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A History of Uighur Religious Conversions (5th - 16th Centuries)

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Tang Li

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1. Introduction

The Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region of China is home for the majority of the modern Uighur. However, the big migration of the Uighur to this region only happened after the middle of the 9th century. The Uighur were known in ancient times as an Eastern Asiatic nation of Turkish race whose influence swept across East and Central Asia for centuries. In the course of the history of China, especially from the time of the Tang Dynasty (618-907), the role the Uighur played in relation to the Chinese empires can be regarded as distinctly important.

The significance of the Uighur presence in history, especially during the Tang period, is reflected in the ample information on them recorded in Chinese historical sources. Apart from Chinese records, Arab, Persian and European medieval sources also give references to the Uighur of the later period, which corresponds to the Chinese sources of the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368). Sources in the Uighur language are also available, but for the most part, preserved only in fragmentary manuscripts and inscriptions.

1.1. The Term “Uighur” in Chinese Historical Records

The word “Uighur” (alternatively Uyгур, Uigur and Uyghur) originates from the Old Turkish word “Uyğur”. Based on its Old Turkish phonetics, the word “Uyğur” was rendered differently in Chinese in different periods of China’s history. The most ancient translation of the word “Uyğur” in Chinese was “Yuanhe”袁纥 which appears in *Weishu* [History of the Wei Dynasty].¹ This work records that the Emperor Daowu’s troops undertook a military campaign westwards and in the year 390, the troops attacked the Yuanhe tribe.² During the Tang period, the historian Prime Minister Wei Zheng compiled a history of the Sui Dynasty, i.e., *Suishu* [History of the Sui Dynasty]. In

¹ Wei Shou, *Weishu* Vol.2, compiled during the period of Northern Qi (550-577).

² *ibid.*

volume 84 of *Suishu*, the Uighur were recorded as one of the Tiele tribes, under the name “Weihe” 韦纥 in Chinese.

During the 10th century, the compiler of the Tang history *Jiu Tangshu* [The Old History of the Tang Dynasty] referred to the Uighur as “Huihe” 回纥 and described them as descendents of the Xiongnu (the Huns). Tang historians also noted that the Huihe were dependents of the Gaoche 高车 polity. Gaoche literally means “high-wheel cart”, and refers to the fact that the people of that tribe used to ride on high-wheel carts. At the time of the Northern Wei period (386-534), the Uighur tribe was part of the Gaoche tribe which belonged to the Turkic Tiele 铁勒 grouping.³ The officers of Huihe served the Tujue 突厥 (the Turk).⁴ In the year 788, the Uighur Khaghan supposedly proposed to the Tang Emperor Dezong through his messenger to change the name of Uighur in Chinese from “Huihe 回纥” to “Huigu 回鹘”⁵, meaning “a circle-around falcon.” The background of the term was based on the Chinese description of a falcon which circles around in the sky and is swift and ferocious. *Jiu Tangshu* provides quite a detailed account of the Uighur; but their depiction is sometimes negative.

Chinese records of the Yuan and Ming periods (13th to the 17th century) -- e.g. *Yuanshi* [History of Yuan] etc -- use the term “Weiwuer” 畏兀儿 (sometimes 畏吾儿) to transcribe the name Uighur. After the 17th century, when the whole Uighur group was converted to Islam, they were called Hui, due to some confusion with the Muslim Hui

³The origin of the Chinese rendering “Tiele” is still debated. Some western scholars believe Tiele is “Töliš”, a term which can be found in the Orkhon inscription. For the discussion of such a debate, see Peter B. Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992): 93-94. However, according to Chinese Turkic scholars Ma Changshou and Cen Zhongmian, the word “Tiele” in Chinese originates from the Turkic “Türkler” which is a plural form of “Türk” and the word “Tujue” in Chinese comes from the Turkic word “Türküt” which is a singular of Türk. Therefore, the two renderings in Chinese, both Tujue and Tiele, mean the same -- Türk. See Cen Zhongmian, *Tujue Jishi* [A Historical Collection on the History of the Turks]. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958): 6-7.

⁴ *Jiu Tangshu*, Vol. 206: Huigu and *Xin Tangshu* Vol. 233: Huigu.

⁵ *Jiu Tangshu*, Vol. 197 and *Xin Tangshu*, Vol.232.

group. Since the Uighur wore turbans, they were called “Chan-Hui 缠回” (literally meaning the Hui with twined turban on their head).

It is obvious that all the above transcriptions were phonetic representations of the original Uighur or Old Turkish word. The slight variations may have been caused by the different geographical locations of the Han Chinese who would have rendered the characters in different pronunciations. The Chinese who lived in the north might have given a different version from the Chinese who resided to the south of the Yellow River. This variation was finally eliminated in the year 1934 when the Xinjiang government decided to abolish all the previous Chinese renderings, and to adopt “Weiwuer” 维吾尔 as the official Chinese transcription of the name “Uyğur”. This usage has remained unchanged until today.

1.2. Early History Reconstructed according to Chinese Records

The Uighur were originally a nomadic Turkish people who moved about in an area north-west of the Orkhon River in Upper Mongolia in the 5th century. Some information on their early history can be found in Chinese historical annals. *Jiu Tangshu* [The Old History of the Tang Dynasty] notes that the Uighur belonged to the Tiele tribes during the time of the Northern Wei (386-584) and they were a people of “small stature, but were valiant and brave”.⁶ They were part of the Gaoche tribe who in turn belonged to the bigger Tiele tribal grouping. The origin of Gaoche can be traced back to the Chidi 赤狄 and Dingling (Ting-ling) 丁零⁷ in the third century B.C.⁸ Chinese sources of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.) called the Turkic-speaking tribes “Dingling”.⁹ During the Northern Wei period, they were described as the people who did not possess stable

⁶ *Jiu Tangshu*, Vol. 206: Huigu.

⁷ *Weishu* Vol.130: Gaoche.

⁸ The reconstruction of the early history of the Dingling tribe is difficult. See Peter Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992): 94.

