

Mar Iazed-buzid, the Great Donor: Part 2A



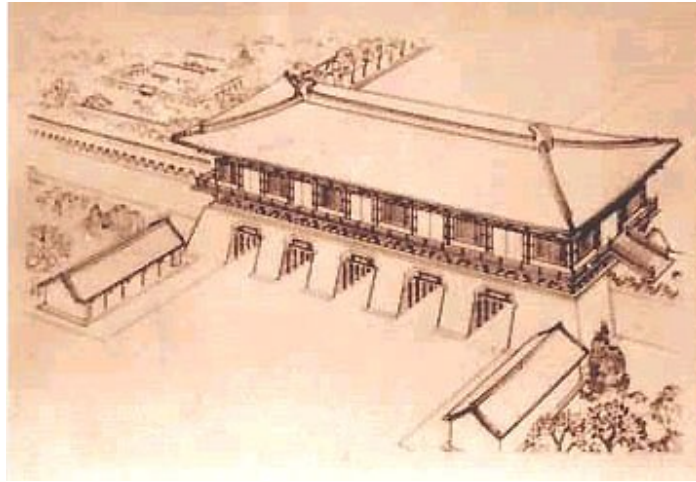
Monument headstone

PART 2: THE RED COURT

His learning was highly exalted during the reign of the Three Emperors;

his skills were extensive and perfectly complete.

*First performing certain faithful service in the Red Court,
his name was eventually inscribed in the Dragon Book.*



Main Gate of Chang-an in Tang times. Artist's rendition

We do not know whether I-ssu approached the towering gateway of Chang-an in autumn, when ripe persimmons hung scarlet in the trees, or in the spring, when the foothills were a soft haze of plum blossoms. Neither is it certain when I-ssu first distinguished himself at the Red Court in the private apartments of the Imperial Palace, whether it was before AD 743 or after 753. We do know that there were no new court appointments for a decade before the death of chief minister Li Lin-fu in 753. During those ten years, whenever Emperor Hsuan-tsung ordered special examinations for accomplished scholars who were not already employed in the government, Li Lin-fu, the administrator of the exams, failed all candidates; the minister then flattered the emperor that he had already brought into his services every worthy man in the empire. This perversion of official duty won Li Lin-fu his timeless infamy. His second notorious manipulation of the amiable emperor he accomplished during the last five years of his life: Jealous of power and fearful that some of the generals might win fame enough in their wars with the Turcomans to eclipse his own royal favor, Li convinced the emperor to dispense with large imperial armies on the frontiers and appoint to their defense instead the new barbarians who had recently submitted themselves to China. When the imperial troops were withdrawn, the tribes of the northeast, and barbarian generals with no

real loyalty to Tang, willingly carried out the expansionist program that the Li advised the emperor to pursue. Warlords of the Khitan and the Hsi came to rule vast territories with autonomous armies while the emperor was left in control of only the palace guard. With these two ruses, the one aimed at the empire's center, the other stretched along its perimeter, Li engineered the field of social forces to which I-ssu would have to conform his life. (See Supplement 1)

The circumstances of I-ssu's life indicate that he most likely signed the imperial Dragon Book to consummate his first year of faithful service to the Court sometime during the desperate final years of Hsuan-tsung's reign (See Supplement 2) – after the death of Li Lin-fu and before the dynastic eruption that raised up another emperor. During those years, the emperor played – at entertainments, at the inferior Taoist pursuit of the material pill of immortality, at the Tantric mysteries, and at love. So enamored was the emperor with his son's beautiful concubine that he took her for his own (See Supplement 3) and left the affairs of state to Li. So distracted was the emperor by his passion for this woman that, after the death of Li and the appointment of Yang Kuo-chung as new chief minister, the jealous rival of Li's successor – An Lu-shan – was able to rise to insurrectionary power without the emperor taking notice. (See Supplement 4)

[<PART 2B: THE RED COURT>](#)

SUPPLEMENTS

Supplement 1:

Early Infamies of Li Lin-fu



An Lu-shan. Portrait
by modern artist

These infamous actions of Li Lin-fu had been preceded by others that established him in power. Two years before the appointment of Li Lin-fu to the office of chief minister, a great battle had been fought against the barbarian Khitans. The emperor proposed to make the victorious general, Chang Kiu, his chief minister. Chang Kiu, because he recognized the position was too important to be given away to a merely successful general, simply refused. The next year a Chinese army was led against the Khitans by a young man and suffered absolute annihilation. By Chinese reckoning, this act warranted the young man's death. When Chang Kiu sent the young man, who was named An Lu-shan, before the emperor to plead for his life, the emperor, disregarding General Chang's protest, not only forgave An Lu-shan but gave him a commission in Shantung.

Another time, when Chang Kiu warned the emperor against deposing the heir-apparent to put his eighteenth son next in line to the throne, Li Lin-fu espoused the cause of the distant young prince and, together with the child's mother, filled the royal ear with such complaints that the emperor dismissed Chang Kiu from court and sent him to take charge of the far off district of Chihli. With General Chang's departure from the palace, the reins of power fell into the hands of Li Lin-fu. From this time on, no one dared express honest opinions.

Years later, the emperor put An Lu-shan in charge of the northeast troops at Chihli, with disastrous results. Too late the emperor found out that when he had rejected Chang Kiu he had rejected the one man who could have saved him from the sorrows that embittered his last years as emperor.

Supplement 2:

The Virtues of Hsuan-tsung's Early Reign



Court Ladies of Hsuan-tsung

The virtues of Hsuan-tsung's early reign are recounted in the stanzas of the Inscription's ode:

*Hsuan-tsung with might and main pursued The Way of Truth.
The temple-names written by the Emperor shone forth.
The tablets of the celestial handwriting reflected gloriously.
The Imperial Domain was embellished and studded with gems.*

[Explanation of the lines: His court was splendidly elegant. He established the long-enduring Hanlin Academy to harbor talented scholars and literateurs and an institute of music and dance to train theatrical performers for palace entertainments. He restored ancient temples and palaces throughout the Empire, and geniuses of culture flourished.]

