An Inscribed Chinese Gold Plate in Its Context: Glimpses of the Sacred Center

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Richard L. Anderson's meticulous and wide-ranging scholarship cautions us against being content with simple cataloging. His example in examining the cultural context of New Testament studies prompts us to look more closely at the origins and ritual significance of an unusual Chinese artifact.

Introduction

The foundation of the Chinese documentary tradition, predating even bamboo tablets and scrolls of silk, is a huge corpus of inscriptions on bronze vessels, largely dating from the Zhou period (1044—256 B.C.). A modern index to this corpus includes 7,312 separate inscriptions that had been discovered up to the year 1980.[1] While a few extant inscriptions are preserved on gold, silver, copper, iron, and pewter, mainly in the form of seals[2] and knife-shaped coins or metal plates used as money,[3] the vast majority of inscribed metal objects are bronze ritual vessels.[4] These have been prized over the centuries by Chinese connoisseurs, who before the modern era seldom recorded the circumstances of their discovery nor their exact location in the tombs. These notes will examine a rarity in the Chinese tradition, a surviving inscribed plate of gold, excavated *in situ*.

Inscribed Decorative Gold Objects in China

As mentioned, inscriptions first appeared on gold in the form of seals, commencing with the Zhou dynasty. In this case the material confirms the royal status of these seals, some of which were given by the king to vassal princes as a symbol of their investiture. Later, toward the end of the Zhou, an era known artistically as the *Huai* style period in bronze work, gold sheets were sometimes attached to bronze plaques and inscribed with various decorations. Many examples are found in the Carl Kempe Collection in Stockholm. For example, a pair of circular gold plaques on bronze, measuring 67 mm in diameter, weighing 147 g, was used to ornament a painted band close to the ceiling of a tomb.[5] Another circular plaque in a gold sheet (62 mm, 12.5 g) is decorated with six interlaced dragons, each forming a figure eight. Similar gold plaques are found in collections in the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm; the Fogg Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts; and the C. T. Loo Collection, New York.[6]

During the Han dynasty (206 B.C.—A.D. 220), gold sheets on bronze plaques continued to be manufactured. One striking variation is a gold plaque with granulated work, fixed to a gilt lacquer sheet by tabs turned over the edges. It is 33 mm long and weighs 2 g.[7] An analogous gold plaque is in the C. T. Loo Collection. Eight other gold plaques from the end of the Han through the Six Dynasties (220—589) are featured in the Carl Kempe Collection (plates 18—20, 22—24, 33, and 37; pp. 78—81, 89, and 93) and bring the practice of decorative gold plates up to the Tang dynasty.

During the Tang dynasty (618—906), inscribed silver plates, platters, planchettes, and plaques seemed to completely replace the use of decorative gold plaques and sheets. Representative silver planchettes and plaques, inscribed with either patents of authority or quotas of taxes, are displayed in various museums in Shaanxi Province and elsewhere.[8] The most arresting example of Tang inscribed silver is a set of silver drinking counters or tallies. Fifty counters, each 20.1 mm long and 1.4 mm wide, are inscribed with a passage from the Confucian classic *Lunyu*,

or the Analects, on the obverse, with the reverse containing the prescribed number of cups that must be drunk as punishment in a drinking game.[9]

These examples of the decorative use of gold and silver for ornamental purposes might obscure the significance of the ritual use of inscribed gold plates, for it is with the introduction of Buddhism into China beginning in the first century A.D. that gold as a writing material takes on new significance.

The Famensi Pagoda

In 1978, an earthquake in Songpan County, Shaanxi Province, caused cracks to appear in the Ming dynasty brick pagoda of the Famen Monastery in nearby Fufeng County.[10] Restoration was proposed but nothing happened until, on 24 August 1981, the damage caused the 350-year-old pagoda to split and partially collapse, leaving only half of it standing. Even this surviving part had to be dismantled in the course of renovation work. This tragedy proved unexpectedly beneficial, as a hidden crypt was revealed below the foundation of the pagoda (fig. 1). The excavators recognized this as the "Underground Palace" of Buddhist literature. This stone-lined crypt was built along the north-south axis[11] and consisted of a series of chambers, ending with the *sanctum sanctorum* directly under the vertical axis of the pagoda. The center of the roof of this chamber was decorated with a 26-petaled silver lotus, confirming the central importance of this chamber.[12] It was filled with many precious objects of gold, silver, porcelain, and other materials—a discovery ranked with the terra cotta warriors in Xi'an and the Neolithic village of Banpo as one of the three most important archaeological finds in Shaanxi Province. The most sacred objects were four sets of reliquaries, each containing a finger bone believed to have belonged to the Buddha, and which survived his cremation in Kusinårå, India, in 483 B.C.[13] The most elaborate consisted of a plain wooden outer casket that revealed six miniature coffins of gold and silver, one inside the other. Nestled securely in the innermost coffin was a tiny pagoda of pure gold, crowned with a pearl and containing the finger bone glued to a silver pillar for display purposes. The relic was marked on the inside cavity with the design of the Big Dipper constellation, a symbol of the still center of the turning heavens.[14] Another finger bone was housed in a gilded silver coffin. A third bone was found in an exquisitely carved white marble reliquary. The fourth and final bone was contained inside a jade coffin decorated with two sapphires placed within several precious containers and hidden in the *mikan* under the marble floor of the innermost chamber.[15] This unexpectedly large collection of finger bone reliquaries is thought to have resulted from the dissolution of the monasteries during periods of violent anti-Buddhist persecutions. The reliquaries had been brought together in the Famen Monastery crypt to preserve them.

Located 120 kilometers west of Xi'an, Famen Monastery was first constructed shortly before A.D. 499, although it was not given that name until later. Local lore claimed that originally it had been founded by the great Indian monarch King Ashoka (ca. 274—236 B.C.) as one of the 84,000 stupas he erected to house relics of the Buddha as part of his national sponsorship of the new religion and extensive missionary effort. This legend may have arisen from the name of the monastery's pagoda—Pagoda of King Ayu in Chinese or Ashoka in Sanskrit. Nineteen Buddhist reliquary pagodas have been built in China over time to house different kinds of relics.[16] The pagoda at Famen Monastery was rebuilt after damages sustained during a period of persecution, 574—78. In 618 the monastery was officially named Famensi, and fifteen years later the Pagoda of King Ayu was renovated. Sometime during the seventh century the pagoda was renamed the *Zhenshenta*, "Pagoda of the True Body," or *Sharira* in Sanskrit.[17] During the Ming dynasty (1368—1644), the most recent installation of the Reliquary Pagoda was completed on its original Tang foundation (fig. 2). Under construction from 1579 to 1609, this edifice lasted until

its collapse in 1981.[18] It was rebuilt and rededicated on 9 November 1988 in lavish ceremonies, one of which consisted of representative priests from all over the Buddhist world entering the pagoda, worshiping while circumambulating the central pillar that stands above the reliquary chamber. Following the course of the sun and revolving stars by moving clockwise around a sacred center is called *rao xing* in China and *pradakshina* in India and is one of the most venerable acts of worship throughout Asia.

The Bodhisattva's Perpetual Offering

Among the many treasures found in the underground crypt was the parcel-gilt silver figure of a man, 21 cm tall, supporting a tray and half kneeling on a double lotus pedestal (fig. 3).[19] The piece may be examined in detail as the craftsman designed it, ascending in an increasing order of importance, from the outer periphery of the base, up through the silver kneeling figure, to the golden tray and the relic it supported.

