

Migrants or Monks

The problems of a migration scenario in first to fourth century Caḍota by the Niya River

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Abstract: In the past decades migration has been the dominant explanation employed by scholars to explain how the Kharosthi script and other innovations from North-West India spread to the Tarim Basin region during the first centuries CE. This article is a case study which seeks to challenge this migration scenario, based on a close study of the textual and material evidence available from the Krorainian Kingdom which occupied parts of the Southern Tarim Basin in antiquity. First evidence which challenges the migration scenario is presented, looking both at linguistic and literary evidence, as well as evidence for continuity in local practice and belief. An alternative scenario based on exchange and interaction is proposed towards the end of the article, arguing that to suppose large scale migration is unnecessary to explain the phenomenon at hand. For this alternative the article draw upon ideas from recent archaeological studies on the pre-historic Central Eurasia.

In late January 1901, Sir Aurel Stein began exploring a site of ancient ruins north of the village of Niya, now in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region of China. Stein's was one of the first scientific expeditions into the Tarim Basin, a large drainage basin nestled between some of the most imposing mountain ranges in the world, namely the Himalaya and Kunlun to the south, the Pamir plateau to the west and the Tianshan and Altai mountains to the north. The region that Stein befittingly called Innermost Asia has historically been an arid region dominated by the vast Taklamakan desert, thus forcing humans to settle in clusters along the foothills of the mountains and near the many rivers that flow into the basin. After being guided north from the village of Niya along one of these rivers, Stein's expedition eventually came upon the remnants of several ancient buildings still clearly visible amongst the sand dunes. The site proved to be a rich archaeological discovery, and to Stein's joy, it also contained a wealth of

ancient documents, many of them very well preserved. Though not as well publicised as some of the more prominent Silk Road sites, such as Dunhuang or Turfan, Stein's discoveries and those of subsequent expeditions resulted in the Niya site¹ being one of the best documented sites of the Tarim Basin and the ancient Silk Routes.² The town, called Caḍota in the documents, was a small community at the edge of the Kingdom of

¹ In this article I have chosen to use the name Caḍota when speaking of the historical town/region while I use Niya to refer specifically to the archaeological site found by Stein north of present day Niya/Minfeng.

² Stein's expedition is covered in detail in his book, *Ancient Khotan*. Several authors have given detailed accounts of the history of the Tarim Basin. Amongst these, Valerie Hansen's *The Silk Road* and Christoph Baumer's *The History of Central Asia*, are the most recent and up-to-date works. Detailed discussions on the Caḍota community can be found in Christopher Atwood's *Life in Third-fourth Century Cadh'ota* and Mariner Erza Padwa's dissertation *An Archaic Fabric: Culture and Landscape in an Early Inner Asian Oasis*.

Kroraina, known to Chinese historians as Loulan and later Shanshan. Sites along the Niya River appear to have been settled since at least the middle of the second millennium BCE³ but the site of Caḍota was inhabited in the first four or five centuries CE before being abandoned.⁴ Judging from the many documents pertaining to taxation and transactions, the majority of the population were farmers, primarily growing a wide variety of crops and practising animal husbandry, supplementing with several other products such as wine and textiles. The documents reveal that the Caḍotans were Buddhists, monks and their community (*Sangha*) played an active part in the documentary evidence and two stupas were also uncovered. In addition, the Caḍotans also held onto old gods and beliefs.⁵ Although it was perhaps initially independent, the town of Caḍota, at the time its documents were written, was ruled by various governors and officials in the name of the king of Kroraina. The royal court was in frequent contact with their officials and the locals could appeal their grievances directly to the king or to a local representative who pronounced judgement according to established laws and regulations. Indeed, the vast majority of documents uncovered relate to various legal problems, crimes and official duties facing the local officials.

