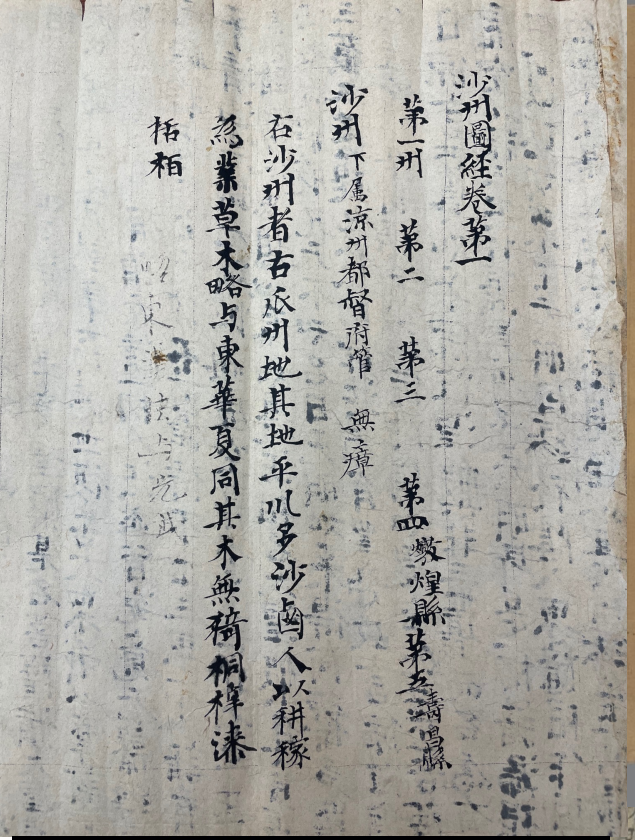
Place-making and place-knowing: Dunhuang in geographical documents and practices

