

THE NATIONAL TRUST – SRI LANKA LECTURE ON
THURSDAY 26TH SEPTEMBER 2019

**“BUDDHIST ART OF SILK ROAD WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KIZIL ROCK-CUT CAVE
TEMPLE IN XINJIANG PROVINCE OF PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA”**

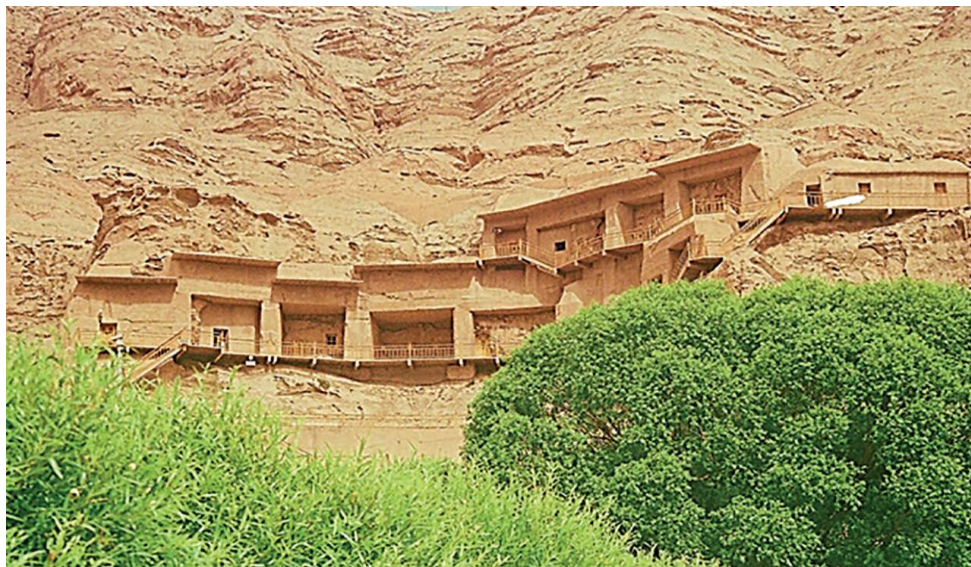
By Bindu Urugodawatte

The 120th Session of the Monthly Lecture Series of the National Trust - Sri Lanka will be held at the HNB Auditorium, 22nd Floor, HNB Towers, 479 T.B. Jayah Mawatha, Colombo 10 at 6.30p.m. on Thursday 26th September 2019.

Silk Road denotes the different trade routes which connected east and west through Central Asia for centuries. Cities in Central Asia flourished due to trade along the routes as well as the religions, knowledge, technology and information which were also carried along these routes enriched the cultures of Central Asia. Buddhism was one of the earliest to change the cultural dynamics in Central Asia and this is reflected in the Buddhist art of Central Asia. This paper mainly focuses on the Buddhist art of Kizil Rock-Cut Cave Temple and its affinity to Theravada Buddhist art based on Buddhist art of Sri Lanka. The differences in themes of Buddhist art of the other Rock-Cut Temples in the Region will also be discussed.

Kizil Rock-Cut Cave Temple is located in the village of Baicheng near the city of Kuche of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of the P.R. of China. Kuche area was known as “Qiusi” during the 1st millennium CE. The Kizil Rock-Cut Cave Temple consist of 236 caves which have been dated to 4th to 7th or 8th centuries CE. These 236 caves have been carved on to the rock cliff and there are Central Pillar Caves, Colossal Image Caves and Residence caves. These caves were used as places of worship for both monks and the lay patrons, as meditation and residence caves for the monks. The Kizil grottoes have paintings portraying the incidents from the life of Buddha, Jataka stories, celestial beings, ornamental decorations and Buddha, Bodhisattva, Arahant, patrons and other figures. The caves also contain many sculptures and provide a wonderful insight to the extent of Buddhism was accepted by the community. The physical labour necessary to excavate 236 caves over a period of four centuries, and create colossal sculptures of Buddha as well as other sculpture and paintings is indeed immense. This indicates a wealthy and a prosperous Buddhist community who lived in the area was able to support the creation of these caves as well as the large monastery with numerous Buddhist monks. The famous 7th century Chinese traveler monk Xuan Zang¹ stated that an early form of Buddhism (Sarvastivada School) was still practiced in the state of Qiusi (modern city of Kuche) and there were more than 100 monasteries in this Kingdom with over 5,000 Buddhist monks. Kizil Rock-Cut Cave Temple is the largest monastery of the ancient Qiusi Kingdom with the Subashi monastery near Kuche being the second largest.

I commenced my research at the Kizil Rock-Cut Cave Temple in 1994 subsequent to my first visit to the site. Since then, I have spent a long time unravelling the mysteries of the paintings and sculpture at Kizil Rock-Cut Cave Temple by comparing the art of Kizil with Sri Lanka Buddhist art. During my last visit I was able to identify hitherto unidentified paintings at this site. The textual evidence of the area does not contain much evidence of Sarvastivada texts. However, the study of the paintings and sculpture indicate a close affinity with the early Buddhist art and Pali texts.



¹ Also spelled previously as Hsüan-tsang, Hyun Tsan, Hhuen Kwan, HiouenThsang, Hiuen Tsang, HiuenTsiang, Hsien-tsang, Hsyan-tsang, etc.

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She is an Archaeologist by profession, trained both in the East and West and carrying out her research in South, Central and East Asia. Her research interests include Buddhist Archaeology of Sri Lanka and South Asia, Silk Road Buddhist Archaeology, Buddhist Archaeology of Central Asia and China. Currently she is carrying out research on *Paintings of Jataka Stories at the Kizil Rock-Cut Cave Temple in Xinjiang Province of China*. She has contributed her research to both national and international publications and presented her research findings at national and international forums in USA, Europe and Asia. Her recent publications include *Buddhist Art and Architecture and Key Buddhist Centres of Devotion and Pilgrimage in Buddhism Living Religion Sri Lanka* published by the Ministry of Buddhasasana of Sri Lanka. *Buddhism in Central Asia in 2600 Years of Sambuddhatva: Global Journey of Awakening, Influence of European Diaspora on Sri Lankan Buddhist Art in the Circulation of Cultures and Culture of Circulation: Diasporic Cultures of South Asia During the 18th to 20th Centuries* are some of her publications. She has worked in governmental, non-governmental and private organisations in Sri Lanka, USA and China in various capacities. She is avid photographer, a nature lover and an intrepid traveller.

The National Trust – Sri Lanka conducts monthly lectures on the last Thursday of each month. The lectures are open to the members and the public at a nominal fee. The HNB Sustainability Foundation is the principal sponsor of the events of the National Trust – Sri Lanka.

Further information can be obtained from the Trust Office Tel 2682730 / 0778081214 at the Post Graduate Institute of Archaeology, 407 Baudhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 7. Members please bring your Membership Card and Invitation if available.