The documents from Caḍota therefore offered scholars a wealth of information on the local people, their administration, religion, sources of sustenance and above all their daily lives and problems. But since their discovery, the documents have also perplexed scholars. Stein, who was well-versed in the ancient languages of India, quickly recognized the writing on the documents as being mainly in the Kharosthi

script once in use in North-West India and the language written as being a form of Prakrit. The find delighted him and intrigued him, and he was quick to remark,

..., there seemed enough in the first day's discoveries to justify the conclusion that, with the Kharosthi script transplanted from the extreme North-West of India, an early form of Indian speech had also been brought into use within the territories of ancient Khotan, probably from the same region. Such a fact could only be accounted for by historical events of far-reaching importance, or else by ethnic movements little suspected hitherto.⁶

Stein here very eloquently expressed the question that the discovery of the Kharosthi documents raised amongst scholars both of the Kharosthi language and of ancient eastern Central Asia in general – namely, how and why the Kharosthi script and the Prakrit language of North-West India had penetrated so deeply into the Tarim Basin, almost to the border of ancient China. Several scholars have discussed this question since Stein's discovery, and Valerie Hansen identifies two rough strands of thought,⁷ corresponding remarkably well with Stein's own proposals. Many of the earliest scholars to study the documents, including some of the giants of the field, favoured direct political control by the Kushan Empire which ruled Bactria and North-Western India in the first and second centuries. Though several scholars have supported this view, notable proponents of which include John Brough⁸, Edwin George Pulleyblank,⁹ and, more re-

³ Tang et al. 2013, 38.

⁴ Hansen 2012, 54–55.

⁵ Hansen 2004.

⁶ Stein 1907, 321. Note that Stein associated the whole southern Tarim Basin area with Khotan.

⁷ Hansen 2004, 290–91.

⁸ Brough 1965, 582–612.

⁹ Pulleyblank 2002, 247–58.

cently, Douglas Hitch,¹⁰ recent research has tended towards criticising this view, and the “Kushan dominance theory” has lost much of its popularity. Because of the constraints of this paper, I will not devote more time to this hypothesis, although it certainly deserves a thorough re-examination.

More recently, however, some scholars have proposed a different solution echoing Stein’s second suggestion, namely that migrants from the region of Gandhara in North-Western India (modern day Peshawar, Pakistan) moved into and settled in the southern Tarim Basin oases, bringing both Buddhism and their language with them. This movement of people is thought to have occurred at the end of the 2nd century CE and is supposed to have occurred due to the political instability and subsequent fall of the Kushan Empire. Amongst the first scholars to argue this view was Meicun Lin in his article *Kharosthi Bibliography* (1996), in which he argued that the Kharosthi script and Buddhism itself were brought with thousands of Kushan/Yuezhi people migrating eastwards.¹¹ Since Lin’s article, the migration theory’s main proponent has been Valerie Hansen, who presented this view in the article *Religious Life in a Silk Road Community: Niya During the Third and Fourth Centuries* (2004) and argued it more forcefully in her recent book *The Silk Road: A New History* (2012), although, in contrast with Lin, she envisioned migration of smaller groups of some hundred migrants at a time.¹² Some other scholars have taken up and reinforced this idea, mainly Arnaud Bertrand in his 2012 article *Water Management in Jingjue Kingdom* where he appears to argue for a larger migration,¹³ and it is also mentioned

by Christoph Baumer in his *The History of Central Asia* (2014).

The present article, however, aims to challenge this migration theory, based on a close study of the Niya documents themselves, their context and the archaeological material from the site. As several recent studies in the field of Central Asian archaeology have shown, notably the works of Michael Frachetti and William Honeychurch, inter-regional interaction was an important factor in the region’s development since pre-historic times.¹⁴ Building on these ideas of inter-regional networks I wish to propose an exchange-based model rather than one based on migration or political control. The model I propose not only better fits with the available evidence, but it also allows for a more nuanced view of the history of the Krorainan Kingdom. In what follows, I have chosen to base my spelling of Chinese words and names on modern pinyin without using tonal marks while the Kharosthi transcriptions follow the translation of T. Burrow. When referring to Kharosthi documents from the Krorainian Kingdom I follow the numbers assigned to them in Burrow’s translation in *A Translation of Kharosthi Documents from Chinese Turkestan*, which broadly agrees with the transcription of Auguste M. Boyer, Edward J. Rapson and Èmile Senart in their *Kharosthi Inscriptions discovered by Sir Aurel Stein in Chinese Turkestan*.

¹⁰ Hitch 1988, 170–92.

¹¹ Lin 1996, 188–89.