The least and the remotest places attained the highest virtue.

[Explanation of the line: He abolished capital punishment and continued to follow the vigorous foreign policy of his predecessors.]

All sorts of works undertaken by the people flourished throughout the land, and each man enjoyed his own prosperity.

[Explanation of the line: He purged the bureaucracy of parasites and favorites, reduced court extravagances, and made special efforts to keep informed about the conditions among the people. At his capital, blue-coated scholars and men of talent assembled in the Garden Where the Talented Are Perched to await examinations or further orders. So grand was his design, Hsuan-tsung banished the mundane name of year and measured his reign in planetary revolutions instead, marking clearly his Empire's time by the circuit of his planet about the sun.]

All of this passed, however, with the first period of his reign, which he styled "The Opening of Origins" (712–741). Had Hsuan-tsung died in middle age, his name would have been remembered with unqualified admiration. But he lived too long. By the time of I-ssu's arrival, the emperor's first long reign had passed into a second, styled "Supreme Virtue" (741–756), that was already near its end. The once direct, simple, and self-controlled monarch was by then turning into a besotted old man under the influence of lovely ladies, and nepotism was blooming large again.

Supplement 3:

The Emperor's Concubine and the Five Households of Yang



Emperor Hsuan with his concubine Yang Kuei-fu and attendants on a terrace. 16th-century painting on

paper by Kano Eitoku.

Yang Yu-han ("Jade Armlet") came to be known by her title, Kuei-fu ("Exalted Imperial Concubine"), and was treated as an empress. According to the account in the Tang History, she was perspicacious, while her modest air and sidelong glances "lifted the Brilliant Emperor to the clouds."

Her three beautiful and talented sisters were given titles coined from the names of states, as well as the revenue derived from those states: Han Kuo, Kuo Kuo, and Chin Kuo. They were each allowed annually a string of one thousand cash for their toilette, their powder, and their make-up. Their mansions were altered to resemble palaces. Before a horrified court, these three, though married, accepted the attentions of the emperor and went about in the palace as they pleased.

Besides the three sisters, two brothers also required imperial assistance. These Five Households of Yang—that is, the establishments of the three sisters and the two brothers—were thronged by people of the Four Quarters, more numerous than the people who filled the marketplace, begging favors and offering bribes. The orders that went out from these sycophantic households were obeyed with even greater celerity than the behests of the emperor himself. When Yang Kuo-chung, their cousin, became chief minister, the blossom of their nepotism reached its fullness.

Supplement 4:

The Rise of An Lu-shan



General An Lu-shan

With tragic fatality, the gigantic effort of the Brilliant Monarch to turn the vast empire into a centralized state degenerated into the satisfaction of the personal ambitions and grand desires of others. Emperor Hsuan-tsung, through his chief minister, Li Lin-fu, had induced such powerful centrifugal forces that, under Li's suppression, these forces grew stronger, more conscious, and more cunning. For many years, the corpulent Turk An Lu-shan had often played an infant at court, cooing and even dressing in diapers, until he became too much favored by the aging emperor and his intoxicating consort. The Exalted Imperial Concubine adopted An as her son (and as her lover); the emperor himself was never content unless he had his Lu-shan in the palace.

But soon An Lu-shan would step onto the stage in the role of avenging nemesis, the huge bulk of his body representing the colossal principle of destruction that the dictator's system had nurtured in spite of itself.

After Li Lin-fu fell ill during the tenth moon of the eleventh revolution of Tien Pao (752), Yang Kuo-chung, Yang Kwei's cousin, returned from the West a day or two before Li's death and succeeded him. An Lu-shan, a man of profound dissimulation, had waited until his court patron Li Lin-fu was dead; now, at the prodding of the new chief minister, he saw

to it that the body of Li Lin-fu, the man most high in royal favor for nearly twenty years, was despoiled by royal command. Claiming that Li Lin-fu had been planning an uprising just before his death, An cleared himself of treasonable charges at the same time that he won new affection from the emperor.

Under the ministry of Li Lin-fu, An Lu-shan had been an awed and obedient servant of the regime, but he adopted no such attitude to the successor. Once freed from Li, the one man whose power he dreaded, An Lu-shan began to take a new and independent position of spite and disobedience toward the new chief minister. For the next three years, An Lu-shan and Yang Kuo-chung entwined in a struggle of ever-increasing intensity. While the aging, pleasure-loving emperor, half-conscious of the danger, tried to ignore what was happening, the two intrigued venomously. On the frontiers, where An Lu-shan had been already much better established, each attempted to build up military strength. In their maneuvers at court, An was bested by Yang. In the end, An Lu-shan decided that his only course lay in armed intervention.

DNA Discoveries—Greg Braden



Greg Braden PHOTO:
gregbraden.com

In this report, visionary author Greg Braden, a pioneer in bridging science and spirituality, discusses three astonishing experiments with DNA that show how DNA can heal itself according to the “feelings” of the individual. The report focuses on how physical life can order nonphysical events. Consociate Terry Hutchinson, who brought this report to our attention, expressed his hope that “along with our known DNA, one day doctors will discover the true light template that helps form our DNA.”