The base consists of three elements: (1) an inverted lotus, (2) a spherical middle section forming a narrow waist, and (3) another lotus opening upward (fig. 4). The overall silhouette represents the hourglass-shaped world mountain emerging from the waters of chaos—the lower lotus—and opening with the upper lotus at the creation of the universe.[20] The lotus flower was observed to grow up from the dark and muddy waters to bloom on the surface with startling purity; its miraculous beauty was seen as a type of creation itself. This ancient Hindu symbol of the divine center of the cosmos—the *padmasana*, or lotus throne—was used in Indian art and literature for the deity who sat at the still center of the universe, whoever he or she was believed to be. Not surprisingly, the symbol was adopted by Indian Buddhists to emphasize the Buddha's central importance.

On each of the eight small lotus petals is an engraved image of a golden *vajra* deity. These three-headed, multi-armed *ashura*, or guardian figures, bear weapons and are surrounded by flaming halos, or *mandorla*.[21] Some *ashura* are seated on a lotus, while others recline on a rocky outcropping. According to the *Rig Veda*, in order to create the universe, the *ashura*, similar to the Greek Titans, joined the *deva*, or gods, in a divine tug-of-war, pulling on opposite sides of the endless serpent *Ananta*, who was wrapped around the narrow waist of the hourglass-shaped world mountain. In so doing, they churned the Milky Way and brought forth all of creation. This cosmogonic myth of the *Amritamanthana*, the Churning of the Milky Ocean to create Ambrosia, was based on observation of the everyday mystery of churning liquid milk into a buttery solid.[22] Thus the eight *ashura* of the base not only protect the eight directions, but also recall the miracle of creation to the viewer's mind. On each petal above them is shown a Sanskrit letter or *bija*, "seed syllable," inscribed in a circle, which represents a particular manifestation of the Buddha, perhaps correlating with the *ashura* below.[23] When these images are flattened and drawn in relation to each other, the eight petals remind us that we are dealing with a *mandala*, or cosmic diagram, showing the relationship of the various powers to each other and to the sacred center (fig. 5).[24]

The mandala tradition may have begun with the *stupa*, a reliquary mound of piled-up earth with a square drawn around it, representing the world mountain and the four-cornered world surrounding it. It evolved into magnificent and complex geometric patterns that formed the ground plan of temples, both Hindu and Buddhist. Frequently a miniature mandala in gold or stone was placed as the foundation deposit at the center of the temple. When translated into two-dimensional art, these mandala paintings became objects of meditation, the most famous examples known in the West being the *Thang-ka* paintings of Tibet.

The spherical middle section has four seated deities crowned and dressed in armor, facing out to the four cardinal directions (see fig. 4.2). They are *Lokapala* or *Tianwang*, Heavenly Kings and Lords of the Four Regions. The

damaged inner rim of the base prevents us from seeing how these four deities may have related to the eight *ashura* below.

The upper lotus with its sixteen petals has a seated Bodhisattva, or heavenly musician, surrounded by delicate honeysuckle tendrils within a double *prabhu-mandala* halo engraved on each of its petals (see fig. 4.3). This was a tedious process but justified in that it reminds the viewer that each petal represents an entire universe, with its own Buddha, ours being just one among the many created by divine power.[25]

The silver kneeling figure is bare chested and wears a long skirt (see fig. 4.4), based on the Indian *dhoti*. He wears jeweled armbands, and several strings of real seed pearls are draped around his neck. This jewelry distinguishes him as a Bodhisattva since representations of Buddha usually have no ornaments. This reflects the story of the historic Buddha's spiritual development in which the man Gautama was born as an Indian prince and wore such signs of royal power, only to renounce them as he started his final steps toward complete enlightenment when he was no longer a Bodhisattva, "One whose essence is Enlightenment," but became the Buddha, "One who is fully Enlightened." Gautama was not the only Bodhisattva, just as he is not the only Buddha. In the *Mahayana* form of Buddhism prevalent in China, Bodhisattva also refers to a class of divine beings who have postponed their entrance into Nirvana in order to stay behind and help those less advanced to achieve this desired state.

The face has high-arching eyebrows painted in blue and green over languid, half-opened eyes. The usual long earlobes of Hindu royalty, distended by the weight of heavy golden spools, in this instance have small gold and pearl earrings. His long, piled-up hair was painted dark blue, a convention for black in Indian art. His face conveys the calm, quiet elegance of the Buddhist images of the previous Sui dynasty (589—618), showing the typical conservative and opulent nature of religious art commissioned for state occasions.

The Bodhisattva's openwork crown consists of small filigree whorls, surrounding a small seated Buddha who can be identified as Amitabha, the Buddha of "Boundless Light." This Buddha governs the western quadrant of the Buddhist paradise where believers can hear the Law taught in its purity and thus be able to enter Nirvana in their next rebirth. The significance of this particular Buddha in the crown is that it identifies the figure below as the most beloved of all Bodhisattvas, Avalokitesvara, "the Lord who looks down [with compassion]."[26] Among his many epithets is Padmapani, "Bearer of the Lotus." In the case of our statue, the relic on its gold tray is supported by a lotus leaf (see fig. 4.5), which suggests that the white finger bone may be seen as the white lotus flower, one of the earliest aniconic symbols of the Buddha himself. The Bodhisattva reverently holds the tray level with his face.[27] He lifts the tray and turns his face slightly to his left, where one would expect to see the Buddha when he is depicted between the usual two attendant Bodhisattvas in sculpture and painting. Thus the finger bone represents, *pars pro toto*, the entire body of the Buddha. The mission of Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva on the left side, is to protect this world in the interval between the departure of the historic Buddha, Shakyamuni, and the arrival of Maitreya, the Buddha yet to come. Later Chinese emperors increasingly identified themselves with this Bodhisattva under his Chinese name, Guanyin.[28]

The figure holds in his hands a silver tray-shaped lotus leaf (see fig. 4.5), upon which rests an inscribed gold plate with a raised rim (see fig. 4.6). The plate is 11.2 cm long and 8.4 cm wide. The gold openwork plaque attached to the plate's four corners by silver chains (see fig. 4.7) was used to lift it, probably to avoid touching its contents.[29] Two of the chains have pins, allowing removal from one long side so the handle would not touch the relic but would hang down at the side, allowing a clear view of the tray and its contents. We can now appreciate that the purpose of this elegant statue and its elaborate base was to display appropriately the finger bone relic for worship, much as

the Catholic monstrance is used to display the consecrated Host for adoration by the faithful. This usage is confirmed by the entry inscribed on the list of contents found at the entrance: "Bodhisattva offering the true body [of the Buddha]."[30]

An examination of the photographs seems to indicate that the inscription was chased into the gold with a cold chisel and not cast into its surface when it was originally made, as was the case with the ornamental flowers. The inscribing was done at a later date, perhaps in commemoration of a particular service performed in behalf of the emperor and at his command. The ceremony would have involved placing the relic on the gold plate and using the smaller plaque (see fig. 4.7) as the handle. The presence in the design of the handle of a three-pronged *vajra*—the diamond thunderbolt—provides further evidence to support this theory. This ancient symbol of irresistible power that shatters ignorance and penetrates to the center of all opposites is often shown in the hands of Hindu and Buddhist gods and their guardians.[31] Thus, by holding this *vajra* handle, the emperor, or a priest acting as his proxy, would "wield the *vajra*" in behalf of the Buddha.[32] And when the ceremony was over, the statue of the Bodhisattva would act as the emperor's proxy in making an eternal offering to the Buddha in the darkness of the crypt.