Alexis Lycas – LMU – 20 July 2022


沙州圖經卷第一

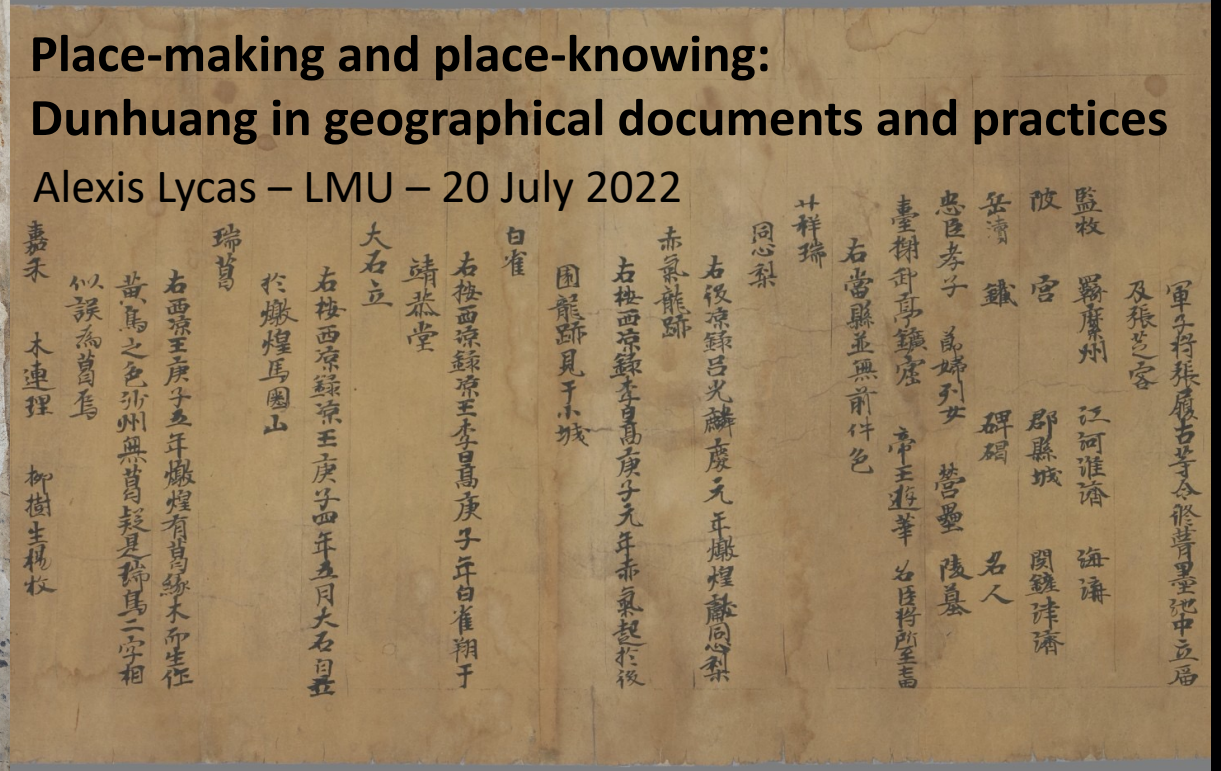
第一州　第二　第三　第四敦煌縣　第五鳴沙縣

沙州下屬涼州都督府管　無疹

右沙州者古瓜州地其地平川多沙鹵人少耕稼

忽業草木略与東華夏同其木無檟桐柞漆

括栢


軍子將張履古等合修普墨記中立碑

及張芝宅

監牧　鸊鵜州　江河淮濟　海濤

陂　宮　郡縣城　関鍵津濟

笳鼓　鐵　碑碣　名人

忠臣孝子　高婦列女　營墨　陵墓

臺榭亭驛廬　帝王遊幸　名匠將帥至書

右當縣並無前件色

艾祥瑞

同心梨

右後涼錄呂光麟慶元年歲煌縣同心梨

赤氣龍跡

右檢西涼錄李皇高庚子元年赤氣起於後

園龍跡見于小城

白雀

右檢西涼錄涼王李皇高庚子年白雀翔于

靖恭堂

大石立

右檢西涼錄涼王庚子四年五月大石自立

於歡煌馬圈山

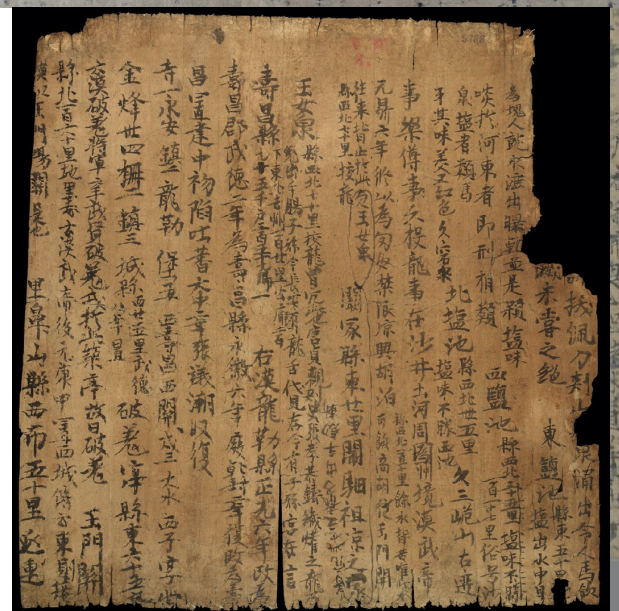
瑞草

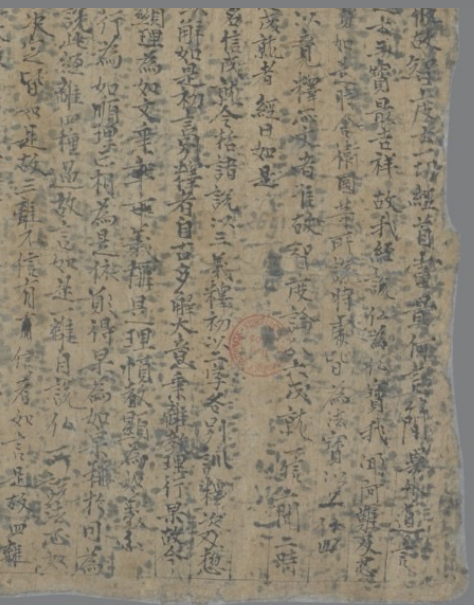
右西涼王庚子五年歡煌有草緣木而生狀

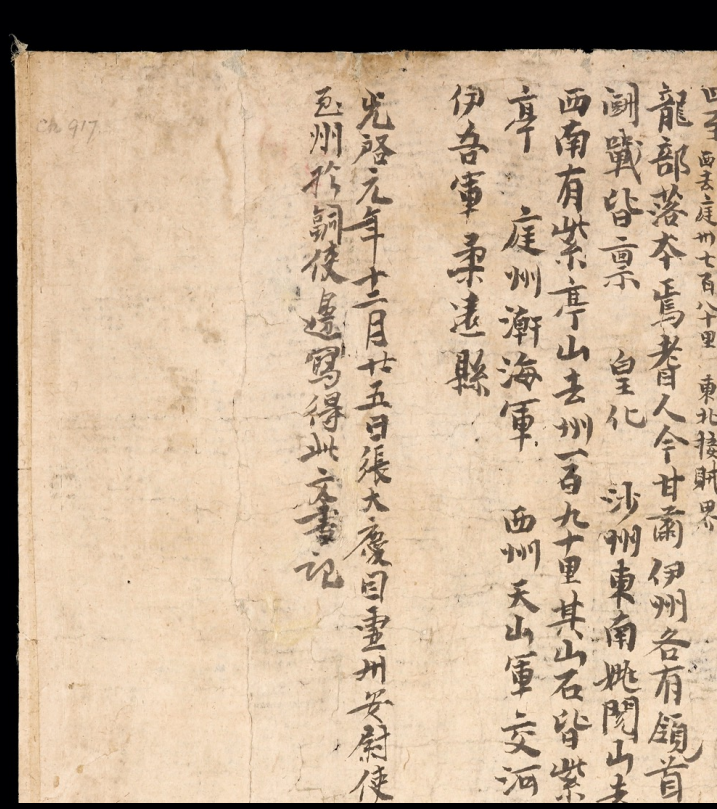
黃鳥之色沙州無草疑是瑞草二字相

似誤為黃鳥

嘉禾　木連理　柳樹生稊牧






龍部落本焉耆人今甘肅伊州各有頡首

涮職皆稟　皇化　沙州東南抵閿山去

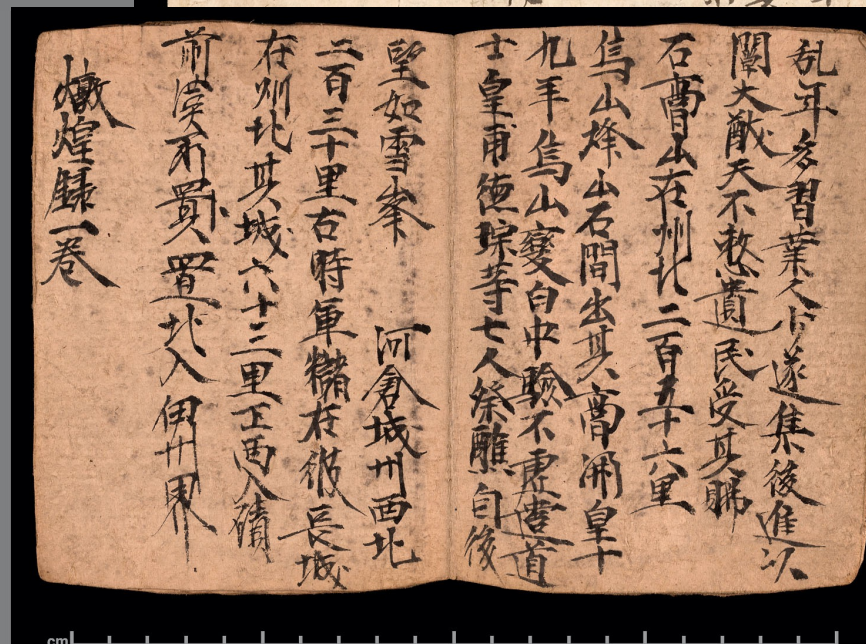
西南有紫亭山去州一百九十里其山石皆紫

亭　庭州瀚海軍　西州天山軍交河

伊吾軍柔遠縣

光啓元年十二月廿五日張大慶自壹州安撫使

瓦州於嗣復遠寫得此文書記


乱平多習業人下遂集後作次

闍大酺天不救遺民受其歸

石壽出在州北二百五十六里

鳥山烽山石間出其南涮皐平

九年鳥山戍白中驗不應書首

士皇甫德琛等七人祭雕白後

望如雪案　河倉城州西北

二百三十里古時軍糧在彼長城

在州北其城六十三里正西人積

前漫未覓置北人倒井界

歡煌縣一卷

BACKGROUND

- Interest in local geographical knowledge before the age of print
- Sources: 方志, 地理志, 風土記 + 水經注, 太平預覽
- Problem: mostly fragments (voluntary + unvoluntary), grey/pragmatic writings
- Solution: Dunhuang documents on local geography: 9/10 mss. (圖經, 圖志, 地境, 錄), 7^{th}-10^{th} c.
- Epistemological problem: historical geography / history of geography
- Methodological problem: “local turn” in Chinese studies; prominence of specific sources + individual/influential approaches. A useful framework?

QUESTIONS