⁹ See Sima Qian, *Shiji* [Records of the Historian] Vol. 110: Xiongnu; and Ban Gu, *Han Shu* [History of the Han Dynasty], Vol. 94: Xiongnu..

dwelling but moved around looking for green pastures.¹⁰ Between the 5th and the 6th centuries, the Uighur began to migrate from their original base near the Orkhon River. Most of them moved eastwards to the region around the Tula River¹¹ and a small group migrated westwards to the west of Yiwu 伊吾 and the north of Yanqi 焉耆 near the Tianshan Mountains.¹²

From the 2nd to the 5th century, the area between the Altai Mountains and the Tianshan Mountains was dominated by the Rouran¹³ 柔然 (known to the West as “Avars”). The Tujue (Gok-Turks or Kōk-Turks¹⁴) served the Rouran as blacksmiths since they were skilled in making ironware, especially weapons, by smelting iron ore from the Altai Mountains.¹⁵ In the middle of the 6th century, the Tujue led by Bumin Khaghan (†552), known in Chinese records as “Tumen” Khaghan 土门可汗, conquered Rouran and rose to be the dominant force of the steppes. The Tiele tribes to which the Uighur belonged soon became the Tujue’s subjects. During this period, the Uighur moved again, this time to the Selenga River. In 582, the Tujue split into the East and the West Tujue (East Turkic Khanate and West Turkic Khanate). The East Tujue (Turks) had their headquarters on the Orkhon (in the present-day Mongolia), while the West Tujue established themselves between the Irtysh and Talas rivers. The Tiele tribes were then controlled by the East Tujue living nearer to the Chinese. In 600, which was the end of the reign of the emperor Sui Wendi (reigned 581-601), the Chinese launched a military campaign against the Tujue in the north. The Tiele tribes were thereby scattered. In 605, the Tujue attacked the Tiele. The Uighur tribe which was one of the dominant sub-tribes among the Tiele tribal group broke away from the Turkic Khanate together with a few other tribes within the Tiele group. The rebel Tiele tribes established their own alliance and conquered a large area extending from west of Dunhuang to east of Yanche including Turfan, Hami and Yanche. The Uighur then moved again to the area around the Selenga River. *Jiu Tangshu* records that about 10,000 Uighur settled near Selenga which was

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ *Suishu Vol. 84: Tiele.*

¹² *Suishu Vol. 84: Beidi.*

¹³ Sometimes written as Yuanyuan or Juan Juan.

¹⁴ Gok-Turk or Kōk-Turk means “Celestial Turk”.

¹⁵ *Suishu*, Vol. 84: Tujue.

6,900 *li* (3,450 km) away from the Chinese capital Changan.¹⁶ In the following years, the Uighur, with the support of the Chinese, made repeated stands against the Tujue. However, the Tujue gradually regained their strength and, 10 years later, the Uighur together with some other Tiele tribes were again conquered by the Tujue. In the following century, further revolts against the Tujue were attempted by the Tiele tribes. In the 7th century, some of the Uighur moved back to the area near the Orkhon River.

During the 7th and the 8th centuries, the Uighur grew to be a powerful nation. According to Chinese sources, among the Uighur proper, there were nine clans with nine surnames bound by blood-relations. They were thus usually called in Turkic “Toquz Oyuz”, meaning “the nine-tribe grouping.”¹⁷ Outside the nine clans, the Uighur were also allied with another eight clans, to whom they were bound by political and military interests. The major of these clans were the Basmil and Karluk.¹⁸ The union with other clans increasingly strengthened the Uighur politically and militarily. The Uighur were also in favor of co-operating with the Chinese Tang court to suppress the Tujue. The result of such an interest led the Uighur to pay tribute to the Tang court.¹⁹ In the year 744, the Uighur headed by Qullıǵ Boyla (Gulipeiluo 骨力裴罗) and assisted by the Basmil and Karluk overthrew the East Tujue on the banks of the Orkhon River. Qullıǵ Boyla now became Qutluǵ Bilge Kül Khaghan (“Blessed with Heavenly Good Fortune, the Wise Kül Kaghan”, 744-747) and established his own Khanate, the “Orkhon Uighur Khanate” with his capital in Ordu Baliq, i.e., Kara Balghasun. Qutluǵ Bilge Kül Kaghan requested the Tang court to grant him the title of Huairen Khaghan 怀仁可汗. His Khanate was also recognised by the Tang court.²⁰ In addition to Chinese sources, the Old Uighur runic inscription from Moghon Shine-usu discovered by J.I. Ramstedt in Mongolia in 1909 contains an important account of the military and political history of

¹⁶ *Jiu Tangshu*, Vol. 206: Huigu..

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ There have been debates and some confusion concerning the nine surnames of the Uighur. Edwin Pulleyblank believed that these “nine-surnames” constituted the confederacy dominated by the Uighur and that there were ten Uighur tribes proper which was the “On Oghuz”. For a discussion, see Edwin Pulleyblank, “Some Remarks on the Toquzoghuz Problem,” *Ural-Altaische Jahrbücher* Vol. XXVIII, 1956.

¹⁹ *Jiu Tangshu*, Vol. 195.

²⁰ *Xin Tangshu*, Vol.232: Huigu I.

the Uighur state, especially the heroic deeds achieved by Eletmish Bilge Khaghan (Khaghan from 747 to 759), son of Qutluğ Bilge Kül Khaghan.²¹

After the Uighur set up their own Khanate, their nomadic way of life was also gradually transformed into a sedentary life-style around the areas of Orkhon and Selenga Rivers. Agriculture and trade with the Chinese became important sources of income for the Uighur economy. Cities and palaces were built as a result of accumulation of wealth. This was witnessed by the contemporary Muslim traveller to the land of the Uighur, Tamin ibn Bahr, who described the Uighur capital as lying within cultivated lands.²²

The relationship between the Uighur Khanate and the Chinese Tang Empire was an inter-dependent one. On the one hand, the Tang court needed the military support, especially, at the time of the rebellion of An Lushan; on the other hand, the Uighur in return obtained silk from the Chinese to support their economy. Tang princesses were married to Uighur Khaghans. The Uighur Empire was maintained for a century, until the year 840 when they were expelled by the Kirghiz.

