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Washington, DC 20013–7012

For deliveries
(DHL, FedEx, UPS, courier):
1050 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20560

ISSN 0571-1371

Printed in the United States of America
© 2014 Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C.

Ars Orientalis is a peer-reviewed annual volume of scholarly articles on the art and archaeology of Asia, the ancient Near East, and the Islamic world. It is published jointly by the Freer and Sackler Galleries and the University of Michigan Department of History of Art. Fostering a broad range of topics and approaches through themed issues, the journal is intended for scholars in diverse fields. *Ars Orientalis* provides a forum for new scholarship, with a particular interest in work that redefines and crosses boundaries, both spatial and temporal. Authors are asked to follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th edition.

Ars Orientalis subscriptions are handled by Turpin Distribution. (For contact information, go to www.asia.si.edu/research/ArsOrientalis.asp.)

Current subscription rates (including shipping):

U.S. individual	U.S. institution	International individual	International institution
Print: \$48	Print: \$58	Print: \$55	Print: \$68
Online: \$40	Online: \$48	Online: \$40	Online: \$48
Bundle: \$55	Bundle: \$65	Bundle: \$60	Bundle: \$80

Subscription-related inquiries (invoice, payment, and change of address):
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The full text of *Ars Orientalis* is also available in the electronic versions of *Art Index* and online through JSTOR (www.jstor.org).

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CLAIMS OF BUDDHIST RELICS IN THE EASTERN HAN TOMB MURALS AT HORINGER

Issues in the Historiography of the Introduction of Buddhism to China

Elephant-shaped *zun* 尊-type wine container. China, Middle Yangzi Valley, first half 11th century BCE. Bronze, 17.2 × 10.7 × 21.4 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Purchase, F1936.6

Abstract

The Eastern Han mural tomb at Horinger often is said to feature one of the earliest Buddhist themes in China, namely, the relics of the Buddha or a related motif. But the controversial basis for such identification, the tomb's now-vanished inscription of “*shēli* 捨利,” resulted from an unverifiable reading by a local archaeologist working under adverse conditions and an unqualified confirmation by a leading authority in the discipline—neither of whom were specialists in Buddhism. There is nothing in the tomb that justifies connecting it to the Sanskrit term *śarīra*, a reference to the Buddha's cremated remains. This essay offers insight into the critical problems that arise when art historical misidentifications are cited in general historical treatments, thus distorting the picture of early Buddhism and its material culture in China.

THE INTRODUCTION OF BUDDHISM from India around the first century CE contributed to one of the most groundbreaking transformations of visual art and religious practice in China. Since Yu Weichao's 俞偉超 (1933–2003) influential 1980 study, several tombs dating to the Eastern Han 漢 period (25–220) have been said to feature such “Buddhist” themes.¹ Despite a few isolated traits, however, these tombs generally lack a broader Buddhist context. And because the tombs are part of an ancient native tradition of mortuary art, scholars typically have been reluctant to highlight strong Buddhist traits within them. Examples usually were labeled as Buddhist-Chinese hybrids or Chinese adaptations of Buddhist motifs.² I believe this caution was justified, and concur in principle with the seminal analysis of such Buddhist-related motifs made by Wu Hung [Hong 巫鴻] in 1986.³

In this paper, however, I will challenge the Buddhist labeling of a particular motif in an Eastern Han tomb and refute the series of Buddhist-related discussions that labeling has engendered thus far. I will examine the so-called Buddhist relics in the famous multi-chambered mural tomb of Xiaobanshen 小板申 M1, Xindianzi 新店子 at Horinger [Helinge'er 和林格爾] in Hohhot [Huhehaote 呼和浩特] (Inner Mongolia) (figs. 1, 2).⁴ As I shall demonstrate, reading these relics as Buddhist occurred as a result of methodological infelicities and circular reasoning, shaped largely by deterministic assumptions propagated by the religion's popularity today and prevailing academic favoritism. More important, a fresh look will help us discern an important methodological problem in the earlier discourses regarding the introduction of Buddhism to Eastern Han China, particularly since unreliable art historical information often compounds the biases of subsequent scholarship. Once this critical issue is clarified, we can come to a better understanding not only about the tomb at Horinger but also, by extension, the art of death in Eastern Han China.

1

1
Isometric projection (sectional view from the northwest) of Xiaobanshen M1, showing the location of the alleged “*shēli* 猧猧” inscription. Xindianzi, Horing, Hohhot (Inner Mongolia), Eastern Han period (180–90 CE). Adapted from Nei Menggu Zizhiq Bowuguan, *Helinge'er Hanmu bihua* (Beijing: Wenwu, 1978), p. 39

The most enduring controversy over the allegedly Buddhist elements at the Horing tomb concerns an infamous but now-vanished inscription on the eastern ceiling wall of the antechamber (fig. 2)⁵:

Shēli 猧猧.

In the corresponding position at the same height in the adjacent southern ceiling is another controversial label, featuring the “white elephant” (*baixiang* 白象) (fig. 3).⁶ Setting aside the Buddhist claim to this elephant for the time being (see below), what is of primary concern for the present moment is Yu Weichao’s proposition that the *shēli* 猧猧 inscription on the eastern ceiling was a phonetic exchange for the standard Buddhist *shèli* [EMC *ɕia^h li^h*] 舍利.⁷ However, I doubt that even the original reading of *shēli* 猧猧 is correct.

Unfortunately, the cartouche (*bangti* 傍題) was so badly preserved that it disintegrated before photographs could be taken.⁸ Given this circumstance, it is not surprising that the official excavation report does not mention the inscription.⁹ Yu Weichao instead refers to unpublished private field notes taken by Li Zuozhi 李作智 then of the Museum of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.¹⁰ Li is said to have recorded the condition of the antechamber ceiling when it was first discovered¹¹:

... In the east[ern ceiling of the antechamber], there is a painting over the tomb entrance of a serpentine animal with the cartouche of *qinglong* 青龍 [Green Dragon]. Over this Green Dragon, there is a painting of a figure in the cloudy mist (*yunwu* 雲霧) seated cross-legged (*pantui* 盤腿) with the cartouche reading “Dong Wang Gong 東王公” [King Father of the East]. In the patch a little below to the north of the King Father of the East, there is a painting of a *pan* 盤-vessel shaped thing, inside of which there remain “four globular items” (*yuanqiuxing de dongxi* 圓球形的東西). On its upper right, there is the two-character label reading *shēli* 猧猧.

Regrettably, none of the items mentioned here survived long enough to be photographed. Therefore, Yu Weichao’s source for this unique Eastern Han inscrip-

2

2
Chariot procession; other motifs, including the alleged Buddhist relic motif with the “*shēli* 猗猗” inscription, are largely no longer visible. Mural painting, eastern ceiling of the antechamber of Xiaobanshen M1, Horing, Eastern Han period (180–90 CE). After Chen Yongzhi et al., *Helin’geer*, pp. 80–81

3

3
Elephant rider and auspicious birds. Mural painting, southern ceiling of the antechamber of Xiaobanshen M1, Horing, Eastern Han period (180–90 CE). After Nei Menggu Zizhiqu Bowuguan, *Helin’geer*, p. 68

tion, with its allegedly Buddhist content, is little more than hearsay. In fact, if one looks closely at the circumstances surrounding the moment the inscription was documented, one finds further reason for concern. Even Yu Weichao was somewhat cautious about the reliability of Li Zuozhi’s work, stating, “On the second of August, 1973, Comrade Li Zuozhi made an additional record from memory.”¹²

It thus appears that the inscription that led Yu Weichao to wax eloquent about Buddhist relics was based on nothing more than a local archaeologist’s memory.¹³ Moreover, the inscription was located fairly high above eye level in a dark tomb chamber (see figs. 1, 2). This casts serious doubt on the reliability of Li’s initial reading, quite apart from the difficulties involved in Yu’s Buddhist gloss.