- How was (geographical) knowledge produced and organized, so as to help agents of the State make things work at the local level?
- Non-imperial agents of change? To what extent do bureaucrats need to take into account the specificities of a given locale?
- Is mobility really a key issue? Better to focus on place and place-making than circulation (*Microstoria* + spatial turn?)
- How do we measure what happens after a crisis, how does bureaucracy work in non-ordinary times?
- Do these geographical practices help to create/build a place/a sense of place?
- Why do they write what they write?

The importance of historical geography

- Writing the history of geography is also writing the history of historical geography: place naming + local typology can be drawn from asking: where, when, by whom were they built?
- The history of a locality is important for historical actors, S.367: 右古昆吾國，西戎之地，周穆王伐西戎，昆吾獻赤刀是也
- A place is a place because someone reports that something happened there, e.g. S.788: 玉女泉，縣西北七十里，絞(蛟)龍曾穴此也。唐貞觀，刺史張孝恭(嵩)鑄鐵爟(灌)之，龍乃兌(脫)出，手賜子孫，今長安有龍舌代(氏)見存
- What should one know about a place?

Genres and efficacy: the production of practical and codified knowledge – 1

- In order to be able to manage a locality: fiscal and demographic data, religious and military elements
- Intertextuality (vertical and horizontal + temporal circulation of knowledge)
- Different genres correspond to different uses of a locality
- Shared goal of efficacy: to convey specific geographical information through the most appropriate and useful channel. 圖經 useful on the ground; other subgenres, less so

Genres and efficacy: the production of practical and codified knowledge – 2

- Multiple subgenres: in S.788, numerous 欠 for missing elements regarding a given place = there are other documents one knows or should know about
- P.2691: a topography with markers and itineraries, rational list of elements one (here a pilgrim) should know + 一一細說，別有本: second piece of evidence of the existence of a known and certainly well-defined set of documents one can turn to. Possibility of knowing everything there is to know about a place
- Spectrum of ordinary, yet codified, geographical writings (except S.5448)

Bureaucratic agency?

- Organization of local/urban knowledge, as reflected in the layout and in the structure of the manuscripts: the spatial logic of the documents echoes the empirical/physical motion in space
- Administrative mobility changes local knowledge: standardization (layout and structure) and innovation (distinction, materialized by auspiciously loaded interpolations which suggest a sense of place + appearance of authorship + importance of the local/locally appointed official
- Local legitimation of the imperial action: eating habits + religious practices + human migrations all coming to an end with the submission to the imperial authority