After the fall of the Uighur Khanate in 840, the Uighur fled towards the south and the west, and the Uighur tribal union thus broke apart. Thirteen clans led by Wujie Tele 乌介特勒 moved southwards. They crossed the Mongolian desert and reached Jinhe (north of Helingeer, today's Inner Mongolia), a territory where Chinese garrisons were stationed.²³ The majority of the Uighur fled westwards and settled at both the southern and northern sides of the Tianshan Mountain range, within and beyond Yumanguan, as well as in today's Gansu Province. They then split into three groups moving in three directions. The first group, comprising fifteen clans, moved to the Pamir Plateau, west of Congling mountains and joined the Karluk there. They were later called "the Uighur of

²¹ For a discussion of the inscription, see G.I. Ramstedt, "Zwei Uigurischen Runeinschriften in der Mord-Mongolei" in *Journal de la Société Finno-Ougrienne* XXX, 3 (1913): 1-63.

²² V. Minorsky, "Tamin ibn Bahr's Journey to the Uyghur", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*. Vol. 12, No.2 (1948): 295.

²³ *Jiu Tangshu*, Vol. 206: Huigu.

West Congling” or “the Uighur of the Western Pamirs” in historical records. This group later established the strong Uighur Karakhanid Kingdom from the 9th to the 13th centuries.

The second group moved to the Hexi Corridor. They settled around Ganzhou 甘州 (today’s Zhangye 张掖 in Gansu province), and established the Uighur Kingdom of Ganzhou. Therefore, they were given the name “the Uighur of Ganzhou” or “Yellow Uighur” who were conquered by the Xixia (the Western Xia) in the first half of the 11th century.

The third group migrated to today’s Turfan region. They conquered the Tibetans there in Beiting 北庭 and occupied oasis cities in the Tarim Basin, including Xizhou (Qocho or Gaochang) and the near-by cities. Historical records name them as “the Uighur of Qocho/Xizhou”. They formed the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho in the 9th century which lasted until the Mongol Yuan Dynasty of the 13th century.

2. A History of Uighur Religious Traditions

As the Uighur moved about in the areas through which the Silk Road extends, their religious traditions also reflect the colorful picture of many world religions along the Silk Road, such as Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, Nestorianism, Buddhism and Islam. These world religions co-existed and interacted there with the Uighurs’ primitive spiritual practices.

2.1. Shamanism and Turkic Cults

Like many nomadic peoples in Central Asia, the Uighur, in ancient times, were closely tied to Shamanism. This primal religion or magic system still lies deep in the belief system of modern Altaic peoples. The central figure of this religion is the Shaman, the one who can communicate with spiritual forces and who can guide, heal and knows

the archaic techniques of ecstasy.²⁴ “Shaman”, originates from the Tungus word “Saman”²⁵ meaning someone who knows. It has different local forms in other Altaic languages. In Uighur, it may be related to the word “qam or kam”, although according to Mahmud Al-Kasgari, the Uighur compiler of the 11th century masterpiece, *Diwan Lugat at-Turk* [Compendium of the Turkic Dialects], Qam is a diviner “kāhin” (MS entry 513),²⁶ who represents only part of the functions which a Shaman may fulfil. According to Turkologist, Robert Dankoff, Qam is Shaman if the definition of Shaman includes initiatory sickness and dreams, employing archaic techniques of ecstasy and magical flight to the celestial regions. However, at the same time, there is also no evidence that the Qam was not a Shaman.²⁷ The word “qam/kam” was used by medieval foreign observers to designate the Turkic or Mongol shaman.²⁸ Shamans perform religious rituals through dance accompanied by drums, mirrors, knives, whips, etc.

2.1.1. Animism

Animism is the characteristic of primal shamanism. Therefore, the worship of nature, animals and plants is basic to this belief. The universe, according to shamanism, is divided into three parts: heaven where the spirits dwell; the human world where human beings, animals and plants live; and hell which is the demons’ place.²⁹ The “tengri” is the supreme god of heaven. The Chinese historical record *Zhou Shu* [Book of Zhou] states that the Tujue worshipped the god of heaven in the month of May.³⁰ The ancient Uighur believed that all things on earth were granted by the tengri. At the same time, the Sun, earth, stars, thunder, fire were all objects of worship. The Tujue treasured the East

²⁴ For more discussion on “shamanism”, see Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964.

²⁵ Manchu-Tungusic languages spoken in Eastern Siberia and Manchuria.

²⁶ Mahmud al-Kasgari. *Compendium of the Turkic Dialects (Diwan Lugat at-Turk)*. Edited and translated by Robert Dankoff. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985): 125.

²⁷ Robert Dankoff, “Kasgari on the Beliefs and Superstitions of the Turks” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* Vol. 95 (1975): 77.

²⁸ See William of Rubruck’s report in Christopher Dawson (ed.), *The Mongol Mission* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955): 12. See also Jean-Paul Roux, *La Religion des Turcs et des Mongols*. (Paris : Payot, 1984) : 64.

²⁹ See Dimulati Aoma’er (Chinese transliteration of the Uighur name), *A er tai yuxi zhu minzu saman jiao yanjiu* [Studies on Shamanism among the peoples of the Altaic language Family]. Urumqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 1995):10-11. 迪木拉提·奥玛尔, 《阿尔泰语系诸民族撒满教研究》. 乌鲁木齐: 新疆人民出版社, 1995. 10-11 页.

³⁰ *Zhou Shu*, Vol 50. Liezhuan Vol. 42.

where the Sun rises. Their tents' entrance always faced the East. The head stones of their graves also pointed to the East.³¹ The *Zhou Shu* has a vivid description of the Turkic cult: "Although the Tujue moved irregularly, each tribe had their fixed place. The Kaghan's permanent place was the Mountain Yudujiu where he had his tent set up with its entrance facing the East. This was the place for Sun worshipping. Each year, the Kaghan led his nobles to venerate their ancestors' burial caves."³²

2.1.2. Animals as Totems

Animal worship is also typical of shamanism. The ancient Uighur worshipped both wild and domestic animals, for instance, wolves, foxes, eagles, bears, fish, etc. Among all these, the worship of the wolf was most characteristic of Uighur animal worship in ancient times. The wolf was their totem which originated from the Tujue belief that an ancestor had a blood relationship with a wolf.³³ The 14th-century Uighur literary work *The Legend of Oghuz Khan* described how a wolf guided the Kaghan to win many battles.³⁴ The wolf is believed to be a lucky omen for giving life and comfort as well as casting out evil. Totem worship is the earliest form of ancestor worship.

