

***Stūpa* and *Tīrtha*: Tibetan Mortuary Practices and an Unrecognized Form of Burial Ad Sanctos at Buddhist Sites in India**

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Perhaps the most characteristic element of Buddhist sites in India is the presence of a *stūpa* which is—where topography allows—the fixed focal point of the entire complex. There are, in fact, literary sources which declare that the *stūpa* was to be the first element established and that its position should determine the position of all monastic residential quarters.¹ A glance at the site plans of almost any moderately well preserved or studied monastic complex in India will show how frequently this pattern—again, when topography allows—holds. But those same site plans will also show a second, almost equally characteristic, element: the “main” *stūpa* at almost all well preserved or studied sites is not only the focal point of the surrounding monastic residential quarters, but it—in almost every case—also seems to have attracted to itself a more or less dense and jumbled array of secondary structures, structures which mirror or mimic it in miniature. These secondary *stūpas* have habitually been called “votive” *stūpas*, but little thought has been given to what “votive” could possibly mean here, and little attention—with some few exceptions—has been given to the fact that these *stūpas*, when well preserved, frequently contain things.

One of the few scholars who did not quickly pass over these secondary *stūpas* was—characteristically—Alfred Foucher. Foucher noted that these “petits édicules” were commonly referred to as “votive *stūpas*”, but he had already seen that such a designation was problematic: “à la réflexion”, he said, “on ne voit pas ce qu’ils ont de plus particulièrement ‘votif’ que les spécimens monumentaux”. We have, in fact, “au moins une preuve concluante”, he said, that all these *stūpas* were not “purs et simples *ex-voto*”.² Foucher’s “conclusive proof” was a single *stūpa* from Gandhari: inside this “petit *stūpa* ... a été trouvé *in situ* un vase de terre ronde ... il contenait, outre une petite quantité d’argile, ’des fragments de charbons et d’os carbonisés’. Cette cruche servait donc bien d’urne cinéraire et”

¹ A. Bareau, “La construction et le culte des Stūpa d’après les Vinayapīṭaka”, *BEFEO*, 50, 1960, 234.

² A. Foucher, *L’art gréco-bouddhique du Gandhāra*, Paris, 1905, I, 51.

Foucher concludes “*l’édicule était un tombeau*”.³ That a significant number of such “petits édicules”, at a significant number of Buddhist sites, were in fact, “tombs” has become increasingly clear from a good deal of material which was mostly published after Foucher was writing in 1905. Since this material—like Foucher’s observations—has been largely ignored, and since it establishes so clearly that it was common Buddhist practice in India to deposit anonymous mortuary remains in close physical proximity to *stūpas* of the Buddha—in effect “à transformer les ensembles monastiques en champs d’urnes funéraires”⁴—it is certainly worthwhile to present here a fuller and somewhat revised version of the summary of some of this material that I published a few years ago.⁵ Such a summary will, I think, establish beyond any reasonable doubt that Indian Buddhists of virtually all periods practiced—like Christians in the medieval West—a kind of “burial *ad sanctos*”.⁶ The reports of both modern and late medieval Tibetan practice that we will also consider here might well establish in addition that such “burial *ad sanctos*” could have taken several unexpected and hitherto unrecognized forms in India, and yet other material might link these Buddhist practices with similar practices connected with Hindu *tīrthas*.

Typical of the material bearing on the nature of secondary *stūpas* at Buddhist sites that has appeared since Foucher wrote is that from Taxila. This material was not fully published until 1951. It adds nearly twenty “new” instances of what Foucher called “une preuve concluante”. Marshall’s *stūpa* B6, for example, situated near the main *stūpa*, contained “some calcined fragments of bone and ashes”; his R4 contained “bone, ashes, and a fragment of carnelian”; and his K3 contained “a small earthenware vase containing some ashes and three copper coins”.⁷ At Jauliāñ—a much smaller site—although the “petits édicules” had all been reduced to mere bases, still at least three still contained mortuary deposits

³ *ibid.*, I, 52; my emphasis.

⁴ G. Fussman & M. Le Berre, *Monuments bouddhiques de la région de Caboul*, I, *Le monastère de Gul Dara*, Paris, 1976, 46.

⁵ G. Schopen, “Burial ‘Ad Sanctos’ and the Physical Presence of the Buddha in Early Indian Buddhism: A Study in the Archeology of Religions”, *Religion*, 17, 1987, 193–225.

⁶ On burial *ad sanctos* in the Christian West see J. Leclercq, “Ad sanctos”, *Dictionnaire d’archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, F. Cabrol & J. Leclercq, ed., Paris, 1924, I, cols. 479–509; Y. Duval, *Auprès des saints corps et ame: L’inhumation “ad sanctos” dans la chrétienté d’orient et d’occident du IIIe au VIIIe siècle*, Paris, 1988; Y. Duval & J.C. Picard, ed., *L’inhumation privilégiée du IVe au VIIIe siècle en occident*, Paris, 1986; P. Ariès, *Essais sur l’histoire de la mort en occident du moyen âge à nos jours*, Paris, 1975, 29–31; *ibid.*, *L’homme devant la mort*, Paris, 1977, 40–43.

⁷ J. Marshall, *Taxila: An Illustrated Account of Archaeological Excavations Carried Out at Taxila Under the Orders of the Government of India between the Years 1913 and 1934*, Cambridge, 1951, I, 241 ff.

and at least one loose reliquary was found.⁸ Barthoux's work at Tapa-Kalan in Haḍḍa, published in 1933, produced even more impressive results. There are nearly ninety small *stūpas* crowded tightly around the main monument in the court, and again, although the upper parts of many of these had been destroyed, a considerable number of these "édicules" still contained their mortuary deposits: "à l'intérieur" of some, Barthoux says, "se trouvaient des débris d'ossements à demi-calcinés parmi lesquels se distinguaient nettement des vertèbres, des têtes de côtes, des articulations de clavicules ...".⁹ Barthoux is unfortunately imprecise about numbers. About all that one can gather is that less than half of these structures still contained funerary remains. How many others originally contained such remains we do not know. But, considering the total number of *stūpas* whose deposits were still intact, this still adds an impressive number of corroborating instances to Foucher's one proof. Moreover, these numbers may be misleading since funerary urns "ne sont nullement le privilège des *stūpa*" but were, in fact, "aussi déposées au large des enceintes".¹⁰ The practice of depositing funerary urns outside of, but in close proximity to *stūpas* which is reflected at Tapa-Kalan must, of course, call to mind what little we know about the still not properly published monastery at Kauśāmbī that has been identified as the Ghoṣitārama. Here, in the central court, which is surrounded on all four sides by the residential cells of the monastery, were found—in addition to the main *stūpa*—"the foundations of a large number of small *stūpas*". Although most are badly preserved, at least two "yielded relics buried in jars". Moreover, mortuary deposits in earthen pots were reported to have been found buried "in the floors adjoining the small *stūpas*".¹¹ But even if we put aside the 'pot burials', two things at least are clear: all the small *stūpas* containing mortuary deposits at the Dharmarājika, at Jauliāñ, Tapa-Kalan, and Kauśāmbī occur in monastic compounds or complexes, all are clustered around the main *stūpa*, and all are—to use Foucher's term—"tombs".

