

Dunhuang during the Western Han, Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties period

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Abstract

This article introduces the situation of Dunhuang from the Han Dynasty to the Wei and Jin Dynasties, including the historical evolution of Dunhuang, the agricultural situation during the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties period in Dunhuang, the excavation of tombs in Dunhuang, the development of Buddhism in Dunhuang, and the unearthed artifacts related to the history at that time. It briefly summarizes the situation of Dunhuang during the Han, Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties.

Keywords

Dunhuang; Western Han Dynasty; Wei and Jin dynasties; Buddhism.

1. The Western Han Dynasty Border Defense and the Establishment of Commanderies in Dunhuang

In the late third century BC, the situation east of Central Asia was as follows: the Xiongnu in the north, the Dayue clan in the middle, and the Warring States Qin and early Western Han in the south.

From the capital city of Chang'an in the Western Han Dynasty to the Western City, it was necessary to establish strongholds along the long Hexi Corridor, so the Hexi Four Commanderies were established - the westernmost of the Hexi Four Commanderies is Dunhuang. The Annals of Emperor Wu in the Book of Han records that Dunhuang Commandery was established in the sixth year of Yuanding (111 BC). The establishment of prefectures in Dunhuang marked the beginning of official historical records in Dunhuang. What we call 'Dunhuang 2000 years' starts from here.

Since 1906, five batches of Han bamboo slips have been produced near Dunhuang, the vast majority of which are from the Western Han Dynasty.

The first and second batches of 789 pieces were stolen by Stein, an Englishman, in 1906-1908 and 1913-1915. The third batch was excavated by the Northwest Scientific Expedition in 1944, with a total of 43 pieces. The above three batches of Han bamboo slips have been published. The fourth batch was excavated by the Han Dynasty Great Wall Investigation Team composed of the Gansu Provincial Museum Cultural Relics Team and Dunhuang County Cultural Museum in 1979. It is said that 1217 Han bamboo slips were unearthed this time. The fifth batch was discovered in March 1981, and the number of pieces is unknown. Brief report on excavation of Han Dynasty beacon tower site in Maquan Bay, Dunhuang only a small portion of the fourth batch of materials has been published, and the fifth batch of materials has not yet been published.

From the published Han bamboo slips, it is known that before the establishment of the county in Dunhuang, there was a "Jiuquan Yumen Duwei" in the area. After the establishment of the county in Dunhuang, this Duwei was renamed "Yumen Duwei" and became part of Dunhuang County.

From the content of the brief, it can be inferred that most of the "garrison documents" left over from the Western Han Dynasty's construction of border fortresses, farming, and setting up

pavilions and towers in Dunhuang County since the reign of Emperor Wu of Han are the earliest historical materials in Dunhuang.

This city was previously presumed to be the site of the Han Yumen Pass, but according to recent research by colleagues from the Gansu Provincial Archaeological Team, it is believed to be the location of the Yumen Captain.

Near Maquan Bay, 11 kilometers west of this city, there is also the city site where the officials of Yumen Pass are located.

The northwest of Dunhuang is vast and sparsely populated, with heavy salt and alkali content, so the city barrier beacon tower site is best preserved.

From the layout of the Great Wall and beacon towers, it can be inferred that Emperor Wu of Han established a county in Dunhuang. It is to use Dunhuang as a rear base for the Western Regions front.

According to the preservation status of the beacon tower site and the content of the Jiandu, the garrison activities at the Maquan Bay site were most prosperous during the reign of Emperor Xuan of the Western Han Dynasty, with a large number of personnel, frequent exchanges, and a relatively large building scale. Afterwards, the scale of the site gradually decreased. By the time of Wang Mang, there was only a small room on the south side of the beacon tower and several surrounding ancillary buildings. About two years after the founding of the country by Wang Mang, it was completely abandoned.

During the reign of Emperor Zhao, the Han Dynasty appointed Prince Proton Captain Tu Qi as the King of Shanshan. The king requested the dispatch of generals to cultivate the fields, which gained him great authority. So, sending Dunhuang people to lead Jiuquan and Dunhuang soldiers west to Loulan won the trust of the whole region. It can be seen that the relationship between Dunhuang and the Western Regions is becoming increasingly close.

The two characters "Dunhuang" were quoted by Tang Yan Shigu in the "Geographical Records" section of the Book of Han, quoting the words of Ying Shao from the Eastern Han Dynasty: "Dun, Daye; Huang, Shengye."

2. Dunhuang during the Eastern Han, Wei, and Jin Dynasties

Not long after Ban Chao returned to the east in the 14th year of Yongyuan reign of Emperor He of the Eastern Han Dynasty (102), he was forced to be appointed as the Deputy Commander of the Western Regions in the first year of Yongchu reign of Emperor An (107). As the second deputy commander of the Western Regions, he was stationed in Dunhuang from the 7th year of Guangchu reign (120). So, Dunhuang's military importance became prominent.