Since early shamanism developed from primordial totemism, it certainly bears a feminist color, especially at the matriarchal stage, as most shamans were women or men dressed as women. Traces of worship of female reproductive organs can still be seen in rock carvings in Altai and Tianshan Mountains in Xinjiang. These petroglyphs depict prehistoric female reproduction worship. As society moved into the patriarchal stage, male reproduction worship became dominant and even a male wolf became their totem -- in *The Legend of Oghuz Khan*, the wolf is male.

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *ibid.*

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ Geng Shimin. "Gudai Weiuer shishi Wugusi kehan de chuanshuo" [The Legend of Oghuz Khan of the Ancient Uighur] in *Collection of the Papers on Language-Literature and History of Xinjiang by Geng Shimin*. (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe, 2001): 117. 耿世民. <古代维吾尔史诗乌古斯可汗的传说> 载《耿世民新疆文史论文集》, 北京, 中央民族大学出版社, 2001. 第 117 页.

2.1.3. Plants as Totems

Apart from animal totemism, plants were also seen as totems. Large trees have a special place in Uighur ancestral worship. The inscription on the Tablet of Merit of the Gaochang Royal Family tells a Uighur myth about large trees. The tablet was originally erected in 1334 and was later discovered in Wuwei County, Gansu Province in 1933. The inscription was bilingual with Chinese on the front and Uighur on the back. The inscription tells about two trees which became wound together. Between them stands a small hill. One day a heavenly light shone on the trees, and there a gall grew. Then, when the gall broke, five tent rooms appeared each with a baby inside.³⁵ The babies all grew up and became tribal heads, and they venerated the trees from which they were born. Therefore, large trees are, for the Uighur, symbols of their ancestors.

It is noteworthy that the shamanic tradition is deeply rooted in Uighur history and still has impact on the modern Uighur life, even though they have been Muslims for hundreds of years. This impact is reflected in their customs and taboos which still guide them in treasuring those things they once worshipped, including the Sun and fire. Today, Uighur shaman can still be found in Xinjiang.

2.2. Manichaeism

Before the discovery of Manichaean manuscripts and paintings in Central Asia, the religion was mainly known in the west through polemics written by its opponents, for instance, St. Augustin. Since the religion was depicted as posing a great threat to many other religions in history, Manicheans were opposed by Christians, Zoroastrians and Muslims. They were persecuted in Persia and their literature was destroyed.

Manichaean original manuscripts in oriental languages were first discovered at the beginning of the 20th century by the Berlin Expedition team in the proximity of the Turfan Oasis. In the same period, another Manichaean manuscript in the Uighur language,

³⁵ Inscription of the Merit of the Royal Family of Gaochang. Line 5.

entitled “Chuastuanift”³⁶ (Manichean Confession of Sins) and Chinese Manichaeism manuscripts were also found in Dunhuang.³⁷ These important discoveries threw new light on the life of the Manichean communities in the East. In 1930, another archaeological find in Medinet Madi in Egypt brought to light the oldest Manichaeism manuscripts so far discovered. They were the Coptic version of the original Greek texts.

2.2.1. Mani and His Religion

Mani (215/6-274/6), born in the Persian province of Babylonia, was the founder of the Manichaeism religion. Some biographical accounts of Mani and the Manichean religion were preserved in the Arabic work *Fihrist*³⁸ (the Index) compiled by Ibn An-Nadim in 988 and *India* by Al-Biruni³⁹ (973-1048). At the ages of both 12 and 24, Mani received supernatural revelations from an angel named At-Taum (twin) who taught him the divine truth which was the new religion Mani was going to preach. Mani first preached his religion in the Persian Empire. His mission was at first unhindered. The religion spread quickly in Persia and then in the Roman Empire in the 4th century. Manichaeism held a particularly strong position in North Africa. St. Augustine was once an adherent of the religion before he became a Christian.

The religion is seen as a syncretism of all religious systems then known: natural philosophy and Zoroastrian dualism mingled with Buddhist, Christian, Gnostic and ancient Babylonian folk-religious elements. However, it cannot be simply seen as a sect or heresy, as medieval writers called it. Rather, it was a wide-spread world religion with its own theological system. Mani claimed himself to be the apostle of light and the successor of Zoroaster, Buddha and Jesus, i.e. the *Paraclete* promised in the New

³⁶ See, J.P. Asmussen, *Xuastuanift, Studies in Manichaeism*. Acta Theologica Danica 7. Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1965.

³⁷ For deeper discussions of Manichaeism in China, see Samuel N.C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in Central Asia and China*. Leiden: Brill, 1998.

³⁸ For details of the *Fihrist* information on Mani, see Gustav Flügel, *Mani, seine Lehre und seine Schriften Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Manichäismus. Aus dem Fihrist des Abû'lfaradsch Mu.hammad Ben Ishak al-Warrâk. Im Text nebst Übersetzung, Commentar und Index zum ersten Mal herausgestellt von Gustav Flügel*. Reprint of the 1862 edition. Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1962.

³⁹ See E. Sachau, ed. and translated, *Al Biruni's*. London: 1888.

Testament. According to Mani's cosmogony, before the creation of the universe and of human beings, only two principles existed. The predominant doctrine of Manichaeism is its Two Principles, the good and evil, and Three Time Zones. The doctrine of Two Principles is a dualistic division of the universe in the realms of God represented by light and the realm of Satan symbolized by darkness and material lust. The Three Time Zones are: the beginning when light and darkness began to be separate; the present when light and darkness are mingled together; and the eschatological end when the two principles are again separated. In the struggle between the light and darkness, the light was first lost to the darkness and the darkness overshadowed the light through human sinful lust. The creation of the world brought the cosmological battles between light and darkness to the human world. Everything that brings light belongs to the realm of God, while things that absorb light belong to the realm of Satan. This mingling of light and darkness is the material world we know. By every human birth, the light elements in the parents' body will be reduced. The only way to help free light seed from darkness is through the special knowledge (gnosis) of the kingdom of light. The salvation is achieved when a human with gnosis dies.

