupas* and cities, of which plans and sketches were carefully drawn. Oldenburg and his men also studied ruins of settlements, temple complexes

³⁶ See Forsyth (1875); Younghusband (1896); Deasy (1901).

³⁷ The earliest correspondence between Oldenburg and Stein dates back to April 1903, but as Susan Whitfield points out, they must have met before that date, since the Russian scholar was in Great Britain in 1885 (at the same time of Stein) and his name figures in the address book Stein used from 1884 on (Whitfield, forthcoming).

³⁸ The archaeologists Vladimir Ivanovich Kamensky (dates n/a) and Samson Petrovich Petrenko (dates n/a) were appointed to go with them, but in the end they could not take part due to an illness that incapacitated them both (Popova, 2008, p. 152).

and caves, and dug out several relics and manuscripts (IDP, 2010 c). Oldenburg was much displeased with Le Coq's approach – which he himself named “sheer robbery, clever, ingenious, but robbery all the same” (Oldenburg, cited in Popova, 2008, p. 153) – and he tried to keep the removal of wall paintings and relics to the minimum, relying mostly on photographs, drawings and written description: he would write that when removal was carried, it was out of a need of preserving the relics (Oldenburg, cited in Popova, 2008, p. 154).



[2.5] Itinerary of Oldenburg's First Expedition.

Oldenburg's achievements of the first expedition were published in 1914, in *Russkaia Turkestanskaia Ekspeditsiia, 1909-1910 goda* [Russian Turkestan Expedition, 1909-1910] and it is the only published record, since a later publication of the official survey was arranged, but the book was never actually printed. Dudin wrote papers on the architecture of Turfan, which were later collated in the volume *Architectural Monuments of Chinese Turkestan (from Travel Notes)*, published in Petrograd in 1916. The materials, mostly fragments of manuscripts

and wooden objects, were later given to the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, where they still are today (Popova, 2008, p. 157).³⁹

2.1.4 THE SINO-SWEDISH EXPEDITION

The Sino-Swedish Expedition (1928-1931) took place after important historical events that changed the political and social order both in Europe and China: the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912 and the First World War. In this sense, this exploration can be set apart from the previous ones, as both the last display of the past regime and a sign of the imminent change. After this venture, in fact, Western scholars were not allowed to work in China anymore.⁴⁰

Hedin, who was supposed to lead this expedition, went back to China in 1926, in order to carry out more explorations in Inner Mongolia and Chinese Turkestan. The sponsor was not, as for some other explorations, a cultural institution, a museum or even a private donor, but the airline company Lufthansa (Johansson, 2012, p. 69). As a matter of fact, Hedin had been contacted by Hugo Junkers (1859 -1935), a famous engineer and aircraft designer from Germany, who wanted the Swede's help in developing new air routes between Asia and Europe. His plan was to create depots in Central Asia, where the airplanes could refuel on the journey between China and Germany (Johansson, 2012, p. 69). However, once Hedin arrived in Beijing the climate of xenophobia exacerbated and Chinese scholars from all over the country firmly opposed Hedin and his team.⁴¹ When, after five months of negotiations, Hedin obtained permission to carry out fieldwork in Central Asia, the conditions imposed by

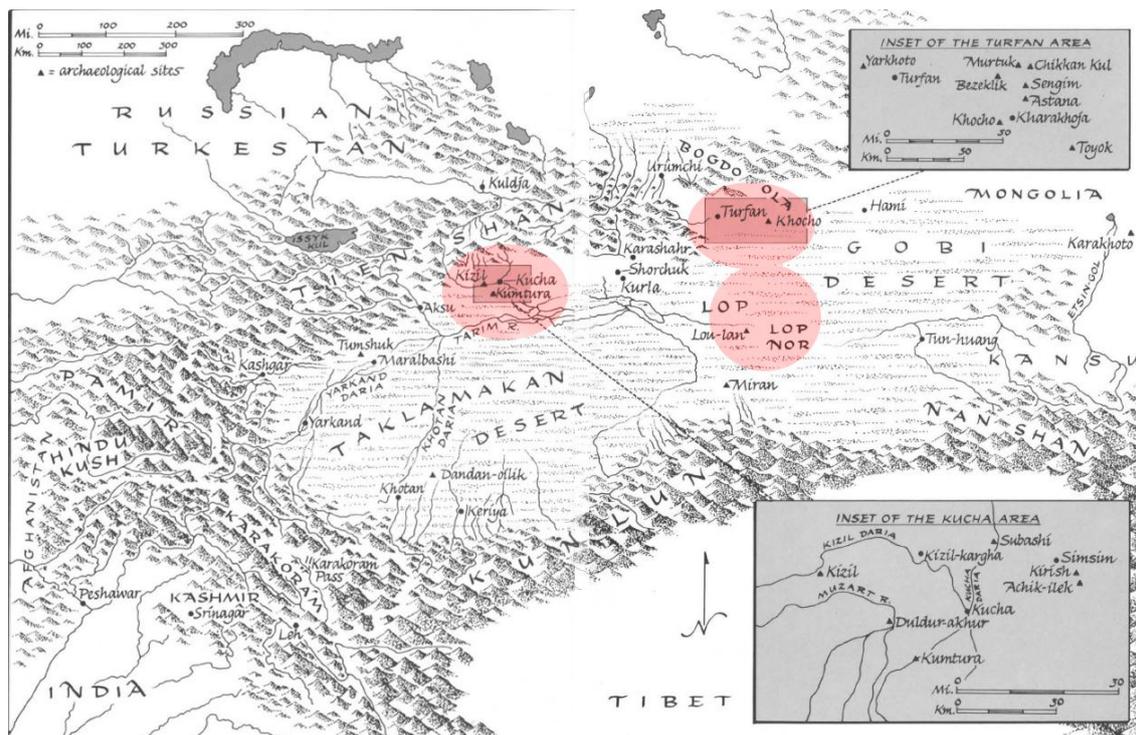
³⁹ The relics were first stored at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (MAE) and then were handed over to the Hermitage in 1931-1932, after a committee appointed by the Academy of Sciences (which Oldenburg was part of) granted the permission.

⁴⁰ Stein made one last attempt in 1930, but was forced to retreat to India and to leave all of his findings to the Chinese authorities (Hopkirk, 1980, pp. 225-226).

⁴¹ The wave of anti-foreignism had increased after the indiscriminate shooting perpetrated by British officials in 1925 at the expenses of the Chinese crowd of workers and students protesting in Shanghai. This event led to the May 30th Movement. For an expansion of the topic, see Ku (1979).

the Chinese government were not the same as the beginning: nineteen provisions were in fact included in the deal. Among them, first and foremost, all the relics and findings of paleontological, geographical and/or archaeological nature had to stay in China as property of the Chinese government. Secondly, ten Chinese scholars had to be an active part of the explorative team, and they were to be treated as equal partners (hence the re-naming as “Sino-Swedish”). Xu Xusheng 徐旭生 (1888-1976), a famous archaeologist and historian, was appointed leader of the exploration (Johansson, 2012, p. 72). Huang Wenbi 黄文弼 (1893-1966), who at the time was employed at Peking University as a teaching assistant in the Humanities Research Center (Wenke yanjiusuo 文科研究所, later Ancient Civilization Research Center Yanjiusuo guoxue men 研究所國學門), was chosen as the head archaeologist (Wang X., 2014, pp. 273-274).

During the first phase of the exploration, from May to November 1927, they travelled through Inner Mongolia, and they arrived in Xinjiang in 1928. They surveyed the area of Turfan and the old city of Gaochang 高昌, Lop Nur and Loulan. From September 1928 to 1931, they surveyed the area of Xikeqin 锡科沁 in Yanqi county 焉耆, Kumtura, Sim-sim, Subashi, Tai Tai'er, and Kizil, where the team spent a total of sixteen days (Wang X., 2014, p. 275) [fig. 2.6]. There Huang Wenbi carried out classification work, numbered more than 140 caves and produced drawings of plans and façades. The team cleaned the debris in several caves, thus discovering new inscriptions dating back to the Tang Dynasty, and plenty of manuscripts in various languages (Su Bai, 1997, p. 152). Huang Wenbi published the results of this expedition much later, in 1954, after the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), in the paper “Tulufan kaogu ji 吐鲁番考古记 [Archaeological Report of Turfan]”, published in «Kaoguxue».



[2.6] Areas in Xinjiang where the Sino-Swedish expedition carried out archaeological work.

This later publication is a testament, among others, to the new socio-political and economical situation in China during the 1930s and 1940s, brought about by wars and political overrule. During these decades Chinese society suffered from the war against Japan, which started in 1937 and then progressed into the Second World War (1939-1945). The civil war between the Nationalists, led by Chiang Kai-shek, and the Communists, under the guidance of Mao Zedong, *de facto* threw China into chaos, until at least the first 1950s. Since the foundation of the PRC is a pivotal turning point in history, all the publications issued after 1949 are sorted as part of the next development phase in the research history (¶ 2.2.2). The situation in Europe during the same decades, albeit different in historical happenings, was not entirely dissimilar. The Europe that had entered the war was obviously not the one that emerged from it, and the same goes for the entire world: the shift of power from the old Europe to the United States of America and the rivalry with the Soviet Union gave way to more than forty years of Cold War, which was to formally end in 1991 with the dissolution of the USSR. During the late 1940s much effort, supported also by external aids like the

Marshall plan (1948-1951), was put into the reconstruction and the reassessment of economy, society, and politics: countries like Italy, France and West Germany underwent a great economical development during the 1950s. Given these happenings, it is understandable why, during the 1930s and the 1940s very few publications were issued, both in China and in Europe. It was only after this years that the academic work fully restarted.

THE EXPEDITIONS

Expeditions	Years	Leader	Participants	Findings
First Turfan Expedition	1902-1903	Grünwedel	Huth, Barthus	44 crates
Second Turfan Expedition	1904-1905	Le Coq	Barthus	103 crates
Third Turfan Expedition	1905-1907	Grünwedel	Le Coq, Barthus	118 crates
Fourth Turfan Expedition	1913-1914	Le Coq	Barthus	156 crates
Pelliot Expedition	1906-1909	Pelliot	Vaillant, Nouette	>14,000 manuscripts >100 coins from Kučean area >200 paintings and statues >800 botanical samples >200 zoological samples
Oldenburg Expedition	1909-1910	Oldenburg	Dudin, Smirnov, Kamensky, Petrenko	>100 manuscripts murals, paintings, terracottas
Sino-Swedish Expedition	1928-1931	Xu Xusheng	9 Chinese and 17 European scholars	manuscripts, textiles and artifacts from Han to Tang dynasties as well as pre-Han. Discovery of Xiaohe tombs

Expeditions	Reports
First Turfan Ex.	<i>Bericht über Archäologische Arbeiten in Idikutschari und Umgebung im Winter 1902-1903</i>
Second Turfan Ex.	“A short account on the origin, journey and results of the First Royal Prussian (Second German) Expedition to Turfan in Chinese Turkestan”; “Reise un Egebnisse der zweiten Deutschen Turfan-Expedition”; <i>Chotscho. Facsimile- Wiedergaben der wichtigeren Funde der Ersten Königlich Preussischen Expedition nach Turfan in Ost-Turkistan; Altbuddhistische Kultstätten in Chinesisch – Turkistan</i>
Third Turfan Ex.	<i>Von Land und Leuten in Ostturkistan, Berichte und Abenteuer der 4. Deutschen Turfanexpedition</i> ; “Die vierte Deutsche Turfanexpedition”
Fourth Turfan Ex.	<i>Trois Ans dans la Haute Asie - Conférence de M. P. P. au grand amphithéâtre de la Sorbonne, le 10 décembre 1909; Douldour-Aqour et Soubachi: Planches (Mission Paul Pelliot III); Douldour-aqur et Soubachi: Texte (Mission Paul Pelliot IV)</i>
Pelliot Ex.	<i>Russkaia Turkestanskaia Ekspeditsiia, 1909-1910 goda</i>
Oldenburg Ex.	“Tulufan kaogu ji 吐鲁番考古记”
Sino-Swedish Ex.	

[2.a] Charts summarising the expeditions.

2.2 ADJUSTMENT PERIOD (1950s-1970s)

After the end of the WWII, no archaeological work by foreigners could be carried out in China: starting from the 1950s, in Europe a period of adjustment came. Scholars turned to the analysis of relics brought back at the beginning of the century, and to their management, since in some cases even the museums storing them had suffered great damage during the war. For instance, in the case of Germany, several paintings had been lost during the bombing of Berlin between 1943 and 1945, while some other were looted by the Russian Red Army and are today at the St. Petersburg State Hermitage Museum (Dreyer *et al.*, ed. 2002).

2.2.1 THE SITUATION IN EUROPE: THE MUSEUM ORIENTED APPROACH

While Europe was recovering from the War, in the academic world the adjustment process regarding Kizil materials dealt mainly with cataloguing and classifying the collections. At the beginning of the 1950s, few works were issued, but their number increased by the end of the decade, along with the first exhibitions of said collections (*i.e.* Auboyer, 1958) [f 2.b]. Exhibitions followed the creation and development of museums holding the materials retrieved with the expeditions: in 1963, for example, the Indian Department of the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin, having grown overtime, was changed into the Museum of Indian Art (from 2006, Museum für Asiatische Kunst) (“About the collection”, 2015). Catalogues of the collections were then issued from the very next year (Härtel, 1964; Härtel, ed. 1971). If, on the one hand, the relics in the collections were obviously the main focus of research, on the other hand, several studies were done on *how* said relics came to Europe. Histories and overviews of explorations, together with compiling works of explorations’ materials and notes appeared (*i.e.* Gabain, 1954; Davidson, 1957; Frumkin, 1962; Dabbs, 1963). The first preliminary general histories of Central Asia and of early Buddhism were also issued (*i.e.* Zürcher, 1959; Gabain, 1961; Hambis, 1963; Litvinski, 1968).