Furthermore, the Buddha’s “relics” (or sacred post-cremation remains) is only one of many meanings for *shēli* 舍利, the graph Yu Weichao assumed was behind the vanished allograph *shēli* 猗猗, translating *śarīra*. As Jonathan A. Silk shows, the early stratum of Buddhist translation in China conveyed the ambivalence inherent in the Indic term.¹⁴ Silk pays particular attention to Lokakṣema’s [Zhi Loujiachen 支婁迦讖] vocabulary in the *Daoxing banruo jing* 道行般若經 (T224), which states¹⁵:

佛語釋提桓因: 不用身舍利, 從薩芸若中得佛。但薩阿竭為出般若波羅蜜中。如是, 拘翼。薩芸若身, 從般若波羅蜜中出。但薩阿竭, 阿羅呵, 三耶三佛薩芸若身。薩芸若身生, 我作佛身。從薩芸若得作佛身。從薩芸若生我般泥洹後舍利, 供養如故。

The Buddha spoke to Śakra Devānām Indra: “It is not through the bodily-body,¹⁶ but rather from omniscience (*¹⁷*sarvajñatā*), that one becomes a Buddha. The Tathāgata emerges from within the Perfection of Wisdom (*Prajñāpāramitā*). Just so, Kauśika [viz. Indra], the body of omniscience emerges from within the Perfection of Wisdom. The Tathāgata, Arhat, Samyaksambuddha has an omniscience body. When that omniscience body is born, I create a buddha-body. I am able to create a buddha-body from omniscience. After my *parinirvāṇa*, my relics will be worshipped.

This plain Prajñā School rhetoric shows that the word *shēli* 舍利 in Eastern Han Buddhism carried two meanings: the living physical body (*shen-sheli* 身舍利) and

4

4
Triangular gable with the King Father of the East and the Dragon and other scenes. Rubbing, 158.2 cm (h). Eastern wall of Wu 武 family Stone Chamber 3 (a.k.a. “Wu Liang ci 武梁祠”) at Wuzhaishan 武宅山 in Jiexiang 嘉祥, Jining 濟寧 (Shandong) Eastern Han period. Princeton University Art Museum (2002-307.34). After Cary Y[ee-Wei] Liu, Michael Nylan, and Anthony Barbieri-Low, *Recarving China's Past: Art, Archaeology, and Architecture of the “Wu Family Shrine”* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2005), fig. 1.37. Princeton University Art Museum / Art Resource, NY

5

5
Queen Mother of the West with a nine-tailed fox and other attendants. Brick, 40.3 cm (h). From Qingbai 青白 at Xinfan 新繁 in Xindu 新都, Chengdu 成都 (Sichuan). Sichuan Provincial Museum (14021), Chengdu. After Robert W. Bagley, ed. *Ancient Sichuan: Treasures from a Lost Civilization* (Seattle: Seattle Art Museum, 2001), fig. 108

the post-cremation relics (*sheli* 舍利). Those who advocate the notion that there are Buddhist relics at Horing'er have looked for *sheli* exclusively in the latter sense of the term, believing that they can identify the “ball-shaped objects on a plate” as relics.¹⁸ But they implicitly suggest the former meaning as they do not explain why one should exclude that broader possibility.

More reliable than this questionable inscription, though, is the tomb itself and its comparison with the totality of second-century Eastern Han (multi-chambered) tombs. Such an archaeological approach very quickly reveals that the Green Dragon and the King Father of the East on the eastern wall were extremely common tomb iconography at the time (fig. 4).¹⁹ Why would the “alien” motif of the *shēli* 猓猓—whether or not it stood for the Buddhist *shèli* 舍利—irrupt into this otherwise conventional scene? One possible option, which would be compatible with the general nature of Eastern Han tomb iconography and also partially vindicate Li's reading, would be to assume that the inscription referred to a lynx (*shēli* 猓猓) or a similar type of animal that typically populated the exalted landscape of early imperial China.

Considering the deteriorated condition of the murals and the difficult situation that caused for archaeologists, it is possible that Li Zuozhi was looking at an animal but failed to acknowledge it as such. What if the painted thing in question were an auspicious “roebuck” (*zhangzi* 麋子), as seen in the contemporary tombs of Suoyaocun 所藥村 M1 at Wangdu 望都, Baoding 保定 (Hebei), or Dahuting 打虎亭 M1 in Mi Xian 密縣 (Henan) (figs. 6, 7)?²⁰ In this regard, the “four globular items” on a plate could have been a damaged representation (limbs?) of the type of animal that often accompanied the King Father and his consort, the Queen Mother of the West (fig. 5).²¹ But even if we concede that Li read the canine (*quan* 犬/ 犭) radical in both characters correctly, the phonetic elements constituting the remainder of the two characters might not necessarily have yielded a reading of *shēli* 猓猓 lynx. The inscription might have been, for instance, *huli* 狐狸 (fox), an attrac-

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Auspicious roebuck. Mural painting, lower register of western wall, Suoyacun M1 at Wangdu, Baoding (Hebei), Eastern Han period. After Hebei Sheng Wenwu Yanjiusuo 河北省文物研究所, *Hebei gudai muzang bihua* 河北古代墓葬壁畫 (The wall paintings in the ancient tombs in Hebei Province) (Beijing: Wenwu, 2000), fig. 32

7

7

Auspicious deer. Tympanum above south door in the antechamber, Dahuting M1, Mi Xian (Henan). After Henan Sheng Wenwu Yanjiusuo 河南省文物研究所, *Mi Xian Dahuting Hanmu* 密縣打虎亭漢墓 (Han tombs at Dahuting in Mi Xian) (Beijing: Wenwu, 1993), pl. II

tive possibility given that the fox, especially its nine-tailed subtype, is frequently a member of the Queen Mother's entourage.²² Or what if those globes were meant to represent the elixir of immortality on a plate? Though mere speculation, at least these alternatives do not stray from standard Eastern Han visual grammar for a tomb space.

In fact, a reading of *shēli* 猼狴 as an auspicious animal is not altogether out of the question. A fantastic beast of a very similar name was known in Eastern Han: the *hánli* [EMC *ɣəm/ɣam li^h*] 含利 monster, mentioned by Zhang Heng 張衡 (78–139) in his *Xijing fu* 西京賦 (Western Capital rhapsody)²³:

含利颺颺, 化為仙車, 驪駕四鹿, 芝蓋九葩。
The *hánli*, mouth gaping,
changed into a sylph's chariot,
which was harnessed to a four-deer team
and carried a nine-petal mushroom canopy.

But this is no less untangled a problem, especially because this reading of *hánli* in the severely corrupt *Xijing fu* has the exact variant reading of *shèli* 舍利.²⁴ To make matters worse, the latter reading of *shèli* stands against *hánli* in Cai Zhi's 蔡質 *Hanguan dianzhi yishi xuanyong* 漢官典職儀式選用 (Han officials' administrative ceremonials selected for use), a now-lost but roughly contemporary text to *Xijing fu*.²⁵ Of course, we may not be completely assured that Zhang and Cai were both speaking about an identical beast; the graphic similarity between the two words (*hánli* 含利 and *shèli* 舍利) may be a mere coincidence. But in any case, both Eastern Han authors refer to *hánli/shèli* only to evoke some menagerie of felicities, typical of early imperial iconography, not in a Buddhist context of any kind.²⁶ Moreover, even if *shèli* in both texts is a superior reading of *hánli*—although I consider that the opposite is more likely the case, on the principle of *lectio difficilior potior*, and that *shèli* reflects some post-Han, Buddhist-savvy scribal *topos*—it is still a considerable leap of the imagination to posit a Buddhist-specific etymology for *shèli* in Eastern Han belles lettres.²⁷ In fact, disyllabic words are often transcriptions of foreign words.²⁸ Accordingly, one might speculate that the animal name(s) used by Zhang and Cai may be of Indic origin and may have taken on a certain zoological character in Eastern Han China different from the

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Distribution of the Buddha's relics.
Schist, 19.1 cm (h). Peshawar
Museum. After Harald Ingholt,
Gandhāran Art in Pakistan (New
York: Pantheon Books, 1957), fig. 154

9

Apparition of relics after Kang
Senghui's supplication. Mural
painting, upper portion of northern
wall of Mogao 莫高 cave 323,
Dunhuang 敦煌, 7th century. After
Dunhuang Wenwu Yanjiusuo 敦煌
文物研究所 ed., *Zhongguo shiku:
Dunhuang Mogaoku* 中國石窟: 敦
煌莫高窟, vol. 3 (Beijing: Wenwu,
1982), pl. 68

original. For instance, there is a bird in Sanskrit vocabulary called *śārī/śārika*.²⁹ If so, Yu Weichao was not entirely scrupulous to assert only “the relics” but not allow any possibilities regarding such an exotic bird, the *hánlì* monster, and so forth. But according to the contemporary parlance of Zhang Heng and Cai Zhi, it seems more logical to view the purported inscription, if it ever existed in the Horinger murals, as a local, epigraphic variant of *hánlì* rather than a skewed reference to Buddhist relics, as it were.³⁰ Indeed, I would hypercorrect Li Zuozhi's field recollection of *shēli* 猙狒 to **hánlì* 猙狒.

