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TITLE

From Mediterranean to China:

Religious elements in Buddhism through the Silk Road

KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

During several centuries, the Mahāyāna Buddhism travelled through Central Asia, on its way to China. In this long journey, this religion contacted with numerous cultural contexts, assimilating elements from different origins. Thus, the Buddhism that arrived to Dunhuang, the famous Chinese “Jade Gates”, in the first centuries of the Christian Era, was deeply transformed, integrating references that came as far as the Mediterranean shores.

In fact, the contacts between the Ancient Near and Middle East with Central Asia, through the millenary system of communications known as the “Silk Road”, allowed that several religious and cultural elements (whether one speaks about animal symbols or iconographic traits) reached distant territories. By means of systematic and complex syncretic processes, these elements were continuously absorbed, integrating different cultural and religious frameworks. Being no exception, during its journey to China, the Mahāyāna Buddhism came across and integrated several of those elements.

With this paper, we aim to analyze some of the religious elements that travelled from Mediterranean to China, focusing our attention on the Chinese Buddhists objects belonging to the collection of the Macau Scientific and Cultural Centre (CCCM), in Lisbon.