¹² Hansen 2012, 26.

¹³ Bertrand 2012, 3–5.

¹⁴ Frachetti 2011, 195–212; Frachetti 2012, 2–38; Honeychurch 2015.

The Migration Theory

To turn first to the migration theory and its factual basis, the theory as presented by Hansen and Bertrand hinges primarily upon three main points; firstly, a passage from the Chinese text *Chu sanzang jiji* [出三藏記集] first highlighted by Lin and which forms the basis of his argument; secondly, the importance stressed by Hansen of the many inscriptions and petroglyphs left in the passes of the Pamir and Karakorum; and thirdly, as both Hansen and Bertrand point out, the very presence of the Gandharan “technology”, such as the Kharosthi script or Gandharan art, which the theory seeks to explain.

Meicun Lin, who first proposed the idea of a large-scale migration of what he calls Kushan or Yuezhi people eastwards in the period 175–220 CE bases his argument upon Chinese historical records.¹⁵ He points to the *Chu sanzang jiji* [出三藏記集], known as the “Collected Records concerning the Tripitaka”, compiled by the monk Sengyou (445–518 CE) between 510–518 CE¹⁶ which contains a catalogue of translations into Chinese of early Buddhist texts and the biographies of several Buddhist authors and translators. Lin, and later Hansen, quotes from the biography of Zhi Qian which states,

Zhi Qian is also called Gongming. He came from the Great Yuezhi Kingdom (viz. the Kushan Empire). Led by his grandfather Fadu, hundreds of his countrymen immigrated into China during the reign of Emperor Ling Di [c. A.D. 168-189] and Fadu was offered an official post....¹⁷

Both Lin and Hansen suggest that the author’s note on Zhi Qian’s grandfather Fadu is an example of one of these waves of migration from Gandhara, moving eastwards across the mountains.¹⁸ Hansen furthermore highlights that in several of the Kharosthi documents, the local officials are instructed to treat refugees well and provide them with seeds for cultivation.¹⁹ Hansen suggests that this might indicate how the migrants from Gandhara may have been treated upon their arrival, though the Caḍota documents appear to deal only with locally displaced people.²⁰

It is the traces of the movement described by the *Chu sanzang jiji* that constitute the second pillar in the migration theory, especially stressed by Hansen. Hansen, Lin and Bertrand attribute the presence of Buddhism in Caḍota to the migrants from Gandhara bringing their religion with them.²¹ Hansen furthermore suggests that the routes used by these migrants can be traced through the petroglyphs they left behind. In the passes through the mountains of the Karakorum and the Pamir, notably in the valleys of Hunza and Gilgit, a wealth of petroglyphs and inscriptions has been discovered and many of the inscriptions were written using Kharosthi.²² Several of the petroglyphs are artfully carved images of stupas, a characteristic Buddhist structure, and Hansen links these images to the migrants headed for the Tarim Basin, drawing parallels between them and the remains of stupas discovered at Caḍota.²³

¹⁵ Lin 1996, 188.

¹⁶ Wilkinson 2015, 387.

¹⁷ Lin 1996, 189.

¹⁸ Lin 1996, 189; Hansen 2004, 291; Hansen 2012, 32.

¹⁹ She quotes only from Doc.292.

²⁰ Hansen 2012, 45.

²¹ Hansen 2004; Hansen 2012, 26; Bertrand 2012, 5.

²² See Neelis 2002, 143–164; Neelis 2006 and 2011 for a good overview and introduction.

²³ Hansen 2012 52–53.

The perhaps strongest evidence on which Hansen bases her migration theory is the presence of innovations originating in the Gandharan region of North-Western India. According to Hansen, the most important of these innovations brought by the migrants was the Kharosthi script itself, which she suggests allowed the migrants to work as scribes for local officials after teaching them to use and make wooden documents.²⁴ She furthermore attributes several seals with western motifs²⁵ and possibly the system of differentiating types of documents by material and shape²⁶ to what she terms the “technologically more sophisticated migrants”.²⁷ Bertrand suggests that in addition to the writing system, both the administration and laws evident in the Kharosthi documents, such as the rules for contracts, were brought by the migrants.²⁸ His paper also suggests a link between the channel irrigation system in use at Caḍota and that of the Gandharan region from which at least parts of the technological basis might have been borrowed.²⁹ However, neither author explicitly explains how the presence of these innovations, having for the most part undeniable links to North-West India, necessitates the large-scale popular migration. The argument of both authors seems to imply that transferal of these innovations could not have occurred without their “original users” moving with them.