At that time, the governor of Dunhuang seemed to gradually assume the responsibility of serving as the deputy commander of the Western Regions and the overall protector of the Southern and Northern Provinces.

During the reign of Emperor Wei Ming (227-232), the governor of Dunhuang, Cangci, issued a pass to the capital city of Luoyang to the Hu people in the Western Regions. Later, "when the Hu people in the Western Regions heard of Ci's death, they gathered under the command of the Wuji Colonel and the Chief Official (Historian) to mourn, or used knife images to demonstrate blood sincerity, and established a temple to commemorate him." These all indicate that Dunhuang and the Western Regions maintain a special relationship.

The documents from the fourth year of Wei Jiaping to the fourth year of Jin Yongjia, which were looted by Swede Svenher in the northwest of present-day Lop Nur, Xinjiang during the Wei and Jin dynasties in 1900, mostly involve the chronicles of Dunhuang. In 1901, Stein excavated the descending documents of the Dunhuang Prefect in the fifth year of Taishi (269), as well as the passage issued by the Dunhuang Prefect with damaged chronology records, along with

documents from the Governor of Liangzhou and edicts from the West City Changshi Camp, which clearly indicated the close relationship between southern Xinjiang and Dunhuang at that time.

Since the beginning of the 2nd century AD, Dunhuang has not only been a gateway to the Central Plains, but also a military and political center that governs the Western Regions.

2.1. Agriculture in Dunhuang during the Wei and Jin Dynasties

During the Wei and Jin dynasties, Dunhuang's agriculture also made significant progress. During the reign of Wei Jiaping (249-253), Huang Pulong served as the governor of Dunhuang, teaching both plowing and irrigation. At the end of the year, he managed to save more than half of the labor force and increase the yield of grain by five. Dunhuang's agricultural technology greatly improved, and the yield of farmland increased by half. The ancient city site of Dafangpan City in the northwest of Dunhuang, from its location and internal layout, should be the Hecang City recorded in the late Tang Dynasty documents such as the Dunhuang Record (5448), where the ancient army was stored. The construction of such a large warehouse city can indirectly illustrate the local economy of Dunhuang in the early Jin Dynasty, which continued the prosperity of the Wei Dynasty.

2.2. Ancient tombs in Dunhuang during the Wei and Jin dynasties

On the Gobi Desert to the east of Dunhuang County, there are thousands of ancient tombs scattered. From the dozens that have been excavated, the earliest one dates back to the Wei and Jin dynasties.

The larger Wei and Jin tombs are mostly arranged in an orderly manner and surrounded in groups of three or five by square walls made of gravel.

In 1944, the Northwest Scientific Expedition Group excavated the large-scale tomb of Zhai Zongying at the Foye Temple. It had front and rear chambers, and a brick gate tower with a height of 3.5 meters was built on the top of the tomb door. The gate tower had a relief gate and painted decorations. This kind of high gate tower and tomb wall setting indicating the family cemetery is a characteristic of large-scale tombs in Jiuquan, Dunhuang, Wei and Jin dynasties.

There is a tomb of Duan Qing in the second year of Wei Ganlu (257) in Jiuquan and other tombs. The surnames Jiuquan Duan and Dunhuang Zhai happen to be the major surnames found in literature in this region.

The painted content of such tombs is complex. Taking the painted gatehouse of Zhai Zongying's tomb as an example, it depicts knights, gatekeepers, four gods, monsters, various birds, and clouds. The shape is vivid, the lines are smooth, and the painting technique is quite mature. It should have some connection with the Buddhist murals that will appear here in the future.

2.3. The situation of Buddhism during the Eastern Han, Wei, and Jin dynasties

In the records of the monk's biography, we seem to understand that the Buddhism spread by the Dharma Vehicle in Dunhuang should be the same as the content popular in Chang'an, the East at that time. Therefore, it is said that "the power of the Vehicle is also great when traveling westward," while the Buddhism popular in Dunhuang and the East at that time was only a relatively simple content of "making the husband, jackals, wolves, and wolves change their hearts, and the Rong and Di learn etiquette.

3. Dunhuang from the Thirty Six Kingdoms to the Northern Wei Dynasty's Establishment of Towns

During the period from the Sixteen Kingdoms to the establishment of towns in Dunhuang by the Northern Wei Dynasty, political changes were frequent in the Dunhuang area, and Buddhism took advantage of this opportunity to spread in Dunhuang. Therefore, there were

significant differences in the overall appearance of Dunhuang before and after this period. For the convenience of narration, we have divided this period into three stages, namely the pre Liang, pre Qin, post Liang, and early Western Liang, which are the first stage; The second stage is the migration from Jiuquan in the Western Liang Dynasty to the Western Liang Dynasty in the Northern Liang Dynasty; The third stage was the period when Dunhuang Town was established during the Northern Wei Dynasty.