PHOTO :
garybraden.com

[Read the article posted online at Red Ice Creations.](#)

Link submitted by Terry Hutchinson

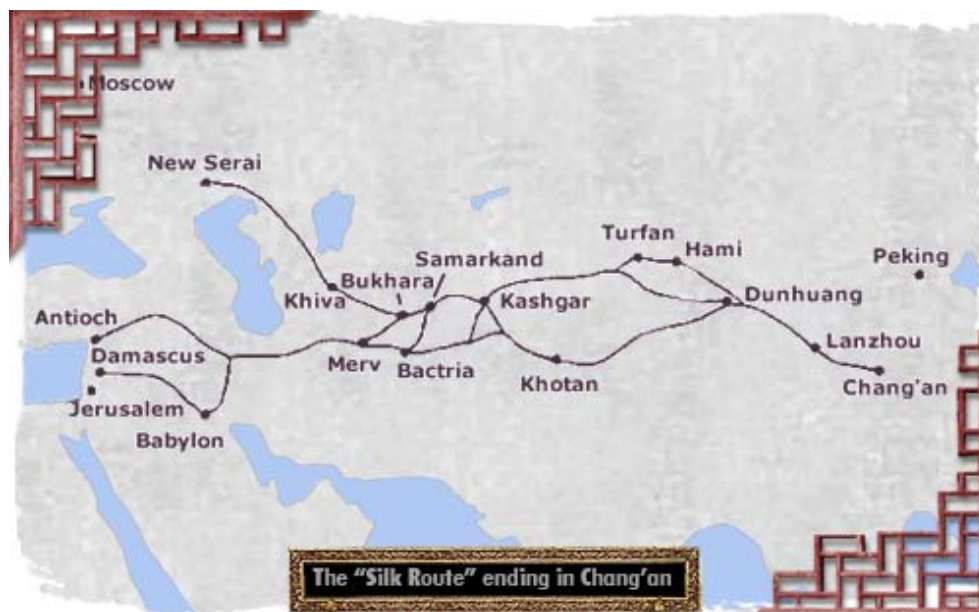
Mar Iazed-buzid, the Great Donor: Part 1



Monument headstone

PART 1: THE EASTERN PATH

. . . a man of harmonious nature and loving to do good, hearing The Way and diligently practicing it, from far out of the City of the Royal Palace came all the way to the Middle Kingdom. . . .



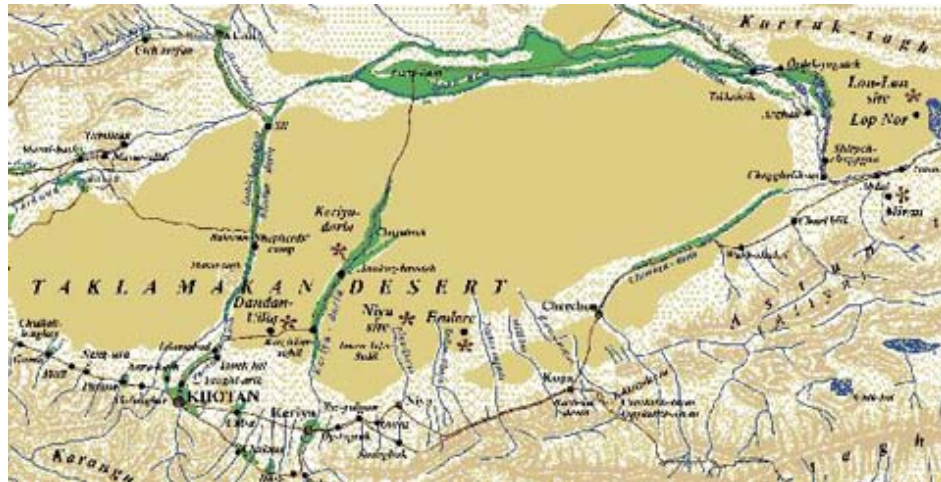
Balkh is indicated on the map as Bactria.

Along about the 100th year of the Hegira (AD 722), the man named Iazed-buzid (whom the people of Tang in China would later style *I-ssu*) was born in the remote Tang vassal state of Takhuristan at the time when the surrounding native tribes were rising up on the high tide of Arab expansion and pressing north in rebellion, with the Arabs, toward Samarkand. Throughout Iazed-buzid's childhood and youth, Chinese armies crossed the mountains and deserts of his homeland to suppress the rebels. During the confusion among the tribes of the Eleven Hordes in the 121st year of the Hegira, the Chinese army destroyed a large part of them, while the tribes farther east, the *hui ho*, or Uighurs, and the Ko Lo Lu, combined to elect a common chief among them. This new chief of the Hordes, confirmed by the Chinese emperor Hsuan-tsung, a year later sent the severed head of his rival to the emperor; but in the 129th year of the Hegira, a coalition of Arabs and Western Turks routed the Chinese armies in a momentous battle near Samarkand: the Chinese had joined their troops and their vassal hordes with those of the king of the Pa Han Na and advanced against the Arab and Turk alliance; ultimately, however, the Ko Lo Lu at the Chinese army's rear revolted and annihilated the Chinese on the banks of the Talas River. Four years later, in the 133rd year of the Hegira, or Flight, all the imperial troops of Tang were recalled from Central Asia. Thereafter, the people turned away from the consolation of the Buddha and toward the sabered moon of Islam.

Like so many of the seventy who are listed in Syriac columns down the side of the Monument stone, sometime before the year 133 of the Flight (755 AD), Iazed-buzid left his home at Balkh, once the royal capitol of Bactria and his father's Metropolitan See, now the main Arab military forward base in the north of Asia. Leaving behind the walls of that weary city and the hundreds of huge circular stupas constructed there by Buddhists centuries before, he sought his fortune as an educated provincial candidate for government service in the Chinese capital. (See Supplement 1) Crossing the river,

perhaps in the entourage of traders, Iazed-buzid passed across the moated citadel of Balkh, the caravan palace and its gardens. On horseback or on foot, he traveled north beyond the Oxus River through the snow-clad Hissar Mountains toward the fertile high-plain valley of Zerafshan that surrounds Samarkand, the next Metropolitan See. Passing through the narrow, winding streets of that yellow maze of houses nestled among trees, at one time the Sogdian capital but now a Muslim town, he turned east and followed the latter half of the same missionary path that his predecessor, Rabban A-lo-pen, had taken more than a century before: He headed southeast more than twenty-seven hundred miles along the Great West Road from the center of far Takhuristan to the end of the road at the opulent Western Capital of China: Chang-an, the largest city in the world, rivaled in size and splendor only by al-Rashid's Baghdad.