²⁴ Ibid., 26.

²⁵ Ibid., 46.

²⁶ Ibid., 47. The documents take a variety of different shapes, rectangular, wedge-shaped, stick-shaped and though mainly made from wood, some were also written on leather. Stein suspected that the shape and material of the document signified its content. Stein 1907, 1, 363–65.

²⁷ Hansen 2012, 44.

²⁸ Bertrand 2012, 47.

²⁹ Ibid., 50–51.

Literary and Linguistic Evidence

Both Hansen and Bertrand explain that in light of recent research, the evidence points strongly towards a scenario involving the migration of waves of hundreds of people from the Gandharan region into the Tarim Basin, with Bertrand going as far as to state in his introduction that this has been confirmed.³⁰ Nevertheless, when looking at available evidence, and in particular by closely scrutinizing the Kharosthi documents from Caḍota itself, I believe there are several objections to be raised against such a conclusion.

The first of these is the near total absence of literary sources, be they Chinese or Indian, describing or even hinting at such a scenario, a lack of evidence that Hansen herself admits in her most recent book.³¹ The record quoted by Lin and Hansen can hardly be said to conclusively support a scenario of migration by people from Gandhara into the southern Tarim Basin in the waning years of the Kushan dynasty. The veracity of the account is difficult to ascertain, being essentially a hagiography written nearly three hundred years after the supposed migration. If the record is accurate, however, this migration would have taken place during the reign of Huvishka, son of Kanishka, in the middle of the Kushan line and hardly in its waning years.³² Recent research, however has confirmed both economic and political

³⁰ Ibid., 5.

³¹ Hansen 2012, 32.

³² It has proven to be extremely difficult to precisely date the rulers and events of the Kushan dynasty, mainly due to the lack of comprehensive sources, and the scholarly debate on this topic has long been a fierce one. I have chosen, however, to base my reasoning on the dates and sequence of events as presented by Harry Falk in *Kushan Histories* because it offers the most comprehensive and up-to-date theory.

upheaval during Huvishka's reign,³³ also reflected strongly in coinage of the era, which could lend credence to the migration of Fadu. It is noteworthy, however, that no Kushan coins later than Kanishka have been found in the Tarim Basin to date, which would suggest that the contact whether in conjunction with occupation or migration, took place earlier.³⁴ At any rate the record does not pertain to the Tarim Basin but rather suggests the immigrants came directly to China. Furthermore, the label "from the Great Yuezhi" is hardly a phrase that accurately identifies people from Gandhara; and might just as well indicate Bactrians or other people from the Kushan realm. Indeed there has been long-standing speculation about whether the ethnonym might frequently refer to the people of Kroraina.³⁵ To my knowledge, there is no other Chinese source providing similar evidence, nor are any other examples presented by Lin or Hansen, although Lin does stress evidence for a population of people from the Great Yuezhi in the Later Han capital Louyang.³⁶ Tellingly, there is no mention whatsoever in the corpus of Kharosthi documents from the Krorainan Kingdom hinting at any such migration having taken place, despite the earliest likely dating to the beginning of the third century, barely a generation or two after the supposed migration. This could be due, of course, to the overwhelmingly commercial and legal nature of the documents in question, though one would expect the influx of hundreds, if not thousands, of new residents to leave some trace of sorts.