One may wonder, moreover, whether Yu Weichao's emendation of the at least conceivable *shēli* 猙狒 (beast) to *shèli* 舍利 ([Buddhist] relics) was culturally justifiable in the first place. It is true that the cremated corporeal remains of the Buddha, one of several meanings for the Sanskrit *śārīra*, often were depicted as globular items in Indian narrative art (fig. 8). As Jonathan Silk's superb philological study has shown, the Chinese transcription of *śārīra* as *shèli* 舍利 would have been available in theory after Lokakṣema circulated his Buddhist translations, which occurred around the same time as the construction of the Horinger tomb around 180–90 CE.³¹ Thus, the issue here is not artistic or philological but sociocultural, and the question is whether the ideological issues involving the Buddhist *shèli* 舍利—a term that could variously refer to the body, the corpse, or the cremated remains of the Buddha—would have been known to an Eastern Han audience in the peripheral northern steppe frontier.³²

For such a sociocultural or anthropological inquiry, the tale of the Gao Chi [Jiaozhi] 交趾—born Sogdian immigrant Kang Senghui's 康僧會 (died 280) first mission to the court of Sun Quan 孫權 (reigned 222–52) at Jianye 建業 is useful, as it throws light on the early sociocultural acceptance of Buddhist relics in China well after the construction of the Horinger tomb.³³ In contrary to Yu Weichao's unqualified acceptance of the allure of Buddhist relics, the narrative of Kang Senghui's missionary effort in South China makes it clear that the relics were neither welcomed nor treated with respect, as it is said that the emperor initially felt he'd been “exaggerated to and deceived by” (*kuadan* 誇誕) the missionary (fig. 9). I assume that this nonchalant response typified the sociocultural attitude in early Buddhist China. If this is true, it is exceedingly unlikely that the Horinger muralist was enthusiastic enough about relics to depict them, especially given the tomb's exceptionally early

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Section of the funerary banner showing the shrouded body or coffin of Lady Dai 代 on a catafalque. From Mawangdui Tomb 1, Changsha, circa 168 BCE. Hunan Provincial Museum, Changsha. After Hunan Sheng Bowuguan 湖南省博物館, *Zhongguo Kexueyuan 中國科學院*, and Kaogu Yanjiusuo 考古研究所, *Changsha Mawangdui yi hao Hanmu* 長沙馬王堆一號漢墓 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1973), vol. 2, pl. 77

date and the absence of archaeological parallels. As a matter of fact, no later Chinese tomb murals feature a motif of relics, not even those associated with known Buddhist sympathizers. Buddhist relics probably were very far from the minds of the Horinger tomb painter and his patrons.

Whether or not the term *shēli* 猙獰 appears in the inscription at all, it seems highly unlikely that the relics of a deceased person, whether the Buddha or a Buddhist saint, would have been displayed in such a fashion in an Eastern Han context. One has to be sensitive to the psychological effects that relics likely carried in society at that time. Wu Hung asserts, “We could infer that the white elephant and the relics of the Buddha also embody the meaning of *xiangrui*” [祥瑞] (auspicious omen).³⁴ But this ignores the possibility that the early Chinese had an aversion toward relics.³⁵ The idea that the occupant of the Horinger tomb would have put *the refuse of a burned corpse* (i.e., relics) into an otherwise felicitous landscape populated by auspicious symbols counters everything we know about the psychological underpinnings of Eastern Han iconography. Even if someone at Horinger knew about Buddhist relics, such a person would not necessarily have connected them with *xiangrui*. After all, the main theme of the murals, at least *grosso modo*, is the hope for postmortem immortality and comfort.³⁶ The visual representation of *dead bodies* or associated by-products is incompatible with such notions, even if the dead body in question belonged to a little-understood and thus powerfully charismatic foreign deity. Arguably, decorating the tomb of one’s ancestors with the ball-shaped remnants of a “barbarian” dead god on a platter would have been conceived as highly unfilial—the breaking of a visual taboo in the Chinese mortuary space, no matter how popular the Buddhist cult of relics may have been.³⁷ No similar representation of such a macabre theme has been attested anywhere else in Han art (fig. 10).³⁸ Was the occupant of the Horinger tomb so exceptional in his love of relics? On the contrary, we have literary evidence to demonstrate that an intellectual of a much later date did not consider relics as *xiangrui*. For example, Han Yu’s 韓愈 (768–824) anti-Buddhist memorial (819 CE) to Emperor Xianzong 憲宗 (reigned 805–20) denouncing the notorious bone relics at Famensi 法門寺 (Dharma Gate Monastery) in Fengxiang 鳳翔, Baoji 寶雞 (Shaanxi) may well be an example of such an aversion.³⁹

11

11

Elephants with multiple tusks in procession. Rubbing (Fu 傅 no. 198). From Tengzhou in Zaozhuang (Shandong), Eastern Han period. Fu Xihua 傅惜華, *Handai huaxiang quanji* 漢代畫象全集 (Beijing: Bali Daxue Beijing Hanxue Yanjiusuo 巴黎大學北京漢學研究所, 1950), pl. 113. Courtesy of the Institut des hautes études chinoises du Collège de France. IHEC/Collège de France © 2014

In light of all the problems mentioned above, it seems more probable that Yu Weichao and Wu Hung erred, and there were no relics in Horinger.

In addition to this example at Horinger, murals at other Eastern Han tombs have been associated with Buddhist relics. For example, the ceiling on the middle chamber of Dahuting M2 often is said to feature relics on a plate.⁴⁰ But I doubt this, because the claim is based on the suspicious case at Horinger, an example of circular reasoning.⁴¹ Given the research I have outlined above, we should raise questions about the validity of such claims.

Because of this, I want to return to Eastern Han society as a basis for a reconsidering the existence of early Buddhist elements. Eastern Han society was not mired in Buddhist-related mysticism or a Buddhist-hybrid religion. Thus, anyone who argues that a tomb mural has a Buddhist context should explain how the tomb was socially connected to actual Buddhist communities. Any tenuous claims should lose their appeal and should be abandoned for the time being. This is exactly the approach I propose for the Horinger tomb. By reconstructing the way in which modern scholarship became saddled with so-called Buddhist relics at Horinger, I have attempted to show the tenuousness of such claims. Li Zuozhi made the initial mistake and was prudent enough not to publish it. But then the notion that he'd virtually discarded was given wide currency by Yu Weichao in his pursuit of early Buddhist traces in China. We have seen Yu's speculation that the now-vanished *shēli* 猊狔 inscription was actually the Buddhist *shèli* 舍利; this was unverified conjecture. There is no verifiable Eastern Han archaeological evidence for this. Regrettably, Yu's claim now has taken on a life of its own and is widely accepted in Western Buddhological circles.

Erik Zürcher (1928–2008) reintroduced the allegedly Buddhist iconography in the Horinger mural to the West.⁴² He mistakenly rendered Yu Weichao's (or rather Li Zuozhi's) *shēli* 猊狔 as *shěli* 捨俐.⁴³ This caused a serious problem, for it set a precedent for adducing invalid archaeological data to strengthen the scant historiographic sources for Buddhism in Eastern Han China. When validated by such a famous sinologist as Zürcher, unreliable art historical information compounds the anachronistic biases of other scholars and becomes the basis for all sorts of further

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12

Two “four tusked” elephants and other fantastic animals. Rubbing, 94 cm (h). From Longyangdianzhen in Tengzhou. Shandong Provincial Museum. After Yu Weichao et al., eds., *Zhongguo huaxiangshi quanji* 中國畫像石全集 (Jinan 濟南: Shandong Meishu 山東美術 et al., 2000), vol. 2, p. 153, pl. 162

speculations.⁴⁴ This has affected the study of Eastern Han Buddhism and the Buddhist art of that period, if there even was such a thing. Bad art history drives out good historiography.