Almost all the instances cited so far are comparatively early and there are other notable instances in this category. Burgess, for example, noted a very long time ago that two, at least, of the small *stūpas* that still remained near the sadly ruined *stūpa* at Amarāvātī still contained earthen pots holding "fragments of burnt bones".¹²

⁸ *ibid.*, I, 373 ff.

⁹ J. Barthoux, *Les fouilles de Haḍḍa, I: Stūpas et sites*, Paris, 1933, 60.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 60–61.

¹¹ G.R. Sharma, "Excavations at Kauśāmbī, 1949–1955", *Annual Bibliography of Indian Archeology, 16, For the Years 1948–1953*, Leyden, E.J. Brill, 1958, xxxvi–xlv; A. Ghosh, ed., *Indian Archeology 1953–54: A Review*, New Delhi, 1954, 9.

¹² J. Burgess, *The Buddhist Stupas of Amaravati and Jaggayyapeta in the Krishna District, Madras Presidency, Surveyed in 1882*, London, 1887, 23; J. Burgess, *Notes on the Amaravati Stupa, Madras, 1882*, 4, 9.

Rea noted at least one other similar small *stūpa* at the site, and shows on his 1905 plan what he labels an “earthenware tomb” lying close to the main *stūpa* near the eastern *āyaka* platform.¹³ Much later—in a 1958 renewal of work at the site—five additional mortuary deposits were found associated with the main *stūpa*. These five deposits were found neither in small *stūpas* nor buried in jars, but, according to D. Mitra, “in the sockets of two stones, one a re-used railing post, in the core of the southern *āyaka*”.¹⁴

Pitalkhora is another early site at which numerous mortuary deposits have come to light. In fact, Deshpande says in regard to his work at the site that “the discovery of so many reliquaries must be regarded as one of the most important results of the operation”. This discovery in fact is particularly significant because Pitalkhora is a rock-cut monastic complex, not a structural one, and until Deshpande’s discoveries—made, according to him, “through sheer luck”—mortuary deposits were commonly assumed not to occur at such sites. But in addition to the deposits in the drum of the main *stūpa* (cave 3), Deshpande found in the debris lying in front of the large *vihāra* cave next to it “two *stūpa*-reliquaries”, a “bead-reliquary within a socket in a broken boulder”, and two more detached stones “with sockets for relics”. One of these last is, he says, “a piece of great interest”. It bears “a miniature *stūpa* in half-relief”, but cut into the *aṇḍa* of this relief *stūpa* is “a socket for the relics”. Deshpande surmises that this *stūpa* may have been “fixed somewhere on the façade of this great *vihāra*”.¹⁵

At Kusinārā also, although most of the secondary *stūpas* had been reduced to mere basements, the two that were demonstrably early and well preserved contained mortuary deposits. One of these was the “perfect little *stūpa*” that was found completely encased—and therefore preserved—by and below the main *stūpa*. It contained “some charcoal and a small earthen pot”. The latter in turn contained “earth and pieces of charcoal, evidently taken from the funeral pyre of some Buddhist”. The fact that it occurred under the main *stūpa* “at a level with the virgin soil” puts its priority beyond doubt. The position of the second instance also establishes its earlier date. This *stūpa* was “engaged in” and in part overlaid by the plinth of the Nirvāṇa temple. It contained “an earthen pitcher ... containing some ashes, apparently corporeal remains ...”.¹⁶ At Amarāvati, Pitalkhora, and Kusinārā then, we have again not only ‘loose’ mortuary deposits, but additional early instances of secondary *stūpas* at Buddhist monastic sites

¹³ A. Rea, “Excavations at Amarāvati”, *ARASI*, 1905–06, Calcutta, 1909, 116–19 & plates.

¹⁴ D. Mitra, *Buddhist Monuments*, Calcutta, 1971, 202, 203, n. 11.

¹⁵ M.N. Deshpande, “The Rock-cut Caves of Pitalkhora in the Deccan”, *Ancient India* 15, 1959, 66–93, esp. 87–90.

¹⁶ H. Śāstrī, “Excavations at Kasiā”, *ARASI*, 1910–11, Calcutta, 1914, 65–66; *ibid.*, “Excavations at Kasiā”, *ARASI*, 1911–12, Calcutta, 1915, 136.

which contain mortuary deposits and could, therefore, only be—in Foucher’s terms—“tombs”. But that such secondary *stūpa*-tombs are not limited to comparatively early sites is clear as well from at least two later sites.

At the monastic site of Mīrpūr-Khas in Sind, D.R. Bhandarkar found what he described as “a regular forest of smaller *stūpas*” around the main *stūpa*. “Those that were opened”, he says, “were found to enshrine relic pots containing bones”;¹⁷ Mitra too says “all the smaller *stūpas* of the upper level, which had been opened, had funerary associations, as they contained urns with pieces of bone”.¹⁸ At Ratnagiri, in Orissa, an even larger number of secondary *stūpas* of various sizes were found tightly packed around the central *stūpa*. Although here—as everywhere else—no systematic effort was made to look for and locate all mortuary deposits, and although, as the excavator herself notes, “the relics were noticed mostly during the conservation of the *stūpas*”, still—in addition to a number of “dislocated” reliquaries—nearly twenty of these *stūpas* still contained their original funerary deposits, and a much larger number must have once contained such deposits. A considerable number of the monolithic *stūpas* have slots or sockets which almost certainly were intended for mortuary deposits, and Mitra herself says, “though bone-relics were found only in a few structural *stūpas* ... there is every reason to believe that there were many more ... for stray bones with or without reliquaries were found in the *stūpa* area”.¹⁹

It is perhaps worth noting too that the Buddhist practice of depositing mortuary remains in close proximity to *stūpas* is not limited to India. It has been noted in both Burma and Sri Lanka. C. Duroiselle, for example, discovered a number of “funeral urns” buried in close proximity to the Payagyi Pagoda at Hmawza. In commenting on these finds, he said the Burmese have “a curious custom, which is similar to that which is in vogue in Christian countries, of turning the sacred precincts of a pagoda into a cemetery”—implying thereby that this was both common and even current practice.²⁰ The evidence from Sri Lanka is even more striking. During renovations undertaken in 1946, “a large number of limestone caskets and earthenware urns” were found embedded in the southern *vāhalkaḍa* of the Ruvanvāli Dāgāba—this, according to Paranavitana, “is the *stūpa* most venerated by the Buddhists of Ceylon”—and all these urns contained mortuary deposits. Moreover, similar “urns” were found buried “close to the base of one of the two stelae which flanked the *vāhalkaḍa*”, and even “buried outside the retaining wall of the Ruvanvāli Dāgāba”. Still other examples of such urns had

¹⁷ H. Cousens, *The Antiquities of Sind, With Historical Outline*, Calcutta, 1929, 97.

¹⁸ D. Mitra, *Buddhist Monuments*, 133.

¹⁹ D. Mitra, *Ratnagiri (1958–61)*, New Delhi, 1981, I, 27 ff.