What the Kharosthi documents of Caḍota do furnish, however, is a wealth of evidence suggesting that the majority of the popula-

tion, as well as most of the officials and scribes, were in fact natives. Thomas Burrow, who closely studied and translated the original corpus of documents, makes it perfectly clear that Prakrit written in Kharosthi was the administrative language of Caḍota while the locals likely spoke a native language he named "Krorainic", probably strongly affiliated with the later "Tocharian" of Kucha and Karashar.³⁷ The most telling evidence for this state of affairs is that the vast majority of names in the documents are in the local Krorainic language.³⁸ While quite a few Indian names do appear, they are overwhelmingly Buddhist in nature and, as Brough points out, are likely the religious names of Buddhist monks.³⁹ Indeed, upon closer inspection, one finds that nearly all of the bearers of Indian names can be identified as monks, admittedly with some exceptions. The scribes, whom Hansen suggests were mainly immigrants,⁴⁰ appear for the most part to have Krorainic names as well, though a few monks with Prakrit names also serve in this capacity. In addition to the many Krorainic names, Burrow also identifies about a hundred Krorainic words, many of them concerned with law and administration. He also detects a strong phonetic influence from Krorainic in the pronunciation and spelling of Prakrit in Caḍota, seen for example in a lack of many voiced stops.⁴¹ This led to many scribes writing the Kharosthi *d* instead of *t* because the locals made no distinction between the two.⁴² If the scribe in question was a native speaker of Gandhari Prakrit, it seems very unlikely that such a change would have occurred. While one might contend that this change in phonology

³³ Falk 2015, 121–22.

³⁴ Wang 2004, 34.

³⁵ Brough 1965, 606.

³⁶ Lin 1996, 189–90.

³⁷ Burrow 1937, vi–ix.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, viii.

³⁹ Brough 1965, 605.

⁴⁰ Hansen 2012, 26.

⁴¹ Burrow 1937, 5.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 5–8.

occurred generations after the original migrants arrived, the argument is hardly convincing, because the first documents likely date from just after the supposed migration event. Thus, it seems clear that Krorainic was the predominant spoken language in Caḍota and in the Kingdom of Kroraina as a whole, with Prakrit used mainly as an administrative, literate and religious language. Indeed, as Mariner Padwa proposes, it is quite possible that the Krorainian elite were not only polyglot but fluent in the local form of Prakrit.⁴³ This must at least have been the case for the scribes who were likely native Krorainic speakers, judging by their names and the way they wrote.

Evidence for Local Continuity

It is not linguistic evidence from the documents alone that raises questions about the proposed migration scenario; there is also the issue of the strong continuity seen in local practices and the material culture. An example of this is the administrative system employed in the Kingdom of Kroraina. Several of the official titles used have been identified as Iranian, such as the very common title *Cozbo* which has also been identified in the Saka language,⁴⁴ while the kings were the bearers of Indian, Chinese and Iranian titles.⁴⁵ Other titles appear to be local, such as *Kitsaitsa* and *Ṣoṭhamṅha*,⁴⁶ while yet others have no clear provenance, such as the title *Ogu*.⁴⁷ The officials in question have no

clear parallels in either a Chinese or an Indian model, and their tasks were distinctly local, such as minding the royal camels. (Doc.180) There is still some debate about the details of the system itself and the roles of these various officials,⁴⁸ but what is clear is that the administration of the Krorainian Kingdom was distinctly native. That is not to say that it was completely autochthonic; the system very likely borrowed heavily from several surrounding sources, but it was still the product of the local needs and environment. As Padwa also discusses at length in his dissertation, there is a strong continuity seen in the local patterns of kinship organization, marriage and similar basic social divisions.⁴⁹ This is further reinforced by frequent references in the documents to “the old law of the kingdom” (meaning Caḍota) in such matters as adoption (Doc.11) and paying a herder (Doc.19), suggesting a continuity in administrative practice. Such continuity would seem at odds with large scale immigration into what was a very small community, as well as with the adaptation of these immigrants’ administrative practises, as Bertrand argues.

Finally, there is also local continuity in the sphere of religion, for though both the written and archaeological evidence suggest that Buddhism was the dominant faith of the kingdom, there are a few intriguing instances of local faith and beliefs. The most telling of these is found in Doc.157 which appears to be a letter penned by the *Ṣoṭhamṅha* Lýipeya to several men whom he politely addresses as “Masters”. In the letter, he describes an animal sacrifice to, and communication through dreams with, a deity called Bhatro, a god unknown from any other

⁴³ Padwa 2007, 256–61.

⁴⁴ Burrow 1937, 90–91.