Having identified the methodological infelicities involved in the reading of *shēli* 猋猋, let us turn to another Buddhist controversy in the Horinger tomb. On the southern ceiling mentioned above (in fact, at an equivalent height as the claimed *shēli* 猋猋 inscription on the eastern side), there is a mural of a white elephant with an accompanying label (figs. 1 to 3). To demonstrate the elephant’s Buddhist connection, Wu Hung compares it to a well-known depiction of fanciful elephants from Tengzhou 滕州, Zaozhuang 棗莊 (Shandong), calling them “six tusked” and noting that the “six-tusked elephant, which in Indian Buddhism stood for one of the Buddha’s former incarnations, is depicted here driven as an object of tribute, a *xiangrui*, which represented Heaven’s approval of the Chinese emperor’s rule” (fig. 11).⁴⁵ Regarding those transformed elephants of Tengzhou, Wu Hung essentially is embellishing the earlier views of both Lao Gan 勞幹 (1907–2003) and Yu Weichao, but there are problems with these assertions as a whole.⁴⁶ First, it is uncertain whether the animal on the rubbing of the Tengzhou stone carvings really had six tusks. I am skeptical; only *three* tusks are shown, as each elephant is represented in profile. Since Lao Gan’s initial conjecture that there were six, both Yu Weichao and Wu Hung have blithely duplicated that number. In fact, one of the two front tusks of the leading elephant appears to come from behind the trunk. Might there actually be *four* tusks? There are indeed two four-tusked elephants carved in the contemporary stone reliefs at Longyangdianzhen 龍陽店鎮, also in Tengzhou (fig. 12). Second, even if there were six, and a six-tusked elephant stood for the Buddha’s incarnation in India, one doubts whether such an iconographic concept

was available in China, especially as early as the mid-first century CE, the date of the Tengzhou carvings and some one hundred years before any Buddhist text with reference to such elephants likely was translated into Chinese (see below).⁴⁷ Third, the fantastic menagerie or procession of auspicious animals—with or without elephants, white-skinned or not—was one of the most widespread features in Eastern Han tombs all across China.⁴⁸

To validate Wu Hung's statement at least partially, it is possible to emend whether a "white-skinned elephant" (*baixiang*) rather than a "six tusked" one often was regarded as *xiangrui* around the mid-first century CE. But Yu Weichao's assumption—and Wu Hung's tacit acceptance of it—that the Tengzhou elephants were "white" is unverifiable; we are unable to see any color on the black-ink rubbing (see fig. 11).⁴⁹ Fortunately, a group of Eastern Han tombs with stone carvings featuring traces of pigment were excavated at Dabaodang 大保當 in Shenmu 神木, Yulin 榆林 (Shaanxi) in 1996.⁵⁰ A door crossbeam from one of the tombs (M24) is decorated with the typical early imperial menagerie motif and an adorable, and yet untransformed, elephant in the center, an architectural context perhaps similar to that of the Tengzhou carvings (fig. 13). The Dabaodang elephant retains a reddish tint around the head, especially on some parts of the lips, eye, earlobe, and trunk. So was it originally pink in color?⁵¹ Should we describe the Tengzhou elephants as being *pink-skinned* instead?

Also, when reviewing Wu Hung's classical sources to find an explicit definition of the (six-tusked or albino) elephant as a *xiangrui*, one finds such references mainly in Shen Yue's 沈約 (441–513) *Furui zhi* 符瑞志, appended to the *Song shu* 宋書.⁵² This individual text from the Southern Liang 梁 (502–87) dynasty undoubtedly was exposed to the Buddhist environment, so Wu Hung's use of it might be anachronistic. As a consequence, it is hard to disprove that Shen Yue's ideas about auspicious elephants were connected to Buddhism due to centuries of cultural conflation. And this does not explain the Eastern Han representations.⁵³

Moreover, Wu Hung's abrupt morphological rendering of the Horing'er inscription (*shēli* 猗猗) as *shèli* 舍利—to strengthen his argument for the Buddhist identification of the elephant in the same tomb chamber—presents its own difficulties.⁵⁴ As we have seen, even the transcription (via Yu Weichao) of *shēli* 猗猗 by Li Zuozhi has problems; that it is freely interchangeable with *shèli* 舍利 is even more dubious. Now the Buddhist connection to Horing'er's white elephant is likely as tenuous as that of the claimed inscription of the relics.

Finally, another point needs to be addressed about the actual religious identity of the Eastern Han (white or six-tusked) elephant. I have elsewhere demonstrated that white elephants were not yet Buddhist symbols in the first century CE, and that such things as "Buddhist elephants" in Eastern Han murals are improbable, thanks

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Mahout and elephant with a reddish tint around the head. Section of a door-crossbeam, 26 cm (h). From Dabaodang M24 at Shenmu in Yulin (Shaanxi). Now in the collection of the Shaanxi Institute of Archaeology. After Shanxi Sheng Kaogu Yanjiusuo et al., *Shenmu Dabaodang* (Beijing: Kexue, 2001), color pl. 23-1

to preestablished early imperial traditions and the socially marginalized Buddhist position in China (fig. 12).⁵⁵ Nevertheless, there is one further nuance to this idea, involving once again the fantastic animals in Zhang Heng's *Xijing fu*⁵⁶:

怪獸陸梁，大雀踳踳，白象行孕，垂鼻麟困。

Strange beasts wildly capered about, and the great bird proudly strutted in.

A white elephant marched along nursing its calf, its trunk dropping and undulating.

The main problem here concerns the semantic vagueness of *yun* 孕, which David R. Knechtges translates as “to nurse.”⁵⁷ This translation seems unproblematic.⁵⁸ For example, Xue Zong's 薛綜 (died 243) commentary paraphrases⁵⁹:

大白象，從東來，當觀前，行且乳。

The great white elephant came from the East.

When it reached the front of the belvedere,⁶⁰
it marched while nursing [its calf].

The fact that Xue Zong lived only a century after Zhang Heng does not guarantee that this commentator from the Eastern Wu 吳 (229–80) was historically exact. Nevertheless, he might have caught his predecessor's implication in a manner that we might easily miss today. In this respect, it is remarkable that the use of *yun* 孕 for “nursing” mirrors Xu Shen's 許慎 (circa 55–149) curious dictionary entry on the elephant (*xiang* 象) graph.⁶¹ As I pointed out elsewhere, his major concern was with elephantine zoology, especially with the rebreeding interval of three years (*sannian yi ru* 三年一乳), and he permitted the semantic range of *ru* 乳 to overlap with *chan* 產, which was also shareable with *yun* 孕.⁶² This theme of the great nursing elephant continued to be current in the time of the compilation of the *Song shu* by Shen Yue, who stated⁶³:

巨象行乳。

The great elephant marched along, nursing [its calf].

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Elephant-shaped *zun* 尊-type wine container. Freer Gallery of Art, F1936.6 (see page 134)

Even in the sixth century, this nursing elephant did not appear in a concrete Buddhist environment but within the familiar landscape of auspicious omens. These occurrences of the same elephantine theme in the works of Xu Shen, Zhang Heng, Xue Zong, Shen Yue, and others clearly suggests that the “nurturing (or reproducing) elephant” was a common trope of long standing that went back to the second century or even earlier (fig. 14). We must remember that the elephantine habitat that Xu Shen alluded to was the exotic locale of Nan Yue 南越. The birth of an infant elephant on Han Chinese soil likely was regarded as extremely auspicious.

Interestingly, Wu Hung’s translation for Zhang Heng’s line is “the white elephant brings about conception” (*baixiang xing yun* 白象行孕).⁶⁴ This transitive use of *xing/hang* 行 seems unacceptable.⁶⁵ Moreover, even if we agreed with the rendering of *yun* as “conception,” it still would be absurd to assume that the elephant could bring it about. Wu Hung implies that Zhang is alluding to Queen Māyā’s conception of the Buddha. At this point, the problem is no longer merely linguistic, but part of the mutually supporting tangle of arguments concerning “Buddhist” iconography—arguments that I have shown lack a solid basis. Wu Hung states⁶⁶:

This idea was not a part of traditional Chinese thought.... [T]he idea that [Zhang Heng] expresses about “the white elephant bringing about conception” must have originated in Buddhist legends.

As I have just demonstrated, the motif of nurturing elephants was prevalent in Eastern Han literature. Information about the triennial breeding cycle of elephants had circulated in China well before Zhang Heng, and extensive literary and archaeological evidence confirms that elephants were known in China long before Han times (see fig. 14). No hidden Buddhist allusion can be detected between the lines of Zhang Heng’s rhapsody.⁶⁷ In fact, the parallel between the great bird and the white elephant as seen in Zhang’s rhapsody is exactly what is attested in the Horinger murals (fig. 3). For this reason, we can rule out Buddhist conjectures concerning the Horinger tomb.