During the 1960s, along with the academic recognition of Buddhist Studies as an individual branch of knowledge (Lopez, 1998, p. 156),⁴² another field of research developed greatly, forming by the end of 1970s a well structured basis which has been a solid foundation for the whole scholarship until today: in 1964, in fact, Schlingloff triggered a renewed linguistic interest with his reconstruction and translation of the Yoga Manual, brought back by the Third German Expedition (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 155). Closely related to linguistics was the development of iconographical studies: much effort was put into linking the imagery found in the caves with that very textual evidence that was beginning to become available to art historians, thanks to the work of linguists not only with Sanskrit and Chinese sources, but also with Tocharian ones.

In Japan, the economic miracle after the WWII that fully bloomed by the end of the 1980s, equated the development of this country with the European one, and – generally speaking – with the “Western world”. Therefore, Japan should be considered within this context.⁴³ After an initial stage between the 1940s and the 1950s, when catalogues and analyses of paintings – both from Kizil and Kumtura – were issued (*i.e.* Kumagai, 1948, 1949, 1953), studies on the Otani collection (*i.e.* Kumagai, 1961) and on literary texts retrieved in Central Asia then appeared (*i.e.* Inoguchi, 1961).

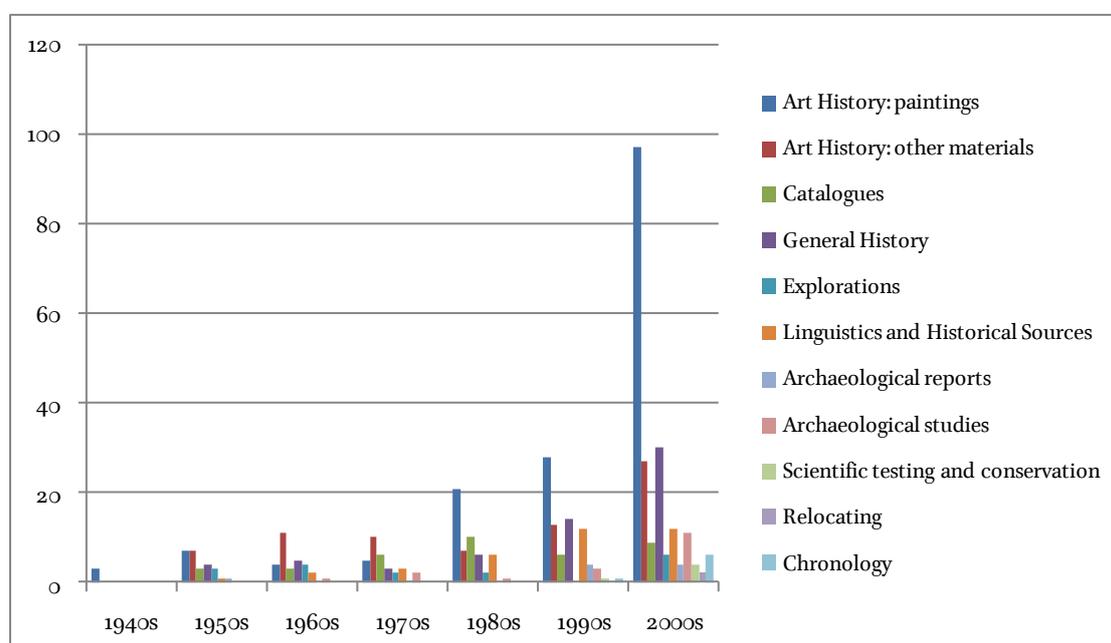
What clearly emerges from this concise outline is that, already by the beginning of the 1980s, all the disciplines concerned with what we can call “Kučean studies” were at full play and had a great deal of material to organise and analyse. The only approach apparently missing was the archaeological one: at the time, no fieldwork could be taken in China, which – as mentioned above – was closed to foreigners and emerging from the Cultural Revolution, and the archaeological work carried out by explorers and scholars at the beginning of the century could not possibly be as exhaustive as required in order to thoroughly understand a

⁴² The first graduate programme in Buddhist Studies was in 1961, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. By the end of 1960s several different institutions offered graduate programmes in Buddhism-related disciplines and in 1978 the first official conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies was held in New York (“About IABS”, n.d.).

⁴³ For a brief economic history of Japan after the WWII, see Allen, 1958.

site. This is why, at an overall glance, the scholarship in Europe between the 1950s and 1980s can be described as “museum-oriented”, that is to say, the subjects and the topics were obviously drawn from the data at hands: the collections stored in the museums. These traditional fields have been thriving since then, and new topics of research – as well as methodologies – have been added to the list due to the technological improvements of the last years [f 2.b]. The situation in China, though not entirely detached from this European developing line, is somewhat different, and therefore will be analysed in the next separate section.

PUBLICATIONS 1940s-TODAY



[2.b] In the chart, both the publications specifically focusing on or including the Kizil rock site and the general publications on Central Asia and the Tarim Basin are included. They are sorted by year of publication and topic. The data are an approximation based on the bibliographical list compiled by Hiyama and Konczak (2014).

2.2.2 DEVELOPMENTS AFTER THE FOUADATION OF THE PRC: PRELIMINARY WORKS

At the beginning of 1930s, the archaeological work was supposed to be handed back into the care of Chinese scholars, as the Sino-Swedish Expedition seemed to suggest. As a matter of fact, though, historical events got in the way: the Sino-Japanese War first and the

civil war then threw China into chaos. Quite obviously, with the country virtually paralysed, close to nothing was issued – academy wise. Work and publications started again with the establishment of the PRC.

At the eve of the foundation of the PRC, Han Leran 韩乐然 (1898-1947) was in Kizil twice between 1946 and 1947. He was a painter and, therefore, he was keenly interested in the cave paintings. He dutifully numbered them, writing directly on the walls. Nevertheless, he numbered none of the unpainted caves (Ma, 2014, p. 5). Not so much remains today of what he did in Kizil and of what he discovered with his analysis, since unfortunately he died in a flight crash in 1947, while he was going back from Urumqi to Lanzhou. All of his sketches, paintings and notes were lost in the crash (Su Bai, 1997, p. 153). Among what is left of him in Kizil, an engraving he did in Cave 10, on the northern wall of the main chamber, records his words:

“These murals are a feast for one’s eye, they all possess high artistic quality and value. All of our country’s cave temples cannot stand in comparison to this one. Alas, the great part of these frescoes have been peeled off and taken away by foreign archaeologists! What a damage for our cultural heritage! [...] To develop and promote the ancient culture, cherish and protect the relics with the utmost care.” (Han, in Ma, 2014, p. 6).

In 1953 Chang Shuhong (1904-1994), a painter himself, and head of the Research Center in Dunhuang since 1951, joined the Xinjiang Relics Survey Team, put together by the Cultural Bureau of North-West with the task of investigating the Tarim Basin. In 1961, Yan Wenru (dates n/a) joined the research group on the Xinjiang caves of the Chinese Buddhist Association and the Dunhuang Research Center: their joint efforts resulted in the thorough investigation of several rock monasteries and caves in Xinjiang, and they produced a new periodization and chronology. As Su Bai remarks, their periodization is quite different from the German one, since they could compare the Xinjiang caves with the Mogao complex and with the ones further East in mainland China; in fact, they had studied for several years these latter caves, something that the Germans had not been able to do at the time (Su Bai, 1997, p.

153). Chang Shuhong produced the book *Xinjiang shiku yishu* 新疆石窟艺术 [Cave art of Xinjiang], which was published several years later, in 1996, while Yan Wenru wrote the paper “Xinjiang Tianshan yinan de shiku 新疆天山以南的石窟 [Caves South of the Tianshan in Xinjiang]”, published in 1962.

In the same years, Huang Wenbi was also carrying out surveys in the area: he was in the Tarim Basin in 1958, and the results of his work were published in *Talimu pendi kaogu ji* 塔里木盆地考古记 [Archaeological Report of the Tarim Basin] (1958) and in “Lüeshu Qiuci doucheng wenti 略述龟兹都城问题 [Notes on the Problem of the Site of the Capital of the kingdom of Qiuci]” (1962).

The general tenor of these publications is that one of a reassessment: sites were surveyed and investigated, in order to take into account the situation of the relics after decades of foreign probing. The archaeological approach, as well as the art historical one, were both tentatively employed, as fieldwork could be carried out. Nevertheless, given the problematic situation brought about by the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961), the famine (1959-1961), as well as the fast-pace radicalising of some extremist tendencies within the Communist Party (Sabattini and Santangelo, 2005, pp. 613-618), all of these preliminary works were quite scarce if compared with the ones issued in Europe. However, they undoubtedly served as the starting point of the modern era of research in China, which flourished after the abrupt stop brought about by the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

2.3 CONSOLIDATION PERIOD (1980s-1990s)

The Chinese academic world that came out from the Cultural Revolution was, obviously, very different from the one that entered it. As a matter of fact, deep scars were inflicted on scholars, intellectuals and researchers all over the country. Additionally, the relics themselves suffered physical wounds. Although the Communist Party’s official position during the Revolution was to protect the relics, at an overall glance, it has been calculated that out of 6843 sites put under protection by the Beijing government in 1958, 4922 were damaged or destroyed by the Red Guards (Wang J., 2011, p. 446). For almost ten

years universities were closed, and most of them reopened only in 1972 (Andreas, 2009, p. 64). The Revolution officially ended in 1976, after the death of Mao Zedong 毛泽东 (1893-1976) and the arrest of the Gang of Four. It was just at the beginning of the 1980s that scholarly work and publications started again.

2.3.1 ARCHAEOLOGY: THE GREAT ERA OF FIELDWORK BY PEKING UNIVERSITY

Between 1979 and 1981 the History Department of Peking University and the Institute for Relics Protection of the Kizil Caves in Baicheng county (Baicheng xian Kezi'er Qianfodong wenwu baoguan suo 拜城县克孜尔千佛洞文物保管所) joined forces in order to investigate the Kizil complex: at that time, the basis for a preliminary study on periodization and classification of caves in the ancient kingdom of Kuča was set. For the first time, ¹⁴C testing was also employed: the samples were taken from the pegs inside the caves or sieved from the rubble on the floor, and they were mostly wood or wheat straws (Su Bai, 1997, pp. 153-161). The results of these survey were published for the first time in 1983. After this preliminary investigation, several comprehensive catalogues of the archaeological work carried out not only in Kizil, but in many other sites in Kuča, were published. As soon as this material came out, several works on the artistic features of Kizil – mainly the murals – were issued from the end of the 1980s into the 1990s. Catalogues and comprehensive works were produced, regarding both the monasteries as archaeological sites (and therefore dealing with all the caves) and the paintings (comprising thus just the decorated caves). The seventeen volumes of *Chinese Buddhist caves* (*Zhongguo shiku* 中国石窟) were published from 1983 on and comprised three volumes on Kizil and Kuntura caves. In 1997, the first volume of the archaeological report on the Kizil grottoes (*Xinjiang Kezier shiku kaogu baogao* 新疆克孜尔石窟考古报告 [The archaeological report of the Kizil grottoes in Xinjiang]) came out, covering fifteen caves in Guxi. The volume was intended as a part of a series on the whole rock monastery.⁴⁴ Works by Huang Wenbi, who had died in 1966, were also posthumously published: *Xibei shidi luncong* 西北史地论丛 [History and Geography of Northwest China]

⁴⁴ Apparently the publication should be resumed in the near future (I thank Giuseppe Vignato for this information).

(1981); *Xinjiang kaogu fajue baogao* 新疆考古发掘报告 [Archaeological discoveries in Xinjiang] (1983); *Meng-Xin kaocha riji* 蒙新考察日记 [Exploration Journals of Mongolia and Xinjiang] (Huang L., ed. 1990).

What is interesting to notice about this phase is that, in China, during these decades, several comprehensive catalogues of the archaeological sites were issued. This is not to say that no work on the artistic features were produced, but it is undeniable that the archaeological fieldwork that could be carried out in Xinjiang definitely influenced the research. Surveys and comprehensive records of the caves did not appear in Europe, as foreigner scholars could not carry out archaeological work in China at least until the mid-1990s (Wilkinson, 2000, pp. 341-355). This is among the reasons why European and American publications appear to be much more museum-oriented (that is, concerned with objects stored in the collections) while the Chinese one, at first, were more of a compiling nature. Given all these elements, at this stage the “archaeological approach” was peculiar to China: Su Bai’s pioneering work is among the best examples.

The opening paper of the first volume of *Zhongguo shiku* was Su Bai’s “Kezi’er bufen dongku jieduan huafen yu niandai deng wenti chubu tansuo”, first published in 1983: it can be considered the starting point of a new methodological approach in the analysis of the Kizil caves. Su Bai, at the time professor in what was to be established as the Archaeology Department of Peking University in 1983, was the head of the research team appointed to investigate the Kizil complex.

What makes his analysis different is the “inclusive” approach: despite taking into consideration only some caves, he analysed both decorated and undecorated ones. He chose several exemplary caves, in an attempt to draw a general line of development and consequently to set a relative chronology. In order to provide a calendrical date to his relative chronology, he made use of the ¹⁴C scientific analysis as well as a comparison with silk objects retrieved in the Astana cemetery.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ The chronology he drew from his analysis is described in ¶ 1.2.

He maintained more or less the typological classifications of caves used by the German scholars at the beginning of the century, but he considered the monumental image caves as a peculiar type of central pillar caves. On the basis of the caves' shape, the paintings' content and style, and of the evident restorations and overlapping in the architecture, he identified three development stages. He then proceeded to describe specific caves ascribed to every phase, thus tracing a development pattern for different types of caves. Although the groups of caves were not the main focal point of his analysis, he identified recurring clusters in different places of the rock monastery. He described six of them, reported in the chart hereafter [§ 2.c], and he ascribed all of them to the second phase of his periodization. While Su Bai did not explicitly declare his criteria to identify a group, he did state that the common feature of every group was the presence of one or more central pillar caves (Su Bai, 1997, p. 157). In the third development phase, small-sized caves became an increasingly important part of the groups, thus being the feature of the period. The issue of the transformation of caves was also addressed, by outlining some of the most evident modifications in shape and function of several caves (*i.e.* Cave 172 was transformed from a monastic cell into a central pillar cave and the corridor of the monastic cell became a tunneled cave) (Su Bai, 1997, p. 160).