Along high mountain passes through Chinese Turkestan, Iazed-buzid made his way to the highland oasis of Kashgar, where midday was white and dazzling when it was not dimmed by the clouds of dust that choked the inhabitants and left a gray film on the black clusters of grapes. From the gardens and vineyards and pastures that sadly overlooked the desert with him, the way began to curve round the southern rim of the wide desert basin called Tarim, the storehouse of the prevailing winds that visited Kashgar two hundred days a year. Two thousand miles away, far past the other end of the shimmering desert whose sun engendered fever and whose moon engendered chills, was the next Metropolitan See, his destination: Chang-an.



Tarim Basin

From the gate of the caravan's resting place outside the city of Kashgar, where the color of the sunset would have been the color of the sand, his caravan began its five-hundred-mile circuit against the wind to the terraces of the hospitable Aryan settlement of Khotan, the most luxurious oasis on the southern rim and the Tang garrison center guarding the key link from India and Middle Asia. From there, he moved through the trade cities of Tun-huang and Lanchow. Then, winding across Asian deserts, the caravan, descending the successive levels of the Dragon Mound, crossed two hundred miles of the emperor's pasture to reach the central plain and finally arrive at its center: the imperial Western Capital, Chang-an.

<[PART 2A: THE RED COURT](#)>

SUPPLEMENTS

Supplement 1:

Provincial Candidates



Heart
Sutra in
standard
style
calligraphy,
Tang
Dynasty

The digest in the Tang history dealing with the choice of good men for office (*Tang Shu Hsuan Chu Chih*) states that every prefecture (*hsien*) and district (*chou*) under the Tang was provided with an Assembly Hall (*kuan*) for the use of students. Each year during the second of the three winter moons (the eleventh month of the year) the official in charge selected the most promising from among the body of students who had “perfected” their studies. These men, called “country candidates” (*hsiang kung*) offered their services in the Department of State Affairs (*shang shu sheng*), connected with the palace. After inspection in the Ministries of Revenue (*hu pu*), they reached the “barrier of examination” before the vice director (*yuan wai lang*).

Before Tang, the successful examination candidates, and other meritorious persons who were sent to the capital by provincial governments for employment at court, were considered part of the imperial tribute required of the area from which they came.

Visit the New Healing Place in Milwaukee



Peig Myota

In mid-June Peig Myota and Lee Ann Baum, who had been residing in Reno for the preceding eight months, announced that they were preparing to return home to the Milwaukee area to reopen their healing center with new insight and a new direction. They have been working with the Feronia Wellness Center since that time to reestablish themselves in Germantown, Wisconsin. And they recently celebrated the grand opening of their new offices.



Lee Ann Baum

[Visit the Healing Center web site to read about the healing services and classes they are offering at their new location.](#)

Mar Iazed-buzid, the Great Donor: Introduction



Monument headstone

Our Great Donor,

Grand Master of the Palace with Golden Seal and Purple Ribbon,

Joint Military Vice Commissioner of the Northern Region,

Director of the Palace Administration by examination,

and granted the purple clerical robe,

the monk I-ssu,

a man of harmonious nature and loving to do good,

hearing The Way and diligently practicing it,

from far out of the City of the Royal Palace

came all the way to the Middle Kingdom.

His learning was highly exalted during the reign of the Three Emperors;

his skills were extensive and perfectly complete.

First performing certain faithful service in the Red Court,

his name was eventually inscribed in the Dragon Book.

When the Secretariat Director,

Duke Kuo Tsu-I, Prince of the Fen-yang Commandery,

first commanded troops in the Northern Regions,

Su-tsung ordered him to accompany the expedition.

Though treated with friendship in the Prince's sleeping-tent,

he made no distinction between himself and others on the

march.

He was nails and teeth for the Duke,

and was ears and eyes to the army.

He distributed his rewards and gifts,

laying up nothing in his own house.

He made offering of the crystal granted him by the Emperor;

he dedicated the cloth of gold granted him when he retired
and sought rest.

He restored some of the old monasteries to their former
condition;

in others he enlarged the worship halls,

elevating and ornamenting their corridors and walls;

roofs and flying eaves with colored tiles

appeared like pheasants on the wing.

He exerted himself beyond measure for the Luminous School;

making benevolence his rule, he dispersed his wealth.

Every year he assembled monks from the monasteries of the
four quarters;

the hungry came and were fed;

the cold came and were clothed;

he healed the sick and raised them up;

he buried the dead and laid them to rest.

Among the purest and most self-denying God-fearing men,

such excellence was never heard of;

*but now the white-robed members of the Luminous Religion
see it in this man.*

– the seventeenth paragraph of the Chinese inscription on the Monument for the Propagation of the Luminous Religion in the Middle Kingdom

*“In the year one thousand ninety-two of the Greeks,
Mar Iazid-buzid,
priest and chorepiscopus
of Khumdan, the royal city,
son of the departed spirit, Milis,
priest from Balkh, a city of Takhuristan,
erected this monument of stone,
on which are written the Law of Him, our Savior,
and the preaching of our forefathers
to the rulers of China.”*

– from the Syriac inscription at the base of the Monument.

[<PART 1: THE EASTERN PATH>](#)

“Can the Human Body Learn to Photosynthesize?”



PHOTO:
bigthink.com

Can the human body learn to photosynthesize? This is the question investigated by Orion Jones at BigThink.com. Take a look at the backwards method that investigative science (and investigative journalism) takes when seeking to discover how the human body works with light.