In addition, the textual basis for Wu Hung’s notion that the “Buddhist elephant brings about conception” does not date to Zhang Heng’s lifetime. In fact, Wu refers to Yu Weichao for the narrative of Māyā’s conception through the avatar of the white elephant, and Yu’s *locus classicus*, the *Xiuxing benqi jing* 修行本起經 (T184), is no longer accepted as an Eastern Han text, although traditionally it has been attributed to Kang Mengxiang 康孟祥 [var. °-祥] (active late second century).⁶⁸ But even if we wanted to advocate an early third-century date for this Buddhist biography, that date is also too late, postdating Zhang Heng’s

rhapsody by a century. In fact, Zhang Heng's work long predates any extant Buddhist translation into Chinese. It therefore seems ill-advised to insist that there was an established Buddhist tradition by 100 CE that could have exerted any iconography-changing (or paradigm-shifting) influence over a mainstream Chinese writer such as Zhang Heng.

Is it possible that the concept of the Buddhist elephant was transmitted orally during the Eastern Han period and was not documented in any way? Such an idea is pertinent to any art historical study of Buddhist iconography. Indeed, oral transmission was closely related not only to literary tradition but also to visual conventions. We must always consider the possibility that a certain visual iconography was based on oral transmission, or vice versa, without (or before) being passed onto literary texts. But if an intangible oral tradition is the only basis for the theories of Yu Weichao and Wu Hung, why frame them with such "arduous" textual and historical research? Since that research is questionable and only muddies the waters, it might have been preferable to investigate possible early Buddhist and Indian connections in early imperial Chinese art. However, such an argument would fail to convince many scholars. I, for one, question whether Buddhist oral tradition accounts for observable phenomena better explained by the rich, preexisting traditions of auspicious (white-skinned or six-tusked) elephants, which were well-established in literary and artistic realms at least a couple of centuries before the spread of Buddhism in China. Of course, Buddhism existed in India well before the founding of the Chinese empire, and India might have been the ultimate origin of all the elephants depicted in early imperial China. Nevertheless, when the first Buddhist translators began to circulate their initial works for a Chinese audience, these putative Indian elephants already would have been naturalized—after four centuries or so—as thoroughly Chinese auspicious imagery. Moreover, our current state of scholarship does not facilitate the search for archaeological evidence for the transmission of Indian elephant motifs in pre-Qin 秦 (before 221 BCE) China.

Thus I believe the Eastern Han elephants were ramifications of a demonstratively earlier tradition that was not particularly propelled by the social intrusion of Buddhism into China. Not a single scholar has convincingly proved that those elephants had a Buddhist origin. Despite this discouraging conclusion about the social status of Eastern Han Buddhism, however, the preceding analysis conveys one invaluable lesson about the study of early Chinese art: the co-relationship between auspicious symbols and their colorful or directional orientation. For instance, Wu Hung claims that "white elephants as a *xiangrui* from the West was already a popular concept among the Chinese of the second century B.C."⁶⁹ But this claim, however valid it is in its own context, must be balanced against Xue

Zong's conceptualization that the "great white elephant came from the East" (*da bai xiang cong dong lai* 大白象從東來).⁷⁰ That is to say, whether they came from the West or the East, elephants must have been regarded as auspicious in second-century China. More generally, the color-direction coordinate (what I call the chromato-directional correlation) of a symbol does not necessarily indicate its historical origin.

To conclude, the Eastern Han murals at Horinger do not provide any grounds for a Buddhist reading. The inscription likely was misread by a local archaeologist working in a darkened tomb, and in any case, nothing justifies its identification with the Buddhist term *śarīra*. Unfortunately, such art historical misidentifications have distorted our picture of early Chinese Buddhism. Now, however, there is an opportunity for a fresh scrutiny of early Buddhist art in China.

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NOTES

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I developed an earlier version of this paper, "Cremation Traces Among Auspicious Omens? Issues on the Introduction of Buddhist Arts of Death to China," as part of my dissertation, "The Genesis of Image Worship: Epigraphic Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2011), 171–90, and read it at the 2012 annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies. I thank Melia Belli for including me on the panel on the Arts of Death in Asia and her suggestions thereafter. I also acknowledge Lothar von Falkenhausen, Jonathan A. Silk, Adam D. Smith, Lai Guolong 來國龍, Eric M. Greene, W. South Coblin, Albert E. Dien, Stuart Sargent, Paul Harrison, Rhi Juhung 李柱亨, and Nam Tongsin 南東信, who shared their wisdom throughout the various stages of the manuscript.

- 1 Yu Weichao, "Dong Han fojiao tuxiang kao" 東漢佛教圖像考 (Notes on the Eastern Han Dynasty Images of Buddha), *Wenwu* 文物 288 (1980.5), 68–77. For Yu Weichao as one of most accomplished practitioners of modern archaeology in China, see Lothar von Falkenhausen, "Yu Weichao (1933–2003)," *Artibus Asiae* 64, no. 2 (2004), 295–312.
- 2 See Wu Hung, "Buddhist Elements in Early Chinese Art (2nd and 3rd Centuries A.D.)," *Artibus Asiae* 47, nos. 3–4 (1986), 263–352; Marylin M. Rhie, *Early Buddhist Art of China and Central Asia*, vol. 1: *Later Han, Three Kingdoms and Western Chin in China and Bactria to Shan-shan in Central Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Stanley K. Abe, *Ordinary Images* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2002), 10–101.
- 3 Wu Hung, "Buddhist Elements."
- 4 See Nei Menggu Zizhiqu Bowuguan Wenwu Gongzuodui 內蒙古自治區博物館文物工作隊, *Helinge'er Hanmu bihua* 和林格爾漢墓壁畫 (Murals of the

Eastern Han tomb at Horing'er) (Beijing: Wenwu, 1978); Gai Shanlin 蓋山林, *Helinge'er Hanmu bihua* (Hohhot: Nei Menggu Renmin, 1978); Chen Yongzhi 陳永志 and Kuroda Akira 黒田彰 eds., *Helinge'er Hanmu bihua Xiaozhi zhuan tu jilu* 和林格爾漢墓壁畫孝子傳圖輯錄 (Compilation of the filial sons' cycle in the murals of the Han tomb at Horing'er) (Beijing: Wenwu, 2009).

- 5 Yu Weichao, "Dong Han," 68–72. Chen Yongzhi et al., *Helinge'er*, 80, 169.
- 6 The latter graph is, however, not unambiguously *xiang* 象, though such a reading seems plausible given that the graph occurs next to the painting of the white elephant itself. For example, Gai Shanlin (*Helinge'er*, 7, 74, 82–83) offered *yang* 養 instead, while conceding that it might still stand for "elephant." On purely graphical grounds, something similar to *chun* 春 or *quan* 券 is also feasible. According to Yu Weichao ("Dong Han," 69), the preliminary reading of the excavation team was indeed *quan*. Nei Menggu Zizhiqu Bowuguan, *Helinge'er*, 34, introduced yet another epigraphic possibility to this elephant glyph, which looks like the *quan* but with its *dao* 刀 component replaced with *gen* 艮, thus similar to *juan* 眷 or Gai's *yang*. See Minku Kim, "The Genesis of Image Worship: Epigraphic Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of California, Los Angeles, 2011), 156–71.
- 7 Yu Weichao, "Dong Han," 68–72. The abbreviation EMC stands for Early Middle Chinese, the system of reconstructed sound proposed by Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *Lexicon of Reconstructed Pronunciation in Early Middle, Late Middle Chinese, and Early Mandarin* (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1991), 278, 188–90. Unfortunately, neither *shē* 猓 nor *lì* 獒 was given in Xu

Shen's *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字. See Wang Li 王力 et al., eds., *Wang Li gu hanyu zidian* 王力古漢語字典 (Wang Li's Lexicon of ancient Chinese) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2000), 694–95, 697. Neither form appears in Bernhard Karlgren, *Grammata Serica Recensa* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1972), 327; W. South Coblin, *A Handbook of Eastern Han Sound Glosses* (Hong Kong: Chinese Univ. Press, 1983), 277, 282; Axel Schuessler, *Minimal Old Chinese and Later Han Chinese: A Companion to Grammata Serica Recensa* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 394, 404; or Tilmann Vetter, *A Lexicographical Study of An Shigao's and His Circle's Chinese Translations of Buddhist Texts* (Tokyo: International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies [ICPBS], 2012), 261–62. It is hence beyond my competency to give any tentative reconstruction of their Eastern Han or EMC sound values here. Rather than let this crucial point slip through, I made an inquiry to W. South Coblin, who shared his expertise and supported my argument, saying, “The compound, as an animal name, is otherwise known only from exceedingly late texts and does not appear to have any identifiable existence in antiquity. And since it does not occur in any Qieyun [切韻] System [QYS] lexica, there is in fact no viable way to assign it a reading within that system, regardless of whose QYS transcription one uses. Additionally, the fact that the original inscription has been lost, if in fact it ever really existed at all, would in any case require us to discount the entire Buddhological argument as overly conjectural.”