The inscription has 65 characters in 11 lines and is executed in a delicate hand. Literally translated, it reads:

> Presented on behalf of the Expansively Filial Greatly Sainted Emperor, the Utmost in Humanity, of Luminous Virtue, Brilliantly Martial and Sagaciously Cultivated: this Sharira Bodhisattva is respectfully manufactured for a perpetual offering. We ask in all humility that His Holy Life will be forever young, that the Holy Branches will have ten thousand leaves, and that the Eight Quadrants will come in submission, and that the Four Seas will have no waves [of turmoil]. Recorded on the Day of Extended Felicitation of His August Emperor, the Fourteenth Day of the Eleventh Month, Year *Xinmou*, Twelfth Year of "Total Harmony" *Xiantong* (January 27, 872).[33]

The listing of virtuous titles of the emperor is the standard introduction of such commemorative inscriptions. This particular inscribed plate is the only known example of the Tang dynasty in which the emperor's full titulary is recorded.[34] The terms reflect the Buddhist and Confucian concerns with the proper regard for the emperor's ancestors and compassion for the people under his care, as well as protection from their enemies. The statue is described as a Bodhisattva, *Pusa*, connected with the "True Body" or Sharira reliquary.[35] The "perpetual offering" mentioned reminds us that these objects were made to be used only a few times and then deposited in the treasure vaults, never to be seen again. The branches may refer to the *Fusang*, or tree of life, while ten thousand is a conventional number meaning all creation. The eight quadrants evoke the eight *ashura* on the base, and the four seas represent the entire world with China as the Middle Country, protected by the four guardians on the spherical middle section or narrow waist.

The Tang emperor, Li Cui—posthumous title Yizong (833—74)—assumed the throne in 860. His interest in Buddhism is hardly mentioned in the official documents devoted to his reign, let alone any record of this episode, either in *Jiu Tangshu* (Old History of the Tang), chapter 19a, or *Xin Tangshu* (New History of the Tang), chapter 9. Yet certain hints contained in the most detailed account provide a possible motivation. Yizong's reign was rather stable, except for troublesome rebels in the southern reaches of the empire, in what is present-day Guangdong Province and northern Vietnam. Rebellions are recorded for the years 864—65, 869, and 870. The one Buddhist incident preserved in the *Jiu Tangshu* is linked up, through sympathetic magic, with the events in the south: in the fifth month of the year 871, "His Highness favored the 'Monastery for Pacifying the Kingdom' [with his presence]

and bequeathed a lofty throne of *gharu* wood to the monk who expounds the sutras."[36] *Gharu* wood, a product of the *mixiang* tree (*Aquilaria agallocha Roxb.*), is produced only in these tropical regions so troubled by discord and rebellion.[37] It seems that His Highness desired to ritually quell this region by symbolically subjecting it, according to principles of sympathetic magic, to the pacifying influences of Buddhism as represented by the throne carved of *gharu* wood. This throne was located in the locus of national Buddhist power, the "Monastery for Pacifying the Kingdom."[38]

An edict preserved in the *Quan Tangwen* "Complete Prose of the Tang" verifies this motivation:

> Edict Welcoming the Bones of the Buddha
>
> This Royal Person, because of My paucity of virtue upon succeeding to the great enterprise for lo these fourteen years, has continuously encountered the crazed depravity of the Southern Barbarians, and the royal forces have been unable to rest. On the throne this Royal Person has been preoccupied with loving and nurturing all sentient beings and spirits. Consequently, I therefore have decided to venerate and worship the Buddhist teachings. I have determined to welcome the Sharira at the Gate of Doubled Mysteries so that the myriads of the populace may pray [to it] for blessings.[39]

Apparently the presentation of the apotropaic wooden throne to the monastery in 871 was ineffectual. Consequently, in the following year the Bodhisattva was cast by imperial commission. It is within this political context that the lines "that the Eight Quadrants will come in submission, and that the Four Seas will have no waves" had particular and contemporary significance. Perhaps this explains why all of the guardians depicted on the base brandish weapons in their multiple arms.

We find a secular response to an earlier instance of dabbling with the same Buddhist relic, beneath the royal dignity from a Confucian point of view, in the biography of the great statesman Han Yu (768—824). The procession of the finger bone of the Buddha from its home in Famen Monastery to the capital of Chang'an had become a popular event, attracting huge crowds of oglers and supplicants, for it had been known to heal onlookers in the past.[40] According to secular sources, such processions had occurred in years 660, 790, 819, and 873;[41] Buddhist sources reveal a total of seven such processions.[42] According to Han Yu's biography,

> The Gateway to the Dharma Monastery in Fengxiang possessed a Sharira Pagoda for Protecting the State; within the pagoda was one finger bone of Sakyamuni, the mortal Buddha. According to common custom, it [the pagoda] was opened once every thirty years. Whenever it was opened, the harvest was plentiful and the people tranquil. In the first month of the fourteenth year (*Yuanhe* reign period, 819), His Highness (Xianzong, r. 806—20) ordered the Imperial Commissioner Du Yingqi to escort thirty members of the palace, all holding fragrant flowers, to the Lin'gao Station to welcome the bone of the Buddha. It entered the palace from the Gate for According with the Light, and remained within the forbidden precincts for three days; thereupon it was escorted to the various monasteries [in Chang'an]. The princes, princesses, aristocrats, and gentry all rushed about making offerings, only fearing to be left behind. Among the commoners some abandoned their work, impoverished themselves, set their heads ablaze, or seared their arms in the effort to make offerings.[43] [Han] Yu never did like Buddhism, so he presented the following remonstrance.[44]

Then follows the text of his famous essay on the bone of the Buddha, including these particularly biting lines:

> Although your servant is utterly ignorant, I certainly realize that His Highness is not deluded by Buddhism, but is doing this act of veneration in order to seek for blessings and good fortune. Now that the harvest is plentiful and the people happy . . . setting up such a spectacle is merely for the sake of amusement. How can anyone as saintly and brilliant as You be willing to believe in such a thing?[45]

This essay by a famous literatus, at the height of his bureaucratic career, caused a sensation.[46] For his earnest but ill-advised words, Han Yu barely escaped summary execution, suffering instead a fate only slightly more tolerable: he was banished immediately to Guangdong, where he had been exiled once before for unvarnished remarks addressed to the throne.

It should be recalled that four finger bones of the Buddha were recovered from the ruined base of the pagoda in 1981; at some point in time Famensi came to be the repository of these other relics. We do have documentary evidence that finger bones were housed in monasteries around the capital and its environs, including temples on Mt. Wutai and the Zhongshan mountain range, and in Sizhou until at least 844. At that time, one year before the great proscription against Buddhism sponsored by the royal house at the instigation of Daoist advisors to the throne, it was forbidden to make offerings to these relics upon pain of public caning. Perhaps at this time the relics were moved to Famen Monastery for safekeeping, for smaller monasteries were closed and their images and scriptures transferred to larger ones during this same year.[47] A catalogue of stone rubbings from the Song period first published in 1119—25 by Zhao Mingcheng (1081—1129) preserves the titles of five stelae erected at Tang period monasteries that housed relics.[48] Presumably, then, at least five physical relics of the Buddha, beyond the many substitution relics made of gold, silver, pearls, and other materials, were preserved in China at the time.