[Read the article online at bigthink.com.](http://bigthink.com)

Link submitted by Frieda Nelson

THE LUMINOUS TEACHING STONE OF CHINA AND THREE SETTINGS: Preface to “Mar Iazed-buzid, the Great Donor”

FIRST SETTING: Mar Iazed-buzid, the Great Donor



Three men are mentioned in the Inscription on the Luminous Teaching Stone who are especially notable: (1) the old Syrian Church Father and historian who authored the text of the Inscription, (2) the talented young Chinese calligrapher who cut the words of the text into the stone of the Monument, and (3) the wealthy Turkic bishop who sponsored the Monument and its raising. The lives of these men suggest the three time settings for the Stone: (1) the Church Father/historian represents the past, from the origins of The Teaching in Syria, nearly eight hundred years before the Stone was raised, and its spread across the Middle East to China; (2) the calligrapher represents the future, from the time the Monument was buried to hide it from destruction shortly after it was raised until the Teaching was finally and completely dissipated shortly before our time; and (3) the episcopal sponsor/donor of the Stone, who represents the time contemporary to the raising of the Monument.

The word *setting* is used in the title with a prescribed

intention. The primary usage is obvious: the frame in which a precious stone is set. Each of the settings shares in this image. But the word *setting* holds at least three other usages: the setting of a dramatic scene, a setting of eggs for incubation, and a table setting. The literary image—the time and place of a dramatic scene—is enacted repeatedly throughout the narrative that is attached to Father Adam, the author of the Inscription, who is a historian and, however mediocre, a poet. This setting is an expansion of the historical Preface that Father Adam himself composed for the Inscription, embedded in the wider history of the Church and told from a millennial perspective. I hope the reader will recognize that the setting named for the calligrapher Lu Yen grows out of the nesting image: a batch of eggs for incubation. Lu Yen's story traces the development of new forms of the Luminous Teaching in China from their conception (when the seeds of Eternal Truth still remaining in the eighth-century Oriental Church animated a teaching of native Chinese stock), through their generations, and on toward our own time. The next setting is named for the celebrated Bishop I-ssu, who, in the Syriac portion of the Inscription, is called Mar Iazed-buzid; this setting partakes of the familiar banquet image—a table setting—but in an imperial manner. As the reader will see, this setting has much in common with the image of a table setting for a festal meal. Bishop I-ssu's story is an expansion of the seventeenth paragraph of the Inscription, fashioned from the time immediately surrounding the inaugural raising of the Stone.

The tale of the past, "Father Adam, Author," and the tale of the future, "Lu Yen, Calligrapher," are not included here. These two narratives will be presented at another time. Only the biographical note "Mar Iazed-buzid, the Great Donor," originally completed in 1989 and recently updated, appears here.

One last word. It may appear that an element of fantasy enters

the makeup of these stories, but they are in no way fictions. The stories are fashioned entirely out of commonplaces, but it must be remembered that what were commonplaces for people in their time are for us fantastic details. Whatever is factually accurate I owe to the work of historians and commentators who precede me; whatever color there is in the telling I owe to English renderings of the poets of the time. The narratives are limited by the amount and kind of information that was available to me at the time of writing. For this reason I am able to say of the verity of these stories only this: If these stories are not true, there are others like them that are true.

Explanations of political and cultural undercurrents, condensed but still too ponderous to find a place in the narrative, have been drawn out of the text and channeled into supplements at the end of each section. These are designed to assist the reader along the way.

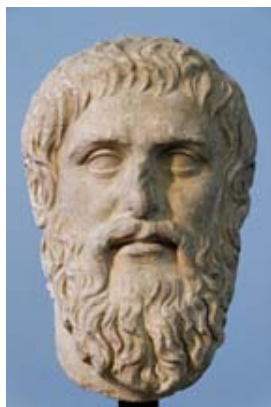
[<INTRODUCTION>](#)

TABLE OF CHINESE PERSON AND PLACE NAMES (in alphabetical order)	
Wade-Giles transliteration	Pinyin transliteration
A-lo-pen	Alopen
An Lu-shan	An Lushan
Chang-an	Changan
Chang Kiu	Zhanggiu
Cheng-tu	Chengdu
Chia Tzu	Qiazu
Chou-chih	Zhouzhi
(Prince) Chung	Zhong

Chung-jen (Ward)	Zhongren
Feng-hsiang	Fengxiang
Feng Ming	Fengming
Hsi Jung	Xirong
Hsiu-shan	Xiushan
Hsuan-tsung (2)	Xuanzong
Hua-men	Huamen
I-ning	Yining
I-ssu	Yisi
Kuan-chung	Guanzhong
(Yang) Kuei-fei or (Yang) Kwei-fei or (Yang) Guifei	Yang Yuhuan
(Yang) Kuo-chung	(Yang) Guozhong
Ko Shu-han	Ge Shuhan
Kuo Tzu-I	Guo Ziyi
Lao-tzu	Laozi
Li Fu-kuo	Li Fuguo
Li Kwang-pi	Li Guangbi
Li Lin-fu	Li Linfu
Ling-wu	Lingwu
Loyang	Luoyang
Lu Yen	Luyan
Ma-wei	Mawei
Pei Ti	Beidi
Ping Liang	Bingliang
Shih Ssu-ming	Shi Siming
Su-tsung	Suzong
Szechuan	Sichuan
Ta-chin	Daqin

Tai-tsung	Daizong
Ta-ku	N/A
Te-tsung	Dezong
Tu Fu	Du Fu
Uighurs (Uyghur)	Weiwuer
Wu-chun	Wuzhun
Wu-tsung	Wuzong
(Yang) Yu-han	Yang Yuhuan
Yin Hsi	Yinxi
Yu-hsien	Yuxian