Manichaeism was an ascetic religion. Its believers were divided into two groups: *Electi* (the Elect or Perfect) and *Auditores* (the hearers). The *Electi* were depicted in the Manichaean painting from Turfan as wearing white robes. They were those who withdrew from the world and devoted themselves entirely to the struggle of freeing themselves from the material darkness. They also had to wander from place to place to preach the teaching of Mani. They were forbidden to eat meat or drink wine or to have property. They were not allowed to marry or to have children. The *Auditores*, on the other hand, were lay people who could possess a fixed dwelling place and have families.

Mani's teaching was strongly condemned by the Christian Church in Europe. Later in its country of origin, Manichaeism was opposed by the Persian King Braham I (reign 273-276) who ordered that Mani to be crucified. However, the religion spread rapidly in Europe, North Africa, and Central Asia. Mani's disciples reached as far as Spain in the West and China in the East.

2.2.2. Uighur Conversion to Manichaeism

The Uighur conversion to Manichaeism in the 8th century was a significant event in Uighur history and is solidly evidenced by the discovery of the Inscription of Karabalghasun, fragmentary Manichaean texts found in the Turfan Oasis, Chinese historical records, as well as Arabic sources. The significance of this event lies in the enhanced status of Manichaeism as a state religion of the Orkhon Uighur Kanate (763-840) after the conversion of the Uighur Muyu Kaghan (reign 759-779) to Manichaeism in 762. After the fall of the Uighur Khanate, the Uighur migrated to the Turfan Oasis and established the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho (850-1250). Manichaeism continued to be a protected religion among the Uighur for a long period.

2.2.2.1. The Inscription of Karabalghasun

In 1889, during his Mongolian expedition, the Russian N. Yadrintsev discovered a stone inscription in Karabalghasun near the Orkhon River. The inscription is in three languages: Old Turkish (Old Uighur), Sogdian and Chinese. The former two had been greatly defaced, and only the Chinese part is still readable. The stone monument is entitled “Monument of the Sacred Literati and the Martial Prow *Toquz Uyğur aytāngridä qut bulmiş alp bilgä Qayan*” who reigned from 808 to 821. The monument seems to have been erected and dedicated to this Khaghan at the time when Manichaeism was in still flourishing in the Uighur Khanate. The identity of this Khaghan can be proved in Chinese record *Cefuyuangui* vol. 965, where it is stated: “In May of the third year of *Yuanhe* 元和 (A.D.809), it was ordered that Toquz Uyğur Khaghan be named *aytāngridä qut bulmiş alp bilgä Baoyi Khaghan* 保义可汗”. This piece of information is confirmed in *Jiu Tangshu* [The Old History of the Tang Dynasty] Vol. 14.

From the broken verses of the Chinese inscription of Karabalghasun, some information on the conversion of the Uighur Khaghan can be reconstructed. The Uighur

Khaghan Mouyu (Bügü) 牟羽可汗(reign 759-779) was asked by the Tang emperor Daizong (762-766) to assist him in putting down the rebel troop of An Lushan and Shi Siming in 762. Therefore, the Khaghan was residing in Luoyang, the capital of the Tang Empire at this period. While in Luoyang, the Khaghan encountered some Manichaeian missionaries probably of Sogdian origin. These missionaries must have been successful in converting the Bügü Khaghan to Manichaeism because he later brought four Manichaeians back to his land. The Manichaeian clergy exercised a considerable influence on Uighur politics after that.

This incident was recorded in the Inscription of Karabalghasun. The Chinese scholar Li Wentian (1834-1895) of the Qing Dynasty period collected this inscription in his *Helin jinshi lu* [A Collection of Stone and Metal Inscriptions of Helin (=Karakorum)]⁴⁰ freshly after the discovery of this inscription. The inscription reads:

The Khaghan⁴¹ settled his army in the East Capital⁴² and observed the customs there... (words missing) four great masters Ruixi 睿息 and others came to the country. They expounded and propagated the Two Principles⁴³ with deep insight into the Three Time Zones.⁴⁴ The Law Kings excelled in their thorough knowledge of the Religion of Light⁴⁵ with proficiency in the Seven Scriptures, talent exceeding the depth of the sea and the height of the mountains, and a flood of eloquence. Therefore, they could initiate the orthodox Religion in the Uighur land... (words missing). At that time, the military superintendent, prefecture governor and internal and external prime ministers... (words missing) confessed their former errors and expressed their willingness to practice this orthodox religion. They swore after the edict. This law is too mysterious to follow. They repeatedly appealed... (one word missing): “being ignorant in the past, we called the devil Buddha. Now we understand the truth and will never repeat our errors. With special hope ... (words missing).”... (words missing) said: “Due to your sincerity, you may now be initiated into the religion.” Those who possessed

⁴⁰ Li Wentian. *Helin jinshi lu* [A Collection of Stone and Metal Inscriptions of Helin (=Karakorum) in *Shike shiliao xin bian* [A New Collection of Historical Stone Inscriptions] vol. 2. No. 15, edited by Luo Zhenyu. (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chubun gongsi, 1979):11465-11467. 李文田, <和林金石录> 载罗振玉校正《石刻史料新编》第二辑 15. 台北:新文丰出版公司, 1979. 11465-11467 页.

⁴¹ Here it refers to Bügü Khaghan.

⁴² The East Capital was Luoyang.

⁴³ The Two Principles are Light and Darkness or Good and Evil.

⁴⁴ Three Time Zones: past, present and future.