This methodology, that is, analyzing the rock monastery as an actual archaeological site, can be considered a turning point in the scholarship on Kizil. By analyzing all types of caves in their context and by outlining their development and the relations between one another, it should be possible to find a general line of interpretation for the whole monastery.⁴⁶ A thorough development of Su Bai's inclusive approach to the whole rock monastery and its features, mainly the groups of caves, came in 2004, with the work by Vignato, which will be discussed in ¶ 2.4.2.

⁴⁶ It should be kept in mind, though, that an important feature is missing and is virtually impossible to reconstruct, that is, the surface buildings, of which just scarce traces remain. At present time, it is impossible to say for sure what part they played in the economy of the whole monastery.

GROUPS OF CAVES BY SU BAI

	Group content	Examples	Group explanation
1.	Central pillar cave + monastic cell	171-172	Cave 171 is a central pillar cave; Cave 172 is a monastic cell. Cave 172 was later transformed into a central pillar cave.
2.	Central pillar cave + square cave + monastic cell	2-3-4	Monastic cell 2 and square cave 3 were added to the existing central pillar cave 4.
3.	Square cave + monastic cell	222-223	Square cave 222 and monastic cell 223 had a common antechamber. On the left side of Cave 223 lies the central pillar cave 224.
4.	Two central pillar caves + square cave	96-97-98	Cave 98, originally a monastic cell, was changed into a central pillar cave. Cave 96 is a square cave. Central pillar cave 97 was added to the group.
5.	Several central pillar caves + square cave	96 to 101	Square cave 96 and central pillar caves 97 to 101 were grouped together
6.	Several central pillar caves + square cave + monastic cell	96 to 105	Cave 102 (unclear typology), Cave 103 (monastic cell), Cave 104 (central pillar cave) and Cave 105 (square cave) were added to an existing group (96 to 101).

[2.c] Groups of caves as identified by Su Bai (1997).

2.3.2 ART HISTORY AND PHILOLOGY BETWEEN EUROPE AND CHINA

While only in the PRC there was the possibility to carry out fieldwork, thus giving way to archaeological studies, in both Europe and China other disciplines related to Kuča flourished, especially art history and philology. Overall, both in Europe and China, these two disciplines grew to be the main trends, but it was only in China that archaeology was developed and this is what sets the two academic worlds apart.

The European scholars' focus were naturally the retrieved materials stored in the museum collections, since the access to the sites in Xinjiang was denied to foreigners, as remembered above. In Europe this phase saw, on the one hand, the consolidation of the linguistic interest. Schlingloff's reconstruction and translation of the Yoga Manual in 1964 had ignited the interest in Central Asian literature (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 155), and during the following years several works on literary sources, along with translations and

collations of historical documents from the area, were issued. In 1975, the first volume of the dictionary *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch der buddhistischen Texte aus den Turfan* [Sanskrit Dictionary of Buddhist Texts from Turfan] appeared. Conceived by Waldschmidt, who was also the editor of the first five volumes, the project is still going on today (Baums and Glass, 2014).⁴⁷ The analysis and translation of Tocharian sources became a pivotal part of the scholarship: among the works of the following decades, Lore Sander's should be singled out in the linguistic field. Her contribution to the study of Buddhist schools and their written evidence in Kuča has been highly significant. She stressed the importance of the Sarvastivada school in several publications (Sander, 1979, 1991, 1999).⁴⁸

On the other hand, probably sparked by the linguistic discoveries, the iconographical studies not only became more and more specific, but they also steadily increased in number during the 1980s and during the whole 1990s [f 2.b]. Single iconographical themes, both across the same monastery and across different sites in Central Asia, were laid out (*i.e.* Howard, 1982; Nagai, 1984). Much effort was put into linking the imagery found in the caves with textual evidence, an attempt that is still going on today (*i.e.* Jera-Bezard, 1976; Ebert, 1985; Rhie 1976, 1988). General histories of Central Asian art increased in number, along with histories of Central and Inner Asia and overviews on the Silk Roads' historical significance (*i.e.* Sinor, ed. 1990; Litvinsky, ed. 1996).

At a general glance, it can be said that the paths tentatively traced during the "adjustment phase" after the WWII, were decisively followed during these decades, and that two main fields were to flourish, namely art history and linguistics, which at present still retain an important role in the research. As in Europe the scholarship was strengthening, along with the consolidation of the pivotal role of institutions like the Museum für Asiatische Kunst in Berlin, the PRC was beginning the process of opening its doors to the West, thanks to the policies of Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 (1904-1997). The renewed contacts

⁴⁷ The dictionary can be found in <http://gandhari.org/n_dictionary.php>, accessed 11/01/2016.

⁴⁸ For an outline of the Sarvastivada school, see Willemen *et al.*, 1990.

between these two ends of the world would later bring about a general increase in the publications, especially in the field of art history.

In China from the late 1980s on, a new generation of scholars studied under the guidance of Su Bai. This generation includes Chao Huashan 晁华山, Ma Shichang 马世长, Ding Mingyi 丁明夷 and Xu Wanyin 许宛音 among others.

Despite tentatively employing Su Bai's archaeological approach, most of them later focused on other matters: Chao Huashan's work dealt with the cave typologies and on evidence of Manichaeism in Central Asia (*i.e.* Chao, 1990). Ma Shichang mainly focused on iconographical matters, painting styles and on the Buddhist caves of Dunhuang 敦煌, as he worked there for fifteen years (*i.e.* Ma, 1984). Together with Ding Mingyi, he analysed the murals about Buddha's life (Ding and Ma, 1985) and later produced the series *Zhongguo fojiao shiku kaogu gaiyao* 中国佛教石窟考古概要 [General archaeological survey of Chinese Buddhist caves] (2009). Ding Mingyi himself focused on murals and their iconographical programmes (*i.e.* Ding, 1983, 1986). Xu Wanyin's work focused on the historical sources concerning the kingdom of Kuča and later on the site of Taitai'er (Xu, 1989). Besides Su Bai's disciples, other scholars from different backgrounds dealt with the Kučean archaeological sites and their diverse features. Once again, the main subject appears to be the mural art and its subject matter. Among the most prolific authors, Yao Shihong 姚士宏 and Zhu Yingrong 朱英荣 should be mentioned.

With regard to linguistics, Tocharian sources from the Tarim Basin had caught the interest of Chinese scholars since the early 1950s. Between the 1980s and the 1990s this interest intensified, and several work were issued in this decade. Among the most representative scholars in this field, Ji Xianlin 季羨林 should be remembered. He wrote on the Tocharian texts retrieved in Xinjiang and on the relationship between Central Asia, China and India from a paleographical point of view, as well as on Buddhist paleographical evidence in both China and India. Starting from the mid-1980s, Lin Meicun 林梅村 has been producing works on Tocharian sources, analysing Gandhari and Karoshti documents

retrieved in Xinjiang as well as tracing the influence of Tocharian language in Classical Chinese (*i.e.* Lin, 1995).

2.4 RECENT DEVELOPMENTS (LATE 1990s TO DATE)

In the last twenty years, the ever-growing contacts and the deepening relations between the European, American, Japanese and Chinese academic worlds made the research on the Kučean Buddhism and its religious and artistic expressions extremely rich. Additionally, the number of scholars and publications dealing with the topic increased. Despite this situation of relative openness, the archaeological approach developed in China did not bring about a change in the tenor of the studies carried out in the West, whose focus continued to be the iconographical analysis of the mural paintings kept in the collections. Conversely, in China, the archaeological approach was employed with alternate fortune, developing along other fields' studies, such as art history and linguistics. Nevertheless, it was in the early 2000s that the archaeological approach, initiated by Su Bai during the 1980s, gained new vigour, thanks to the work by Vignato. The last years' most poignant innovation is the introduction of scientific testing in the study of murals. Truth to be said, a relatively long tradition with ¹⁴C testing exists, but other new technologies have also been introduced in the recent years.

2.4.1 THE BOOM OF ICONOGRAPHICAL STUDIES

When taking into consideration the publications about Kizil, one fact is clear, even at a brief glance. Half of the whole published material deals with the wall paintings. If one takes into consideration also other artistic materials retrieved in the caves, such as wooden objects and sculptures, and general art catalogues, the works dealing with the artistic features of the caves amount to more than 60% of the total of the publications [f 2.d]. Among them, iconographical studies constitutes the main group, dealing alternatively with one cave, or several caves, with a single theme or several ones. The iconological approach, theorised during the 1930s by Abi Warburg (1866-1929) and Panofsky (1892-1968), has been tentatively used in some instances, with alternate fortune. Starting from the first years of 21st century, a

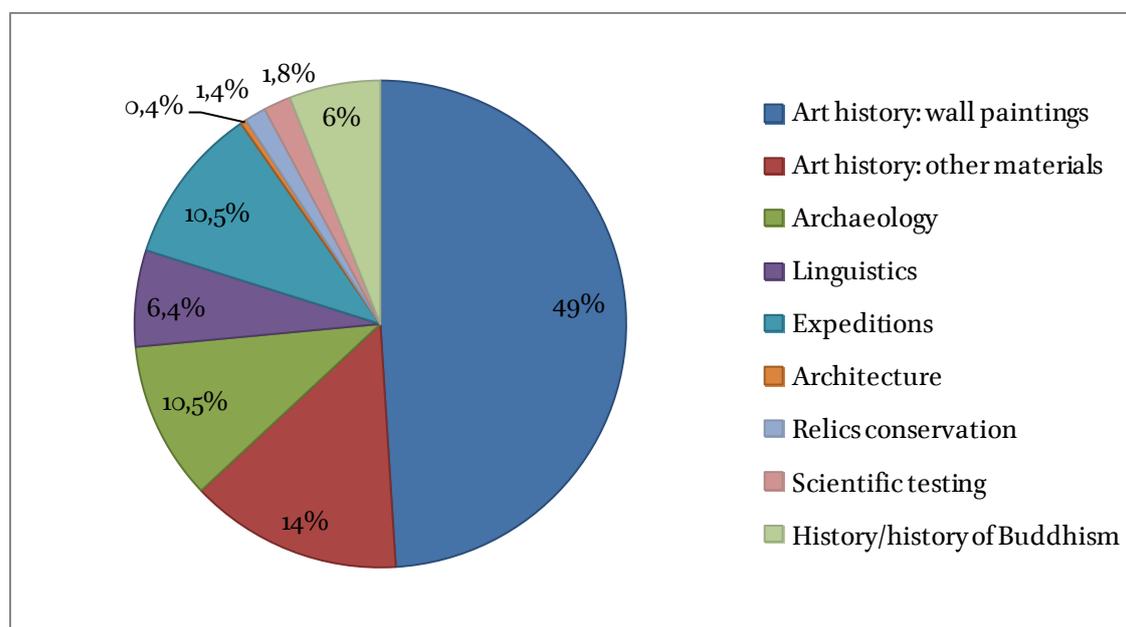
significant increase in the amount of publications in this field regarding Kizil is registered [f 2.b].

History wise, this could be a result of the new kind of open-door policies tentatively adopted by the PRC first during the 1980s, and fully developed between the 1990s and the 2000s. Within the climate of post-Cold War Europe and America, these policies contributed to cultural exchanges between these two ends of the world in a much deeper way than it was in the past. Academy wise, on the one hand, closer cultural relations between China and the West may have played an important role. On the other hand, the linguistic interest, which had grown rapidly during the 1990s, made possible, at the beginning of the 21st century, the appearance of several studies on Tocharian A and Tocharian B sources from the Kučean area. Since iconography is deeply intertwined with literary material for the purpose of classification and identification of the represented subjects, this may have been another factor in the rapid increase of iconographical works' publication.

A consideration must be made: since the beginning of the studies on Kuča, the published materials on this topic have been growing. As an overall trend, the number of people interested in the field increases. If the situation persists as it is now, and the works keep on been published at this very rate, it can be predicted that in the next few years, the academic interest over these topics concerning Kuča will deepen. Additionally, in the last few years, the topic of Central Asia peremptorily hit the headlines again thanks to the “New Silk Road” policy, launched by the Chinese government in 2013, coinciding with Xi Jinping's 习近平 tour around Central Asian countries (Brugier, 2014). Despite being mainly an economical and political project, the influence over cultural developments could be important. For instance, in November 2014, when APEC [Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation] was held in Beijing, the exhibition *Sichou zhi lu* 丝绸之路 [The Silk Road] was opened at the Beijing National Museum (China Daily, 2014). The exhibition, which apparently was one of the largest on Silk Road in recent years, comprised more than 400 objects from all around China and was sponsored, among others, by the Ministry of Culture of the PRC and by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (National Museum of China, 2014).

Despite attracting scholars from all over the world, the iconographical analysis of the Kizil murals finds one of its best expression in the German school, where a deep-rooted tradition initiated by Grünwedel, Le Coq and Waldschmidt is still flourishing. The work by Yaldiz, formerly director of the Museum für Asiatische Kunst in Berlin, dealing with iconographical issues (*i.e.* Yaldiz, 1992, 2008) as well as with general overview of the Berlin collection is noted. Russell-Smith, at present curator for Central Asian Art at the same Museum, deals with Uyghur influence on the Northern Silk Road, focusing especially on Dunhuang (*i.e.* Russell-Smith, 2003, 2005). Perhaps more poignant is the work carried out by Zin: starting in 2005, she has been publishing a series of articles on the identification of the murals' subjects in Kizil, taking into account several themes depicted in different caves and analysing their relations to the literary sources.⁴⁹ Hiyama, who earned her Ph.D. at the Freie University of Berlin, also focuses on the interpretation of Kizil paintings and on the identification of Central Asian artistic motifs (Hiyama, 2010, 2013).

PUBLICATIONS ON KUČA AND KIZIL SORTED BY TOPIC



[2.d] The chart takes into consideration the publications included in the bibliographical list compiled by Hiyama and Konczak (2014). The publications taken into account in this chart are those dealing specifically with Kuča, Kizil, and the materials there retrieved. They are sorted out on the basis of the subject.

⁴⁹ Zin has published so far six pieces of this work. The last one was issued in 2013. They were all published in «Indo-Asiatische Zeitschrift» (Zin, 2013).