⁴⁵ As an example, see Doc.401. Here the king Vasmana uses both the Indian *Maharaya* and *Devaputra*, as well as the title *Jitugha*, shown to be the Chinese *Shizhong* 侍中 (Brough 1965: 600–602). In a stone inscription from Endere the king Amgoka has an even more impressive list of titles, including the Iranian King of Kings. See Salomon 1999, 4.

⁴⁶ Burrow 1937, 82, 127.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁴⁸ Atwood 1991, 161–99; Li 2014. The two authors present substantially different views, and no clear conclusion has emerged so far.

⁴⁹ Padwa 2007.

sources and who appears to have been a local deity. The very fragmentary Doc.361⁵⁰ also mentions some item or being belonging to another local deity named Acokisgiya. These examples show very clearly that, while Buddhism had attained a central place in the religious life of the Caḍotans, they still kept to practices that likely were far older. In their funerary style as well, the locals stuck to the old local traditions, traditions that seem to go quite far back. It is noteworthy, for example, that in some of the tombs discovered near Caḍota the deceased had been placed in a hollowed out log,⁵¹ identical to the arrangement seen at the site of Djoumboulak Koum by the Keriya river further west which dates from the middle of the first millennium BCE.⁵² The grave goods chosen to accompany the dead, and the way they were placed in the grave, are also notably similar. It is not only this continuity of earlier religious practices that bear witness against the migration scenario at Caḍota, however; because as many scholars have already noted,⁵³ amongst them Hansen herself,⁵⁴ the Buddhism revealed in the Kharosthi documents was far removed from the known orthodoxy. The monks at Caḍota were frequently engaged in exchange (For example in Doc.419 and Doc.425) and not only owned property but also slaves (Doc.345) and in some cases, could also be slaves themselves (Doc.152). The monks did not practise celibacy but rather married and are frequently mentioned as having children (Doc.418 and Doc.419). As van Schaik notes in his recent study this breach of the rule of celibacy could possibly be tied to the local community's traditional kinship struc-

ture or possibly due to the demands of the king.⁵⁵ In fact, the line separating a lay person from a monk appears often to have been blurry, a situation that the king and central authorities at times tried to curtail, as seen in Doc.489, where regulations laid down by the Sangha of the capital are conveyed to Caḍota. It seems reasonable to assume that these peculiarities of the local practice grew out of Caḍota's relatively small size and isolation, where local traditions and expectations likely mixed with established Buddhist doctrine.

While these examples of local practices were surely influenced and modified based on external input throughout their existence I find that they speak strongly against a scenario of hundreds of migrants settling in Caḍota. Surely this fairly small community, if subjected to immigration on such a scale, would have been coloured far more strongly by the cultural and organizational practices of the newcomers, one would imagine, especially in the fields of administration and religion which are often dominated by the literate and the elite. While the lack of evidence supporting a migration scenario in and of itself is not enough to disapprove it, I believe the strong local continuity seen in the Niya material does.

The exchange alternative

The problem remains, however, that many of the innovations, ideas and cultural expressions seen at the Caḍota site can undeniably trace their roots back to the North-West of India and in particular to the Buddhist centres of Gandhara. In this case, I believe it would be fruitful to apply Occam's Razor to the problem at hand, because the scenario that would demand the least amount of conjecture is surely to propose that these ideas

⁵⁰ Burrow in his index here mistakenly cite Doc.371.

⁵¹ Xinjiang Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology 2007, 29–32.

⁵² Debaine-Francfort – Abdouressul 2001, 138.

⁵³ Atwood 1991; Schaik 2014, 269–77.

⁵⁴ Hansen 2004, 293.

⁵⁵ Schaik 2014, 275.

and innovations were brought by way of small-scale exchange and interaction. Regional exchange, on a small scale and over smaller distances, has always been an important fact of human interaction, and as noted earlier archaeological research on Central Asia has shown that these small-scale connections spread several important innovations, such as agriculture, over massive distances in pre-historic times.⁵⁶