⁴⁵ Religion of Light: Manichaeism.

paintings of the evils should burn them. Those who worship gods and devils... (words missing) and accept the Religion of Light. Let the foreign custom of grilling blooded animals be changed and this land should be a land of vegetarian repast. Let the land of butchering be changed to a land of benevolent persuasions. Therefore...(words missing) people from top to bottom followed (the law). Upon hearing people's acceptance of this orthodox religion, the Law King praised their piety deeply...(words missing) and virtue. He led several monks to propagate the religion within the country. Afterwards ... (word missing) Manichaeans (Mushe)⁴⁶ shuttled from east to west and preached the religion in the land.⁴⁷

The initial response to Manichaeism in the Uighur lands seemed to be not that spontaneous after Būgū Khaghan introduced this religion to his people. A Manichaean fragment in Uighur found in Turfan tells about an interesting story about the difficult situation at the time of national conversion and the inner struggles which Būgū Khaghan had to fight: When the four Manichean clergymen entered the Uighur lands, they encountered some difficulties from the local officers and people as their audience and those Sogdian merchants were often in danger of being killed. Since Sogdians were in danger, it gives us a clue that those Manichaeans were probably of Sogdian origin. From the writer of the fragment, the Manichaean Electi seemed to have advised Būgū Khaghan against someone called "Tarqhan" who seemed to be an opponent or a leader of a group. Būgū Khaghan discussed this situation with the Manichean Electi for two days and two nights. On the third day, Būgū Khaghan fasted and experienced pain. He was then deeply moved. He continued the fasting and he felt lost and uneasy. Later, the Khaghan convened a big gathering and he knelt down before the Electi and begged them to forgive his sins.⁴⁸ After Būgū Kaghan's command, many people agreed to follow the Manichaean doctrine.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Muche, *Chinese* 慕闍, meaning Manichaean title.

⁴⁷ The Chinese Inscription of Karabalghasun, line 7-10. Collected in Li Wentian. *Helin jinshi lu* [A Collection of Stone and Metal Inscriptions of Helin (=Karakorum) in *Shike shiliao xin bian* [A New Collection of Historical Stone Inscriptions] vol. 2. No. 15, edited by Luo Zhenyu. (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1979):11466. 李文田, <和林金石录> 载罗振玉校正《石刻史料新编》第二辑 15. 台北: 新文丰出版公司, 1979. 第 11466 页. This passage is translated by Li Tang.

⁴⁸ Willi Bang and Annemarie von Gabain. "Türkische Turfan-Text II" *Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Berlin: Reimer, 1929): 415-417.

⁴⁹ *ibid.* 419.

However, the dispute on the Uighur conversion to Manichaeism proposed by Būgū Khan, though successful, seems to have sown the seeds of hatred among some Uighur officials, especially, the prime minister Tun Baga Tarqan (whether he was the “Tarqhan” mentioned in the manuscript is unknown) who was also Kaghan’s cousin. This led to the assassination of Būgū Khaghan in 779 when he was listening to a Manichean sermon in his pavilion. Tun Baga Tarqan then became the Khaghan (779-789). Under his rule, Sogdian merchants were killed, and Manichean propagation in the Uighur lands was therefore disrupted. It was only during the reign of ay *tängridä qut bulmiš alp bilgä Qayan* (808-821) to whom the Inscription of Karabalghasun was dedicated that Manichaeism experienced a revival in the Uighur lands.

2.2.2.2. Other Manichean Relics Found in Turfan

The discovery of Manichean relics in Turfan is closely connected with the European, especially German, expeditions in the region at the turn of the 20th century. In 1902, the first German expedition led by Prof. Albert Grünwedel from the Museum für Völkerkunde zu Berlin was carried out in Turfan with the hope of finding connections between Buddhist and Hellenistic arts in East Turkistan. Grünwedel’s team dug at the ruined city of Qočo where Manichean frescos were found. The excavation in Turfan was continued by the second German expedition team led by Albert von le Coq from 1904 to 1905. Von Le Coq’s team excavated in various places like Qočo; Yar-choto (Yaryoli); the monastery of Tuḃoq; ruin city of Martuq; and Sängim (the cult place in the canyon). The outcome of this expedition was the unexpected discovery of invaluable religious, mostly Manichaeian, relics. Two important Manichaeian relics found in Qočo were: a Manichaeian cult place named as “Group K” and a Buddhist temple ruin termed “Ruin Alpha”. In these places, many Manichaeian manuscripts were mixed with other religious fragments of Buddhism and Nestorianism. In the middle of the ruined city, they discovered a Manichaeian temple ruin, which they called Ruin Group K. In this temple a bundle of Manichaeian manuscripts in Sogdian and Middle Turkish languages was also

found.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, they also found a former library complex where several broken Manichaean silk paintings with pieces of male figures in white clothes and hats as well as cloth materials were discovered. In the middle of the temple, there were three halls which Albert von le Coq deemed to be a fasting place (*čaidan*).⁵¹

In 1907, Marc Aurel Stein discovered in Dunhuang a Manichaean fragment of “*Chuastuanift*” (The Confession of the Auditors) which was written in Old Turkish (Old Uighur).⁵² Albert von le Coq later published his systematic studies of the Manichaean fragments from Turfan.⁵³

The Manichaean manuscripts in the Uighur language so far discovered are numerous, but fragmentary. Apart from *Chuastuanift*, the longest single fragment, there are also other religious texts like *iki yiltiz nom* [Two Principles], *ädgü tatiyliḡ nom* [Principle of Good Taste], a text on the economic life of the Manichaean monastery discovered in 1954, as well as Manichaean letters and hymns.

2.2.2.3. Sogdians as Manichaean Missionaries

As Bögü Khaghan brought Manichaean missionaries to his Khanate on the Orkhon River in 763, Manichaeism began to flourish among the Uighur and became the state religion of the Uighur Khanate. Sogdians were believed to be the missionaries of this religion to the Uighur. These East-Iranian people, originally from the land of Sogdiana (today’s Samarkand), were the main contributors to the cultural, economic and religious life along the Silk Road. Along the Silk Road, there were Sogdian colonies which extended to the Steppes and to China. Sogdian settlements in these regions are

⁵⁰ Albert von le Coq, *Die Buddhistische Spätantike in Mittelasien: Die Manichäischen Miniaturen*. (Berlin: Verlag Dietrich Reimer Ernst Vohsen, 1923): 23-25.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, 26.

⁵² For a study on this fragment, see Albert von le Coq, *Chuastuanift: ein Sündenbekenntnis der Manichäischen Auditores, gefunden in Turfan (chinesisch-Turkistan)*. Berlin: Reimer, 1911.

⁵³ Albert von le Coq, *Türkische Manichäica aus Chotscho* Berlin: Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1912.

documented from the 6th and 7th centuries.⁵⁴ The Sogdian language was actually the *lingua franca* among the people along the Silk Road. Persia was the place where many world religions thrived, especially, Zoroastrianism, Nestorianism and Manichaeism. Therefore, Sogdians from the Persian Empire also carried these religions to the Sogdian diaspora along the Silk Road. Manichaean missionaries from Persia began to win Sogdian converts in the 4th century.⁵⁵ One of the languages of the Inscription of Karabalghasun was written in Sogdian, which suggests a strong Sogdian influence on the Uighur Manichaean Khanate and these Sogdians were mainly Manichaean adherents.