Chinese art historians have also been prolific, and, from the early 2000s, works on both iconography and pictorial styles have been issued. Beside Ding Mingyi, Huo Xuchu 霍旭初 has also written on the influence of Kizil paintings (Huo, 2006 a) and on iconographical matters (Huo, 2006 b). Much has been written on *jataka* paintings in rhombic frames and their meaning as typologies (*i.e.* Yao, 2006; Tan 2006) and on the representations of Buddha's life stories. Comparative studies on the murals of Kizil and Dunhuang have been carried out by Jia Yingyi 贾应逸 (2006). The presence of Sarvastivada and Mahayanistic content in the Kizil murals is another topic of great interest, both in China and in the West (*i.e.* Zhu, 2006). The Japanese and the Russian publications are, generally speaking, along the same line.⁵⁹

2.4.2 DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL APPROACH

While studies in iconography grew larger and their focus went deeper, the archaeological work initiated by Su Bai in 1983 and republished in 1997, in the *Archaeological Report of the Kizil Grottoes*, was developed mainly by scholars of Peking University. At present, Li Chongfeng 李崇奉 and Vignato of the Archaeology Department of Peking University both analyse the caves from an archaeological point of view. Nevertheless, while Li Chongfeng mainly focuses on the transmission line from India to China and analyses the Central Asian grottoes under the light of such connection (Li C., 2003), Vignato developed Su Bai's intuition and made the cave groups the fundamental unit in the analysis of the sites.

Truth to be said, before Su Bai, Grünwedel had already noticed that some caves could be clustered together, on the basis of their closeness and of some connective elements between them. The caves he grouped together were Caves 2 [Höhlengruppe mit dem Kamin C. D. E.], 3 [Höhlengruppe mit dem Kamin B.] and 4 [Höhlengruppe mit dem Kamin A.]; 38 [Höhle mit dem Musikercor] and 39; 197, 198 [Teufelshöhle mit Annexen C. B.] and 199 [Teufelshöhle mit Annexen A.]; 66 [Rotkuppelhöhle B], 67 [Rotkuppelhöhle A] and 68; 82

⁵⁹ From a statistical point of view, during the period in exam (2000-2015), the increase in the number of publications regarding Kizil murals' iconography *specifically* was more significant in both Germany and China than in Japan or Russia.

[SchätzHöhle D. E.], 83 [SchätzHöhle C.] and 85 [SchätzHöhle A.] Both groups with and without central pillar caves were identified (Grünwedel, cited in Vignato, 2006, p. 362).

Su Bai's take on the matter was to consider the groups of caves in the context of the monastery, thus highlighting their developing nature (Vignato, 2006, p. 362) and the modifications/transformations of the caves (and, consequently, of the group). He deemed the presence of at least one central pillar cave as the main common feature of every group. Chao Huashan, in 1990, placed his criteria to identify a group, summarised in five points: proximity of the caves and clear boundaries separating them from other caves; common architectural features (*i.e.* antechambers and walkways); one pathway or stairway leading to a group; presence of five worship places and a narrow cave; a central focus, *i.e.* a larger cave or a cave with a more complex décor (Chao, cited in Vignato, 2006, p. 326). According to his definition, he identified seven caves groups [f 2.e], which constitute a peculiar kind of monastery, the "Five Temples Monastery", which is consistent with the meditation practice of Hinayana Buddhism (Chao, 2006, p. 28). This definition, though, appears based more on a preconceived postulate (that is, there *must* be a Five Temple Monastery), rather than on an observation of the physical data, as Vignato has already pointed out (2006, p. 326).

After Chao Huashan's attempt, the Italian archaeologist Vignato (b. 1962) developed and furthered the archaeological approach. He carried out fieldwork in Kizil and described his results in his Ph.D. dissertation, defended in 2004 at Peking University. A summary was published two years later in «East and West» in English. In his methodology, which he has been developing through the years, Vignato makes use of typologies. Relying on the traditional classification of cave types (¶ 1.3.1), he identifies groups of caves using the following criteria:

- 1) "the relative closeness of caves to each other;
- 2) the gap between the caves of one group and other caves or other groups;
- 3) a common antechamber or suspended balcony;
- 4) a common access between caves carved at an upper level;

- 5) the carving of caves at the same level, since in only a few cases a group was composed of caves carved at different levels;
- 6) the typology of better-preserved groups as a means of identifying more damaged groups of the same type.” (Vignato, 2006, pp. 365-366).

Hence his definition:

“A group of caves is a number of caves carved close to one another, usually set at the same level, contained within well defined boundaries which do not overlap with the boundaries of other groups, sometimes connected by architectural elements, such as balconies or suspended walkways, and usually comprised of caves of different types and having different functions.” (Vignato, 2006, p. 367).

GROUPS OF CAVES BY CHAO HUASHAN

	Location	Caves	Group explanation
1.	Houshan	203 to 208; 211 to 219; 230 and 231	Caves from 205 to 208 and Cave 219 are central pillar caves; Caves 203, 204, 215, 216, 218, 230 and 231 are monastic cells; Cave 212 is a lecture hall; Caves 211 and 231 are of a mixed type.
2.	Gunei	96 to 101	Caves 97 to 101 are central pillar caves; Cave 96 is a square cave.
3.	Gudong	181 to 191	Caves 181, 184, 186, 188, 189 are central pillar caves; Cave 190 is an elongated cave; Cave 191 is of a mixed type; Caves 182, 183, 185 and 187 are niches;
4.	Gudong	175 to 180	Cave 176 is an elongated cave; all the other are central pillar caves
5.	Gunei	195 to 199	Central pillar caves. Cave 198 is the result of the transformation of a monastic cell, resulting in the corridor being used as an elongated cave.
6.	Guxi	2 to 19 and 24	Cave 4, 7, 8, 13 and 17 are central pillar caves; Cave 3 is a lecture hall; Caves 2, 5, 6, 10, 15, 18, 19 and 24 are monastic cells; Caves 9 and 16 are of a mixed type; Cave 14 is an elongated cave.
7.	Guxi	27 to 43	Caves 27, 32, 34, 38 and 43 are central pillar caves; Cave 33 is a lecture hall; Caves 29, 35, 36+37, 40 and 42 are monastic cells; Caves 28 and 39 are of a mixed type.

[2.e] Groups of caves identified by Chao Huashan (Chao, 2006, pp. 24-28).

Using the presence of central pillar caves – or lack thereof – as a distinction criterion, Vignato identifies two types of groups and their related subtypes [f 2.f]. Groups of the first type consist of one or more square caves and one or more monastic cells. The square caves differ greatly from one another in terms of variety of architectural features, while the

monastic cells are often very simple and do not have a deposit room at the end of the corridor. The décor of square caves is diverse, both in layout and content, and can be ascribed to the first pictorial style. Groups of the second type comprise at least one central pillar cave, which can be associated with square caves or monastic cells. The décor of the central pillar caves is quite standardized and, even if their plans differ greatly from one another, the ceiling is, in most cases, barrel-vaulted (Vignato, 2006, pp. 372-377).

TYPES OF GROUPS BY VIGNATO

Types of group	Subtypes	Examples
First type	A: a monastic cell, a longitudinal rectangular cave and a square cave	Caves 174, 174a, 174b
	B: one or more square caves (with Lanterne-decke or domed ceiling) and one or more monastic cell	Caves 166, 167, 168, 169 and 170
	C: a monastic cell and a longitudinal rectangular small cave (with or without the later addition of square caves)	Caves 141 and 142
	D: a transverse rectangular cave and a monastic cell	Caves 230 and 231
Second type	A: a central pillar cave, a monastic cell and a square cave	Caves 15, 16 and 17
	B: a central pillar cave and a monastic cell	Caves 171 and 172[1]
	C: two central pillar caves with individual antechambers	Caves 192 and 193
	D: five central pillar caves	Caves 175 to 180

[2.f] Types of cave groups identified by Vignato (2006, pp. 372-381).

Groups of caves can be further gathered together, in super-clusters called districts. A district is described as

“an area defined by clear boundaries, where caves or groups of caves of the same type were concentrated; it was a functional unit which carried out a specific function and, by complementing the functions carried out by other districts, contributed to the harmonious running of the monastery. [This] definition of district [...] supports two different situations, that is, a district was an area of the site where groups of the same type were set up, or where caves of the same type were carved”. (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 101).

Since a district contains caves of the same type, if caves of another type are present, they must have been a later addition and are not to be considered part of the original planning

(Vignato, 2006, p. 381). In Kizil seven districts are identified: the first, the second and the fourth in Guxi, the third and the fifth in Gudong, the sixth in Gunei and the seventh in Houshan. It must be pointed out that, according to Vignato's view, the fifth district overlaps the limits of Gudong and stretches along the western cliff of Gunei (Vignato, 2006, p. 390). The division in district responds to a functional need, rather than a typological one: each unit had in fact its role – at least in the original planning – and carried out a specific function well highlighted by the caves there hewn. At a general glance, all the sites in Kuča have an operative division, and three main functions can be recognised, that is, worship, residence and meditation (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 101). Therefore, as typologies of caves and typologies of groups can be defined, typologies of districts can be employed too. While in some sites the three functions neatly corresponds to actual districts (*i.e.* Kizil-gaha, Tograk-eken), in Kizil the situation appears more complicated given the numerous modifications the whole site underwent (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 6, p. 26 and p. 42). For a discussion on the employment of typologies as interpretative tools and its implications, I refer to the next chapter (§ 3.1.2).

2.4.3 A BRIEF NOTE ON THE EMPLOYMENT OF SCIENTIFIC TESTING

In recent years, the major innovation was perhaps the introduction of scientific testing in the analysis of not only Kizil, but also of many other archaeological sites on the Silk Road. Regarding Kizil, two are the main typologies of investigations carried out at present times: the radio-carbon analysis for dating and the chemical analyses of pigments.

The radio-carbon dating method (^{14}C) was created and developed during the 1950s (Zhang, 2015), and it was employed in Kizil for the first time in 1979, at the same time archaeological fieldwork by the History Department of Peking University was carried out under the guidance of Su Bai. The latter and his team gathered pieces of wood and remains of straw embedded in the plaster that covered the walls from a number of caves, namely Caves 38, 6, 47, 171, 3, 17, 190 and 8 (Su Bai, 1997, p. 161). The strands and the fragments were consequently examined using the ^{14}C method, which confirmed the provisional chronology Su Bai had set up using architectural and stylistic features. After this preliminary

investigation, ¹⁴C dating has been employed several times [f 2.g]: testing has been carried out not only in China, but also in Japan and in Berlin, on some of the paintings stored at the Museum für Asiatische Kunst. Many publications discussing the results have been issued (*i.e.* Huo, 2006 c; Yaldiz 2010; Nakamura *et al.*, 2012).

RADIO-CARBON ANALYSES

Year	Institution	Caves
1979	Wenwu baohu kexue jishu yanjiusuo 文物保护科学技术研究所	63, 47, 13
1979-1981	Beijing daxue lishi xi kaogu jiaoyanshi 北京大学历史系考古教研室	47, 3, 38, 6, 171, 17, 190, 8
1989-1990	Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 中国社会科学院考古研究所	224, 76, 4, 8, 34, 68, 77, 98, 104, 114, 117, 118, 119, 125, 129, 135, 162, 171, 180, 189, 196, 198, 206, 212, 219, 227, 27, 39, 48, 60, 69, 70, 77, 84, 91, 92, 99, 123, 139, 161, 165, 178, 207
1995, 1997, 1998, 2011	Nagoya University 日本名古屋大学	8, 171, 224, 13, 67, 76, 77, 92, 205

[2.g] Radio-carbon analyses 1979-2011 (after Zhang, 2015, pp. 23-30).

Another employment of scientific testing that is steadily growing in importance in recent years is the analysis of pigments. In this instance, several samples are taken from the paintings in order to discover what was used to make the very colours used in the murals. This kind of analyses could open new paths in the study of both technological development and goods trade among the civilizations of Central Asia. Once again, the major centres for this kind of investigations seem to be China, Germany and Japan. As a matter of fact, the latest publications have been issued in these countries (*cf.* Su Baimin *et al.*, 2000; Taniguchi, 2008, 2010; Li Z., 2010). The latest scientific investigation on both the pigments and the soot found in wall paintings has been carried out at the BAM Federal Institute for Materials

Research and Testing with the support of the Museum für Indische Kunst, and the results were presented by dr. Schmidt at a conference in München in May 2015.⁵¹

Other technological and scientific innovations could, in the future, bring new light in the Kučean studies and open new paths for the interpretation of archaeological and artistic remains. This is why both the scientific and the technological approach should not be overlooked but, conversely, employed at their best potential.⁵²

⁵¹ Schmidt, 2015.

⁵² An example of the employment of computer technologies applied to archaeology is found in Nishimura *et al.* (2015). The team created new digital tools to compare old and new maps of Karakhoja and to subsequently identify the archaeological remains which are reported in the explorations' maps, but are virtually impossible to recognise today.

Toward a different methodology?

In the second chapter, an historical approach to the scholarship on Kuča showed the research trends that emerged throughout this century and their development to date. At the same time, the reasons that lie behind these tendencies have been outlined and described. In the last few years, a progress towards reconciliation of the two detached approaches of art history and archaeology has been identified. This progress stems both from historical reasons, that is the opening of the PRC and the consequent tighter contacts between Europe and China, and from scientific innovations. As a result, the number of publications has been increasing over the last ten years [f 2.b] and both traditional and new disciplines are nowadays involved in the study of the rock monasteries of Chinese Turkestan.

In this context, it is important to thoroughly understand both the traditional and the new disciplines' methodologies, in order to assess their accomplishments and recognise their limits. Therefore, in this chapter, the main methodologies employed in the study of Kučean rock monasteries will be laid out. Works dealing with Gudong caves in Kizil have been chosen as case studies. Published works on Gudong are not many and few of them deal with Gudong as a whole, focusing instead of single decorated caves carved in this section, or including said caves in broader analyses, mainly of an iconographical nature. Some of the most studied caves are to be found among those of Gudong (Caves 171, 172, 163, 198, *etc.*). Nevertheless, a great variety, both in topics and methodologies, can be found within the published material dealing with Gudong caves, thus allowing a wide range of general considerations. Since a methodology should be relevant to the study of both a part and the whole monastery (and then, possibly, to other rock monasteries), the choice of works dealing with Gudong specifically must not be considered a setback. It is undeniable that Gudong had its own peculiar features and the caves there hewn had specific religious functions that made this area different from others within the same complex. Nevertheless,

since the caves carved in Gudong were a necessary part of Kizil and organically contributed to its complete functioning, the general considerations on methodology presented here can be applied to the whole rock monastery.