An explanation based on exchange and interaction would find strong parallels to historical events which are far better documented. One event that springs to mind is the spread of Christianity and the Roman alphabet to many parts of Europe during the early Middle Ages, such as to Scandinavia or Ireland. While certainly many monks, missionaries, traders and others travelled from the Mediterranean region to both Scandinavia and Ireland, neither region was subject to political control or mass migration from the original Mediterranean heartland of the Roman alphabet and Christianity, and as often as not it was the people of these “remote” regions whose movement brought about contact and the transfer of both faith and writing system. Another, perhaps closer example is the spread of Buddhism and the Chinese script to Japan during the 7th and 8th centuries. Here too the movement of people was certainly involved in this transmission, with monks and envoys travelling in both directions, but again, there are no signs of direct political control or mass migration from the places where these innovations originated. What both cases show very clearly, however, is the efficiency with which exchange, interaction and small-scale movement can transfer ideas and innovations, as well as perhaps how rapidly early

states adapt useful innovations from their older neighbours.

A more plausible scenario, then, could be that the many innovations which reach the Tarim Basin from North-Western India – religion, the writing system, art and other things – did so not through waves of thousands or even hundreds of migrants, but rather through many smaller journeys undertaken along far older routes and networks. Some of these journeys could have gone no further than to the next village, for purposes of trade or perhaps marriage, while some might have been longer, envoys travelling to the courts of foreign kings or missionaries seeking to spread their religion. Whether or not the Kushan Empire had political control in the Tarim Basin, it must have exercised strong influence on neighbouring Khotan and Kashgar in the west, as is indeed described in the Chinese history *Hou Hanshu*.⁵⁷ Envoys likely travelled back and forth, and with them likely many others, not least monks and missionaries. As Chinese monks did in later times, we can imagine pious individuals from the Tarim Basin also travelling to Gandhara and India to seek learning and ancient texts. Moreover, an undercurrent to these rarer journeys must have been countless much shorter trips undertaken by local people for their local needs, but at the same time forming the basis for a larger network.

A full exploration of this proposed alternative falls beyond the purview of this paper, but I would still like to highlight some interesting points that I believe speak in favour of this hypothesis. Hansen suggests that there was minimal overland trade along the Silk Road in the early centuries CE, based mainly on the lack of evidence of foreign

⁵⁶ Frachetti 2012.

⁵⁷ Fan Ye, 88 (43-45).

traders in the Kharosthi documents.⁵⁸ While she is certainly right that there is little evidence for the large caravans and wealthy merchant popularly envisioned, there are in fact several clues to suggest an underlying network of small-scale exchange and interaction. A closer inspection of the Kharosthi documents from the Krorainian Kingdom reveals that they mention several individuals whose names, or the ethnonyms given to them, suggest a possible foreign origin. The appearance of people given the ethnonym *Cimna* or *Cina*, identified by Burrow as Chinese⁵⁹ in some of the documents is hardly surprising. (For example Doc.255, Doc.324, Doc.403, Doc.686) Several contemporary documents in Chinese from the sites of Caḍota and Kroraina show the presence of a Chinese garrison in the capital during the latter part of the kingdom's existence. Doc.324 is of particular interest however, detailing a contract on the sale of a slave entered into by a Cinaşǵaşi (the Chinaman Şǵaşi). In the document, Şǵaşi is described as having paid two golden staters and two drachma in recompense for a stolen slave, and although it is unclear whether or not these words denote money or measurements,⁶⁰ it is still noteworthy. It seems likely that Şǵaşi, whose name does not appear elsewhere, might have been a merchant of some sort or else an entrepreneuring Chinese envoy. In addition to these possible Chinese presences, Burrow identifies eight names as being non-native due to their phonology, most likely with Iranian roots.⁶¹ Sims-Williams has furthermore identified some Bactrian names amongst the kharosthi documents, such as Bhimaşena in Doc.38⁶²

and Mareǵa in doc.431-432.⁶³ It is naturally difficult to equate names or ethnonyms with specific birthplaces or origins, but this could be an indication of the plurality of outsiders living in or passing through Caḍota.