The Thiasos of Plato, Part 4



Plato sculpted
by Silanion
circa 370 BCE



Socrates
portrait by
Palermo,
copied from
the 4th-
century
original



Present-day view of a grove at
Plato's Academy. PHOTO:
gardenvisit.com

The creation of a *thiasos* allowed the teaching of Plato to exist. Its creation was a necessary legal condition to own a

shrine on public land and to hold banquets in a public *gymnaseion*. Like the establishment of a modern church, it was primarily a financial arrangement. (See Supplement 6) Generally speaking, every *thiasos* in Athens was an institution organized for religious observance and for fellowship; the *thiasos* was a public construct guided by law; its duties were narrowly defined public activities; however, neither the general duties nor the organizational structure reveal the character of Plato's *thiasos*, any more than the corporate structure and by-laws of a modern church reveal its character. The duties of a *thiasos* were distinct from its functions; its legal obligations, from its formal purpose; its social standing, secondary to its religious concerns and educational purposes, as they are with a modern church. There was a multitude of *thiasoi* in Athens; they were integral to society, and they followed no uniform structure. One general principle, however, did hold: Athenian law recognized a *thiasos* not as an individual entity but as several joint owners with a common interest; and the law recognized a single individual of that association who served to hold the properties for the *thiasos* – the *archon* (or in Plato's case *scholarch*); but the law did not recognize the privilege of that single individual to mortgage or to sell any part of a thing held in common by the *thiasos*. In this, too, Plato's Academy resembled a church. (See Supplement 7)

There is one other clear indication of the independent legal standing of Plato's Academy: Neither the *Mouseion* nor the Garden appear in Plato's will, which does mention two other estates. Plato did not need to bequeath the *Mouseion* or the Garden to the Academy because the *temenos*, and thus the *Mouseion*, was administered through the *thiasos*, and the Garden was owned by it.

The establishment of the *thiasos* on the public land of the Academy, instead of on private land, ensured its survival in perpetuity. This act of Plato is a testament to his wisdom.

After Plato's death, a law sponsored by one Sophocles of Souion (the law was enacted in 307 BCE and repealed in 306 BCE) made it illegal, under penalty of death, for any philosopher to be appointed head of a school without the consent of the *boule* (the senatorial administrative council) and the *ecclesia* (the general legislative assembly) of Athens. For a time, that law sent all other philosophers packing. (See Supplement 8) The institution of Plato's Academy remained untouched for a thousand years.

This much can be said of Plato's Academy by evidence of ancient sources and of history. To go further, to find out *what* Plato taught at the Academy or *how*, requires another source of information and another approach.

Now that I have arrived at this point in my comparison, and look back over this page, it is clear to me, as it may be already clear to you, that I, too, like the other academicians before me, have recognized in Plato's Academy the one of which I am a part. I hope it is clear as well that my method is different from theirs. Where others have clouded the past with images of themselves, I have simply noted the resemblance.

Robert G. Petrovich
February 22, 2010

SUPPLEMENTS

Supplement 6:

The Sacred Academy of Plato



William Blake's vision of Plato
inspiring a student

Plato's Academy was a complex society within the Athenian political community, with its own obligations and privileges. A legally recognized religious-social-political organization, its relationship to the Athenian *politeia* was strong, well defined, and direct. There would have been a public forum with regular meetings, elections for priest, treasurer, and other official positions, decrees posted and voted upon, oversight of land management, shrine upkeep, recording of finances, etcetera. How like a church established in the United States of America this is, where Articles of Incorporation create a legal person and deem it a body politic with continual perpetual succession and with power to acquire and possess property, with its purpose and privileged position in society delineated with by-laws, and with rules that regulate its internal functions; there are files and records to keep on local, state, and federal levels, and there are the same

concerns of management and upkeep.

Plato's Academy and a modern church even operate, in their respective societies, according to the same social design: separation from the mundane, in activity and in space. A *temenos* in classical Athens was a piece of land "cut off" and assigned as an official domain, an area reserved for worship, a territory or field of deity or divinity. A church in the United States by its nature is "exempt" from taxes; which is to say, it is kept outside the world of commerce and the everyday. The two words – *temenos* and *exempt* – have the same meaning: The word *temenos* is from the Greek verb *temeno*, "to cut"; the word *exempt*, from the Latin *exemptus*, past participle of *eximere*, "to take out." The law of the state of Nevada, where I reside, puts it succinctly enough: ". . . buildings used for religious worship, with their furniture and equipment, and the lots of ground on which they stand, . . . owned by some religious society or corporation, and parsonages so owned, are exempt from taxation" (*Nevada Revised Statutes* 361.125). In the state of California, even the real estate of a scientific organization can qualify for tax exemption if it is used for religious purposes.

The courts of California have defined worship as the formal observance of religious tenets or belief. These are the elements they have used to define religion (*Fellowship of Humanity v. Alameda County*):

- (1) a belief,
- (2) a cult involving a gregarious association openly expressing the belief,
- (3) a system of moral practice directly resulting from adherence to the belief,
- (4) an organization within the cult designed to observe the tenets of the belief.

The content of a religious belief is not of government concern. Examination of the truth or validity of religious beliefs is foreclosed by the First Amendment of the United

States Constitution. The Supreme Court of the United States has ruled that government has no authority to pass judgment on the legitimacy of a religious belief or to define permissible religious belief (*Fowler v. Rhode Island*) Federal law has also left the definition of the term *church* to “common meaning and usage” (*De LaSalle Institute v. U.S.*).

The terms *church*, *religion*, *religious purpose*, *religious organization*, etcetera are found, but not specifically defined, in the Internal Revenue Code. In that code, certain characteristics have been developed by the Internal revenue Service, and by court decisions, and are attributed generally to churches. The Internal Revenue Service uses a combination of these characteristics, together with other facts and circumstances, to determine whether an organization is to be considered a “church” for federal tax purposes. These characteristics on the list describe Plato’s Academy: distinct legal existence, formal code or doctrine and discipline, literature of its own, established place of worship, regular religious services, a school for the preparation of its members. The following are other characteristics on the list that may apply to Plato’s Academy, but for which we have no proof: recognized creed and form of worship, definite and distinct ecclesiastical government, distinct religious history, membership not associated with any other church or denomination, organization of ordained ministers, ordained ministers selected after completing prescribed courses of study, schools for religious instruction of the young.