3.1 PERKS AND LIMITS OF THE TRADITIONAL APPROACHES

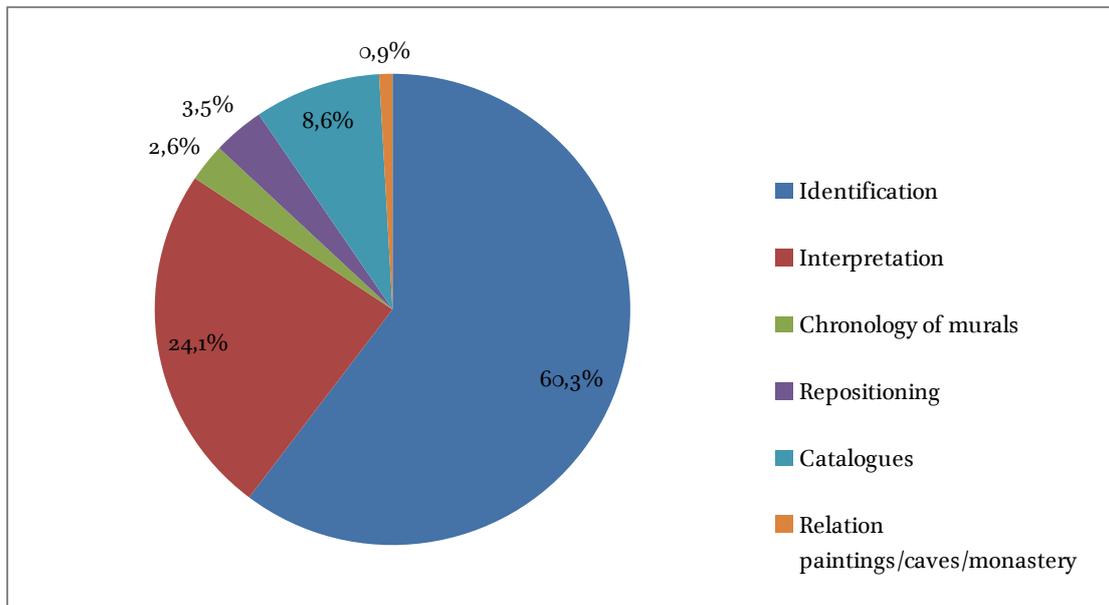
Two disciplines have been elected as the main focus of this analysis, namely art history and archaeology. By analysing some exemplary works by scholars of both fields, an attempt to identify some interpretative tools that bore results and breakthroughs will be made. At the same time, the limits of both approaches will be underlined. Lastly, a note on the employment of scientific testing will be made.

3.1.1 ART HISTORY: ICONOGRAPHY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

In chapter two, it has been remarked on the fact that the greatest part of the studies carried out on Kizil rock site pertains to the discipline of art history. Overall, two are the basic focuses regarding the object of art. One is the subject, that is to say, *what* is represented, and the other is the form, that is to say, *how* it is represented. In terms of methodologies, several different approaches can be outlined, from iconography to iconology, from formalism to semiotics, *etc.* With regard to Kizil, iconographical studies concerning the identification of the pictorial subject matter are undoubtedly the most favoured type [f 3.a]. That is not to say that other approaches are lacking: the inquiry into pictorial styles, decorative motifs and their relations to other Central Asian cultures accounts for an important part of the paintings' study. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that iconography constitutes the greatest part of the art history material written on Kizil. Works on Gudong carrying out an iconographical analysis are many and diverse. On the basis of the topic and of the number of caves taken into consideration, they can be generally classified into four subcategories:

- 1- one iconographical theme + one cave;
- 2- one iconographical theme + several caves;

ART HISTORY PUBLICATIONS SORTED BY TOPIC



[3.a] Publications on Kizil caves dealing with murals, sorted by topic.

3- several iconographical themes + one cave;

4- several iconographical themes + several caves.

By keeping in mind that every classification is also a simplification (and that, therefore, it has to be used with caution), I will focus here on four works, published from the 1980s, representative of these subcategories, in order to set up some examples of how iconographical analysis can be applied to cave paintings. Their results and limits will be highlighted.

Yaldiz (1992) employed the iconographical methodology in an attempt to interpret the subject of some paintings of Cave 196, a central pillar cave. The antechamber has collapsed, the main chamber has a longitudinal barrel-vaulted ceiling, while the rear room has a flat ceiling (*Kezi'er shiku neirong zonglu*, 1999, p. 221). Relying on the traditional classification of the paintings styles introduced by Grünwedel (1912), she ascribes the murals in Cave 196 to the Second Indo-Iranian Style (dated 600-750 CE, after Le Coq and Waldschmidt). She elects three paintings placed side by side in the lozenges of the main chamber's vault as her main focus and then proceeds to analyse the subjects represented in

each unit. She identifies them with the conversion of Uruvilva Kasyapa, a sectarian leader who, after witnessing a number of miracles performed by the Buddha, recognised his superior spiritual power and converted to Buddhism. The textual sources she uses in the identification are from the *vinaya* of the Mulasarvastivada school and closely related to the *Catusparisasutra*.⁵³ By linking the visual representations with textual sources, she identifies and describes in detail three of the nine miracles performed by the Buddha on such occasion, namely the subjection of the *naga*, the obstruction of the sacrificial fire, and the receding of the floods. She then proceeds to compare these representations with early Indian ones, depicted in the *stupa* of Sanchi. Her methodology – which can be summed up into three steps, namely, description, identification, and comparison – can be chosen as a classic example of basic iconographical analysis, which deals with the description, the identification and the classification of images. By linking the murals to the textual sources, she describes and identifies the images represented, consequently classifying them. In this case, all the three can be ascribed to the category of “Buddha’s life stories”. Nevertheless, her paper fails to fulfil its apparent main aim: the interpretation of the murals, announced in the very title, cannot be found anywhere. Hers is a study in *identification*, rather than in *interpretation*.

While Yaldiz deals with a restricted amount of material, the approach of Lesbre (2001) to the same topic is somewhat broader. She chooses the same type of paintings (that is, “small lozenge-shaped scenes characterized by the central pattern of the sitting Buddha, which are depicted on the vaulted ceilings of most Kyzil [Kizil] caves dedicated to worship”, 2001, p. 305), but she takes into consideration several caves, and then elects three central pillar caves as case studies: Cave 34 and Cave 80 in Guxi, and Cave 171 in Gudong. As she states, her attempt is to identify and classify such murals. She proceeds first by identifying two types of ceilings, on the basis of the presence of depictions of a central seated Buddha. She distinguishes between “mixed ceilings” (that is, *jatakas* and central-Buddha images),

⁵³ The *Catusparisasutra* was retrieved by Le Coq in Kuča, and deals with the foundation of Buddhist orders. It also relates events of Buddha’s life, his meditation practice and his preaching, together with miracles he performed to convert heretics (Waldschmidt, ed. 1959, p. 192).

where *jatakas* are depicted in lozenge-shaped patterns below the central-Buddha representations, and “*jataka ceilings*”. The scenes she analyses are present only in the mixed ceilings, since the central Buddha figure cannot be found in the *jatakas*. By using three thematic super-categories, namely, *subduing/conversions*, *almsgiving*, and *parables*, she classifies the scenes within these three, proceeding to further classify them within subcategories concerned with the subject matter [f 3.b]. After the classification is done, a comparative approach determines the similarities and the differences between depictions of the same topic in different caves.

POSITION OF THE LOZENGE PAINTINGS WITH A CENTRAL BUDDHA IN CAVES 34, 80, 171

SUBDUING /CONVERSIONS	Left haunch			Right haunch		
	34	80	171	34	80	171
Subduing of Mara	×				×	×
Subduing of the Ogre Atavaka						×
Subduing of Hariti				×	×	×
Subduing of the naga					×	?
The Harp contest with the Gandharva king			×	×	?	
Jyotiska resuscitated				×		
The false pregnancy	×					
Conversion of the butcher	×					
Subduing of Srigupta	×	?			×	
Conversion of the Kasyapa brothers				×	?	×

ALMSGIVING	Left haunch			Right haunch		
	34	80	171	34	80	171
Four Kings						×
Offering of food				×		
Purna's alms						×
Monkey offering a bowl of fresh palm sap			×			
Gift of the first monastery			×	?		×
Mahaprajapati's gift of a precious cloth				×		
Offering of flowers	×					×
Offering of the stone by the Brahman jeweler			×		×	
Symbolic alms of dust	×					
Old beggar's alms of lamp oil			×			
Avaricious Todeya reborn as a dog					×	

PARABLES						
	Left haunch			Right haunch		
	34	80	171	34	80	171
The six animals	×					
The four venomous serpents					×	
The pigeon, the raven, the serpent and the deer			×			
The log of wood floating			×			
The bandit hit three hundred times						×
The blind tortoise			×			
The child strangled in a well			×		×	
The monkey trapped on sticky grass					×	
Rahula and the jug of water	×				×	?
The elephant who leaves the sword	×				×	?

OTHER						
	Left haunch			Right haunch		
	34	80	171	34	80	171
The first sermon at Benares						×
The self-portrait painted by the Buddha				×		×
The Miraculous crossing of the Ganges					×	
The Conversion of Ugrasena			×		×	

[3.b] Lozenge-shaped images with a central Buddha in Caves 34, 80 and 171, sorted by thematic categories (after Lesbre, 2001). Left and right are intended from the entrance of the cave, facing the central pillar.

Since Lesbre's approach is wider and heavily relies on the work by Chinese archaeologists and art historians, she is able to tentatively interpret the murals as a visual representation of ascetic rigor, a *memento* against those temptations that would make the devotees sway from the correct path. She links the attention paid to self-control and asceticism to the presence of Hinayana schools in Kuča.

While Lesbre's paper deals with one iconography throughout several caves, Zin's work (2013) focuses on two different iconographies depicted in murals previously found in Cave 184. The two paintings were brought to Germany by the Fourth Turfan Expedition and are currently stored in the Museum für Asiatische Kunst. Cave 184 is a central pillar cave,

with a partially extant antechamber. The ceiling of the main chamber is a longitudinal barrel vault, while the corridor for the *pradaksina* has a transverse barrel-vaulted ceiling (*Kezi'er shiku neirong zonglu*, 1999, pp. 206-207). Zin makes use of comparative artistic materials from other caves in order to compare and complete her identifications, mostly from the nearby Cave 189 (a domed square cave, which is the result of the transformation of Cave 189+190, a monastic cell, *Kezi'er shiku neirong zonglu*, 1999, p. 213), from Sim sim Cave 48 (a central pillar cave with splendid surviving décor, Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 131) and from Kumtura Cave 23 (a central pillar cave, Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 70). By analysing all of the details in the formal representation and by linking them to the textual evidence describing the events of the Buddha's life, she is able to identify two episodes: Buddha's descent from the Trayastrimsa Heaven of the god Indra and the crossing of the Ganges (legend of the umbrellas). The comparative materials better preserved in other caves and other sites help reconstruct the whole pictures, which are heavily damaged in several parts. Zin's use of literary sources is systematic and effective, and the attention she pays to details, both in the visual and literary expression, is commendable. She is able to rule out several texts as the source for the murals' iconography, since many images represented in the paintings are not found in the texts, and *vice versa*. She ultimately links the paintings to the *Mulasarvastivadavinaya* and the *Mahaparinirvanasutra*.⁵⁴ The two paintings are explained as belonging together as counterparts, given the similar dimensions and composition, and given the comparison with Cave 189, where two complementary paintings of the same subjects are represented on opposite sides of the entrance door.

A wider approach is employed by Ma Shichang (2006) when dealing with central pillar caves' iconography. The topic he chooses is extremely various and vast, since he focuses on the murals of the ceiling of the main chamber and murals of the rear chamber of several central pillar caves throughout the whole site of Kizil. Su Bai's lesson was not lost on him: much of his effort is in fact put into contextualising the central pillar caves in the

⁵⁴ For an expansion on the Sarvastivada and the Mulasarvastivada and their *vinaya*, see Willemen *et al.*, 1997. For the *Mahaparinirvanasutra*, see Yamamoto, tr. 1973.

context of the rock monastery, drawing a dividing line between two typologies of caves on the basis of their apparent function. Consequently, he identifies caves used as living facilities or linked with the monks' everyday life, and caves with a religious function (worship, teaching, preaching, *etc.*). Central pillar caves obviously belong to this latter typology, together with decorated square caves and monumental image caves. After a thorough description of the architectural features of this cave typology and its nomenclature, he proceeds to classify the ceilings' paintings on the basis of the position first and of the subject then, as summarised in the chart hereafter [f 3.c].

Following Su Bai's chronology and periodization, Ma Shichang consequently classifies central pillar caves into the three development phases already outlined, and integrates Su Bai's description of the central pillar caves' architectural features and their development throughout time with the murals' iconography. By linking the latter with historical sources and Buddhist texts, his conclusion is that, given the late appearance of the theme of the Thousand Buddhas in the décor of central pillar caves of the third phase (6th-7th century on), and the apparent lessened importance of the *nirvana* in the rear area of the caves, it is only from the 6th century that the influence of the Mahayana teachings in Kizil grew. Before that period, from what can be inferred both from the murals' topics and from their relation with texts, Hinayana school (or schools) flourished in the complex, and this is consistent with the historical sources (Ma, 2006, p. 247). Although Ma Shichang's approach is wider and Lesbre does not convene with him on the classification of the central Buddha's lozenge-shaped images as *avadanas*, the two scholars' conclusions (and, up to a certain degree, Zin's ones too) are similar: Lesbre interprets the central Buddha's depictions as a symbolical representation of the concept of ascetic rigor fostered by Hinayana teachings. Ma Shichang highlights the prominence given to the historical figure of Sakyamuni: the *avadanas* are thus linked to his activity as a preacher, while the depiction of life and his previous incarnations, together with the *nirvana* scenes, describe and glorify his figure (Ma, 2006, pp. 247-248). Ma links these scenes to Hinayana texts, especially the ones used by the Sarvastivada school. Sakyamuni's prominence in the murals is consistent with the Hinayana

principle of *wei li shijia* 唯礼释迦 [Sakyamuni as the sole object of worship] (Ma, 2006, p. 247).