The group of outsiders who most strongly figure in the Kharosthi documents, however, are people from Khotan, a large oasis located in the far south-west of the Tarim Basin near where the passes from Hunza enter the Basin. People identified as Khotanese appear in all manner of contexts; some as slaves while others are seemingly ordinary members of the community, but sometimes they also appear as hostile attackers. Khotan itself was also a frequent destination for travellers mentioned in the Kharosthi documents and even the queen of King Mayiri is said to have travelled there in Doc.637. There was clearly frequent and close contact between Kroraina and Khotan, and Khotan would be a likely place of origin for the transfer of the "Gandhari" innovations to Caḍota. Khotan clearly had strong links to Gandhara and the Kushan domain in general, as seen both in the presence of Buddhism and Kharosthi at many nearby sites such as the Rawak stupa⁶⁴ but perhaps more clearly in the so called Sino-Kharosthi coins. These extraordinary bronze coins, purchased by Stein, were mainly found in the Khotan oasis and carry on the obverse a horse or camel surrounded by a Kharosthi inscription while the reverse is inscribed in Chinese.⁶⁵ The Kharosthi inscription names the King of Khotan who issued the coin, while the Chinese inscription explains the coin's worth in Chinese weight measures. It has been shown that these coins used the Bactrian tetradrachm and drachm as their model, yet the Chinese inscription was clearly meant to

⁵⁸ Hansen 2012, 50.

⁵⁹ Burrow 1937, 89.

⁶⁰ Wang 2004, 67.

⁶¹ Burrow 1937.

⁶² Sims-Williams 2010, 48.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁶⁴ Stein 1907, 304–6.

⁶⁵ Wang 2004, 37.

introduce them to an area where Chinese coins were common, as was the case in the Tarim Basin.⁶⁶ Dated to the first century CE by Joe Cribb, these coins are clear signs of early interaction between Khotan and the Kushan domains in North-Western India.⁶⁷ It is also likely that the extraordinary Doc.661 of the Krorainian corpus was written by a Khotanese scribe, possibly also in Khotan. This document, written in a different variant of Prakrit⁶⁸ and dated after the reign of a king Hinaza of Khotan, details the sale of a camel from a certain Khvarnarse, a distinctly Iranian and likely Khotanese name. Of even greater interest, moreover, is the name of the buyer, a *Sulīga* named Vagi-ti Vadhaga, who must have been a Sogdian named Vagi/Vagisti Vandak.⁶⁹ This Vandak was certainly far from home, but a cache of letters discovered by Stein in a Chinese watchpost near Dunhuang in the eastern Tarim Basin shows that he was not the only Sogdian travelling this far. Five of the letters found were written in Sogdian, datable to around 313 CE, and their content makes it clear that there were small communities of Sogdians living in many sites in the eastern Tarim Basin and Gansu. These documents show clearly that not only was mobility possible across the networks of Eastern Central Asia, but also that communication via mail along these routes was viable.

Conclusion

The historiography of not only ancient Eastern Central Asia but also the ancient Silk Routes has long been dominated by the two theories of political control and of migration as models for explaining the spread of tech-

nology, ideas, material goods and more. But as this article has endeavoured to show there is a third, perhaps more important factor that should also be taken into consideration, namely exchange and interaction. It likely was not the only factor at play in ancient Caḍota, and indeed I find that all three factors likely played some part in the spread of a wide variety of goods and ideas across Inner Asia since ancient times. But at least in the case of Caḍota it seems clear that migration did not play as large a role as has been alleged, and indeed that the most suitable explanation is one based upon small-scale exchange and regional interaction. The details of this exchange scenario still need to be ironed out, but as I believe the short discussion above shows, evidence does in fact exist upon which one could base a reconstruction of at least some of the countless, intricate networks criss-crossing Eastern Central Asia already from antiquity. I believe this exchange-and-interaction alternative offers not only a scenario less reliant on conjecture to fill the gaps of historical records, but also one that can be better corroborated by the available evidence. Going forward there is much research still to be done on the ancient societies of Eastern Central Asia, but I believe that the exchange-and-interaction scenario outlined above will allow for a more nuanced view of the development and history of this region. I would also suggest that a closer study of the many smaller networks and connections evident in much of the documentary material from the Krorainian Kingdom can also broaden our understanding of the greater Eurasian network of antiquity, the “Silk Road” if one will, opening for new insights into its function and development.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 37–38.

⁶⁷ Cribb 1984; Cribb 1985.

⁶⁸ Burrow 1940, 137. See the note to document 661.

⁶⁹ Grenet et al. 1998, 102.

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