The reason why a once militant, animal-hunting and meat-eating nomad people like the Uighur suddenly became a people of confession and vegetarian repast is still, more or less, a mystery to us. It is most believed that the Uighur economy and trade depended strongly on the Sogdian merchants because the Sogdians were the carriers along the ancient commercial routes.⁵⁶ No doubt, the role which the Sogdian merchants played was very significant. Actually, Sogdians were for a long time in charge of the silk trade among the Turks, which means that at the time when the Uighur overthrew the Turkic Empire on the Orkhon Rive in 744, there had been already numerous Sogdian merchants living there and serving in the court of Turkic Kaghans. This is evidenced by the Manichaean manuscripts which note that many Sogdian merchants (*sartlary*⁵⁷) were killed by the Manichaean opponents. Sogdian sinicised names can be found in Chinese records which name the Sogdians as “the Hu of nine surnames”. *Sartlary* mainly refers to Sogdians merchants. At the Kaghan’s court, persons with sinicised Sogdian names were recorded.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, *Die Seidenstraße: Handelsweg und Kulturebrücke zwischen Morgen- und Abendland*. (Köln: DuMont Verlag, 1988): 159. See also, E.G. Pulleyblanke, “A Sogdian Colony in Inner Mongolia” *Toung-pao* 41 (1952): 317-356.

⁵⁵ Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, *Die Seidenstraße*, 159.

⁵⁶ Alois van Togerloo, “La Structure de la Communauté Manichéenne dans le Turkestan Chinois à la Lumière de Emprunts moyen-Iraniens en Ouïgour” *Central Asiatic Journal* 25 (1982): 262.

⁵⁷ W. Bang and M. von Gabain, *Türkische Turfan-Texte II*, 415. Fragment line 16.

⁵⁸ For instance, there was someone called An Suijia who discussed the issues with the Turkic officials at their court. An is one of the family names of the Hu. See, in *Suishu* [Book of Sui] Vol. 51.

2.2.2.4. Manichaeism in the Uighur Kingdom of Qočo (866-1209)

With the overthrow of the Uighur Khanate by the Kirghiz in 840, the Uighur were scattered and dispersed. One of their groups migrated to today's Turfan region. Archaeological finds from Turfan have testified to the early presence of multiethnic and religious communities in the region, such as the Sakas, the Tocharian, the Wusun and the Xiongun (the Huns), before the main inflow of the Uighur refugees from Orkhon in the 9th century. As early as the Eastern Han Dynasty (23-220), Chinese soldiers were already stationed there and were engaged in agriculture of the region. Meanwhile, Qočo under its Chinese name Gaochang was under the suzerainty of the Tang Dynasty since 640, therefore, and had been subject to Chinese influence.

Tibetans occupied the Tarim-Basin during the 7th and the 8th centuries, during which time they introduced Tibetan-Buddhism and old Tibetan Bon-Religion to the area. Tibetan manuscripts have also been found in Turfan.⁵⁹ The Uighur conquered the Tibetans there in Beiting 北庭 and occupied oasis cities in the Tarim Basin. In 866, the Uighur finally established their Uighur Kingdom of Qočo which flourished until it became subjugated to the Kara Kitai in 1130. This was a turning point for the Uighur from a nomadic tribe to a sedentary state with trade and agriculture as its main source of income. Both archaeological finds from the ruined city of Qočo and Chinese written sources⁶⁰ testify to a high flourishing civilization during this period. Manichaean influence inside the Uighur Kingdom was not only on the politics of the State but also on the culture, especially the language and script of the Uighur.

⁵⁹ A.H. Franke, "Tibetische Handschriftenfunde aus Turfan" *Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (SPAW)*(1924): 5-20.

⁶⁰ *Song Shi* Vol. 490.

2.2.2.4.1. Manichean Political Influence

Politically, the Uighur court relied heavily on the advice of the Manichaeans. The *Tang guoshi bu* [Addition to the History of the Tang Dynasty] Vol. 2 states: “People of the Western Regions always discussed politics with Manichaean clergy. The Tang capital city also set up a (Manichaean) monastery for them. Their laws are: meal time after dark taking water and vegetables; and refraining from milk and cheese.”⁶¹ The Uighur government always sent Manichaean messengers to the Tang court. The encyclopaedia *Cefuyuangui* records: “In 796, the Uighur again sent eight Manicheans to the Tang capital.”⁶² In reality, the Uighur court sent Manichaean missionaries back to China. China during that period depended repeatedly on Uighur military assistance, and therefore, the Tang court allowed Manicheans to set up their monasteries on Chinese territory. In May of the first year of the Changqing reign (821), five hundreds and seventy-three people including the Uighur prime minister, Doudou, princesses, and Manicheans came to the Tang court to receive the Tang princes for marriage. They all settled in the temple of Hong Lu.⁶³ In the same volume of *Jiu tangshu*, it also states the importance of Manicheans as mediators between the Uighur and the Chinese Tang courts.

On the second day of the twelfth month of the eighth year of the Yuanhe reign (813), a banquet was prepared for eight Manicheans who were to return to the Uighur lands. They are ordered to meet the prime ministers at the Zhongshusheng (secretariat). Before that the Uighur had asked for a marriage alliance. Emperor Xianzong asked his respective department to estimate the cost. The ceremony would cost about 5,000,000 ligatures of coins. Due to upcoming punitive expeditions within the empire, the Tang court could not afford to accept this marriage alliance. Since the Uighur believed in Manichaeism, the emperor ordered his ministers to convey his declination to the Uighur authority through the Manicheans.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Li Zhao, *Tang guoshi bu* [Addition to the History of the Tang Dynasty] (唐) 李肇, 《唐国史补》二卷.

⁶² Wang, Qinruo. *Cefuyuangui* Vol. 979. [Great Tortoise of the National Archives]. Taipei: Zhonghua shuju, 1981. 王钦若, 《册府元龟》卷 979, 台北: 中华书局, 1981.