CENTRAL PILLAR CAVES' CEILING PAINTINGS SORTED BY POSITION AND TOPIC

Main chamber					
Median strip			Vault		
Celestial images	<i>Avadanas</i>	Other	<i>Jatakas</i>	<i>Avadanas</i>	Other
		Birds			Seated Buddhas, seated Buddhas inside <i>stupas</i> , thousand Buddhas
171	178, 198	196	<u>178</u> , 198	<u>163</u> , <u>171</u>	180, 197

Rear chamber/corridor			
Side walls		Ceiling	
Buddha's life stories	Other	Celestial images/ standing Buddhas	Other
	<i>Samsara, jatakas, stupas, standing Buddhas, Thousand Buddhas, donors, etc.</i>		<i>Jatakas sea-scapes, etc.</i>
163, 172, 175, 178, 179, 192, 193, 199,	171, 172, <u>175</u> , 176, 163, 184, 186, 192, 195	163, 171, 179, 193, 195, 198, 199	198

[3.c] Central pillar caves' paintings sorted on the basis of position and topic (after Ma, 2006). The underlined caves are the ones described in detail in the paper. Ma deals with all the central pillar caves where the murals are recognisable and well-preserved. Only the caves in Gudong are reported in the chart.

The aforementioned four works are a typical example of how iconography was applied to cave paintings. To a different extent, and depending on the scope of the research, iconography is pivotal in the description, classification and identification of the subject matter of every artistic expression. But furthermore, by identifying the subject, as well as inquiring into form and style, it highlights *relationships*. Relationships between images and texts are undoubtedly the most important within this context, with the caveat that texts and images are not always perfectly corresponding. Nevertheless, by pointing to different versions or editions of *sutras*, the images refer not only to a certain story, or to a certain

narrative, but to a whole system of beliefs that, if correctly identified, can give an insight into the whole religious system as it was operated by a specific Buddhist school (or schools) in different periods. Stylistic relationships can then trace dependence and independence in terms of artistic expression. That is to say, by identifying similarities and differences between motifs within the same rock site, between sites within the same kingdom and/or different ones, a system of influences can be tentatively traced.

The main issue of iconographical studies is that they are somewhat limited, not in the subject matter of the research *per se*, but in their premises: most often than not, the context of the paintings elected as the research subject is either forgotten or set aside. For the purpose of interpretation of Kizil art, however, the context must not be overlooked, as the paintings were not portable. Murals ought to be assimilated to architectural features, as “structural” elements necessary to the completion of a cave. They are necessary “structural” features in the sense that their absence in a worship-type cave means that the cave was not completed. Their decorative nature is overshadowed by their cultic meaning. That is why they are mostly, if not exclusively, found in caves of a worship nature and this is why they can be interpreted as cultic tools and as visual representations of not only a *sutra*, but of a whole religious beliefs’ system.

Since the focus of art history is the study of art, it is natural that only decorated caves were taken into consideration, even if most caves in Kizil had no décor (Vignato, 2006, p. 363). Nevertheless, by putting images in the correct context, iconographical analysis is not impoverished, nor its importance is lessened, but, conversely, it should be enriched. This is, for example, the approach used by Ma (2006), as described above, and Howard (Howard and Vignato, 2014, *cf.* ¶ 3.2). Iconography should be used then with a particular attention to contextualisation, which will work, in this case, in two directions: contextualisation of physical data and contextualisation of mind-frame. As for the former, archaeological analysis will give the operative frames to put not only murals, but also other visual representations and architectural features in the correct place – quite literally. As for the latter, a deeper knowledge of local historical and literary sources, together with a wider multidisciplinary approach would possibly give a tentative insight into the minds of the Kučéans.

3.1.2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL TYPOLOGIES AS INTERPRETATIVE TOOLS

While art history deals with visual expressions of motifs, images and symbols, their classification and interpretation, archaeology concerns itself with recording, classifying and interpreting all the features in a site. Fieldwork and excavation retain a central role because they provide the data about human activities in a period of time in terms of location and chronological changes (Renfrew and Bahn, 2000, p. 106). With regards to grottoes, the situation is peculiar: the stratigraphical method, which is the main tool of archaeology, can be employed to a limited extent. Caves are open contexts, they have not been sealed, neither by human intervention, nor following natural occurrences. Therefore, generally speaking, traditional stratigraphy – which can be labelled here as “vertical stratigraphy” – cannot be employed because the subsequent levels of construction and modification are not completely superimposing but, rather, overlapping and permeating each other. The only possible stratigraphy may occur in the case modifications and reparations were carried out in the caves: the mutual relationships established are seen in said overlapping processes, which Su Bai defines as “dongku benshen de gajian he xianghu de dapo guanxi 洞窟本身的改建和相互的打破关系 [modifications of structural superimpositions and overlapping relations and of the caves themselves]” (Su Bai, 1997, p. 153). It is, in a sense, an “horizontal stratigraphy”, that cannot employ the geological superimposed strata, but nevertheless can give insights into how the caves were hewn and into their chronological succession.⁵⁵ Additionally, it is the necessary first step in the setting up of typologies’ development, which concurs with both the establishment of a relative chronology and the classification and identification of clusters of data, were they caves, groups of caves or entire sites.

To set up typologies, one needs first a stratigraphy and secondly a set of objects. After identifying the superimposed layers, the objects retrieved in them can be accordingly classified on the basis of such stratigraphy. Since this superimposition is a chronological

⁵⁵ The difference between “vertical” and “horizontal” stratigraphy is neither clear-cut nor absolute: as a matter of fact, the stratigraphical layers, which superimpose in the traditional geological stratigraphy, develop *horizontally*, but superimpose *vertically*. The distinction between “vertical” and “horizontal” is employed also by Spink (1991, p. 70) in describing the development of Ajanta Caves in western India.

sequence, similarities and differences among the physical data are recorded as a chronological typological sequence (a “seriation”, which is “an exercise in relative chronology”, Renfrew and Bahn, 2000, p. 122). A development line is thus traced. As for caves, stratigraphical information comes from the aforementioned overlapping processes, as seen in the caves themselves. Therefore, after identifying different cave types,⁵⁶ it is possible to trace a development for said cave types on the basis of overlapping. This is the methodology first employed by Su Bai in 1983.

At present times, the archaeological approach is carried on by Vignato. With the remarks made above – that can be summed up in the concept that typological seriations are effectively based on “horizontal stratigraphy” – much of Vignato’s work deals with typologies not only as the result of the investigation, but also as interpretative categories. That is why, after identifying typologies of caves, typologies of groups and typologies of districts, said typologies can be employed as abstract categories in interpreting new data, or in comparing similar typological groups/sequences found in other parts of the same site, or even in different sites (as seen in Howard and Vignato, 2014). An extensive discourse on typologies as employed in Kizil is found in “Archaeological survey of Kizil – Its groups of caves, districts, chronology and Buddhist schools” (Vignato, 2006). After carefully describing and classifying groups of caves in first (*i.e.* without a central pillar cave) and second type (*i.e.* with central pillar caves), districts are identified after the fact that groups of the same type were often clustered together. Furthermore, on the basis of the types of caves hewn in each district, a general function for said district can be drawn. Vignato identifies three functional needs as shown by the very caves in a district: worship and communal activity, living, and meditation (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 55). Having set up the three typologies, one can use them in the interpretation of the whole site or parts of it.

For example, regarding Gudong, the superimposed rows of caves hewn in the façade of the cliff can be clearly separated because, at a lower level, no groups of the second type were hewn, yet conversely, in the upper level, only groups of the second type are found.

⁵⁶ For the issues regarding the classification of caves’ types itself, cf. ¶ 1.3.1, ref. 20.

Knowing that the two types of caves' groups are not to be clustered together, a dividing line can be drawn between the two, thus identifying two districts, which Vignato names District Three (below) and District Five (above). After the three functional classifications outlined above and given the abundance of central pillar caves in District Five, it follows that District Five in Gudong was a worship district (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 186). District Three, despite being heavily damaged, can be recognised as a worship district too, given the presence of decorated square caves and of monumental image caves (probably added in a later development phase, Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 33). Nevertheless, it is a different type of worship district: since no central pillar caves are found and since the pictorial programmes painted in caves of the two districts highlight different themes, it follows that the rituals carried out there were not analogous. Possibly, they even belonged to different Buddhist schools (Vignato, 2006, p. 410).⁵⁷ Furthermore, the lack of monastic cells in District Five hints that, at least from a certain point in time, the living needs of the monks were carried out in a different part of the monastery, possibly a surface structure built on the flat area in front of Caves 192 to 200. As a matter of fact, in District Five monastic cells were fewer since the beginning, but at a certain point, some of them were even transformed into worship caves, *i.e.* Cave 171 (changed into a central pillar cave) or Cave 189 (changed into a square cave) (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 35).

The district typologies – worship, living, meditation – can be then applied to the analysis of other sites, to highlight similarities to and divergences from the models. One must always remember, though, that such models, theorised from physical data, are general explanatory frameworks and that they themselves deal with extreme data variation. That is to say that – since human processes are generally not mathematical in nature – said models are to be revised at every application.

⁵⁷ Howard addresses the possibility that Buddhism was first introduced in Kuča by the Dharmaguptaka, one of the early Buddhist schools, which flourished under the Saka: they were supposedly Indo-Scythian rulers from north-west of India, and prospered there before the Kushan Empire conquered their territories. Under the Kushans the Sarvastivada school then prevailed (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 164).

In other words, typologies can be employed as scientific theories. Although an unanimously accepted definition of “scientific theory” is lacking, Hawking’s words can be taken here as a starting point:

“a theory is a good theory if it satisfies two requirements: it must accurately describe a large class of observations on the basis of a model that contains only a few arbitrary elements, and it must make definite predictions about the results of future observations.” (Hawking, 1998, p. 10).

Other definitions are consistent with Hawking’s, focusing on the identification of constructs, models and of the relationships among them (Suppe, 2000). Falsifiability is often added (*i. e.* Doty and Glick, 1994), even if its status as a necessary discerning criterion is often challenged (Swinburne, 1964). Generally speaking, on the basis of the criteria and of the definition above, theories must fulfill three functions: they must classify, interpret, and predict. Typologies do all of these three. They classify physical data, in a two-ways process, that is, sorting new information and shaping, by adding new details, typologies themselves. They interpret, in the sense that they can be employed as tools in the understanding of the mind-frame and the reasons behind the setting up of the monastery itself, or its role within a sociopolitical context. Finally, they predict: whenever a set of data is apparently lacking – according to typologies already set and observed in other sites of a similar nature – then it is possible to reasonably predict the very missing information.

A brief example will clearly explain this instance. In the case of Gudong District Five, as already mentioned above, monastic cells were few, at least from a certain point in time, when no new caves of such type were hewn and almost all the monastic cells already present in the area were transformed into worshipping caves. The residential need, which according to the district typologies is one of the three functions that must have been carried out in the whole site, must have shifted then from its original location to another one. One can predict that new residential quarters were either hewn as caves in other districts of the rock monastery, or set up in a surface building, whose presence has already been briefly discussed above. In Simsim an analogous situation can be observed, as no living facilities were hewn in the whole site. Vignato therefore suggests that some of the surface structures – whose actual

traces can still be seen today – comprised residential quarters (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 15).

As for the relation between archaeology and art history, it is, of course, a two-ways path. If, on the one hand, the issue of contextualisation within an archaeological framework for the artistic features of the caves has been addressed as having a pivotal importance, on the other hand, it is also true that archaeology cannot be devoid of considerations about the presence of such artistic features. Since art was a necessary part of worshipping caves with specific functions in the economy of the whole monastery, it is only natural that art itself has to be considered so, that is, *in context* and deeply interrelated to the archaeological, historical and social background, as sketched by the data we have today. A clear-cut separation between the two disciplines is not beneficial, mostly so in this instance, for they can both benefit from one another's methodologies and results.

3.1.3 SCIENTIFIC TESTING

In recent years, the employment of scientific testing in the study of caves has been developing at a fast pace. Two appears to be the main directions: on the one hand, scientific testing is carried out in order to determine an absolute chronology and, in this case, the ¹⁴C analysis is the main methodology employed, although it is not the only one; on the other hand, pigments analyses, carried out with the most diverse methods, can cast light on the materials employed in the making of the paintings, and can consequently broaden the research on the production and the management of such materials.

Starting from 1979, ¹⁴C has been employed in several different occasions and yielded different results. Peking University's results, used by Su Bai for his chronology and published in 1983, and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' ones, published in the volume *Zhongguo meishu fenlei quanji – Xinjiang bihua quanji* 中国美术分类全集·新疆壁画全集 [Catalogue of Chinese art – Xinjiang paintings] (Duan, ed. 1995) are among the earliest instances. From that time on, other investigations have been carried out not only in China, but also in Japan, at Nagoya University, and in Germany, at the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, among others (Nakamura *et al.*, 2012; Yaldiz, 2010).

Despite being as scientifically accurate as possible, ¹⁴C-based analysis is not completely immune from mistakes. Errors can arise from within the methodology itself and from the data collected. On the one hand, the computing of some of the parameters can differ between laboratories, and therefore the final results can bear a great deal of discrepancies between one another (Zhang, 2015, pp. 21-22). On the other hand, the data themselves can bear fallacies in the way they were collected and/or in their nature. The choice of samples is a subject of controversy: wooden materials could have been taken from pieces much older than the caves themselves, or could have been changed over time, thus frustrating the effort of an absolute dating (Vignato, 2008, pp. 38-39). Moreover, organic samples could have been exposed to pollution or other contaminating agents, since caves were not sealed away from environmental hazards (Zhang, 2015, p. 21). Other issues concern the final interpretation of the ¹⁴C results: when a mural is radio-carbon dated, this tentative dating is, most often than not, extended to the whole grotto, without taking into consideration that walls could have been re-plastered and repainted in later periods. As a matter of fact, we must not presume that *in every case* the paintings we see today were contemporary with the hewing of the cave itself. Additionally, when analysing the resulting chronology, one must take notice that the spans of time identified with this type of scientific testing are often too wide to be really useful. These are among the reasons why different laboratories across the world yielded very different results even for the same cave. See for example Cave 17: in 2000 the Museum für Asiatische Kunst in Berlin analysed one of the murals coming from this cave, now in their collection. The laboratories confirmed the dating of 237-320 CE for the painting; other radio-carbon dating from China and Japan yielded respectively 400-530 CE and 561-657 CE (Ghose, 2008, p. 43).