8 Yu Weichao, “Dong Han,” 68.

9 Nei Menggu Bowuguan, *Helinge'er*. Yu Weichao, “Dong Han,” 77 n. 4, also noted that there were inconsistencies between

this report and the “in-situ account” (*zai muzhong suozuo biji* 在墓中所作筆記) drafted in the summer of 1973. Although Yu does not clarify individual discrepancies, the most outstanding difference seems to center on the alleged existence of this *shēli* 猓猓 cartouche.

10 According to Yu Weichao (“Dong Han,” 68–69), this manuscript was titled “Helin Handai bihuamu chuci diaochaji 和林漢代壁畫墓初次調查記” (Preliminary field notes on the Han mural tomb at Horin[ger]), which to date has not been published.

11 Yu Weichao, “Dong Han,” 68–69. Translation is mine.

12 Yu Weichao, “Dong Han,” 68: “*Genju ji yi suo zuo bucong jilu* 根據記憶所作補充記錄.” Italics are mine.

13 Yu Weichao, “Dong Han,” 68–72.

14 See Jonathan A. Silk, *Body Language: Indic śarīra and Chinese shēli in the Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra and Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (Tokyo: ICPBS, 2006), 11 *et passim*.

15 T8, no. 224 (II), 432: a15–20. See Karashima Seishi 辛島静志, *A Critical Edition of Lokakṣema's Translation of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (Tokyo: International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology [IRIAB], 2011), 67–68. Translation is Silk, *Body Language*, 40, with a few of my own emendations, which are intended to maintain Silk's sense.

16 This *shen-sheli* 身舍利 finds parallelism in Zhi Qian's 支謙 *Da mingdu jing* 大明度經. T8, no. 225 (II) 484: a17 (“不用是身舍利得佛也”). This is no surprise: we now consider this to be a revision (retranslation) of Lokakṣema's archaic *Daoxing banruo jing* rather than a new version of his own translation of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*. See Jan Nattier, *A Guide to the Earliest Chinese Buddhist Translations:*

Texts from the Eastern Han and Three Kingdoms Periods (Tokyo: IRIAB, 2008), 73–89, 116–48. Silk, *Body Language*, 38–39, offers an appositional compound of *ātmabhava-śarīra* for Sanskrit correspondence to *shen-sheli*.

17 Here and below, an asterisk indicates a hypothetical reconstruction following the convention of Buddhist philology.

18 The “ball-shaped objects on a plate” is from Wu Hung, “Buddhist Elements,” 268; Wu Hung, *The Wu Liang Shrine: The Ideology of Early Chinese Pictorial Art* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1989), 139, which was taken from Li Zuozhi's “globular items” (*yuanqixing de dongxi* 圓球形的東西) in a “*pan*-vessel shaped thing” (*panzhuangwu* 盤狀物). See Yu Weichao, “Dong Han,” 69.

19 For the general program of the Horinger murals, see Anneliese Gutkind Bulling, “The Eastern Han Tomb at Ho-lin-ko-êrh (Holingol),” *Archives of Asian Art* 31 (1977/78), 79–103; Jiang Wei [江蔚], “Images of Historical Figures in the Helinge'er Tomb,” an unpublished conference paper read at the 2013 annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies in San Diego.

20 For these tombs, see Hsin-mei Agnes Hsu [Xu Xinmei 徐心眉], “Pictorial Eulogies in Three Eastern Han Tombs at Wangdu and Anping” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Pennsylvania, 2004), 85; Michèle Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens, “Two Eastern Han Sites: Dahuting and Houshiguo,” in *China's Early Empires: A Re-appraisal*, ed. Michael Nylan and Michael Loewe (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 83–113, esp. 92. For the iconography of deer as door guardians, see Hayashi Minao 林巳奈夫, “Monban to mon wo mamoru kami 門番と門を守る神,” in *Ishi ni kizamareta sekai: Gazōseki ga kataru kodai Chūgoku no seikatsu to shisō*

- 石に刻まれた世界: 画像石が語る古代中国の生活と思想 (Tōkyō: Tōhō Shoten, 1992), 36–49.
- 21 See above, n. 11.
- 22 For the cult of the Queen Mother of the West, see inter alia Suzanne Cahill, *Transcendence and Divine Passion: The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1993).
- 23 Translation by David R. Knechtges, *Wen xuan or Selections of Refined Literature*, vol. 1: *Rhapsodies on Metropolises and Capitals* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1982), 233. Diacritics are mine. For the discussion of the *hánli* 含利 monster, see Derk Bodde, *Festivals in Classical China: New Year and Other Annual Observances During the Han Dynasty, 206 B.C.–A.D. 220* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975), 151–63. Also see Erik Zürcher, “Han Buddhism and the Western Region,” in *Thought and Law in Qin and Han China: Studies Dedicated to Anthony Hulsewé on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. W. L. Idema and Erik Zürcher (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 160–61 (rpt. in *Buddhism in China: Collected Papers of Erik Zürcher*, ed. Jonathan Silk [Leiden: Brill, 2013], 355–56).
- 24 Beside the variant readings of *hánli* 含利 vs. *shèli* 舍利, this passage (LL. 719–2) involves another serious corruption, that is, *hua* 化 (change) vs. *bei* 北 (north), the situation that reaffirms the level of difficulty in dealing with text criticism. Moreover, adding more problems than solutions to the matter, Knechtges, *Wen xuan*, vol. 1 (1982), 232, promotes the idea of Fujita Toyohachi 藤田豊八, “Zen Kan ni okeru seinan kaijō kōtsū no kiroku” 前漢に於ける西南海上交通の記録 (Records on the traffic between the West and South Seas during the former Han), *Geibun* 芸文 5, nos. 10–11 (1914), 301–25, 405–14 [rpt. in *Tōzai kōshōshi no kenkyū: Nankai hen* 東西交渉史の研究: 南海篇 (Tōkyō: Oka Shoin 岡書院, 1933), 95–135, esp. 123–24], who suggested long ago that this variant of *shèli* 舍利 was “another form” of a gloss to indicate the regions of Shénlí [EMC *dzim liǎ/li*] 諶離 by the Irrawaddy River, later known as Xīlì 悉利. Fujita’s argument may have certain validity on the etymology of *hánli*/*shèli*, but does not help our purpose because of the unexplained outstanding phonetic and graphic gaps between *shèli* 舍利 and *shénli* 諶離.
- 25 Although Cai Zhi’s text in its entirety has been lost, its reference to *shèli*/*hánli* is, for instance, quoted in a commentary to Fan Ye’s 范曄 (398–445) *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 10, *ji* 紀 5 (q.v. Xiaohan Di 孝安帝), 205: “The beast of *shèli* comes from the western direction” (舍利之獸從西方來). Bodde, *Festivals*, 152ff., is determined to alternate this reading of *shèli* 舍利 consistently with *hánli* 含利 even when he cites Sun Xingyan’s 孫星衍 (1753–1781) reconstructed collection of the *Hanguan dianzhi yishi xuanyong*, where the variant reading of *hánli* 含利 is not *prima facie* recognized.
- 26 For such themes, see inter alia Leslie V. Wallace, “Chasing the Beyond: Depictions of Hunting in Eastern Han Dynasty Tomb Reliefs (25–220 CE) from Shaanxi and Shanxi” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Pittsburgh, 2010).
- 27 In contrast, Bodde, *Festivals*, 155, views that *hánli* 含利 “has a more Chinese ring to it” and is the “Sinification” of *shèli* 舍利.
- 28 See E. G. Pulleyblank, “Chinese and Indo-Europeans,” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, nos. 1–2 (1966), 9–39, esp. 34; “Zou 鄒 and Lu 魯 and the Sinification of Shandong,” in *Chinese Language, Thought, and Culture: Nivison and His Critics*, ed. Philip J. Ivanhoe (Chicago: Open Court, 1996), 39–57, esp. 43.
- 29 William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms with Sanskrit and English Equivalents and a Sanskrit-Pali Index* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1937), 278–9, q.v. 舍利. Bodde, *Festivals*, 154–55.
- 30 See Ruan Rongchun 阮榮春, “Dong Han fojiao tuxiang zhiyi: Yu Weichao xiansheng shangque” 東漢佛教圖像質疑: 與俞偉超先生商榷 (Questioning Notes on the Eastern Han Dynasty Images of Buddha: Discussion with Yu Weichao), *Dongnan wenhua* 東南文化 3 (1986.2), 205–12, esp. 206–7.
- 31 Silk, *Body Language*, 53.
- 32 For meanings of *shèli* 舍利 in translated Chinese Buddhism, see above, n. 16. See Karashima Seishi, *A Glossary of Lokakṣema’s Translation of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (Tokyo: IRIAB, 2010), 413–14.
- 33 The account is found in Sengyou’s 僧祐 (445–518) *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集. T55, no. 2145 (XIII) 96: b7 *et seq.* An account that closely parallels this is found in Huijiao’s 慧皎 *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳. T50, no. 2059 (I), 325: b6 *et seq.* The latter version was fully translated in Édouard Chavannes, “Seng-Houei,” *T’oung pao*, 2nd ser., vol. 10 (1909), 199–212. For Kang Senghui’s Sogdian network, see Étienne de la Vaissière, *Histoire des marchands sogdiens* (Paris: Institut des hautes études chinoise, 2002), 77–80 (trans. by James Ward, *Sogdian Traders: A History* [Leiden: Brill, 2005], 71–74).
- 34 Wu Hung, “Buddhist Elements,” 271. For *xiangrui*, see inter alia Hans Bielenstein, “An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts’ien-Han-Shu,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* [BMFEA] 22 (1950), 127–43; Bielenstein and Nathan