²⁰ C. Duroiselle, “Excavations at Hmawza, Prome”, *ARASI*, 1911–12, Calcutta, 1915, 147.

been “picked up” much earlier from “the debris of the Southern Vāhalkaḍa of the Abhayagiri Dāgāba”, another important *stūpa* in Sri Lanka. Paranavitana, on the basis of this material, seems to sum up the obvious: “There is, therefore, enough evidence to come to the conclusion that cinerary urns of people, not necessarily of holy men, were embedded in the fabric of the *vāhalkaḍa* of Ceylon *stūpas* or buried in their vicinity”.²¹

Likewise, in almost the opposite direction of the Buddhist world, the deposition of mortuary remains at Buddhist sites in Central Asia has been noted more than once. Grünwedel noted such deposits in considerable numbers at ’Kosh-gumbaz, near Karakhoja.²² Stein noted “many such deposits in the form of urns and little wooden boxes full of calcined bones” at the Buddhist site of Shikchin, near Kara-Shahr.²³ Later too, he found similar deposits at the Buddhist complex at Tōr-Dhērai, on “the south-eastern marches of Iran which are comprised in the present Balūchistan”.²⁴ When he encountered such deposits yet again at Sahri-Bahlōl, he explicitly declared that the Central Asian finds and practice had Indian precedents: “It is certain that the custom of such funerary deposits with which I first became familiar in Chinese Turkeṣtān, by finds at the foot of several Buddhist shrines and *stūpas* at the Shikchin site (Ming-oi) near Kara-Shahr, was practiced already in Gandhara”.²⁵

Even this quick and necessarily incomplete survey establishes several things. It establishes the fact that Foucher’s “proof” is not an isolated one, that, indeed, a significant number of the kind of secondary *stūpas* habitually taken to be “votive” were not “votive” at all, but were—again to use Foucher’s term—“tombs”. The number of such identifiable “tombs”, moreover, would almost certainly have been even greater if these structures were not almost everywhere badly preserved or disturbed. But our quick summary reveals more than the presence of these tombs. It reveals as well that even apart from these individual *stūpa*-tombs, anonymous mortuary remains were deposited in significant numbers at Indian Buddhist sacred sites. In addition to those found in *stūpas*, mortuary deposits have been found at such sites buried in earthenware pots,

²¹ S. Paranavitana, “Recent Discoveries at the Ruvanvāli Dāgāba (Mahāthūpa) of Anurādhapura”, *Annual Bibliography of Indian Archaeology*, 15. For the Years 1940–1947, Leiden, 1950, xlii–xlv.

²² A. Grünwedel, *Bericht über archäologische Arbeiten in Idikutschari und Umgebung im Winter 1902–03*, München, 1906, 110 ff; *ibid.*, *Altbuddhistische Kultstätten in Chinesisch-Turkistan: Bericht über archäologische Arbeiten, von 1906 bis 1907, bei Kuca, Qarasahr und in der Oase Turfan*, Berlin, 1912, 336 ff.

²³ A. Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay: Personal Narrative of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost China*, London, 1912, I, 366.

²⁴ A. Stein, *An Archaeological Tour in Waziristān and Northern Balūchistan*, Calcutta, 1929, 69–70.

²⁵ A. Stein, “Excavations at Sahri-Bahlōl”, *ARASI*, 1911–12, Calcutta, 1915, 111–12.

vases, and jars; they have been found in sockets of re-used railing posts or broken boulders, in relief *stūpas*, urns, in the slots or sockets of small, solid, monolithic *stūpas*, and in stone pots. Because, however, so many Buddhist sites in India are badly preserved, disturbed, or inadequately excavated and reported, we do not know the actual number of such deposits. It appears—from what we do know—that the number was large. Moreover, there is a possibility that it was *very* large indeed.

Although secondary structural *stūpas* appear to have been numerous at almost all Buddhist sites in India, there is at least one class of objects found at these sites which occurred in far, far greater numbers. These objects, made of clay—both unbaked and baked—have habitually been called “miniature *stūpas*”. They can range in size from an inch or two to maybe eight or nine inches high. They can also range in form from fairly detailed replicas of structural *stūpas* made in molds, to conically shaped “spirals”, to almost amorphous balls of clay. They have been found not just in hundreds, but in tens of thousands at some sites, and they have been found in one of two contexts, although always it seems in the upper or late layers. They occur scattered loosely around the site, but concentrated—like the *stūpa*-tombs—around the main *stūpa*; or—like the mortuary deposits, but in large numbers—they have been found deposited in the cores of secondary structural *stūpas*. Cunningham, for example, refers to both at Bodh-Gayā: “But there were hundreds of thousands of even smaller offerings in the shape of little clay *stūpas*, both baked and unbaked, from 2 or 3 inches in height, to the size of a walnut. Scores, and sometimes even hundreds, of these miniature *stūpas* were found inside the larger *stūpas*”²⁶ Even after the site had been very much disturbed, Oertel still found at Sārnāth “a great number of miniature votive *stūpas*”, and, he says, “a large number of burnt clay ‘spirals’ ... were also exhumed, varying from one to two inches in diameter. Similar ‘spirals’ were exhumed by Cunningham at Bodh-Gayā ... I take these ‘spirals’ to be the humblest type of votive *stūpa*”.²⁷ Ten years later such objects were still being found at Sārnāth. At Kusinārā, Vogel noted that “rough balls of baked clay ... turned up in great number at various places in the course of excavations”, and that “spindle whorls, balls, miniature *stūpas* and other nondescript objects of baked clay turned up in nearly every part of the site”.²⁸ At Mirpūr-Khas, Bhandarkar found amid the “regular forest of smaller *stūpas* ... diminutive clay *stūpas*”, he says, “in numbers”.²⁹ At Śāṅkaram, Rea recovered at least 44 “terra cotta votive

²⁶ A. Cunningham, *Mahābodhi or the Great Buddhist Temple under the Bodhi Tree at Buddha-Gaya*, London, 1892, 46–7.

²⁷ F.O. Oertel, “Excavations at Sārnāth”, *ARASI*, 1904–05, Calcutta, 1908, 71–2.

²⁸ J.P. Vogel, “Excavations at Kasiā”, *ARASI*, 1905–06, Calcutta, 1909, 69 and n. 1.