3.1. Before the establishment of a town in the Northern Wei Dynasty, the Western Liang region

In the first half of the 5th century, the successive wars and unrest in Dunhuang provided an opportunity for the spread of Buddhism.

The inscription at the end of the "Ten Recitation of Bhikkhus Precepts" stolen by Stein from the Dunhuang scripture cave reads: "In the first year of Jianchu, on the fifth day of the twelfth lunar month in the year of Yi Si (405), Bhikkhus De You received his precepts in the south of Dunhuang City, and the monks, monks, preceptors, teachers, and teachers were all present at the same time. Twelve people, including Dao Fu and Hui Yu, were present at the precepts venue..." (797)

The Book of Wei, "Shi Lao Zhi," also records that before Emperor Taiwu pacified Liangzhou, "Dunhuang was connected to the Western Regions, where Taoism and customs were intertwined. Its old style was characterized by villages and villages, with many pagodas and temples.

The nature of Dunhuang Buddhism at that time can be inferred from the records in "Biographies of Famous Monks" and "Biographies of Eminent Monks".

In the volume of "A Comprehensive Record of the Three Treasures of China" by Dao Xuan in the early Tang Dynasty, it is recorded that Juqu Mengxun carved cave statues on cliffs in the south of Liangzhou City. Although the Rui statue in the Liangzhou Grottoes no longer exists, eight small stone pagodas from the Northern Liang period have been discovered in Dunhuang and Jiuquan, with three in Dunhuang and five in Jiuquan. The small stone pagodas from Jiuquan and Dunhuang are both intact and damaged.

This type of small pagoda is funded to carve people for the purpose of doing merit, but Buddhists do it for the purpose of meditation and observation. Its function is similar to the popular small gold and bronze statues in the future. In the early stages of the introduction of Buddhism into Middle earth, combined with Taoist techniques, sculptural forms serving Buddhism were no exception. It is worth noting that this early form of Buddhist pagoda and the practice of incorporating certain Taoist elements on the pagoda are never seen in the existing early grottoes of Mogao Grottoes today. Of course, there are similarities between the Buddha and Bodhisattva statues carved on the tower base and the early paintings of the Mogao Caves in the lower Buddhist niches of the pagoda, which offer offerings to heaven and humanity. This also suggests that they are not too far away in terms of time distance.

3.2. the Northern Wei Dynasty's establishment of Dunhuang County

The political center of the Hexi Corridor shifted from Jiuquan to Dunhuang. The chronology in the book comprehensively reveals the situation in Dunhuang at that time, and further analyzes the changes in the situation in Dunhuang and the issue of the excavation age of the early surviving caves in Mogao Grottoes.

In this situation, it is worth considering whether Dunhuang can excavate niches in groups or batches like the existing early caves of Mogao Grottoes. (It is generally recognized that the earliest surviving caves in Mogao Grottoes are the two groups or batches of caves 275, 272, 268 and 259, 257, 254); It is not by chance that we cannot find clear features from the mid-5th century in the two earliest surviving caves mentioned above.

The situation of Wei being weak, gentle, and strong changed around the time when Emperor Xiaowen decided to strengthen the defense of Dunhuang Town and upgrade it to the position of Grand General.

The first Dunhuang Grand General mentioned in literature was Mu Liang, the governor of Qinzhou and son-in-law of Emperor Wencheng, who was sent here before the ninth year of the Taihe era (485). After Mu Liang, the Dunhuang Grand General mentioned in literature, as well as the Grand General of Chariots and Cavalry Yan Ti ("Biography of Yan Qing" in the Book of Zhou) Emperor Xiaowen's measures coincided with the attack of the newly emerging formidable enemy, Gaoche. In the 1880s, the Dunhuang region began to enter tranquility.

Even later, after the Northern Wei Dynasty moved to Luoyang in 494, Dunhuang not only lifted the threat of the northwest Rouran, but also added connections with the Central Plains. It is reasonable for the existing early caves of the Mogao Grottoes to appear in batches in this context.

The early surviving caves of Mogao Grottoes are relatively dated. During this period, the Wuzhou Mountain Grottoes near the capital city of Northern Wei, Pingcheng, which is now known as the Yungang Grottoes in Datong, Shanxi, had already been excavated. The first batch of grottoes there, the "Five Caves of Tanyao," had been basically completed. The 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th grottoes, which were excavated around the beginning of Emperor Xiaowen's reign to the 13th year of Taihe (471-489), were gradually completed. The Mogao Grottoes are widely recognized as the earliest standard cave, cave 275, which we believe is close to the 7th, 8th, and 9th, 10th groups of caves in Yungang.

The absolute age of the early surviving caves in Mogao Grottoes. The discovery of tower style small stone pagodas and embroidered Buddha statues dating back to the 11th year of the Taihe era (487) in Dunhuang in recent years also provide clues to the absolute age of the early surviving caves in the Mogao Grottoes.

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