Secondly, with regard to pigment analyses, various methodologies, such as spectrometry, polarized light analysis, X-ray diffraction, *etc.*, are employed in determining what materials made up the colours used in the paintings. As in the case of ¹⁴C dating, these methodologies are as scientifically accurate as they can be. Nevertheless, the main issue lays in correctly interpreting the data gained. That is to say, what do these information can tell us

about the paintings first and the site then? As an example, the article by the Su Baimin *et al.* (2000) will be briefly discussed here.

Su Baimin and his team from the Gansu Museum and the Dunhuang Research Institute employed three main methodologies to analyse the murals. Polarised Light Microscope (PLM), X-rays Diffraction (XRD) and cross-section analysis were used to investigate samples from ten caves, deemed representative of all the chronological phases. Even if not stated outright, the chronology in use in this work corresponds to the one identified by Yan Wenru. The fifty-six samples are taken from New Cave 1 (which was not ascribed to any phase), Caves 38, 114, 180 (second phase), Cave 77 (early phase), Caves 100, 179, 171 (third phase), Caves 186, 135 (fourth phase). The colours examined are blue, green, red, black and white. It would not be useful here to report all the chemical elements identified by the survey, nevertheless it is interesting to report the conclusions the scientists drew from said information, and to see how they can be employed in a general context. By drawing a comparison with the caves of Dunhuang, they notice that the variety of the pigments employed in Kizil is quite low, and that variety is even lower if one considers the earliest caves. That is to say, a certain degree of homogeneity in the use of pigments is a peculiar feature of the caves ascribed to an early phase of the development of the site. The other interesting point of the survey concerns the blue colour, which was mainly done with lapis lazuli. According to literary sources, no reserves of lapis lazuli has been found in the Chinese area, nevertheless several Chinese Buddhist caves made use of this very pigment, and apparently Kizil was no different. Therefore, it follows that the lapis lazuli came from the historically famous Afghanistan's reserves. The team consequently analysed lapis lazuli samples from both Kizil and Afghanistan with PLM, to discover that both the mineral traits and the molecules' configuration of the two samples are consistent with one another and most similar. The team concludes that Kizil's lapis lazuli came from Afghanistan.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ In May 2015, dr. Schmidt of the BAM Federal Institute for Materials Research and Testing, presented the results of a recent technical analysis conducted on samples from the detached wall paintings from Cave 40 in Simsim. The analysis of the blue pigment did not convene with the general opinion that the lapis lazuli present in Kuča belonged to the Afghanistan reserves, but it actually showed variation (Schmidt, 2015). It would be of

This brief report, as many others concerning scientific testing of caves' materials, is an example of how the scientific methodologies can be employed in order to deepen the knowledge on a subject matter to the utmost. Nevertheless, they are tools and therefore must be employed accordingly, and the results are to be interpreted within fixed parameters. What is most important is, once again, contextualisation. As in the case of ^{14}C , the pigment analysis does not tell us anything – besides the chemicals – if one does not take notice of the context of the caves and, specifically, of the “horizontal stratigraphy” that said caves show. Moreover, one must always inquire further into what the newly gained data entail: with regard to the production and the manufacturing of the pigments, for instance, it would be interesting to know how many pigments can be considered “man-made”, and how many were natural,⁵⁹ what was the degree of re-elaboration of the materials, whether phases can be identified in the use of the very pigments too and whether they are consistent with the stylistic shifts or not. It is interesting to ponder, then, on the production centres, on the degree of import and on what this implied for the economy of the monastery, and so on. It is quite simplistic to solve this issue by saying that, since Kuča was located on the Northern Silk Road, then it naturally follows that the exchange of goods was common and thriving. Whether it is true that this geographical and historical context is not to be overlooked, it is also undeniably true that trading has a price: one must look into what this entails for the relations between the monks and the merchants, between the monastery and the ruling class, and within the very monastery itself.

interest to further analyse this instance, in order to understand if the differences in the pigments between caves of the same complex and between different sites can be linked to painting styles and/or to chronological phases.

⁵⁹ Su Baimin's survey highlights the case of the green pigment. The dicopper chloride trihydroxide (TBCC) is the only type of green found in Kizil, while in other sites in China other mineral pigments were also found. In nature TBCC is usually found together with copper azurite and with malachite, but the reserves are scarce. It can also be found as an oxidation product of copper. Su Baimin's analysis revealed that the strata of TBCC in the samples contained no foreign molecules, such as malachite, and were perfectly homogeneous. Therefore, the team concluded that the TBCC employed in the making of the green colour must have been man-made (Su Baimin *et al.*, 2000, p. 73).

3.2 AN ATTEMPT TO IDENTIFY DIFFERENT PATHS

Having stressed the operative frameworks in the scholarship so far, and having identified the general perks and limits, it is possible to draw an outline of the possible new directions. The importance of contextualisation has already been stressed: so far, it has been intended as a process concerning both time and space. As for the former, it is not only a matter of pinning a calendar date to a site, a cave or a painting, but it is also an effort in periodization – as in an historicising process that proceeds from both archaeological evidence and historical and literary sources. As for the latter, contextualisation means location. Allocating a material culture's remains in the correct place they were intended to be is fundamental to prevent mistakes in the interpretation of said data. It does not only mean to re-locate virtually murals that have been detached from their cave walls, but also to understand the context of the whole cave (was it part of a group? Was it changed overtime?). It is also to choose carefully the samples for the scientific testing, minding their belonging to a specific layer and, therefore, to a specific phase, and to interpret the results accordingly.

Additionally, even the mind-frame that lied behind the creation of such monasteries and of the art within them can be contextualised. An anthropological approach should be envisioned: an effort should be made in interpreting the caves (and, consequently, their artistic features as part of the whole) and their functions abiding by the mental categories of the people that produced them. That is to say, an *emic* approach, rather than an *etic* one, should be employed as a general operative framework.⁶⁰ The biggest limit of this approach with regard to Kučean/Tocharian social group (or groups) is quite clear, since it requires direct contact with members of a community. Thus, it cannot be fully employed in the study of communities living centuries ago. Nevertheless, starting from the literary and historical sources, some attempts can be drawn, at least in some aspects.

⁶⁰ In anthropology, *emic* refers to the knowledge as expressed by a culture within a culture and it stands for the viewpoint of the social group that is the object of a research; *etic* is a generalisation based on the mind-frame of the researcher. It is, therefore, the viewpoint of the observer (usually, the anthropologist) (Headland, 1990).

An example is an early work by Soper, who in 1950 published a short article titled “Early Buddhist attitudes toward the art of painting”.⁶¹ Albeit unaware of the conflict between *emic/etic* – if only because the very phrasing was coined in 1954 and was not widespread until the late 1960s (Headland, 1990) – it is true, though, that Soper’s work can be employed within this framework. By translating Chinese renditions of Early Buddhist texts that deal with the theme of painting, Soper traces a great array of opinions *of the Buddhists within a Buddhist context* toward the visual representation, ranging from aniconism to iconolatry (Soper, 1950, p. 147). Notwithstanding the inherent issues of the article,⁶² the implied approach is an example of how the study on the literary sources can shape an *emic*-type knowledge. To put it briefly, to understand how the actors themselves perceived an object is to better understand the object itself, were it a mural, a cave temple or a whole monastery. Therefore, this is the reason why analyses on Tocharian sources dealing with Buddhism within the socio-economical Kučean context, as for example the ones currently carried out by Ogihara (2013) and Ching Chao-jung (2015), will possibly give new insights into the matter.

If the “anthropological approach” can be employed as a basic premise, then it follows that all the disciplines involved in the study of Kizil (or any other Buddhist rock site in Kuča) can follow this directive. As a matter of fact, a different knowledge of the society, the politics, the economy as well as the religious, and the frame of mind of the Kučean can stem not only from the study of literary sources, but also from other disciplines and, mostly, from the combination of them. Given that an anthropological operational framework should be envisioned as a basic premise, a multidisciplinary approach should then be employed. It is, in fact, a matter of acknowledging the complexity of sites like the cliff temples. For

⁶¹ Already in 1928 Lalou, using Tibetan sources, had done a similar work for the Mulasarvastivada *vinaya*.

⁶² Soper himself lamented the great vastness of the literary materials. He wrote: “in offering this *florilegium* of quotations, I must confess first that it represents a probably tiny, but certainly indeterminate fraction of an unexplored whole” (Soper, 1950, p. 147). In the second instance, as Howard notes, “these conventions applied literally to surface buildings, not to cliff temples; consequently, we do not have a complete correspondence between text and décor in the Kuča caves” (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 106).

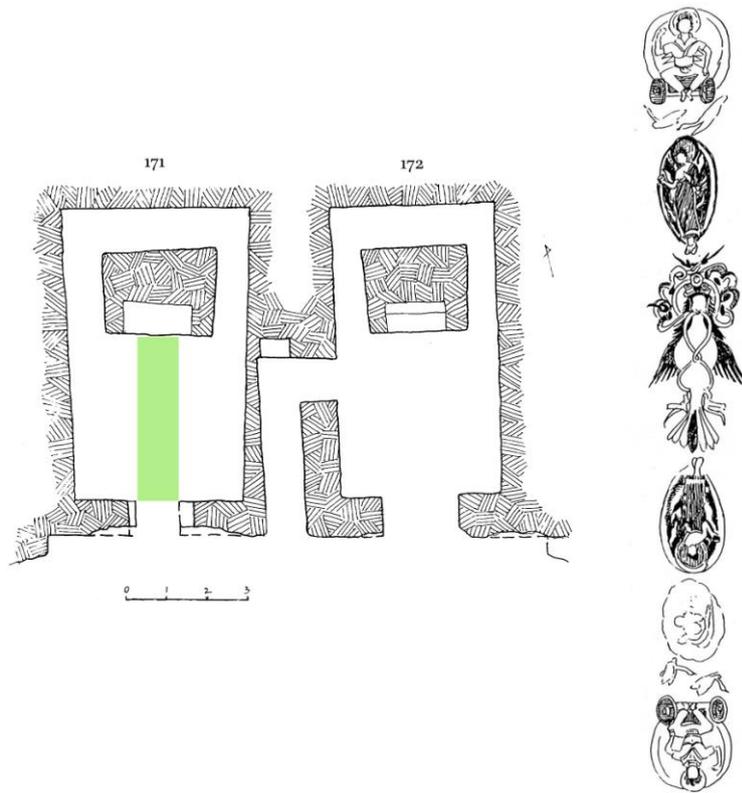
example, if it is true that the Buddhist murals of Kizil cannot be fully understood unless placed in their correct location within a cave and within the whole monastery, it is also undeniably true that the whole site cannot be fully understood without the artistic features. As stated elsewhere, every discipline has its own methodologies and its own aims that differ from one another, but it is also true that, by employing a multidisciplinary approach, new interpretations of old data arise.

The latest work by Howard and Vignato (2014) can be singled out as the example. Both the tendencies I have stressed above, that is *contextualisation* and *multidisciplinary approach*, are in fact employed. As they say,

“we have embraced an ‘holistic’ approach by considering all the interrelated factors active among caves, groups of caves, districts and sites; the same comprehensive principle guided us in deciphering the underlying reason behind the choice of a specific decorative system, a reason ingrained in textual sources, but especially in the monastic practices of a particular, indigenous denomination. To reach this goal we have combined different disciplines – archaeology, religion and art.” (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 170).

It is the multidisciplinary approach that makes this work innovative: by relying on archaeological interpretations of the sites in Kuča and on literary sources either originating in Kuča or available in Pali or Sanskrit, the art historical material consequently falls within a different doctrinal context from the one that can be inferred by considering just one cave.

By contextualising the visual representations – which has not been done at this extent before – Howard is able to get a new understanding of the pictorial program of central pillar and of monumental image caves. She relies on the manuscripts retrieved in the area by the German Expeditions – manuscripts which show the existence of a local form of meditation particular to the region – and on the recent textual discoveries in Gandhara, concerning norms and regulations for the meditation practice (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 111). Moreover, archaeological evidence, as explained by Vignato, shows the essential role of the meditation caves (Howard and Vignato, 2014, pp. 87-79). Moving from these premises, Howard then produces a new explanation for the décor of the caves, making meditation the



[3.1] Position of the median strip painting on the ceiling of Cave 171 and drawing of the median strip (after Ma Shichang, 2006, p. 178 fig. 4).

pivot under whose light the murals should be interpreted. Her point is that the images connected with Sakyamuni are the representative of this “lost tradition” (Bretfeld, cited in Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 111), which was *local* and was *rooted in meditation literature*. Many are the iconographies she employs in order to make this tradition evident: three chosen examples from Cave 171 in Gudong can explain her new interpretation.