The recent Imperial Tombs of China exhibit at Brigham Young University included one of these substitution relics from the Great Cloud Monastery located in Gansu Province. Housed in triple coffins of gilt bronze, silver, and gold, the reliquary bottle contained fourteen grains of pearl-like kernels in the shape of rice. The exhibition catalogue explains the background to these substitution relics:

> These relics are believed to be the ashes of the Sakyamuni Buddha (ca. 565—486 B.C.). According to Buddhist tradition, after the Buddha died and was cremated, his body was transformed into relics the size of rice kernels which could not be pulverized or scorched and sometimes produced brilliant light and divine effects. . . . A Buddhist sutra states, 'If there is no genuine relic, then a relic can still be created out of gold, silver, glazed tile, crystal, jasper, glass, and other valuable materials,' so that even sand, herbs, or pieces of bamboo or wood can serve as relics. The relic in this exhibition seems to have been made from pearl or something similar.[49]

In 1985 excavation work at the Qingshansi or Monastery for Celebrating the Mountains near the tomb of the First Emperor of Qin uncovered another hidden crypt dating from the Tang dynasty. It yielded yet another set of silver and gold coffins; in an interesting parallel to the Famensi Sharira Bodhisattva, these coffins were carried by a Bodhisattva resting on a lotus throne. Inside the gold coffin was a glass bottle containing substitution relics of an undetermined substance.[50] Another example recently excavated was the gilded bronze miniature pagoda placed under the foundation of the Ming dynasty Great Awakening Monastery in Nanjing, included in the Imperial Tombs exhibit (fig. 6).[51] This was found in a specially shaped brick-lined pit with a circular opening at the top, representing the roundness of the heavens, and a square bottom, representing the four-cornered earth. The four blue-and-white vases contained sweet-smelling herbs collected from distant regions and brought together in the vases to honor the sacred center. The Tibetan style stupa contains a seated female figure, Ushnisha Vijaya, protected by

four guardian kings, who stand in front of four stupa-shaped doorways. This particular deity was an emanation of the Buddha's crowning knot of hair and was invoked to pray for the extended life of the emperor. Understandably, the only solid-gold object in this intricate, three-dimensional mandala was the most important and was placed on a ledge at the front: the figure of the reclining Buddha as he passed into Nirvana.[52]

Significance of the Gold Plate

Gold played an important symbolic and liturgical role in the Buddhist religion. This is easily seen by reference to any good Buddhist dictionary—Chinese or Indian—in which the following terms are in common use: "golden land," a Buddhist monastery; "golden words," the words of the Buddha; "golden treasury," the Buddha nature in all the living; "golden mouth," mouth of the Buddha; "golden body" or "golden mountain," the body of the Buddha; "golden person," the Buddha or his image; and most significantly, "golden bones" or relics of the Buddha.[53] In the *Divyavadana*, King Bimbisara, on the advice of the Buddha, sent a neighboring king a painting of his teacher and the essence of the new Buddhist doctrine inscribed on a gold plate.[54]

In Sri Lanka, the first of the large stupas, the Ruwanveli, or "Gold dust," Dagoba became known simply as the *Mahathupa*, or "Great Stupa" (fig. 7). When the 254-foot-diameter dome was finished, it was covered with white plaster and ornamented with painted and gilded details.[55] The *Mahavamsa* describes the treasures of the central relic chamber of the Great Stupa as including a 27-foot-high silver Bo tree in the center. The Bo tree is revered because it sheltered the Buddha when he attained enlightenment and may be compared to the tree of life in western tradition. Four golden Buddhas were placed facing out to the four quarters of the earth, thus forming a great three-dimensional mandala.[56]

The stupa tradition was not unique to the Buddhists in India, as it was based on the ancient Hindu custom of burial tumuli. This widespread custom must also be looked at in conjunction with the *agnicayana*, or Vedic rite of constructing the fire altar, the Hindu model of the universe (fig. 8), thus combining time and space as well as the rituals of royal power. In a surprising parallel to our Chinese Bodhisattva bearing a lotus leaf, according to the *Satapatha-Brahmana* the object forming the second layer of the foundation deposit is also a lotus leaf, which bears a golden disk, representing the sun, with twenty-one knobs on its circumference, representing the twelve months of the year, the five seasons, three worlds, and the sacrificer himself.[57]

Several biographies of noted monks of the Six Dynasties and Tang periods illustrate various aspects of the ritual importance of gold. Once eleven taels of gold were presented as an offering to an image of the Buddha.[58] The biography of the Tang cleric Sengyuan records that in constructing a pagoda, a gold plate or platter, *jinpan*, is necessary.[59] This is the recognizable tradition of the foundation deposit, found in many cultures throughout the world. Presumably such a plate functioned as the foundation plate found at the base of many excavated temples in India. An example is the Gupta period Shivite temple in Gokul, in which a square gold plate with a crudely incised figure of Nandi, the animal steed of Shiva, was placed in the center of a square stone in the foundation deposit (fig. 9). Such a plate stabilized the ritual center of the microcosmic building and the macrocosm it paralleled.[60]

One biography associates gold very closely with relics of the Buddha. While preaching the Buddhist gospel, Sengshi witnessed two pieces of the bones of the Buddha that had been stored in a stone box transform suddenly into yellow gold.[61] We have previously seen that gold was one substance that could substitute for a genuine corporal relic. One entry even records the use of gold plates to transcribe sacred sutras: Shanwuwei "again

smelted gold like palm leaves[62] and copied the *Mahaprajnaparamita-Sutra* (The Perfection of Wisdom Sutra)."[63] This sutra was the fundamental philosophical work of the Mahayana school. Written in some 6,400,000 Chinese characters, it occupies three full Western-style volumes in its modern critical edition;[64] copying it on gold plates must have necessitated an extraordinary amount of gold as well as a huge investment in human and monetary resources.

Complete sets of such gold plates are apparently no longer extant in China. But a famous example of the Jingangjing—a Chinese translation of the *Vajracchedika-prajnaparamita*, or Diamond-Cutter Sutra, dating to the eighth century (fig. 10)—was inscribed on nineteen gold plates measuring 14.8 x 13.7 cm found in a bronze box within a stone box buried under a five-storied pagoda in Iksan, Korea.[65] The text opens with a group of monks who circumambulate the living Buddha three times and then sit down to listen to his teachings. He makes a series of apparently contradictory sayings similar to the later Zen *koan*. He warns of a future period called the "Latter Days of the Law" when the oral transmission will have decayed. He prophesies that there will be at least some enlightened beings who will understand and teach his true doctrine. He then promises that the country that preserves and teaches this sutra will have to be honored and worshiped by the worlds of gods, men, and evil spirits. It will become like a *chaitya*, or temple.[66] It is apparent that this promise was the motivation for Korean Buddhists to inscribe the sutra on gold plates and preserve it under a pagoda.