Section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code provides for the types of nonprofit organizations that are exempt from federal income tax. Exemptions apply to nonprofit corporations organized and operated exclusively for religious, scientific, literary, or educational purposes, to promote the arts, or to foster national or international amateur sports competition, among others. (Another federal provision provides a deduction for some donors who make charitable contributions

to these types of 501(c)(3) organizations.) There is no doubt in my mind that Plato's Academy, if established in the United States of America, would qualify as a 501(c)(3) organization. You will have to judge for yourself.

There is also one more point of equivalence which I would like to bring to your attention: the question of funding, a question which gives us the opportunity to dispel another common misconception. To manage the *temenos*, and the *Mouseion* within its boundaries, together with its shrine and its banquets, the Academy *thiasos* needed funding, just as a church needs funding to carry out its liturgical and educational activities. How did Plato's Academy manage to exist financially? The answer is donations. We have this much on the word of Damascius, the last *scholarch* of the Academy: ". . . the property of Plato's successors did not come, as most think, from Plato's own fortune, for Plato was poor . . . [but rather] because many people, as they died, left their property to the School."

Supplement 7:

The Legal Standing of Aristotle's Lyceum



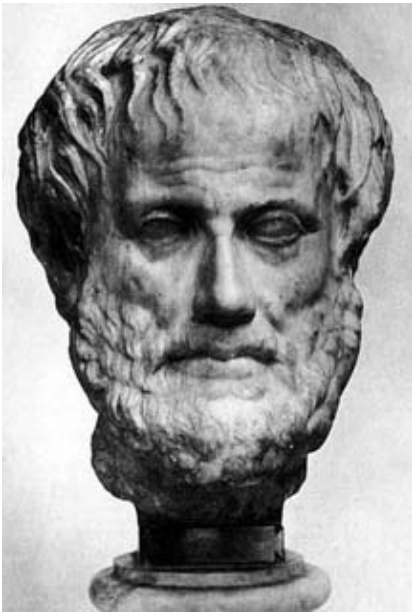
Aristotle's Lyceum by German artist Gustav Spangenberg (1828-1891)

By comparison, the legal standing of Aristotle's Lyceum bears no resemblance to Plato's Academy. If Aristotle had formed a

thiasos to administer his Lyceum, it would have been barred from ownership or administration of the underlying property since he was a *metikos*, a foreign resident.

Supplement 8:

Aristotle, the Foreign Philosopher



Aristotle (sculptor unknown)

Aristotle, the tutor of Alexander the Great of Macedon, fled the anti-Macedonian sentiment of Athens in fear of his life soon after the death of his famous student in 323 BCE, and died the following year of stomach problems. Seventeen years later, the same sentiment drove out Aristotle's successor, Theophrastus, along with all the others. Plato served as head of the Academy until his death around 347 BCE; by the time the law of Sophocles of Souion was enacted in 307 BCE, Polemon had succeeded Plato, Speusippus and Xenocrates as *scholarch*; and no existing source for the life of Polemon mentions his flight in the face of that law.

Steamboat Hot Springs Open House



Steamboat Hot Springs Healing Center invites you to attend their semiannual Open House and Health Fair on Saturday, September 29, 2012 from 1 pm to 5pm.

You will be able to experience sample therapies including chair massage, sound table, and full-spectrum light therapy, reflexology, Sonatherapy, aromatherapy, and the geothermal healing waters in their outdoor tub.

You will also be able to tour the historic site and attend classes and presentations:

1:15 Artist & Author **Rowena Kryder** speaks on how to “Penetrate the Ordinary Mind”

2:15 **Dr. Karl Maret:** Cutting Edge Healing Practices

3:00 Class hosted by **DoTerra Essential Oils**.

3:15 Myree Townsend, Image Consultant: “Taking Time for You, YOU DESERVE IT!”

4:15 **Jim Eaglesmith**, Performance Artist and Storyteller: “Take a ‘Chants on Love’ a collection of Poems, Prayers, and Poetry set to Original Music.

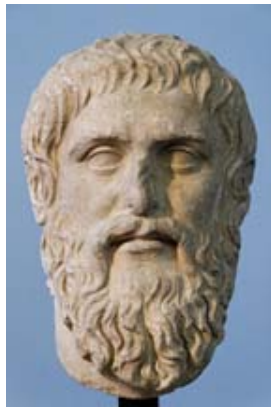
Vendors include: Two Feathers Healing Formula, Arbonne International, Image Just for You, DoTerra Essential Oils and

MANY MORE!

Refreshments will be served.

<http://steamboatsprings.org/> or call 775.853.6600 for information

The Thiasos of Plato, Part 3



Plato sculpted
by Silanion
circa 370 BCE



Socrates

portrait by
Palermo copied
from the 4th-
century
original



Pompeii gymnasium seen from the
top of the stadium wall PHOTO
Haiduc

Plato as a child had attended an exercise garden other than this one, the private *gymnaseion* of the grammarist Dionysios. There he had learned to compose tragedies and dithyrambs from famous teachers of music, and there in the *palaistra* of Ariston of Argos he had trained to compete as a champion wrestler in the Panhellenic games. As a youth, however, Plato studied philosophy at the Academy. (We have it on the word of Aristotle that he studied Heracleitus with Cratylus; according to another tradition, he studied Parmenides here.) It was also at the Academy that Plato was formally presented to Socrates on the morning after Socrates had dreamed a prognostic dream in which he recognized Plato (a young swan flying out from the altar of Eros and settling in his lap, transforming into a full-grown swan and taking off into the sky again, singing a song that charmed all who heard it). In his twentieth year (407 BCE), after he had listened to Socrates discourse at length while the first tragedy he had ever composed played out on stage in the theater, Plato committed the decisive act of

burning his poetry in a public spectacle at the Theater of Dionysius Eleuthereus during the Dionysiac festival. From that moment, Plato turned from his purely poetic ambitions and devoted himself to Socrates and the Pythagorean love of wisdom.