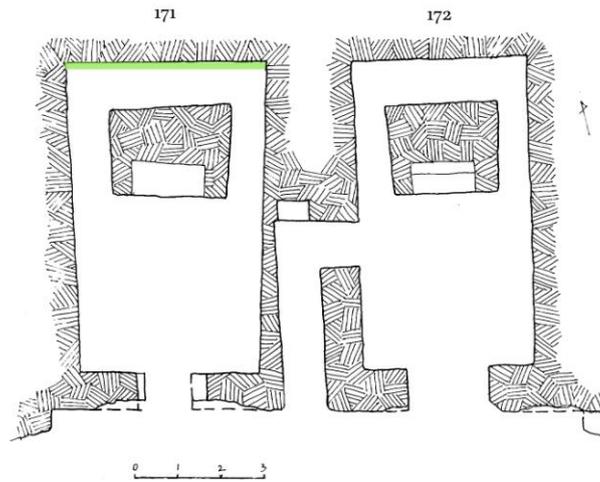
Howard makes use of the presence of a seated Buddha in the central pillar’s front niche as the starting point. Even though no sculpture can be seen today, traces of the halo surrounding the image survived on the wall behind, thus giving an idea of the original size. Notwithstanding the good preservation state of Cave 171, great parts of the pictorial program have been lost and are considerably damaged: in reconstructing the original paintings, Howard relies on the description made by Grünwedel of Cave 92 (Äffinhöhle, in Gunei), a

square cave that, peculiarly, bore on the main front wall the depiction of the Indrasaila Visit, usually found in central pillar caves.⁶³ Her take on the story's depiction is that the mountain landscape, usually set up in lozenge tiles or painted, on the façade of the central pillar and the median strip on the ceiling both stem from the act of meditation represented by the central niche's Buddha image. The powerful results generated by meditation are present not only in the ceiling (as it will be explained shortly), but also in the rhombic frames, depicting examples of mental concentrations, among *jatakas* and *avadanas*: it is meditating that allows the devotee to recall past lives, thus re-experiencing those karmic retributions.

In this context, the median strip itself would also be a representation of the power of meditation. Generally described as celestial figures or cosmological representations [*Tian xiangtu* 天相图] (*Kezier shiku neirong zonglu*, 2000, p. 191), Howard adds another meaning to the figures depicted. Rather than the sky being the main aim of the painting, the celestial images possibly point to the *context* in which the Miracle of Sravasti takes place.⁶⁴ The Buddha, in deep meditation, makes show of his faculties, emitting flames from the upper part of the body and water from the lower part, while levitating. This is possibly represented in the median strip, where – among the deities representing the Sun and the Moon, the personification of the Wind, celestial birds and *naga* – two Buddhas within a mandorla can be seen holding the *patra*, or alms bowl, emitting fire from the shoulders and spurting water [fig. 3.1]. Variations of this pattern can occur, but all of the elements are usually present in

⁶³ The god Indra, together with the Gandharva Pancasika and other *devas*, went to visit Buddha while he was meditating. In order to rouse Buddha from his deep mental concentration, Pancasika sang a love song. Indra then proceeded to ask Buddha questions on theoretical matters. In the end, after Buddha revealed that only a boundless, untainted spirit could achieve enlightenment, Indra converted (Walshe, 1995, pp. 321-335).

⁶⁴ The miracle took place in the city of Sravasti, in northern India. Six non-believer ascetics challenged Buddha to perform wondrous deeds. On the day of the contest, Buddha manifested himself in the sky, showing four different poses. Fire emanated from the upper part of his body, while water ran from the lower part. Rays of light originated from his body. Buddha then proceeded to perform four kinds of miracles in all directions. He then stated that this extraordinary acts, which together are known as the Twin Miracle, could be performed by all those who followed the *dharma*. The six heretics were thus defeated, and their leader committed suicide (Rotman, 2008).



[3.2] Parinirvana scene and its position in Cave 171.

every representation; the greatest recorded change is the replacement of the Buddha's figures with monks performing the same miracles (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 116).

In the last instance, the Parinirvana scene would also be deeply interrelated with meditating: in the rear chamber of Cave 171, Buddha is depicted lying on his right side, supporting his head with the right hand, and flames are spurting from his reclined body [fig. 3.2]. The presence of flames, associated with the spiritual strength generated by meditation – as in the depiction of the Sravasti miracle – hints that Buddha, during his final release, was in an advanced stage of *dhyana*. The three scenes (the Indrasaila Visit, the Sravasti Miracle and the Parinirvana) thus appear deeply interrelated and form an intellectual unit based on meditation. They would be then on the same level, with no theme imposing over the other

(Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 118).⁶⁵ Furthermore, even the scenes painted on the lateral walls are consistent with this framework. The scenes representing Buddha surrounded by devotees and adorers serve the purpose of glorifying the effects of meditation, in the sense that they follow the natural conversions of those witnessing the miracles and listening to the *dharma*. Therefore, in these images, the role of Buddha not only as a preacher, but also as the supreme example of the meditation's power, is highlighted (Zin, 2010, pp. 22-30).

In considering the whole cave as a unit, what emerges is that all the features were deeply interrelated on the basis of common functional and religious needs. In Howard's words,

"If we extend this conclusion to what lies beneath the decoration of central pillar caves, to what I call its inner components, it becomes clear that meditation and preaching are the ultimate sources of the paintings, most likely to remind Sarvastivadin monks of these two fundamental tasks required of them. Wonder-workings and superhuman skills are not thus acts of flamboyance but rather tools leading to conversions. Miracle-making fulfils, in the end, the function of pointing the way to enlightenment." (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 120).

Although the amount of data needed to get an all-encompassing and complete point of view on Kuča and its Buddhism is impossible to get in its entirety, this latest work by Howard and Vignato shows that – up to a certain extent and having settled clear research parameters – some objectives can be fulfilled. Moreover, this approach bears innovative results. The "holistic" method, which I have defined as a contextualisation process, makes careful use of the historical and religious sources stemming from and/or consistent with the local traditions, finds its origin and confirmation in the archaeological evidence and its consequent interpretations, and informs all the results in different fields.

It is contextualisation that can bring about a different understanding in art history: rather than being a new iconographical identification, Howard's interpretation of the murals

⁶⁵ Li Chongfeng does not convenue with this interpretation and considers the Parinirvana scene depicted in the rear chamber the main pictorial program in the cave (Li C., 2014, p. 144).

of the central pillars and of the monumental image caves in the Kučean sites can be regarded as iconological: by employing both external (archaeological evidence and literary sources) and internal means (the paintings themselves, as necessary expressive signs of a culture – or part of it), Howard is able to identify the main operative functions behind the creation of the artistic programs. In this sense, the murals' "symbolical value" (Cassirer, cited in Panofsky, 1939, p. 8) or "intrinsic meaning or content" (Panofsky, 1939, p. 14) shall appear consistent with texts, historical happenings and material remains. With regards to Kizil, the two main sources behind the paintings (and, therefore, of the whole monastery?) were meditation and preaching, both consistent with the Buddhist practice of Sarvastivada – identified by the sources as the prevailing school in the kingdom (Howard and Vignato, 2014, p. 120).

CONCLUSIONS

This work has been an attempt to rationalise a whole *corpus* of studies, produced in little more than a century of scholarship on the topic of Kučean Buddhist caves and especially on Kizil rock site. The main aim was not to judge, but rather to set the past contributions within the context of their time and of their academic background, in order to give an historical perspective on the reasons behind the need of a new approach.

Different historical phases that brought about the current research tendencies have been highlighted. Four of them have been traced, from the beginning of the 20th century until today. The phases have been defined on the basis of the appearance of different methodologies or different employments of said methodologies. Historical vicissitudes, that made the research flourish or hindered it, have been noted on the basis of both quantitative and of qualitative parameters. That is to say, both important fluctuations in the number of publications in a brief period of time and the introduction of new approaches have been taken into consideration as discretionary principles.

What emerges is that the relatively young Kučean studies – which can be ascribed to the even younger Buddhist studies – are moving on two paths, which, albeit not completely detached, are somewhat distant. If, on the one hand, the works focusing on the artistic features of the caves are flourishing in both China and Europe, on the other hand, the archaeological context of the caves is often set aside. Archaeological analyses of the sites are carried out only in China, nevertheless, after the intense fieldwork of the 1980s and 1990s, the archaeological campaigns in Xinjiang concerning the Buddhist sites have virtually stopped. Archaeological studies in the strict sense are today carried out by Giuseppe Vignato from Peking University, where Su Bai's legacy is evidently stronger. I have stressed enough the importance of acknowledging that, though every discipline has its own subject matters and its own methodologies, the effort in working together, rather than apart, bring new

results in the research. The last publication by Howard and Vignato is a clear example, as I discussed in detail in Chapter Three. This new approach, if fully embraced, could shape a new phase in the research history. It is impossible to say what the future developments may be, nevertheless, at present, Howard and Vignato's approach appears as the most innovative.

Archaeology and art history are not the only disciplines involved in the Kučean studies, and the importance of linguistics cannot be overlooked. The research on Tocharian sources and especially on meditation literature originating in Central Asia proved to be a pivotal asset in defining the features and the characteristics of Kučean Buddhism and, possibly, its role within the socio-political context of the Tarim Basin kingdoms.

The employment of scientific technologies in testing the archaeological and artistic materials is one of the most recent innovations. Besides ¹⁴C analyses, employed in order to date the samples, works on pigment testing are increasing. Within the parameters already discussed, these technologies will possibly shed new light on the very materials used in the making of the caves and of the paintings, and on the relationships of said materials with the environment where rock monasteries developed. Moreover, this new understanding will improve the conservation technologies making them more suitable to different types of materials.

In the last instance, what emerges is that, when studying the Buddhist rock sites in Kuča, one has to keep in mind the complexity of the situation. Setting aside for a moment the particular aims of a research, an effort in understanding the site as a whole, even if tentatively, should be put forth. It should be impossible to interpret a single feature's meaning of a cave – were it a painting, a sculpture, an architectural element – without understanding the position of said feature within the context of the cave first and of the rock monastery then. If not impossible, then it would be shallow at best and misleading at worst. This is the meaning of the employment of an “anthropological eye”, that is, an effort in contextualising all the elements, from putting things in the correct order – or in the correct location – to the struggle to see them as they were intended to be, in order to understand their function and role within the social, political and religious structures of that culture.

In order to contextualise all the elements, several disciplines should be employed together. As a matter of fact, the features of a rock monastery are today the subjects of study of different disciplines, but they were intended as multifaceted externalisations of a consistent whole: Buddhism, as it was practiced in Kuča by the Tocharians during the different phases of its own development. These externalisations – the caves themselves, the paintings, the sculptures, *etc.* – are remains and, nevertheless, they are also the only signs that can say something about that Buddhist system. In fact, “Buddhism” in itself is an abstract denomination to which several elements can be ascribed. Nevertheless, by correctly interpreting the material evidence, the very Buddhist features and characteristics can be identified.

With regard to Kizil, several issues remain to be solved, first and foremost the long-standing problem of the absolute chronology, which will not probably find a definitive solution in the next few years. Nevertheless, by employing the “holistic” approach, new questions could arise whose answers could ultimately shed light on some major traditional issues. For instance, one could wonder about the meaning of the typologies identified in Kizil and in the other rock monasteries of Kuča: are the functional districts a Kučean way of planning and of thinking a rock monastery? Since groups of caves are not peculiar to the Kučean Buddhist sites,⁶⁶ can a comparison be drawn between different clusters in different sites? What can this comparison tell about the planning of rock monasteries in different regions and about their Buddhism? The relationship between the Kučean rock monasteries themselves and between similar sites in India, Central Asia and China could possibly be investigated under this light. This inquiry, together with an iconological approach to the study of the murals in the caves – such as the one emerging after Howard’s latest investigation – can offer a new insight into the reasons that stand behind the creation of these places, and into how life was conducted by the monastic community there.

⁶⁶ For example, groups of caves can be also identified in other rock sites in western India, such as Ajanta (*cf.* Spink, 1991), Pitalkora, Baja, Ellora, *etc.* (Vignato, 2006, p. 367).

GLOSSARY OF SANSKRIT TERMS

ARHAT	A person who has completed the path of enlightenment and has attained <i>nirvana</i> in Hinayana Buddhism.
AVADANA	A type of story drawing a line between past lives' virtuous deeds and consequent lives' events.
BODHISATTVA	Someone on the path of liberation. The term is used in Hinayana Buddhism also to refer to Gautama in his previous lives.
DEVA	A type of non-human beings in Buddhism. Their life spans are generally longer than humans, and they are more powerful.
DHARMA	The cosmic law that orders the universe; the whole corpus of Buddhist teachings.
DHYANA	Meditative stages necessary to reach the highest form of concentration. There are four steps: investigation and scrutiny; stopping of the perception of the outside world; physical bliss; calm abiding and insight.
GANDHARVA	Non-human beings in Hinduism and Buddhism. In Buddhism they are regarded as a type of <i>devas</i> , highly skilled in music.
HINAYANA	Buddhist schools that do not accept the teachings of the Prajnaparamita Sutra and of the Lotus Sutra. The term, created by the Mahayana Buddhist schools, had originally a derogatory meaning. The term is used today as a synonym for Theravada, even if they do not correspond exactly.
JATAKA	Stories of the previous lives of the Buddha.

KARMA	The result of every actions in one's life. The karmic retribution is at the basis of consequent incarnations.
MAHAYANA	Buddhist schools that state the moral and spiritual superiority of the <i>bodhisattva</i> over the <i>arhat</i> . Mahayana Buddhism is the most widespread today, with the sole exception of the Theravada school in South East Asia.
NAGA	A deity taking the form of a snake in the Hinduist, Buddhist and Jainist pantheon.
NIRVANA	"Liberation, extinction". It is the ultimate goal of the Buddhist path, when the circle of rebirth is finally stopped.
MOKSHA PARISHAD	Quinquennial assembly founded by Emperor Asoka (268-237 BCE).
MUDRA	Ritual gestures, mostly performed with hands.
PANCHA PARISHAD	<i>cf. Moksha parishad</i>
PANCHAVARSHA	<i>cf. Moksha parishad</i>
PANCHAYARSHIKA	<i>cf. Moksha parishad</i>
PATRA	Alms bowl.
PARANIRVANA	<i>cf. Nirvana</i>
PRADAKSINA	Ritual circuambulation.
SAMSARA	Cycle of re-birth in Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism and Sikhism.
SRAMAN	Monk.
STUPA	A Buddhist structure holding the remains of important monks or nuns, objects and scriptures. Some <i>stupas</i> can have a votive meaning. In India and Central Asia they are generally of a hemispheric shape

and can have a square basement. In China *stupas* are built in a tower-like fashion.

SUTRA	Buddhist sacred text.
UDDESIKA	Overseer.
VINAYA	Set of rules for the monastic community.

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