²⁹ See note 17 above.

spiral shaped *dāgobas*".³⁰ West—buried or in the debris near a cluster of *stūpas* in his cave 13 at Kanheri—discovered a deposit of at least 26 miniature *stūpas*.³¹ In describing some of his work at Rājagṛha, Marshall says: "The western part of the mound was opened to a depth of 10 feet only. In it were the remains of some brick walls, and in the earth round about and above them were found a number of clay *stūpas*, about two inches high and one inch in diameter at their bases. The presence of these miniature *stūpas* suggests", he says, "that a larger *stūpa*, the core of which was of earth and debris, was built over the remains of the brick walls ...".³² What Marshall is assuming had existed here at Rājagṛha has in fact been found intact at a number of other sites. At Satyapir Bhiṭā, "situated to the east of the main establishment at Paharpur at a distance of about 300 yards from the eastern exterior wall of the Mahāvihāra", Dikshit found in the "relic chamber" of a structural *stūpa* "a thick deposit of miniature votive clay *stūpas* numbering several thousand".³³ Similar deposits have also been noted at Nālandā: "At Nālandā one votive *stūpa* [i.e., a secondary *stūpa*] contained no less than 1000 unburnt clay caskets [i.e., miniature *stūpas*]"³⁴ Similarly, in "the box chambers" or "central deep shaft" of at least three structural *stūpas* at Kotila Mura in the Mainamati Hills, hundreds of "unbaked clay votive *stūpas*" were found.³⁵

All these finds are, of course, difficult to date precisely. But—for future reference—two things might be noted. First, all these finds, whatever their precise date, are late. Probably none can be dated before the 7th century, and most probably date from as late as the 10th to the 12th. The second point to be noted is that although we have examples from Andhra, Sind, and the Western caves, the vast majority of these finds come from Eastern India, from Bihar and Bengal. What this means, of course, is that the practice of depositing miniature *stūpas*—both separately and in large numbers together in the cores of secondary structural *stūpas*—is attested at Buddhist sites in India during precisely the same period that formative Indian influence was being most fully felt in Tibet. Moreover, these practices appear to have been current and particularly common in precisely those geographic areas in India with which Tibet had the closest and most

³⁰ A. Rea, "A Buddhist Monastery on the Śaṅkaram Hills, Vizagapatam District", *ARASI*, 1907–08, Calcutta, 1911, 171; Rea's dates for this site (158, n.1) are undoubtedly far too early.

³¹ E.W. West, "Result of Excavations in Cave No. 13 at Kanheri", *JBBRAS*, 6, 1862, 157–60.

³² J.H. Marshall, "Rājagṛha and Its Remains", *ARASI*, 1905–06, Calcutta, 1909, 96–97.

³³ R.B.K.N. Dikshit, *Excavations at Paharpur, Bengal*, Delhi, 1938, 83.

³⁴ S.R. Das, *Rājibāḍīdāngā*, 1962: *An Interim Report on Excavations at Rājibāḍīdāngā and Terracotta Seals and Sealings*, Calcutta, 1968, 64.

³⁵ F.A. Khan, *Mainamati: A Preliminary Report on the Recent Archaeological Excavations in East Pakistan*, n. p., 1963, 29–30.

continuous contact. Both factors would seem to suggest at least the possibility that Tibetan practices in regard to miniature *stūpas*—some aspects of which are well known—are a direct extension of Eastern Indian practice, and might therefore help us to more fully understand our Indian evidence. That we do not understand this evidence very well is already clear.

As some of the reports cited above already indicate, miniature *stūpas* at Indian sites have habitually been taken—like the secondary *stūpas* we started with—as “votive”, but without, again, any thought being given to what “votive” could mean in a Buddhist context.³⁶ There are, moreover, textual sources which present the making of miniature *stūpas* as a source of great merit, texts like the *Adbhutadharmaparyāya*, the *Kūṭāgarasūtra*, the *Mahāraṇasūtra*, and the *Pratītyasamutpādasūtra*.³⁷ But while these texts fully articulate the merit of such activity, they do not account for the placement of the resulting *stūpas* at established sacred sites. They either say nothing about where such *stūpas* should be placed, or, when they do, they say, significantly, that the merit results from placing these *stūpas* “on an unestablished place” (*mi gnas pa'i phyogs su/apratiṣṭhitapūrve pṛthivī-pradeśe*). That is to say, at places where there were no previous *stūpas*.³⁸ This would seem to rule out placing such *stūpas* at Bodh-Gayā, Sārnāth, and the other established sites at which they have been found. There are also, to be sure, Chinese accounts about individuals in India making miniature clay *stūpas*. But, here too, there is either no indication of where such *stūpas* were placed, or what indications are given suggest that they were not deposited at established sites. In the case of Hsüan-tsang, for example, he refers to the deposition of large numbers of miniature *stūpas* in “a great *stūpa*”, but he indicates that this was done by a layman and that monks had to be “invited” to its consecration: this would seem to imply that such *stūpas* full of *stūpas* were not erected within monastic complexes.³⁹ Likewise, the only thing I-ching says in regard to the location of such *stūpas* is that: “They sometimes form these *stūpas* in lonely

³⁶ See, for example, W.H.D. Rouse, “Votive Offerings (Greek)”, *ERE*, 12, 641, “The votive offering may be defined as a permanent memorial dedicated of free will to a supernatural being”; in Latin America “votive offerings”—*milagros* in Spanish—are defined as objects “primarily offered to a saint in thanks for his or her answering a petitioner’s prayer”; M. Egan, *Milagros: Votive Offerings from the Americas*, Santa Fe, 1991, 1.

³⁷ Y. Bentor, “The Redactions of the *Adbhutadharmaparyāya* from Gilgit”, *JIAS*, 11, 1988, 21–52.

³⁸ R. Salomon & G. Schopen, “The Indravarman (Avaca) Casket Inscription Reconsidered: Further Evidence for Canonical Passages in Buddhist Inscriptions”, *JIAS*, 7, 1984, 107–23, esp. 115 ff.

³⁹ S. Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, London, 1884, II, 147.

fields and leave them to fall in ruins”.⁴⁰ What can be got from both I-ching and Hsüan-tsang in regard to the placement of miniature *stūpas* would seem to suggest that the miniature *stūpas* they are talking about were—in conformity with the textual tradition—placed in an “unestablished place”, a place where there were no previous *stūpas*. So, although both are frequently quoted as doing so, neither I-ching nor Hsüan-tsang can sufficiently account for what is actually found at established Buddhist sites in India. In this they are also like the textual sources that have been similarly cited. The problems with the “votive” or the “merit” interpretation do not, however, stop here.

We have seen above that a significant number of secondary structural *stūpas* at Buddhist sites which had been taken as “votive” actually contained mortuary deposits and were, in fact, “tombs”. There is as well evidence in some cases to suggest a similar funereal function for “miniature *stūpas*”, evidence to suggest that they too “contained” things. Perhaps the clearest evidence comes from the Kotila Mura *stūpas* at Mainamati. At least three of the largest *stūpas* contained—exactly like similar *stūpas* at Paharpur and Nālandā—large numbers of “miniature *stūpas*” deposited in their cores or “relic chambers”. But in this case—although the same was not actually noticed at Paharpur and Nālandā—it was carefully noted that these miniature *stūpas* “were found *encasing bone-relics* and tiny clay sealings”.⁴¹ The huge numbers of such *stūpas* would seem to rule out taking these “bone-relics” as “relics” of the Buddha. These too look like mortuary deposits. It is, moreover, not just at Kotila Mura that such evidence has been noted. Mitra, for example, also refers to a “minor” clay *stūpa* from Mīrpūr-Khas which contained bones.⁴² In these cases, a mortuary function for this type of miniature *stūpa* would seem obvious. In other cases, it can be context alone which suggests a funerary function.