A year later, Socrates committed the first of the public acts that drew the derision of leading citizens of the *polis*. Plato continued to associate with him, and Socrates continued to teach for another eight years. Then a series of court trials aimed at religious impiety charged the atmosphere of Athens. The series culminated with an affidavit against Socrates that accused him of impiety and of corrupting the youth of the *polis*. The charges were serious. During the trial, Plato mounted the platform to speak on behalf of Socrates as one of the youths who had not been corrupted by him but was shouted down. The proceedings ended with the conviction of Socrates and the death sentence. During Socrates' last month of life, Plato visited him in prison; then he exited the scene.

After a self-imposed exile spent in Egypt, in Cyrene (Libya), in Italy, and in the cradle of the spiritual community of Pythagoras, Sicily – ten years following the judicial murder of Socrates, his exemplar and the midwife of his soul – Plato returned to the Academy to memorialize the teachings of Socrates and to celebrate them on the sanctuary grounds where Socrates had taught. He gathered together a community of spiritual companions and organized them into a *thiasos*, then acquired for this new religious association a sacred plot of land (*temenos*) in the Academy and erected upon it a shrine to the Muses (*Mouseion*), an appropriate act in this sanctuary dedicated to education. (See Supplement 3) At first, the shrine was perhaps no more than a small altar in a small section of the grounds that served as a gathering place for the members of Plato's Academy. Later, perhaps, a moderate building was constructed to surround it; but it was the shrine that represented bonded property on public land. Here Plato's

Academy of higher education celebrated the original arts of the Muses: Here they were free to give voice (***Aoide***) to divine truths and to the maieutics that bring them to birth, in oral teachings, in lectures, and in dramatic dialogues; here they observed liturgical occasions (***Melete***) with symposia and with all-night vigil feasts; and here they practiced the techniques of spiritual recollection (***Mneme***).

In time, Plato acquired a little garden estate near Colonos, not far from the sanctuary grounds of the Academy. (See Supplement 4) Plato taught at the sanctuary both in the exercise garden and in his *Mouseion*, and he taught outside the sanctuary in his Garden. Both *Mouseion* and Garden were parts of Plato's Academy. Public lectures might have been delivered in one of the pillared halls of the exercise garden or in the *exedra*, the three-walled open room furnished with benches, nearby. There might have been another *exedra* constructed on Plato's *temenos* near the shrine for seminars and feasting; and perhaps a third in Plato's own Garden, where he had his private quarters, and where, it seems, he met with his closest companions for private teaching and discussions. (See Supplement 5)

<READ PART 4>

SUPPLEMENTS

Supplement 3:

Plato's Shrine to the Muses



Philosophers
debating by “the
tree against which
young Phaedrus
leaned,” in a first-
century mosaic of
Plato’s School from
Pompey

In his *Phaedrus*, another kind of shrine to the Muses, Plato recalls Socrates and Socrates’ praise for Calliope, “the oldest” among the Muses, and Urania, “the next after her,” who “preside over the heavens and all discourse, human and divine, and sing with the sweetest voice,” and also for their devotees, those “who honor their special kind of music by leading a philosophical life.”

Supplement 4:

A King's Ransom for Plato's Private Garden



“Plato and His
Disciples in
the Garden of
the Academy”
by Alexandre
De Baer (circa
1874), from La
Vie Des
Savants
Illustres

Plutarch tells us that when Plato traveled to Syracuse a second time (360/361 BCE), he fell into disrepute with its tyrant, Dionysios, who entrusted the philosopher to a Spartan ambassador with instructions to dispose of him. The ambassador attempted to sell Plato on the island of Aigina, but a certain Annikeris, who was passing through on his way to Olympia, ransomed him. Dion, a friend of Plato and the political opponent of Dionysios, attempted to return to Annikeris the money he had paid for Plato; but Annakeris refused and used the money to buy for Plato the little garden estate near Colonos.

Supplement 5:

The Private Garden of Plato



A representation of Aristotle and Plato discussing philosophy in a garden, from a tile design at the 16th-century Jesuit university St Francisco at Evora, Portugal. PHOTO gardenvisit.com

The Garden of Plato was acquired in addition to the original Academy sanctuary. A tale of Plato's old age suggests that Plato had his personal quarters there.* The use of the Garden seems to have changed upon Plato's death. Plato's chosen successor as *scholarch*, his nephew Speusippo, did not live there, but a later successor, Polemon, seems to have spent all his time there. It is plausible that the *thiasos* formally acquired the garden property sometime around Plato's death, if not before. It was not disposed of in Plato's will, yet it was in the possession of Xenocrates, Polemon, and their successors all the way into the sixth century of the Christian era. The sanctuary of the Academy was destroyed in 88 BCE by the invading Roman army of Sulla, who cut down the groves sacred to Athena for timber to build siege engines to attack Athens, but the Garden remained in the hands of the Academy until its last *scholarch*, Damascius, escaped the statutory persecutions of Justinian in 529 CE and fled with his companions and the Academy library to Sassanid Persia, and later found sanctuary in Harran, near Edessa, where the students of the Academy-in-exile remained until the tenth century, aiding the Islamic

preservation of Hellenic medicine and philosophy.

* One day, while Plato, then about eighty years of age and to some extent losing his memory, was walking the colonnades of the Academy alone without anyone to stand by him (Xenocrates was abroad and Speusippos was ill), Aristotle ambushed him with a gang of his own persuasion, questioning Plato aggressively and elenctically. Plato retreated from the sanctuary. When Xenocrates returned from abroad, he saw Aristotle perambulating on the colonnades (*peripatos*) where he had left Plato three months before and observed that Aristotle did not go back to Plato's but instead went off to his own place in town. Xenocrates, suspecting that Plato was ill, asked a companion where Plato was. The companion replied, "He is not ill, but Aristotle has been giving him a hard time and has forced Plato to retire from the *peripatos*, so he is philosophizing in his own garden."

<[READ PART 4](#)>