Another set of multilingual gold plates, inscribed in Tibetan, Chinese, Manchurian, and Mongolian, was presented to the eleventh Dalai Lama by Emperor Daoguang (r. 1821—51) of the Qing dynasty and is on display at the Potala Palace.[67] An extraordinary find from Asia was a set of twenty gold leaves inscribed in Pali.[68] It was the "Golden Torah" of Pali Buddhism, similar to the palm-leaf manuscript commonly found in India and Burma, a form imitated by the plates cast and inscribed by the monk Shanwuwei mentioned above and distantly echoed by the leaf-shaped tray that holds the gold plate of the Sharira. Other sets of inscribed gold plates from Asia include a plate in Japanese, sheets from Thailand, plates from India, and gold tablets from Iran.[69]

Daoists also used gold plates in their scriptural tradition of this Chinese indigenous religion. The furnace god, Zaojun (Tsao ChÅ¸n), was "an alchemist in charge of the furnaces used to fashion plates of gold that confer immortality on the users."[70] An early Daoist anthology yields many relevant citations of interest. Called the *Yunji qiqian*, or "Seven Slips from the Cloudy Satchel," this eleventh-century anthology is a resumé of the entire Daoist patrology, *Daozang*.[71] One set of scriptures from the Daoist Heavens was called "The Golden Book and the Prohibitions and Monographs of the Transcendents" (*Jinshu xianzhijie*).[72] "Golden books and secret writing" was another pairing,[73] as was "golden books and jade tablets" or "golden books with secret exegesis in jade."[74] This association between metal and mineral is still reflected in the practice of writing prayers to the spirit of the mountain in gold ink on jade tablets placed in an elaborate stone box on the summit of Mt. Tai.[75] In the preface to the imperially compiled biographies of Daoist immortals, His Highness recorded that their words and deeds were "worthy of inscribing on plates of gold and being secreted within the Orchid Terrace," the celestial counterpart of an earthly institutional library.[76] An ancient practice of transcribing prayers on planchettes of silver and other metals, or jade plates with writing in gold, and then casting them into mountain grottos and streams, is an early Daoist manifestation of communicating with the gods through metallic inscriptions.[77]

Gold played a similar role in the West. The most famous example of the ritual use of gold in traditional Jewish culture, of course, is the Tabernacle of Moses, in which, through a series of areas of increasingly restricted access,

the ark of the covenant at the center reminded Israel of its past as well as present connection with heaven. A true reliquary, it preserved the original stone tablets of the Law given to Moses and other testimonies of God's miraculous dealings with his people. The box itself was of acacia wood overlaid with gold plate, while the mercy seat was of solid gold, an indication of its supreme holiness as the throne of God. One possible reconstruction of the sacred geometry of the layout of the Tabernacle puts the holy of holies in the center of the second square (fig. 11), suggestive of the familiar mandala pattern of Buddhism.

In western Christianity, "the shrine containing a grave or, more frequently, a fragmentary relic, was very often simply, 'the place': *loca sanctorum*, s topoÄ±."[78] The Shinto temples of Japan often enshrine a tangible object, such as a bronze mirror, called the *shintai*, or "body of the god." The possession of a relic ensured the *praesentia* or physical presence of the holy, and its procession into the capital, whether fourth-century Constantinople or ninth-century Chang'an, confirmed that the community deserved the *praesentia*.[79]

In the restored gospel, the presence of the holy is nowhere more evident than in the building of temples. For example, great attention has been given to the proper order of the placing of temple cornerstones (D&C 94:6), from those at Far West, to a recent placing of the Mount Timpanogos Temple's cornerstone in a ceremony that combined elements of previous cornerstone, record stone, and capstone-laying activities. The archetype is the Salt Lake Temple, where the symbolism seems to have been most carefully worked out. This temple was seen in vision by Brigham Young, who struck his cane forcefully into the ground and proclaimed, "Here we shall build a temple to our God."[80] The spot, now presumed to be the center of the temple, was marked by Wilford Woodruff with a stake, within the ten-acre square known as Temple Block. The southeast corner of the square was used as the baseline and meridian of the city. This meant that every location would be measured from the temple and described in an efficient coordinate system.[81] In contrast to the Far West experience, where large uncut stones were manhandled into place on ground level, the Salt Lake Temple foundation was excavated at great effort and cost to a depth of "about sixteen feet below the surface of the eastern bank."[82] The four large cornerstones, presumably squared according to Wilford Woodruff's sketch, were placed in time to be dedicated on Wednesday, 6 April 1853, during general conference (fig. 12). Just twelve years earlier to the day, Joseph Smith had laid the cornerstones of the Nauvoo Temple in accordance with "the strict order of the Priesthood."[83] The speeches and prayers on the latter occasion were given by various priesthood quorums standing on their respective stones. Starting with the southeast, or chief, cornerstone, Brigham Young and the First Presidency commenced the ceremony, then the Brethren circumambulated clockwise and the Presiding Bishopric dedicated the southwest cornerstone, and so on.[84]

This sunwise, or clockwise, movement was restated years later in Orson Pratt's 1878 plan of the cycle of moonstones to be carved and placed on the exterior of the Salt Lake Temple (fig. 13).[85] As a sign of the importance of his astronomical investigations, he was given space in the southeast corner of Temple Block for a small wooden observatory with wooden shutters on the roof (fig. 14, lower right).[86] He also designed the Big Dipper arrangement on the center west tower and rotated it so the two "pointer stars" actually point to the real North Pole (fig. 14, upper left). The temple architect, Truman Angell, interpreted this symbolic constellation with the explanation that "the lost may find themselves by the Priesthood."[87] Ancient cultures such as the Chinese have used this same constellation to find the same still center of the circling heavens (see page 23 above). Brother Angell placed the Salt Lake Temple firmly in the ancient tradition by explaining, "The whole structure is designed to symbolize some of the great architectural work above."[88]

In 1893 Brigham Young's son and Church architect, Joseph Don Carlos Young, drew up a plan for the ordinance rooms that moved in an ascending, clockwise spiral ending in the southeast corner with three rooms: on the east, the sealing room for the living; in the center, the holy of holies; and on the west, the sealing room for the dead.[89] It is safe to assume that Brigham Young was responsible for the major design elements. He knew his Bible better than most and was familiar with the description of the holy of holies in the Tabernacle of Moses and in the Temple of Solomon, where that room is clearly described as a cube (see Exodus 26:15—25 and 1 Kings 6:20). Yet he chose to make this most holy of rooms circular and surmounted by an eighteen-foot dome, with all the architectural complications this created.[90] We are left to wonder if he did this because he understood that the square with its cube and the circle with its sphere both point to the same divine center.[91]

On 13 August 1857 President Young joined with other church leaders at a ceremony in which a foundation deposit, a metal box containing records of the church in a hollowed-out quartzite stone, now known as the "record stone" (fig. 14), was placed in the southeast corner, above the cornerstone but below the first course of granite blocks.[92] A complete set of Deseret gold coins was included, an interesting parallel to the gold coins found in Buddhist foundation deposits that help in dating the structure.

In this complex of symbols and rites, the most surprising parallel to the Chinese tablet is the inscribed copper plate (fig. 15)[93] placed in the capstone of the Salt Lake Temple. After invoking a continuity with the ancient Tabernacle of Moses and the high priest's gold plate inscribed with the phrase "Holiness to the Lord" (Exodus 28:36), the copper plate records, "The corner stones were laid April 6th 1853 commencing at the South East Corner," listing the General Authorities at that time, followed by the General Authorities thirty-nine years later, when the capstone was laid at noon as the sun reached its highest point. The presence of these two memorial deposits in the Salt Lake Temple is paralleled in numerous Asian stupas and pagodas, in which a foundation deposit is present at ground level and another reliquary at the top under the spire (cf. fig. 7).[94]

Conclusion

In the context of traditional Buddhism and compared with Daoism and other general Asian religious practices, the significance of the Chinese gold plate lies on several levels. Textually, as a document, it recorded a prayer for the long life and health of the emperor and invoked a blessing upon his realm. It further announced the presentation of this Sharira Bodhisattva as a perpetual offering to the holy relic. Symbolically, gold was the most auspicious and appropriate gift to the Buddha, which partook of the Buddha nature while functioning as a literal relic. Gold was believed to spiritually charge or sanctify a place—thus its presence in these numerous rituals. Perhaps its presentation served in this case to reinvigorate the sanctity, and, by extension, the prophylactic power against evil of a holy site charged with protecting the realm. For sites that housed relics, whether temple, shrine, or grave, were, according to Peter Brown, "loci where Heaven and Earth met."[95]

More prosaically, the presentation of the Sharira Bodhisattva and its inscribed gold plate verified the most mundane motivation for housing relics: to attract endowments and patronage.[96] This plate, then, represented much more than its simple message, since its message did no more than confirm the symbolism and religious function of the plate and the Sharira and direct the power of such symbolism outward to the person of the emperor and his realm. These are noble purposes, to be sure, but serve a different function than gold plates that contained sacred scripture—whether the Diamond-Cutter Sutra, the biographies of Immortals, or the Book of Mormon—where the ritual medium was subordinate to the religious message.