The miniature *stūpas* referred to above from Kanheri cave 13, for example, were found together in the same context with two “stone pots”. Both of these “stone pots” contained “ashes” and were, therefore, funerary urns. Although the report makes no specific mention of “bones” in regard to the miniature *stūpas*, the fact that they occurred in the same context as mortuary deposits would suggest that these little clay *stūpas* and the mortuary pots were intended as similar kinds of deposits.⁴³ Mīrpūr-Khas also presents a similar situation. Even apart from the case cited by Mitra, context alone seems sufficient to establish a mortuary function for the miniature *stūpas* from the site: here “the diminutive

⁴⁰ J. Takakusu, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practiced in India and the Malay Archipelago*, London, 1896, 150.

⁴¹ F.A. Khan, *Mainamati*, 29–30; my emphasis.

⁴² D. Mitra, *Buddhist Monuments*, 133.

⁴³ E.W. West, “Result of Excavations in Cave No. 13 at Kanheri”, 160.

clay *stūpas* ... found in numbers” were found among and together with the “regular forest of smaller [structural] *stūpas*”, and all of the latter that were opened “contained urns with pieces of bone” and “had funerary associations”.⁴⁴

Cases like these from Kotila Mura, Mīrpūr-Khas, and Kanheri where the evidence for a funereal function for miniature *stūpas* is either sure or fairly certain raise obvious problems for the “votive” interpretation. But, in the majority of cases, it is true that we simply do not know how many of the huge number of small clay *stūpas* so far found at Buddhist sites contained bone or ash or had funerary associations. This, at least in part, may be because these miniature *stūpas* have been—as Taddei has pointed out—so poorly published.⁴⁵ But it may also be because the process used to produce them may have made their funerary character very hard to detect. It is at this point that the Tibetan evidence—which, as we have seen, has a very good chance of reflecting or continuing late eastern Indian practice—becomes particularly significant. It may provide a clue both to the process by which these little clay *stūpas* were manufactured and to an otherwise unknown aspect of Indian Buddhist funeral practices. We might first look, for example, at the description of the final part of a Buddhist funeral ritual performed in Ladakh in 1979. Eva Dargyay describes in the following terms what she calls “the essential part” of the *dge-tsha*, “the final part of the funeral rites” she observed at Karcha:

“An old layman brought forward, on a slab of natural stone, some bones—remnants from the cremations which had occurred during the last year ... The man placed the bone fragments on a small table in front of the acting bLa-ma who blessed them ... Next the old layman brought a ball of clay ... Meanwhile the old layman pounded the bone fragments on a flat stone laden with auspicious powder made from white stones ... Then he blended the bonemeal with the damp clay, which he shaped into eight miniature *mchod rten*. A senior monk inserted a blade of grass into each *mchod rten*, which were then called *tsha-tsha*. When they dried they were placed into a full-sized *mchod rten* where the *tsha tsha* will stay permanently.”⁴⁶

This procedure—known technically according to Dargyay as the *rus chog* or “bone ritual”—would, of course, leave little visible trace of the mortuary remains involved, but would, over time, produce a very large number of miniature clay *stūpas* of exactly the same form as those found, for example, at

⁴⁴ H. Cousens, *The Antiquities of Sind*, 97.

⁴⁵ M. Taddei, “Inscribed Clay Tablets and Miniature Stūpas from Gaznī”, *EW*, 20, 1970, 78; he gives a good bibliography of works referring to miniature *stūpas*, 85–6.

⁴⁶ E.K. Dargyay, “Merit-Making and Ritual Aspects in the Religious Life of Sanskar (West Tibet)”, in R.W. Neufeldt, ed., *Karma and Rebirth: Post-Classical Developments*, Albany, 1986, 179–89, esp. 183.

Kotila Mura, Paharpur, and Nālandā. The same may be said for an even earlier version of essentially the same procedure which has been described by Turrell Wylie. Wylie's description refers to established practice in 18th-century Sa-skya Tibet:

“The bones of the deceased were then pulverized and mixed with various medicinal substances, the chief of which was myrobalan (*a-ru-ra*). This was then mixed with clay and moulded into *tsha-tsha*. The ashes of the body were also pressed into these clay funeral-relics. Some resembled miniature *stūpas* and were painted red and gold. Depending on the amount of ash and bone recovered, the number of *tsha-tsha* ran well into the thousands. These clay *tsha-tsha* were then ... deposited in a *gdung rten* [i.e., a mortuary *stūpa*].”⁴⁷

What Dargyay observed in 1979 was, then, by no means new. Essentially, the same ritual procedure was already an established part of Buddhist funeral practices in 18th-century Tibet. It is, moreover, very unlikely that the Tibetans invented it. *Tsha-tsha*, the word used to refer to the “mixture of pulverized human bones, medicines, and clay”, for example, does not appear to be Tibetan. It is most probably a loan-word derived—according to Tucci—from Prākṛit *sacchāya* or *sacchāha*⁴⁸ and points towards India where the word *chāyā* had already old and established funeral associations—it is, for example, the word used to name the “pillars” erected in memory of the dead at places like Pauni and Nāgārjunikoṇḍa, both of which had early and important Buddhist establishments.⁴⁹ But in addition to considerations of this sort, there is the striking correspondence between the material remains produced by the ritual procedure described by Dargyay and Wylie and the material remains seen so clearly at Kotila Mura. This correspondence is probably enough to establish the Indian origin of the Tibetan practice and suggests the strong probability that what occurred in 18th-century Tibet was already established practice in 10th-century Bengal.

But if the ritual process observed in 20th-century Ladakh or described for 18th-century Sa-Skya can account for what archeology revealed at Kotila Mura certainly, and probably at Paharpur and Nālandā, if that ritual process can in addition account for the fact that certain mortuary evidence at the latter two sites might have been very hard to detect, we have not yet seen evidence that would

⁴⁷ T. Wylie, “Mortuary Customs at Sa-Skya, Tibet”, *HJAS*, 25, 1964–5, 229–42, esp. 239.

⁴⁸ G. Tucci, *Indo-Tibetica, I: “mC’od rten” e “ts’a ts’a” nel Tibet indiano e occidentale*, Rome, 1932.

⁴⁹ V.V. Mirashi, “A Pillar Inscription of Mahakshatrapa Rupiamma from Pawni”, *Nagpur University Journal*, 16, 1964, 1ff; H. Sarkar, “The Cāyā-Stambhas from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa”, in S. Settar & G.D. Sontheimer, eds., *Memorial Stones: A Study of Their Origin, Significance, and Variety*, Manipal, 1982, 199–207.

account for the deposition of large numbers of separate, individual clay *stūpas* at established Buddhist sites outside of structural *stūpas*. There is, however, further material from the Tibetan world that might do this, and introduce an important distinction as well.

Martin Brauen—who, like Dargyay, was describing “Death Customs in Ladakh”—says:

“The *tsha tsha* are produced by a monk from the pulverized bone fragment which is mixed with the dust of five metals and with clay. With the help of a model, the monk prepares at least one little figure (*tsha tsha*) from this mass which is then put in a pure place such as a cult room, on a hill, in the niche of a *mchod rten* or of a *ma ni* wall.”⁵⁰

Here, of course, is a variant description of the process by which mortuary remains would be rendered virtually undetectable. But, here too, it is explicitly said that the resultant “little figure (*tsha tsha*)” is intentionally placed “in a pure place”—notably “in the niche of a *mchod rten*”.⁵¹ Ladakhi practice would, therefore, account for both forms of deposition which have been noted at Indian sites. Other statements of Tibetan practice, based both on different sources and other geographic areas, however, introduce a potentially interesting distinction.