- Sivin, "Further Comments on the Use of Statistics in the Study of Han Dynasty Portents," *The Journal of the American Oriental Society* 97 (1977), 185–87; Bielenstein, "Han Portents and Prognostications," *BMFEA* 56 (1984), 97–112; Martin Kern, "Religious Anxiety and Political Interest in Western Han Omen Interpretation: The Case of the Han Wudi Period (141–87 B.C.)," *Chūgoku shigaku* 中国史學 10 (2000), 1–31. These omens are largely canonized in the "Furui 符瑞" section (*zhi* 志) of Shen Yue's 沈約 (441–512) *Song shu* 宋書. For an overview of the latter, see Tiziana Lippiello, "Shen Yue and His Treatise in *Songshu*," in *Auspicious Omens and Miracles in Ancient China* (Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica, 2001), 113–54.
- 35 See n. 33.
- 36 For the concepts of tombs in early China, see inter alia Lai Guolong, "The Baoshan Tomb: Religious Transitions in Art, Ritual, and Text during the Warring States (475–221 BCE)" (Ph.D. diss., UCLA, 2002); Lothar von Falkenhausen, *Chinese Society in the Age of Confucius (1000–250 BC): The Archaeological Evidence* (Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, Univ. of California, 2006), 312–16; Alain Thote, "Les pratiques funéraires Shang et Zhou: Interprétation des vestiges matériels," in *Religion et société en Chine ancienne et médiévale*, ed. John Lagerwey (Paris: Institut Ricci, 2008), 47–76 (trans. by Margaret McIntoshi, "Shang and Zhou Funeral Practices: Interpretation of Material Vestiges," in *Early Chinese Religion*, pt. 1: Shang through Han [1250 BC–220 AD], ed. John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski [Leiden: Brill, 2009], 103–42).
- 37 See Gregory Schopen, "Burial *Ad Sanctos* and the Physical Presence of the Buddha in Early Indian Buddhism: A Study in the Archaeology of Religions," *Religion* 17 (1987), 193–225 (rpt. in *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India* [Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 1997], 114–47).
- 38 An interesting exception may be, however, the lower portion of the Mawangdui 馬王堆 M1 banner, where the shrouded body or coffin of Lady Dai 代 on a catafalque seems to be viewed from below. See Michael Loewe, "The Painting from Tomb No. 1, Ma-wang-tui," in *Ways to Paradise: The Chinese Quest for Immortality* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), 17–59, esp. 45–46; Sofukawa Hiroshi 曾布川寛, *Konronzan e no shōsen: Kodai Chūgokujin ga egaita shigo no sekai* 崑崙山への昇仙: 古代中国人が描いた死後の世界 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1981); Anne Birrell, "Return to the Cosmic Eternal: The Representation of a Soul's Journey to Paradise in a Chinese Funerary Painting, c. 168 BC," *Cosmos: The Yearbook of the Traditional Cosmology Society* 13, no. 1 (1997), 3–30; Huang Bingyi [黃冰逸], "From Chu to Western Han: Re-reading Mawangdui" (Ph.D. diss., Yale Univ., 2005), 248–62.
- 39 "Lun fogu biao 論佛骨表," *Changli Xiansheng wenji* 昌黎先生文集 39, in *Zhonghua zaizao shanben* 中華再造善本, ser. 4, vol. 33 (Beijing: Beijing Tushuguan Chubanshe, 2002), 14, 2v–4v. For translations, see inter alia Edwin O. Reischauer, *Ennin's Travels in T'ang China* (New York: Ronald Press, 1955), 221–24.
- 40 Wen Yucheng 溫玉成, "Gong yuan yi zhi san shiji Zhongguo de xianfo moshi 公元1至3世紀中國的仙佛模式" (The Dao-Buddhist motifs in first- to third-century China), *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 (1999.1), 159–70 (rpt. in *Zhongguo fojiao yu kaogu* 中國佛教與考古 [Chinese Buddhism and Archaeology] [Beijing: Zongjiao Wenhua], 73–94).
- 41 See Kim, "The Genesis of Image Worship," 178, n. 200.
- 42 Zürcher, "Han Buddhism."
- 43 See Zürcher, "Han Buddhism," 164, also cited unchecked by Silk, *Body Language*, (2006), 53, n. 143. The same error was repeated by Max Deeg, "Why Is the Buddha Riding on an Elephant? The Bodhisattva's Conception and the Change of Motive" in *The Birth of the Buddha: Proceedings of the Seminar Held in Lumbini, Nepal, October 2004*, ed. Christoph Cueppers, Max Deeg, and Hubert Durt (Lumbini, Nepal: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2010), 114, n. 83.
- 44 For his magisterial contribution to the field, see J. A. Silk, "In Memoriam, Erik Zürcher," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 31, nos. 1–2 (2008), 3–22.
- 45 Wu Hung, "Buddhist Elements," 272–73.
- 46 Lao Kan [Gan 勞幹], "Six-tusked elephants on a Han bas-relief," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 17, nos. 3–4 (1954), 366–69; Yu Weichao, "Dong Han," 74.
- 47 Lao Gan dates the Tengzhou carving to the reign of Zhang Di 章帝 (75–88 CE); Wu Hung accepts this. The legendary *Sishi'er zhang jing* 四十二章經 may or may not date to that time, but that is beside the point, because this purportedly early text lacks any reference to elephants. See Henri Maspero, "Le songe et l'ambassade de l'empereur Ming," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* 10 (1910), 95–130; Tokiwa Daijō 常盤大定, "Kan Mei kyūhōsetsu no kenkyū 漢明求法説の研究" (Study on the story of Han Ming Di's Buddhist mission), *Tōyō gaku* 東洋學報 10 (1920), 25–41; Liang Qichao 梁啟超, "Fojiao zhi chu shuru