Since our interest was prompted by the Nephite golden plates, an intriguing question to consider here is the intent with which Moroni constructed his four-sided box of stones laid "in some kind of cement" (JS—H 1:52).[97] Did he choose that shape because it was the most practical design for storing the Nephite record and regalia, or did he orient the four sides to the four quarters of the world, a phrase mentioned six times in the text itself?[98] If the latter is true, he was doing more than just storing religious records inscribed on gold plates: he was constructing sacred space, a temple in miniature, to house the tangible links with his sacred past and continuing a tradition that stretched across thousands of years and throughout most of Asia.

Notes

Research for this paper, including internal travel within China to visit Xi'an and a trip to the University of California at Berkeley, was generously supported by FARMS. We wish to thank Noel Reynolds for setting us on the trail of Chinese gold plates.

1. See Sun Zhichu, ed., *Jinwen zhulu jianmu* [Concise Index of Published Bronze Inscriptions] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981). See the comprehensive survey of the historical discoveries of bronze inscribed vessels in China in Edward Shaughnessy, *Sources of Western Zhou History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), chap. 1.

2. See Thomas F. Carter and L. Carrington Goodrich, *The Invention of Printing and Its Spread Westward* (New York: Ronald, 1955), 12. Two gold seals, one from the Han and one from the Ming dynasties, are analyzed and illustrated in *Nanjing bowuyuan cangbaolu* [Catalogue of Treasures Stored in the Nanjing Museum] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe and Joint Publishing, 1992), 81, 272—75. For Chinese seals in general, see Tsuen-Hsuin Tsien, *Written on Bamboo and Silk: The Beginnings of Chinese Books and Inscriptions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 54—58, and Tsuen-Hsuin Tsien, *Chemistry and Chemical Technology: Paper and Printing*, Science and Civilisation in China, vol. 5, part 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 5—7.

3. See Tsien, *Written on Bamboo and Silk*, 50—53.

4. See ibid., 309.

5. See Bo Gyllensvard, *Chinese Gold and Silver in the Carl Kempe Collection: A Catalogue* (Stockholm: Nordisk Rotogravyr, 1953), 66, pl. 6.

6. See ibid., 65, pl. 5. Other Huai style gold plaques are represented by plates 7 and 8a (pp. 66, 69).

7. See ibid., 77; pl. 17a.

8. Eight inscribed planchettes are illustrated and described in *Tangdai jinyinqi* [Gold and Silver Objects from the Tang dynasty], ed. Zhenjiang bowuguan (Beijing: Wenwu, 1985), appendix, plates 5—13.

9. See *Tangdai jinyinqi*, pl. 240. The set is described and its use in Tang period drinking games analyzed by Donald Harper, "The *Analects* Jade Candle: A Classic of T'ang Drinking Custom," *T'ang Studies* 4 (1986): 69—91; see also "Gilded Silver Drinking Tally Receptacle on a Turtle," in *Treasures: 300 Best Excavated Antiques from China*, ed. China Cultural Relics Promotion Center (Beijing: New World, 1992), 314.

10. Pagoda or Dagoba is the Portuguese pronunciation of the Pâli *Dhâtu-gabâha*, Sanskrit Dhâtugarbha, "womb world," one of the names for the Buddhist stupa in India, which the Chinese translated as *ta*; see Henry Yule and A.

C. Burnell, *A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive* (London: Murray, 1903), 652—57. *Famen* means "Gateway to the *Dharma*," or Buddhist law.

11. The Tang crypt is oriented 9 degrees west of true north, a significant discrepancy probably resulting from the use of a magnetic device rather than astronomical observation. In 1580, the earliest date of reliable readings, magnetic north was 10 degrees west of true north from this site. The modern Chinese diviner's board, *shih*, has a compass placed in the center to help the geomancer align himself with the hidden currents of *qi*. It is still used to orient buildings and especially temples and tombs. If the orientation of Famensi was magnetic, it would be an early example of this tradition. Joseph Needham, with Wang Ling and Kenneth G. Robinson, *Physics and Physical Technology: Physics*, Science and Civilisation in China, vol. 4, part 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955—), 301—13.

12. See Roderick Whitfield, "Esoteric Buddhist Elements in the Famensi Reliquary Deposit," *Asiastische Studien* 44 (1990): 252.

13. See Famensi Bowuguan yanjiushi, ed., *Famensi wenji* [Anthology of Famen Monastery, hereafter abbreviated as *Wenji*]. *Famen lishi wenhua yanjiu congshu* (Shaanxi, Famens: bowuguan yanjiushi, 1990), 1:147.

14. See Zhu Qixin, "Buddhist Treasures from Famensi," *Orientations* 21 (May 1990): 79.

15. *Mikan*, meaning "secret niche," corresponding to the Gárbhagriha, "womb chamber," of Hindu temples where the "seed" is planted that gives life to the structure. Stella Dramrisch, *The Hindu Temple* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), 1:27. Some scholars believe this fourth relic is the only "true" bone based on its hidden location. The other three were "shadow bones" intended to protect the genuine one. Zhu Qixin, "Buddhist Treasures," 80.

16. See Wenji, 155.

17. Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *A Dictionary, English and Sanskrit* (London: Allen, 1851), 1057, gives a definition of *sáríra* as as "the body, bodily frame, solid parts of the body . . . originally that which is easily destroyed or dissolved." In true Buddhist enjoyment of contrasting opposites, we have the paradox of the gilded Sharira container that does not rust and the corruptible ashes and bones within, the *zhen shen*, or "true body."

18. A more detailed historical epitome is presented by Chen Jingfu, "Guanyu Famensi lishi de jige wenti [Several Problems in the History of Famen Monastery]," in *Wenji*, 123—36.

19. Parcel-gilding is a sophisticated technique whereby a gold-and-mercury amalgam is deposited on the silver surface and the mercury is driven off by application of controlled heat. P. A. Lins and W. A. Oddy, "The Origins of Mercury Gilding," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 2 (1975): 365—73, demonstrate the origin of the process in the third century B.C. in Chou dynasty China, from which it spread to the west by the first century A.D.

20. *Sumeru*, *Meru*, and *Mandara* are just a few of its many names; see Adrian Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stupa* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Studies on Southeast Asia, 1985), 226—28, and the discussion in Georgio di Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, *Hamlet's Mill: An Essay on Myth and the Frame of Time* (Boston: Gambit, 1969), 382—83.

21. *Mandorla* is Italian for "almond," from the Latin *amygdala*. Scholars have yet to explain the curious coincidence of the similarity of this Christian term for the almond-shaped glory that surrounds Christ to the Sanskrit *mandala*,

which, *inter alia*, also means "halo"; see also note 24 below.

22. Ambrosia, the food of the gods, is cognate with our word *immortal*, the Greek version of the Sanskrit Amrita; A. M. Fowler, "A Note on a±mbrotoß," *Classical Philology* 37 (January 1942): 77.