Tadeusz Skorupski, basing himself on a text written by Rdo rje brag Rig ’dzin Padma ’phrin las (1640–1718) describing “the practice of the cremation according to the Northern Terma”, says: “One mixes the bones with scented water and soil and places the mixture in the casting form for making *tsha tsha*”—but, he adds—“Except for a lama or a holy person, the *tsha tsha* should not be placed in a *stūpa* ... the *tsha tsha* of ordinary people should be deposited in a place which is quiet and free from the disturbances caused by different demons and local deities”.⁵² These remarks—together with similar remarks by Ramble in regard to Bon po practice in South Mustang⁵³—would seem to suggest the possibility of the two forms of deposition being connected with two distinct groups. Wylie’s observations may also support this. His description of the deposition of miniature mortuary *stūpas* within a larger structural *stūpa* refers only to “the two ruling houses of Sa-skya”; Skorupski, on the other hand, suggests that similar depositions *within* a larger structural *stūpa* took place only in the case of “a lama or holy person”. It begins to look like the kind of *stūpa* discovered at Kotila

⁵⁰ M. Brauen, “Death Customs in Ladakh”, *Kailash*, 9, 1982, 326.

⁵¹ cf. C. von Furer-Haimendorf, *The Sherpas of Nepal: Buddhist Highlanders*, London, 1964, 237, “It [the funereal *tsha tsha*] is deposited either in some isolated spot . . . or it is placed in a *gomba* or the building containing the prayer-wheel.”

⁵² T. Skorupski, “The Cremation Ceremony According to the Byang-gter Tradition”, *Kailash*, 9, 1982, 76.

⁵³ C. Ramble, “Status and Death: Mortuary Rites and Attitudes to the Body in a Tibetan Village”, *Kailash*, 9, 1982, 341.

Mura, Paharpur, Nālandā, and possibly at Rājagṛha *in which* large numbers of little clay *stūpas* were deposited might well have enshrined the mortuary remains of a locally important monk or a member of some ‘ruling house’; and that the individual miniature *stūpas* deposited outside of structural *stūpas* by themselves at Indian sites might have enshrined the remains of otherwise ordinary people. This at least seems possible, and if *stūpas* of the Kotila Mura type could, in fact, be taken to be mortuary *stūpas* of local monks, this in turn could explain why after the 5th/6th century we no longer find in India the kind of monastic cemeteries or mortuary shrines which up until that time are widely attested.⁵⁴

As the conditional character of my language hopefully makes clear, the Tibetan material is by and large merely suggestive. Given the nature of the case, it could hardly be otherwise. This material is itself not free of problems, not the least of which is that it is by no means entirely consistent. Moreover, the Tibetan practices themselves have not yet received systematic study or investigation—they come to us now only in disjointed and sometimes casual observations. They cannot, obviously, constitute proof. They can in a very limited way confirm; they can also suggest. But in both respects they are already important.

Tibetan practices can fully confirm what we know for certain from only a few Indian sites like Kotila Mura, Mīrpūr Khas, and Kanheri; they can fully confirm that miniature clay *stūpas* could and did have mortuary functions. Tibetan practices can offer one good explanation as to why such mortuary functions would otherwise be so difficult to detect: if Indian practice was what Tibetan practice suggests it was, it would have left little if any observable trace of the mortuary remains involved. By suggesting the development of a specific form of the deposition of the mortuary remains of “lamas and holy persons”, the Tibetan material may also indicate that identifiable mortuary *stūpas* and cemeteries for the local monastic dead did not disappear in India after the 5th/6th century—as at first sight might appear to be the case—but that they simply once again only changed their form. Beyond this, and perhaps most broadly, Tibetan practices suggest the distinct possibility that a large number of the miniature clay *stūpas* at Buddhist sacred sites in India were, or contained, the mortuary remains of the ordinary dead, that such remains were deposited at such sites in large numbers, and that Indian Buddhists practised burial—perhaps more accurately, *deposito—ad sanctos* in a form and on a scale not yet recognized. By doing so, by revealing perhaps how the ordinary dead were treated, the Tibetan material suggests—ironi-

⁵⁴ G. Schopen, “An Old Inscription from Amarāvātī and the Cult of the Local Monastic Dead in Indian Buddhist Monasteries”, *JIAS*, 14, 1991. It is perhaps worth noting that seemingly similar deposits of miniature clay *stūpas* have also been noted in Sri Lanka—see M. Müller, “Dagobas aus Ceylon”, *ZDMG*, 12, 1858, 514–17; D.K. Dohanian, “The Wata-dā-gē in Ceylon, The Circular-Relic-House of Polonnaruva and Its Antecedents”, *Archives of Asian Art*, 23, 1969/70, 31–40, esp. 38.

cally—that Buddhist sacred sites in India were profoundly and characteristically Indian, that such sites had at least one of the same specific functions that Hindu *tīrthas*—especially those connected with rivers—had. Kane, for example, says:

“The Viṣṇudharmasūtra (19.11–12) and Anu[śāsanaparva] 26.32 state that the collected bones [of the deceased] should be cast in Ganges water ... It was provided in the Purāṇas that a virtuous son, brother or daughter’s son or a relative on the father’s or mother’s side should cast the bones in the Ganges”⁵⁵

The *Tristhalīsetu* of Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa—which Richard Salomon says “is traditionally considered to be the most authoritative of the many Sanskrit texts on the subjects of *tīrtha* and pilgrimage”—takes it as a given that “sentences prescribing, for instance, the throwing of bones into a *tīrtha* ... are seen in all *purāṇas* and in a great many compendia”.⁵⁶ The deposition of post-cremational remains at a *tīrtha*—what the texts call *asthi-prakṣepa*—is, in fact, both the prescribed and actually practised final procedure in the ‘orthodox’ Hindu ritual for disposal of the dead. What both the *stūpa*-tombs we started with, and what we seem to have discovered about the function of miniature clay *stūpas*, seem to indicate is that Indian Buddhists had an almost perfectly parallel procedure, that, in fact, the main Buddhist *stūpa* at a site had—in regard to the deposition of the dead—exactly the same function as the Hindu *tīrtha*. There may, however, be even more specific parallels. The *Tristhalīsetu* cites from the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* an interesting description of the ritual to be followed in depositing the bones of the deceased in a *tīrtha*:

“Having bathed and anointed (the bones) with the five cow-products, and mixed with them gold, honey, ghee and sesamum, *then placing them in the hollow of a ball of clay (mṛtipiṇḍapuṭe nidhāya)*, he should look in the direction embraced by the pretas. Saying ‘Homage to you, O Dharma,’ he should enter the *tīrtha*, and saying ‘(May he be) pleased with me,’ should throw in the bones.”⁵⁷

Here the parallels between prescribed *purāṇic* procedure and what Tibetan material suggests was Buddhist practice go beyond the basic activity of depositing the final form of mortuary remains at a sacred site, be it *stūpa* or *tīrtha*. In both, the “bones” are first brought into contact with various “auspicious” or “medicinal” substances—gold, metals, ghee, sesamum. But perhaps more important—certainly more specific—in both cases the “bones” are incorporated into “a ball of

⁵⁵ P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, 2nd ed., Poona, 1973, IV, 243.

