

# The Treaty Temple of *De ga g.yu tshal*: Reconsiderations

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**ABSTRACT** In a brief article published in 2004, I advanced the hypothesis that the Treaty Temple of De ga g.yu tshal might be the beautiful and famous cave-temple, Anxi Yulin 25. My hypothesis, though welcomed by some scholars, generated quite a lot of controversy among colleagues in China. In 2009, I published a much expanded version of the original article, and made an important discovery: the term de ga in the Tibetan name of the Treaty Temple, was a transcription of the Chinese toponym Daxia 大夏. In August 2013, at last I have had a good fortune of visiting Anxi Yulin and Dunhuang, and I now believe that De ga/Daxia can only refer to the region that is now Linxia in southern Gansu, where the Daxia River preserves the earlier name. Nevertheless, I believe that my second hypothesis, or something similar to it, must still hold, that is, Anxi Yulin 25 may have been an imitation of De ga g.yu tshal, but I now think it equally possible that it preceded the Treaty Temple by some years, and that it dates to the reign period of Khri Lde srong btsan (r. 805-815).

In a brief article published in 2004,<sup>1</sup> I advanced the hypothesis that the Treaty Temple of De ga g.yu tshal, which was well known from the Tibetan documents PT 16 (Paris) and IOL Tib J 751 (London) found in the "hidden library" of Cave 17 in the Dunhuang Mogao grottoes, might

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Kapstein, "The Treaty Temple of De ga g.Yu tshal: Iconography and Identification." In *Essays on the International Conference on Tibetan Archeology and Art*, ed. Huo Wei. Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Chubanshe, 2004: 98-127.

be none other than the beautiful and famous cave-temple, Anxi Yulin 25. The reasons that led me to this conclusion were: (1) the remarkable correspondence between the iconographic program of the Treaty Temple, as described in the "Prayers of De ga g.yu tshal," and the actual iconographic program preserved at Anxi Yulin 25; (2) the high probability that Anxi Yulin 25 could be dated to about the third decade of the ninth century, close to 822/3, when De ga g.yu tshal was constructed; and (3) the likelihood that Tibetan *g.yu tshal* was equivalent to Chinese *yulin*, by the principle of transcribing the first syllable phonetically while translating the second. My hypothesis, though welcomed by some scholars, generated quite a lot of controversy among colleagues in China.

In 2009, I published a much expanded version of the original article,<sup>2</sup> in which I sought to establish the historical context in detail and to answer critics of my original hypothesis. In addition to the three points mentioned above, I also noted there the remarkable reference that we find in the "Prayers of De ga g.yu tshal," and the "Inventory of Yulim" (PT 997) to the important role of the lord of Phyug mtshams in both; for "Yulim" can only be identified with Yulin. As I was concluding my work on this article, however, I made an important discovery: the term *de ga* in the Tibetan name of the Treaty Temple, a term which had not been previously understood, was nothing other than a transcription of the Chinese toponym Daxia 大夏, whose pronunciation in Middle Chinese had been, roughly, *d'âi-ya'* (using Kalgren's now dated approximation, which is, however, adequate for present purposes).<sup>3</sup> Daxia, of course, is best known as the area of southern Gansu Province now known as Linxia 临夏, where the major waterway is still known as the Daxia River 大夏河.

Although the 2009 article detailed this finding, I nevertheless sought to reconcile it with my hypothesis, and continued to argue that De ga g.yu tshal was to be identified with Anxi Yulin 25. I did, however, admit that my theory, in the light of this new data, was less sure than I had earlier thought, and so I raised the question, "Would it not be preferable, then, to hold that Dega YutSEL was in fact located in that region [of southern Gansu], and, while accepting the general drift of the interpretation advanced here, to consider that Anxi Yulin 25 was more likely created in imitation of it?"<sup>4</sup>

Having continued to reflect upon this, and having at last had the good fortune of visiting Anxi Yulin and Dunhuang in August 2013, I now believe that De ga/Daxia can only refer to the region that is now Linxia in southern Gansu, where the Daxia River preserves the earlier name. In other words, Anxi Yulin 25 cannot be the Treaty Temple of De ga g.yu tshal.

Nevertheless, I believe that my second hypothesis, or something similar to it, must still

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2 Matthew Kapstein, "The Treaty Temple of the Turquoise Grove." In *Buddhism between Tibet and China*, ed. Matthew Kapstein. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2009: 21-72.

3 It seems that scholars in China came to recognize this fact also, at about the same time as well.

4 Matthew Kapstein, 2009: 57.

hold, that is, that Anxi Yulin 25 must be presumed to have had some relationship with the Treaty Temple. Given the physical situation of the cave, which dominates the entire Anxi Yulin complex, the considerable excellence of the excavation and the artwork, and the continued likelihood, in my view, that it dates to the third decade of the ninth century (or perhaps a few years before or after), and given, too, the involvement of the Phyug mtshams lord in connection with both Yulin and De ga g.yu tshal, together with the iconographical program common to both temples, it seems impossible that the one was created in complete ignorance of the other. According to my alternative theory, Anxi Yulin 25 may have been therefore an imitation of De ga g.yu tshal, but I now think it equally possible that it preceded the Treaty Temple by some years, and that it dates to the reign period of Khri Lde srong btsan (r. 805-815). In that case, the temple of De ga g.yu tshal, constructed during the reign of Khri Gtsug lde btsan, also known as Ral pa can (r. 815-838), consciously mimicked and thus honored a major edifice from the time of his father.

Of course, these points must remain speculative in the absence of further evidence. Some day, we may hope, the foundations of De ga g.yu tshal may yet come to light near Linxia in Gansu. And perhaps continuing examination of the physical evidence that is conserved at Anxi Yulin 25 will clear up lingering uncertainties regarding its precise dating as well.

In closing, I wish to thank my colleagues and friends in China—especially Huo Wei (Chengdu), Xie Jisheng and Huang Weizhong (Beijing), and Liu Yongzeng and Sha Wutian (Lanzhou/Dunhuang)—for the interest they have shown over the years and for the opportunity they have given to me to discuss the interpretation of Anxi Yulin 25 with them.

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