23. No correlation has been found with the diagrams available to us for comparison, though the Guanyin and Amitofu *bija* syllables would seem to be appropriate.

24. Monier-Williams, *Dictionary*, 775; màṇḍala "circular, round . . . a disk (esp. of sun or moon); . . . also 'the charmed circle of a conjuror,' globe, orb, ring, circumference, ball, wheel . . . the path or orbit of a heavenly body, a halo round the sun or moon, . . . a circular array of troops . . . district, . . . province, country . . . a multitude, group, band . . . a division or book of the Rig-veda, . . . a particular oblation or sacrifice."

25. This representational tradition reached its climax in the creation in bronze of the 53-feet high Great Buddha at Nara, Japan, in 749. On each of the many petals, a large complex diagram of a Buddha flanked by Bodhisattvas and numberless concourses of angels was engraved. See Snodgrass, *Symbolism of the Stupa*, 208 fig. 133.

26. Surprisingly, the Chinese name of this Bodhisattva, *Guanyin*, is not contained in the inscription. As artists tried to depict his all-encompassing compassion more clearly, he was shown with increasingly feminine traits, eventually becoming the more familiar image of the latter form of *Guanyin*, the so-called Goddess of Mercy.

27. This custom of elevating an honored object above the eyes or head with both hands is still observed in many cultures throughout Asia.

28. For example, the infamous empress, Tz'u-his, insisted that she be called the *Lao Fo*, or Old Buddha. See David M. Farquhar, "Emperor as Bodhisattva in the Governance of the Ch'ing Empire," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 38 (1978): 5—34.

29. The four chains remind one of the four *wei* cords that hold up the cosmic umbrella in one of the early Chinese models of the universe; for a discussion of *wei* cords, see Derk Bodde, "Myths of Ancient China," in *Mythologies of the Ancient World*, ed. Samuel N. Kramer (New York: Anchor, 1989), 387. In Japan, the rare form of the *Tahø tø*, Treasure Pagoda, has four symbolic chains connecting the *stupika* finial to the square roof that protects the circular stupa below; see Pierre Rambach, *The Secret Message of Tantric Buddhism* (New York: Rizzoli, 1979), 39, 58—59.

30. Whitfield, "Esoteric Buddhism," 255.

31. The three-pronged thunderbolt wielded by Zeus, the trident by Poseidon, and the triple thunderbolt on Roman shields are all manifestations of this motif in the West.

32. *Vajrapani*, "Wielder of the *Vajra*," is the name of another popular Bodhisattva.

33. The inscription is shown on fig. 4.6 and transcribed in Zhang Tinghao, ed., *Famensi* (Hong Kong: China Shaanxi Tourist Publishing House, 1990), 99.

34. See *Treasures: 300 Best Excavated Antiques from China*, 312.

35. Not "Buddha" as translated in *Treasures*.

36. *Jiu Tangshu* (Peking punctuated ed.), 19a.678.

37. See Li Hui-Lin, *Nan-fang ts'ao-mu chuang: A Fourth-Century Flora of Southeast Asia* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1979), 87—90, for this tree and its aromatic products.

38. A parallel of nearly a thousand years earlier is found in the *Mahavamsa*, the national epic of Sri Lanka, in which a king made a lavish donation to the monastery building he had just completed. The donation consisted of an ivory throne embellished with a golden sun, a silver moon, pearl stars, a white umbrella, and ritual implements for use by the chief priest of the *Tirunansis*, who would thus be sitting in the center of the universe as he expounded the Buddhist doctrine. This appears to be a common royal prerogative; Wilhelm Geiger, trans., *The Mahavamsa or the Great Chronicle of Ceylon* (London: Luzac, 1964), 184.

39. *Quan Tangwen* (1818; reprint, Taipei: Wenyou shudian, 1972), 85.29.

40. See Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China: An Historical Survey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 225. For the healing of a blind man during a procession in 631, see *Famensi wenji*, 152. The modern procession of the Buddha's tooth in Kandi, Sri Lanka, remains one of the largest celebrations of its kind in the Buddhist world.

41. See Ch'en, *Buddhism in China*, 280. A restored Tang period mural depicting the procession of the relics is reproduced in part in *Famensi*, 93—94.

42. See *Wenji*, 153.

43. These excesses were not rhetorical exaggeration. According to an eyewitness, a fervent young monk adorned his head with artemisia and set it afire. He was held upright by the crowd, writhing in agony, until he passed out. The same eyewitness records that a soldier cut off his left arm in front of the relic as it passed by; holding his severed arm in his right hand, he swished blood from it on the relic with every pace he took; see Ch'en, *Buddhism in China*, 281. The custom continues in Korea and Japan as zealous nationalists cut off their little fingers during mass rallies to demonstrate their commitment to the cause.

44. *Jiu Tangshu*, 160.4198.

45. *Jiu Tangshu*, 160.4199. The entire text of this essay has been translated by J. K. Ridout in *Anthology of Chinese Literature*, ed. Cyril Birch (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 2:250—53. For this episode in the life of *Han Yu*, *see Charles Hartman*, *Han Yu and the T'ang Search for Unity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 84—87; and Homer H. Dubs, "Han Yü and the Buddha's Relic: An Episode in Medieval Chinese Religion," *Review of Religion* 11 (November 1946): 5—17.

46. As stressed by H. A. Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature* (New York: Grove Press, 1923), 200.

47. See Ch'en, *Buddhism in China*, 230. For a contemporary account of these relics and their official disfavor, see Edwin O. Reischauer, trans., *Ennin's Diary: The Record of a Pilgrimage to China in Search of the Law* (New York: Ronald, 1955), 340. The righteous Nephites at the end of their history felt the same need to gather their sacred relics together in a safe place, an underground chamber in the hill Cumorah.

48. See *Jinshilu* [Register of Metal and Stone (Inscriptions)] (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1985), 63, 66, 68—69.

49. *Imperial Tombs of China* (Memphis: Lithograph Publishing, 1995), 120—21.

50. See *Wenji*, 162—63.

51. See *Imperial Tombs of China*, 134.

52. Compare Geiger, *Mahavamsa*, 217, in which the king prays that the relics will take on the form of the Buddha as he "lay upon his deathbed," which they do in a miraculous manner.

53. William E. Soothill and Lewis Hodous, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms* (1937; reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977), 280—84.

54. See Pranavitana, "Roruka: Was It Mohenjo-daro?" in *Studies in Asian History*, ed. Kishori S. Lal (London: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1969), 111.

55. This tradition continues in Southeast Asia, where the domes are covered in many layers of gold leaf, causing them to shine in the sunlight like a mountain of light, a frequent description. A Thai aphorism proclaims: "When the temples gleam, Buddha smiles on the land," a self-fulfilling prophecy since the gold is applied as an act of devotion. When the economy allows more people to afford this gift, the temples indeed gleam, proving the blessings of prosperity.

56. One thinks of Facsimile 2 in the Book of Abraham, the hypocephalus motif in which the central seated figure frequently has four rams' heads facing out to the four quarters, thus making this Egyptian cosmic diagram part of the same tradition as the mandala. An indication of their symbolic and real connection with inscribed gold plates is the fact that two examples are actually made of gold leaf, and several are painted in yellow on black to represent gold.