⁵⁶ R. Salomon, *The Bridge to the Three Holy Cities: The Sāmānya-Praghaṭṭaka of Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa’s Tristhalīsetu*, Delhi, 1985, xiii, 285.

⁵⁷ R. Salomon, *The Bridge to the Three Holy Cities*, 162, 426; my emphasis.

clay”, although in different ways, and it is this “ball of clay” which was actually deposited.

The suggestion here that the Hindu deposition of mortuary remains at a *tīrtha* and the Buddhist deposition at a *stūpa* are functional—in part, even formal—equivalents is not really new. Something like it was at least hinted at by Jonathan Duncan in 1799. In one of the earliest of what D.K. Chakrabarti calls “reports on field-discoveries” made in India,⁵⁸ Duncan refers to the discovery of “urns” containing “bones” near “the temple called Sarnauth (i.e., Sārnāth)”. “The natives in that district” offered several explanations for these “bones”, one of which was “that the remains of the deceased may have probably only been thus temporarily disposed of, till a proper time or opportunity should arrive of committing them to the Ganges”. Duncan did not accept any of these explanations, but said “I am myself inclined to give the preference to a conclusion ... that the bones found in these urns must belong to one of the worshippers of Buddha, a set of *Indian* heretics, who, having no reverence for the *Ganges*, used to deposit their remains in the earth, instead of committing them to that river...”⁵⁹ Duncan, then, was already suggesting that the Buddhist deposition was an alternative or necessary equivalent of the Hindu practice. The only thing he did not say was that “the earth” in or on which the Buddhist deposition was made had to be near a *stūpa*—but no one knew then what Sārnāth was.

It is perhaps strange, and certainly unfortunate, that no one pursued Duncan’s early suggestion that Buddhists—almost of necessity if they had “no reverence for the Ganges”—must have had some alternative form of disposing of their dead. Had someone done so, we might have discovered far sooner that Indian Buddhists did indeed have an alternative form of such disposal, and that that alternative was remarkably parallel to Hindu practice as the *stūpa*-tombs, loose deposits, and now miniature *stūpas* at Buddhist sites seem to suggest: in both the Hindu case and the Buddhist case the remains of the dead, in whatever form, were deposited by preference at a sacred site.

There are, of course, historical problems which remain, problems like the relative chronological priority of the *purāṇic* or Buddhist case. But the basic parallels appear to be hard to avoid, and these are particularly useful parallels. The largely *purāṇic* parallels are particularly useful because the Buddhist practice—like so much else that appears to have been actually practised by Indian Buddhist communities—has not been explicitly articulated in the surviving normative canonical literature. That literature does not, for example, explicitly tell us why

⁵⁸ D.K. Chakrabarti, *A History of Indian Archeology From the Beginning to 1947*, New Delhi, 1988, 22.

⁵⁹ J. Duncan, “An Account of the Discovery of Two Urns in the Vicinity of Benares”, *Asiatic Researches*, 5, 1799, 132.

these things were done. The *purāṇic* case is otherwise. It clearly indicates why mortuary remains were deposited at *tīrthas*: both because of what was there, and because of the effects of close physical contact between what was there and the mortuary remains that were deposited.

However variously it might be expressed, one of the more constant and recurring themes in discussions of the nature of *tīrthas* is the complete identity between *tīrtha* and divine person: the *tīrtha* is the deity:

“The Sarasvati is an embodiment (*mūrti*) of Brahman; the Gaṅgā, of Viṣṇu; the Narmadā, of Śaṅkara (Śiva). The three rivers are the three gods (*tisro nadyas tridevatāḥ*)

... but acceptance of gifts at a *tīrtha* is the same as selling the *tīrtha*. When the Gaṅgā is sold, then Janārdana (Viṣṇu) is sold (*vikrītāyāṃ tu gaṅgāyāṃ vikrītaḥ syāj janārdanaḥ*).

Wherever is the Gaṅgā, there is Śambhu (Śiva) (*yatra gaṅgā ... śambhus tatra*).⁶⁰

Although not yet so widely recognized, and although again rarely so clearly articulated in Buddhist literary sources, the same sense of presence, of identity between place or thing and person can be demonstrated for the Indian Buddhist context as well. It starts—as is slowly being acknowledged—very early in Indian Buddhist inscriptions where “relics” of the Buddha are described as, in Lamotte’s phrase, “un être vivant doué de souffle”.⁶¹ But it has perhaps been best expressed by Professor Bareau: “D’autre part, la participation du *stūpa* au caractère sacré des reliques et de la personne du Buddha ou du saint tend à personnaliser le monument ... Dès avant notre ère, donc, le *stūpa* est plus que le symbole du Buddha, *c’est le Buddha lui-même*”⁶² This means, of course, what can be simply stated by adapting one of the *purāṇic* phrases, by reading not *yatra gaṅgā ... śambhus tatra*, but *yatra stūpaḥ ... buddhas tatra*: ‘wherever there is a *stūpa* ... there is the Buddha.’ The sense of presence is almost certainly the same.

Given the striking similarity in the concepts of *tīrtha* and *stūpa*, given that in both cases there was thought to be a virtual identity of sacred person and sacred

⁶⁰ R. Salomon, *The Bridge to the Three Holy Cities*, 13, 203 (cited from the *Skandapurāṇa*); 170, 437 (cited from the *Padmapurāṇa*); 175, 443 (cited from the *Brahmapurāṇa*).

⁶¹ E. Lamotte, *Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien: Dès origines à l’ère Śaka*, Louvain, 1958, 474; cf. G. Schopen, “Burial ‘Ad Sanctos’ and the Physical Presence of the Buddha”, 203 ff; G. Schopen, “On the Buddha and his Bones: The Conception of a Relic in the Inscriptions of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa”, *JAOS*, 108, 1988, 527–37.

⁶² A. Bareau, “La construction et le culte des Stūpa d’après les *Vinayapīṭaka*”, *BEFEO*, 1960, 269; my emphasis.

place, and given that mortuary remains were deposited at both *tīrtha* and *stūpa*—sometimes in strikingly similar ways—it would not be going very far, I think, to suggest that such deposits were made for very similar reasons. Here again Hindu literary sources are far, far more explicit. The *Viṣṇudharmasūtra* and *Anuśāsanaparva*, again for example, say that “as many particles of the bones of a man remain in Ganges water, for so many thousands of years he dwells in heaven”.⁶³ Likewise the *Tristhalīsetu* gives numerous passages of a similar purport:

“So doing [i.e., ritually depositing the remains of the deceased at a *tīrtha*], (even) one who is in the city of the pretas would find a place in heaven like Mahendra. As long as a man’s bones remain in the waters of the Gaṅga, for so many thousands of years, he rejoices in the Brahma-world.”⁶⁴

This same text, in fact, makes the declaration of such intentions an explicit part of the actual procedure:

“Then after bathing in the *tīrtha* with the bones ... he should declare ‘I am throwing the bones of so-and-so Śarma, of such-and-such a gotra, into such-and-such a *tīrtha*, that he may reach the Brahma-world and never return.”⁶⁵

The motive here is not ambiguous. These sources assume and intend that, by depositing the mortuary remains of the deceased at a *tīrtha*, that deceased individual will attain “heaven” (*svarga*) or “the Brahma-world” (*brahmaloka*) and will remain there for a more or less very long time. This attainment by the deceased is a direct result of the deposition, a direct result of placing his remains in the presence of or in contact with the person of the divine: both will henceforth dwell in the same divine place as well.