- 佛教之初輸入,” *Gaizhao* 改造 3, no. 12 (1921), 69–79 [rpt. in *Foxue yanjiu shibapian* 佛學研究十八篇 (Shanghai: Zhonghua, 1936), 1–23, esp. 5–7]; Robert H. Sharf, “The Scripture in Forty-two Sections,” in *Religions of China in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1996), 360–71.
- 48 For chimerization, hybridity, and other relevant issues relating to animal deformation, see Helen E. Fernald, “Two Colossal Stone Chimeras from a Chinese Tomb,” *The Museum Journal* 18, no. 2 (1927), 159–73; Alfred Salmony, *Antler and Tongue: An Essay on Ancient Chinese Symbolism and Its Implications* (Ascona: Artibus Asiae, 1954); Michael Loewe, “Man and Beast: The Hybrid in Early Chinese Art and Literature,” *Numen* 25, no. 2 (1978), 97–117 [rpt. in *Divination, Mythology and Monarchy in Han China* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), 38–54]; Barry Till, “Some Observations on Stone Winged Chimeras at Ancient Chinese Tomb Sites,” *Artibus Asiae* 42, no. 4 (1980), 261–81; Roel Sterckx, *The Animal and the Daemon in Early China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002).
- 49 Yu Weichao, “Dong Han,” 74.
- 50 Shaanxi Sheng Kaogu Yanjiusuo 陝西省考古研究所 and Yulin Shi Wenwu Guanli Weiyuanhui 榆林市文物管理委員會, “Shaanxi Shenmu Dabaodang di 11 hao, di 23 hao Han huaxiangshimu fajue jianbao 陝西神木大保當第 11 號, 第 23 號漢畫像石墓發掘簡報,” *Wenwu* (1997.9), 26–35; Shaanxi Sheng Kaogu Yanjiusuo ed., *Shaanxi Shenmu Dabaodang Han caihui huaxiangshi* 陝西神木大保當漢彩繪畫像石 (Chongqing 重慶: Chongqing Chubanshe, 2000); Shaanxi Sheng Kaogu Yanjiusuo and Yulin Shi Wenwu Guanli Weiyuanhui Bangongshi 榆林市文物管理委員會辦公室 eds., *Shenmu Dabaodang: Handai chengzhi yu muzang kaogu baogao* 神木大保當: 漢代城址與墓葬考古報告 (Beijing: Kexue, 2001). For a contemporary tomb nearby with similar iconography and style, see inter alia Shaanxi Sheng Bowuguan 陝西省博物館 and Shaanxi Sheng Wenguanhui Xiezu Xiaozu 陝西省文管會寫作小組, “Mizhi Dong Han huaxiangshimu fajue jianbao 米脂東漢畫象石墓發掘簡報,” *Wenwu* 190 (1972.3), 69–74.
- 51 A few local scholars have stated that the elephant is white-skinned, for the rest of its body seems to have a whitish hue. See Wang Weilin 王煒林, “Shaanxi Shenmu Dabaodang Han caihui huaxiangshi,” *Shoucangjia* 收藏家 (1998.4), 6–8, esp. 6; Qiu Nan 邱楠, Liang Zhaozhua 梁昭華, and Wang Yifeng 王軼峰, “Shaanbei Shenmu Daobaodang Han huaxiangshi xingzhi chutan 陝北神木大保當漢畫像石形質初探,” *Sichou zhi lu* 絲綢之路 165 (2009.20), 17–21, esp. 19. But this white tone is spread all throughout the lintel, including the rugged background. I therefore suspect that the slab was whitewashed for priming, and that most of the actual coloring, applied on top of the whitewash, has not been preserved. Other carvings from Dabaodang in general seem to have had the white primer applied to them. It is probably too conjectural to argue about the elephant’s iconography based on the occurrence of this white primer. Coincidental as it may be, elephants in pink, reddish brown, terracotta color, etc., often feature in several South and Southeast Asian traditions, whether Buddhist or not. See inter alia S. K. Gupta, *Elephant in Indian Art and Mythology* (New Delhi: Abhinav, 1983), 54; Rita Ringis, *Elephants of Thailand in Myth, Art, and Reality* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), 105, 116, et passim. Nonetheless, it would be far-fetched to claim Dabaodang’s elephant to be connected to such Indian-derived iconography.
- 52 See Wu Hung, *Wu Liang Shrine*, 233–44.
- 53 Zürcher, “Han Buddhism,” 164–65, however, accepts the Tengzhou elephants as “Buddhist” elements.
- 54 Wu Hung, “Buddhist Elements,” 268, 307; Wu Hung, *Wu Liang*, 139, 397, q.v. *she-li* 舍利.
- 55 See Minku Kim, “Return of the Elephants: Problems of Mistaken Buddhist Identities for the Art of Early Imperial China” (2011), unpublished paper presented as part of Stanford University’s Silk Road Lecture Series, organized by Albert E. Dien. Also see Kim, “The Genesis of Image Worship,” 135–71.
- 56 Translation is from Knechtges, *Wen xuan*, vol. 1, 231–33.
- 57 Erwin von Zach (1935), translated this *yun* 孕 to suckle (säugen) in *Die chinesische Anthologie: Übersetzungen aus dem Wen-Hsüan von Erwin von Zach, 1872–1942*, vol. 1, ed. Ilse Martin Fang (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958), 15.
- 58 For example, Wang Li, 213, q.v., gives a single definition of *huaitai* 懷胎: to be pregnant. On the other hand, Bodde (*Festivals in Classical China*, 160, n. 83) suggests *ying* 盈 (EMC *jiajñ*) in place of *yun* 孕 (EMC *jñh*) and translates: “A white elephant moves *grandly*” (italics are mine). See Pulleyblank, *Lexicon*, 375, 390. Nevertheless, this alternative seems superfluous in this context.
- 59 Translation adapted from Knechtges, *Wen xuan*, vol. 1, 232.
- 60 For this particular belvedere, Xue Zong might have alluded to the famous elephant-viewing point of Guanxiang-guan 觀象觀 in Emperor Wu Di’s 武帝 (reigned 141–87 BCE) Shanglinyuan 上林苑. See Sanfu huangtu 三輔黃圖 4; Song Minqiu 宋敏求, *Chang’an zhi* 長安志 4, 7.

- 61 “象; 長鼻牙, 南越大獸, 三年一乳” (The elephant; with a long nose and tusks; is a large animal from/of Nan Yue; bearing single young once every three years [translation is mine]), *Shuowen jiezi*, 9B: 45r (6102). Kim, “The Genesis of Image Worship,” 137ff.
- 62 See Kim, “Return of the Elephants.”
- 63 *Song shu* 19, *Zhi* 志 9, *Yue* 樂 1, 546 (“魏晉訖江左, 猶有夏育扛鼎, 巨象行乳, 神龜扑舞, 背負靈岳, 桂樹白雪, 畫地成川之樂焉”). An almost-verbatim parallel is found in Fang Xuanling’s 房玄齡 (579–648) *Jin shu* 晉書 23, *Zhi* 13, *Yue xia* 下, 718 (“魏晉訖江左, 猶有夏育扛鼎, 巨象行乳, 神龜扑舞, 背負靈嶽, 桂樹白雪, 畫地成川之樂”), cited by Zürcher, “Han Buddhism,” 161, n. 12. Zürcher mistakenly renders this twice-attested *juxiang* 巨象 as *baixiang* 白象, taking it as evidence that confirms Yu Weichao’s Buddhist reading of the iconography at Horinger.
- 64 Wu Hung, “Buddhist Elements,” 271.
- 65 Zürcher, “Han Buddhism,” 160, favors Wu Hung’s translation, which he slightly modifies to “the white elephant effecting pregnancy,” over Knechtges’ translation, which I consider superior.
- 66 Wu Hung, “Buddhist Elements,” 271–72.
- 67 As a matter of fact, Zhang Heng’s *Xijing fu* might be not completely devoid of Buddhist rapport or Indic terminology. For instance, many scholars agree that its reference to *sangmen* 桑門 would be an early transliteration of *śramaṇa*. See E. Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, 3rd rev. ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 29; Knechtges, *Wen xuan*, vol. 1, 236; E. Pulleyblank, “Stages in the transcription of Indian Words in Chinese from Han to Tang,” *Veröffentlichungen der Societas Uralo-Altaica* 16 (1989), 78. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the other images in Zhang’s rhapsody should be interpreted as Buddhist elements.
- 68 Wu Hung, “Buddhist Elements,” 271. See Nattier, *A Guide*, 108. Recently, Deeg, “Why is the Buddha,” esp. 108, 114, has investigated the Chinese inclusion of the bodhisattva as the rider of the elephant in connection with linguistic issues, subscribing to the so-called Gāndhāri hypothesis of early Chinese Buddhist translations. But Deeg’s dating of the *Xiuxing benqi jing* to the Eastern Han may be anachronistic, and this has led to a circular argument regarding the “Buddhist” iconography of the Horinger tomb.
- 69 Wu Hung, “Buddhist Elements,” 272.
- 70 Wu Hung, “Buddhist Elements,” 272. But Wu Hung’s basis for this impression, i.e., Emperor Wu Di’s *xiang zai yu, bai ji xi* 象載瑜, 白集西 was likely not about the white elephant at all but rather about an elephant carriage or howdah (*xiangzai* 象載). See Kim, “The Genesis of Image Worship,” 135ff.