57. See Julius Eggeling, trans., *Satapatha-Brahmana*, Sacred Books of the East, vol. 41 (London: 1882—1900), 364—68.

58. See *Tang gaosengzhuan* [Biographies of Eminent Monks of the Tang], in *Taishø shinsh¥ daizøkyø*, ed. Takakusu Junjirø and Watanabe Kaigyoku, 55 vols. (Tokyo: Taishø shinsh¥ daizøkyø, kankøkai, 1924—29); (the printing of this series of the Buddhist canon is hereafter abbreviated as *T.*), *T.* 2060, 19.586b.

59. See *Tang gaosengzhuan*, 18.574b.

60. See N. G. Majumdar, "Excavations at Gokul," in *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India, 1935—36*, ed. I. F. Blakiston (Delhi: Manager of Public Affairs, 1938), 67—69. The tradition continues. On Sunday, 10 November 1996, the Hare Krishna group in Spanish Fork, Utah, broke ground for their new temple by excavating a large square pit, oriented to the four directions. After milk offerings were poured in, a silver image of Ananta Sesha was placed in the center as a foundation deposit. It represents the "unending" cosmic serpent who holds the planets in their orbit and will thus support the temple. *Daily Universe*, Monday, 11 November 1996, 7.

61. See *Tang gaosengzhuan*, 26.671a.

62. *Beiye*, an ellipsis for *beiduoye*, was a leaf from the *Borassus flabelliformus*, the palmyra or fan-palm, whose leaves were used for writing, called *Pattra* in Sanskrit.

63. *Song gaosengzhuan* [Biographies of Eminent Monks of the Song], *T*. 2061, 2:714c.

64. According to Kogen Mizuno, *Buddhist Sutras: Origin, Development, Transmission* (Tokyo: Kosei, 1982), 91.

65. A photograph of this set of plates, National Treasure No. 123, is contained in *Kum sok gong ye* [Gold and Other Metallurgical Products], *Hankuk ui Mi* [The Beauty of Korea], vol. 23 (Seoul: Chungang Ilbosa, 1985), plates 119—20; description on p. 220, and *The March of Islam* (Alexandria, Va.: Time-Life Books, 1988), 122—23.

66. See Max Müller, trans., *Buddhist Mahayana Texts*, Sacred Books of the East, vol. 49 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), 111—44.

67. See *Potala Palace* (Beijing: Cultural Relics, 1990), 136, for color plate. Reference and color xerox copy provided courtesy of William Hamblin.

68. See H. Curtis Wright, "Metal Documents in Stone Boxes," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City and Provo, Utah: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 2:279—80.

69. See the convenient compilation of Franklin S. Harris Jr., "Old World Writing on Metal Plates," *Millennial Star* 96 (25 January 1934): 57—59.

70. Helmut Wilhelm, "Chinese Mythology," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1981), 4:413—14.

71. See the prefatory material included in K. M. Schipper, *Projet Tao-Tsang: Index du Yunji qiqian* (Paris: Ecole-française d'Extrême-Orient, 1981).

72. *Yunji qiqian*, in Daozang [Daoist Patrology] (Shanghai: Hanfenlou, 1926), 40.11b.

73. *Yunji qiqian*, 9.2a.

74. *Yunji qiqian*, 11.2b, below, and 6.20b.

75. See Edouard Chavannes, *Le T'ai chan: Essai de Monographie d'un culte chinois. Appendice: Le dieu du sol dans la Chine antique* (Paris: Leroux, 1910), 55; Dwight Baker, *T'ai Shan: An Account of the Sacred Eastern Peak of China* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1925), 143. The BYU exhibit also featured a set of bilingual jade plates from 1662 in Chinese and Manchu, recording the biography of Emperor Shunzhi. The inscriptions on some of the plates had gold ink rubbed into the incised letters; see *Imperial Tombs of China*, 150.

76. *Yunji qiqian*, 103.2a.

77. See the exhaustive study by Edouard Chavannes, "Le jet des dragons," Mémoires conçernant l'asie orientale 3 (1919): 9—220.

78. Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 10—11. For the Chinese-Buddhist belief in the sacred center and the role of temples and shrines as microcosms, see Rolf Stein, *The World in Miniature*, trans. Phyllis Brooks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

79. On this point, see Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 92—93.

80. Journal History of the Church, 28 July 1847, Archives Division, Historical Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (*hereinafter* LDS Church Archives).

81. The peripatetic Richard Burton described the cornerstone ceremony and noted that the Great Salt Lake City itself was divided into some twenty wards numbered from the southeast corner. Thus the city was a conscious extension of the sacred order of the temple. Richard R. Burton, *The City of the Saints* (New York: Knopf, 1963), 240.

82. *Deseret News*, 13 April 1853.

83. *History of the Church*, 4:331.

84. A practical explanation of the preeminence of the southeast may lie in Brigham Young's comment when he chose to make the southeast corner attic room his office in the Nauvoo Temple: "There is the most light." It contained an altar and was also used as a sealing room. Stanley Kimball, "The Nauvoo Temple," *Improvement Era* (November 1963): 978.

85. Brother Pratt actually needed fifty-two spaces for his plan to be acurate, but only fifty were available. This shows the inherent flexibility of design in these matters.

86. The original heavy red sandstone base used under his telescope has been replaced by a modern copy on the original site and rests unnoticed among the flowers.

87. Truman Angell, "The Temple," *Deseret News*, 17 August 1854, p. 2.

88. Ibid.

89. See James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord: A Study of Holy Sanctuaries, Ancient and Modern* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1912), 191—93.

90. The dome projects up into the next floor of administrative offices and gives its name to the Dome Room. Coincidently, it looks very much like a stupa with eight circular windows.

91. This change from square to circle may have been influenced by Brigham Young's experience of seeing the great dome of St. Paul's in London on his mission as well as discussions with Truman Angell, who had also visited St. Paul's.

92. See Talmage, *The House of the Lord*, 148. It was opened 136 years later, and the paper contents had decayed from moisture seeping in. *Church News*, 21 August 1993, 7.

93. A transcription of the plate can be found in Dean R. Zimmerman, "The Salt Lake Temple," *New Era* (June 1978): 36. Brigham Young placed a silver plate with a similar inscription in a box within the wall at the top of the St.

George Temple (see Janice F. DeMille, *The St. George Temple: The First 100 Years* [Hurricane, Utah: Homestead Publishers, 1977], 30—31).

94. See Snodgrass, *Stupa*, 266.

95. Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 10.

96. "A monastery or nunnery which possessed relics could hope to attract endowments both from local people and pilgrims from further afield." Janet Burton, *Monastic and Religious Orders in Britain, 1000—1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 12. On relics in general, see Friederich Pfister, *Der Reliquienkult im Altertum* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974); Marie-Madeleine, *Highways of the Faith: Relics and Reliquaries from Jerusalem to Compostela* (Secaucus: Wellfleet, 1986); and G. J. C. Snoek, *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist: A Mutual Relationship* (Leiden: Brill, 1995). For studies of individual relics, see as a mere sampling William C. Prime, *Holy Cross: A History of Invention, Preservation, and Disappearance of the Wood Known as the True Cross* (New York: Randolph, 1877); John R. Butler, *The Quest for Becket's Bones: The Mystery of the Relics of St. Thomas of Becket of Canterbury* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), and H. E. Gove, *Relic Icon, or Hoax?: Carbon Dating the Turin Shroud* (Philadelphia: Institute of Physics, 1996).

97. David Whitmer, in an 1875 interview, called it a "casket" and said it was eventually washed down to the foot of the Hill Cumorah. Lyndon Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1991), 7.

98. See 1 Nephi 19:16; 22:25; 3 Nephi 5:24, 26; 16:5; Ether 13:11.