The Buddhist literary sources are, by contrast, nearly silent about intention or motive. It is, however, hard to imagine that the Buddhist practice which appears to be so similar in both form and conception could have been in any important way otherwise motivated. What little we have from Buddhist literary sources also makes this unlikely. The Sanskrit version of the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, in what is probably the single most important canonical passage dealing with Buddhist *tīrthas*, describes those who will go to the sites of the Buddha’s birth, enlightenment, first teaching, and death in the following terms:

“They will come [to these sites], monks, after my passing away, the attendants of shrines, the worshippers of shrines (*caityapāricārakās*,

⁶³ P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, IV, 243.

⁶⁴ R. Salomon, *The Bridge to the Three Holy Cities*, 162, 426 (citing the *Brahmāṇḍa-purāṇa*); 162, 427.

⁶⁵ R. Salomon, *op. cit.*, 166–7, 433.

caityavandakāś). They will speak thus: ‘Here the Blessed One was born’; here was the Blessed One fully and completely awakened to the most excellent, correct and complete awakening,’ etc., ... Which of them on that occasion will with devout minds die in my presence, (*mamāntike kālaṃ kariṣyanti*) they—those with karma yet to be worked out (*ye kecit sopadhiśesāḥ*)—all will go to heaven (*te sarve svargopagā*).”⁶⁶

Here we seem to have an explicit statement of the Buddha’s actual presence at Buddhist sacred sites. Activity that takes place there is said to take place “in his presence” (*mamāntike*). Here, too, it is said that death at such sites results in heaven for those “with devout minds”. That is to say that death at a *stūpa* has exactly the same effect as the deposition of mortuary remains at a *tīrtha*: the deceased in both cases goes to heaven. It would, of course, take very little to make the parallel complete, and it has in fact been suggested that the idea expressed in the *Mahāparinirvānasūtra*—only very slightly extended—is probably able to account for the fact of *deposito ad sanctos* observed so commonly at Indian Buddhist sites.⁶⁷ The extension need only be from *death* at such sites to *the deposition of the dead* there. Curiously enough, precisely this ‘extension’ also appears to lie behind the *purāṇic* development, although there again it is explicitly articulated:

“If a person’s bones sink in the water of the Gaṅgā within ten days [after his death], then he will obtain a benefit equal to that of dying at the Gaṅgā.”⁶⁸

The fact that such an extension is attested in a late Mīmāṃsaka compilation does not, of course, prove a similar extension in the Buddhist case. It is, however—like so many of the parallels cited—certainly suggestive. It may add a final link in a long series of parallels—parallels of different kinds from modern Ladakh and 18th-century Sa-Skya, from a 17th-century “Northern Terma” text, from various *Purāṇas* and that same Mīmāṃsaka text—all of which combine to allow us, perhaps, to understand more fully the archeology of Buddhist sacred sites in India and the religious life that produced it. But if it takes diverse sources of this sort to document what appears to have been a commonplace in actual Buddhist practice, this of necessity says something about the nature and limitations of Buddhist literary sources. It also points to the value of yet one more and final kind of source which we can cite here.

⁶⁶ E. Waldschmidt, *Das Mahāparinirvānasūtra*, Berlin, 1951, III, 390, 41.9.

⁶⁷ G. Schopen, “Burial ‘Ad Sanctos’ and the Physical Presence of the Buddha”, 203–204.

⁶⁸ R. Salomon, *The Bridge to the Three Holy Cities*, 163, 427; on Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa as “a true *mīmāṃsaka*”, see xxi–xxiv.

Although we know that some form of burial *ad sanctos* was practiced at Gandhairi, Taxila, Jauliāñ, and Haḍḍa, at Kauśāmbī, Amarāvātī, Pitalkhora, Kusinārā, at Mīrpūr-Khas, and Ratnagiri in India; at Hmawza in Burma, and Anurādhapura and Abhayagiri in Sri Lanka, in Chinese Turkestan and the eastern fringes of Iran; and although the evidence suggests that yet other forms were practised at Kanheri, Kotila Mura, Paharpur and Nālandā, as well as in 18th-century Sa-Skya and modern Ladakh—still, in spite of all this, our secondary scholarly sources, until recently tied almost exclusively to normative literary sources, contain hardly a word with regard to such practices. Ironically, we must in fact go to a 19th-century travel account by two French Vincentian missionaries to get a sense of the extreme importance these practices could and did have in the lives of actual Buddhists. Huc and Gabet in their account of *Travels in Tartary, Thibet and China* noted almost a hundred and fifty years ago that:

“The most celebrated seat of Mongol burials is in the province of Chan-si, at the famous Lamasery of Five Towers (Ou-Tay) [Wu-t’ai]. According to the Tartars, the Lamasery of the Five Towers is the best place you can be buried in. The ground in it is so holy, that those who are so fortunate as to be interred there are certain of a happy transmigration thence. The marvellous sanctity of this place is attributed to the presence of Buddha ... it is certain that the Tartars and the Thibetans have given themselves up to an inconceivable degree of fanaticism, in reference to the Lamasery of the Five Towers. You frequently meet, in the deserts of Tartary, Mongols carrying on their shoulders the bones of their parents, to the Five Towers, to purchase, almost at its weight in gold, a few feet of earth, whereon they may raise a small mausoleum. Even the Mongols of Torgot [Turgūt] perform journeys occupying a whole year, and attended with immense difficulty, to visit for this purpose the province of Chan-si.”⁶⁹

The value of Huc and Gabet’s account—like all such accounts—lies in the fact that unlike more ‘learned,’ and thereby artificial, descriptions of Buddhist practice, it does not present us with a textual reconstruction of what Buddhists should have done, but with a description of what some actually—they say “frequently”—did. In doing so it may allow us to see from another angle the very considerable significance that the archeological record suggests practices like burial *ad sanctos* had in actual, living Buddhist cultures. It may allow us to see more directly the kind of behavior and the sometimes considerable human efforts that very likely produced what we see in the archeological record of

⁶⁹ E.R. Huc & J. Gabet, tr. by W. Hazlitt, *Travels in Tartary, Thibet, and China 1844–46*, London, 1928, I, 93–4.

Buddhist sacred sites in India. For this—if nothing else—the shortcomings of such accounts can certainly be forgiven.

The energy and efforts that such practices sometimes seem to have required are impressive. They must count for something. They in at least some sense must be indicators of value. They may suggest that unless and until we take these practices fully into our accounts we may have missed something important.