⁶³ *Jiu tangshu* Vol. 195. Translated by Li Tang

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

The Uighur also asked the Tang court to set up a Manichaean monastery which was granted by the Tang court.⁶⁵ Since the Tang court relied on the military assistance of the Uighur during the crises constituted by the rebellions of An Lushan and Shi Siming, it had to make some concessions to Manichaeism which was protected by the Uighur, but the religion had not been so favored in China. As a result of the new monastery, however, Manichaeism encountered a revival in China and many other monasteries were built.

When the Arabs conquered Persia, many Manicheans kept secret about their faith. There were about 500 Manicheans who gathered in Samarkand during the time of al-Mutqadir (880-943), but the king of Khurasan wished to kill them. We read from *Kitab al-Fihrist* by Ibn Abī Ya` qūb al-Nadīm that the Uighur Khaghan protested against the persecution of Manicheans in Samarkand by threatening to kill Muslims in Turkistan in return:

About five hundreds of their men (Manicheans) assembled in Samarqand, but when their movement became known, the ruler of Khurasan wished to kill them. Then the king of China, who I suppose was the lord of the Tughuzghuz (Uighur), sent to him, saying: "There are more Muslims in my country than there are people of my faith in your land." He also swore to him that if he [the ruler of Khurasan] should kill one of them [the Manicheans], he [the King of China] would slaughter the whole community of [Muslims] who were with him, and would also destroy the Mosques and appoint spies among the Muslims in the country as a whole as to slay them. So the ruler of Khurasan left them alone except for exacting tribute from them.⁶⁶

This event shows that even during the tenth century, Manichaeism was still the state religion of the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho although Muslim already penetrated into the region. Uighur Khaghan could still guard their religion through political and military might.

⁶⁵ Wang, Bo, *Tang huiyao* [Notabilia of Tang] Vol. 49. 王薄, 《唐会要》49 卷.

⁶⁶ Bayard Dodge, translated, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*. (NY: Columbia University Press, 1970): 802-803.

2.2.2.4.2. Manichaeism and the Economy

Qocho served as a hub of communications along the Silk Road. Therefore, apart from agriculture, handicraft and other productions, trade was essential for the Uighur Kingdom.⁶⁷ Chinese historical records portray vivid pictures of trade with the Uighur as well as the products exchanged. The envoy of the Song court Wang Yande visited Gaochang (=Qocho) in 984 and gave a detailed and vivid description of Gaochang when he returned from his official trip there. From Wang Yande's description, the country of Gaochang was a land "rich in food crops except buckwheat, where the rich ate horse meat as well as sheep and wild duck and people played plucked instruments like the Pipa and Konghou..."⁶⁸ "There were no poor people within the country. When someone had no food, all came to help. The inhabitants enjoyed longevity with many over 100 years old. No-one died young"⁶⁹ Wang Yande also saw a Manichaean monastery there although at that time Buddhism had already replaced Manichaeism as the main religion there as the number of Buddhist temples exceeded the Manichaean ones in the country.

So far, sources on the economic life of the Manicheans are scarce. Thanks to the discovery of a Manichaean fragment of the period from the 9th to the 11th century on the economic life inside the Manichaean monastery, some limited information can be gathered as to how Manichaeans managed their economic and financial affairs. The fragment was found by Huang Wenbi during a field-trip in Xinjiang in the early 1950s. The content is an official decree issued with an official seal by the Uighur government of Qocho to Manichaean monasteries. It specifies the amount of lands and prerogatives given to Manichaean monasteries.⁷⁰

The content of this fragment provides clues as to how economic life in the monastery functioned. The Uighur government seemed to grant large pieces of lands to

⁶⁷ For a detailed discussion on the production and trade of the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho, see, Peter Zieme, "Zum Handel im uigurischen Reich von Qocho" *Altorientalische Forschungen* 4 (1976): 235-249.

⁶⁸ Tuotuo, *Song Shi: Gaochang*. [History of the Song Dynasty] Vol. 490.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ Geng, Shimin. "Notes on an Ancient Uighur Official Decree Issued to a Manichaean Monastery" *Central Asiatic Journal* Vol. 35. No. 3-4 (1991): 210.

various Manichaean monasteries, as stated in the fragment: one in the north and the other in the south of the city (line 85). One of the resources of the monasteries' income came from land-lease (line 87). The lands had double functions of providing both money and goods, that is, money through rental as well as the fruits of cultivation. The cultivated lands produced different kinds of grains and fruits which would in return be distributed to the monasteries. It also states that the monastery had warehouse which stored grain and fruit. This shows that the Manichaean monasteries were for the most part self-reliant in terms of food-provision. This money would in turn cover the expenditures of the monastery, e.g., making clergy gowns (line 39), clothing and shoes (line 41), etc. Meanwhile, there were also different kinds of labourers in the monasteries, like, rug-makers, shepherds, goose-tenders (line 121-122), etc. There was also a full-time medical doctor (line 123). It is not clear whether these workers were paid labourers. It is more likely that they belonged to the monastic community and did not get paid for their work.

2.2.2.4.3. Manichaean Influence on Uighur Culture

Manichaean contribution to Uighur culture was significant. Turfan was such a melting pot of cultures and religions. Among the Turfan relics, there are not only fragments of the world religions like Manichaeism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, but also inscriptions of Confucian and Taoist classics, and Hindu gods appearing in Buddhist and Manichaean paintings. The Turfan documents include 16 languages written in 24 kinds of scripts.⁷¹ In the ruin city Qočo, Albert von le Coq discovered a Manichean and Buddhist library with numerous Manichean literature pieces in Middle Persian, Sogdian and Uighur languages. If Chinese Manichaica is also added to the collection, it can be seen that Manichean missionaries were very successful in producing religious literature in diverse languages.

At the time of the Uighur Empire on the River Orkhon, the Uighur used Orkhon Turkic language written in Runic script, which was used for inscriptions, such as the Inscription of Kara Balghasun. Up until the period of the Uighur Kingdom of Qočo, due

⁷¹ H-J. Klimkeit, *Die Seidenstraße*, 194.

to Sogdian influence, the Uighur used Sogdian alphabets for their language, and this was later referred to as “Old Uighur”, even though prior to their migration to the Turfan region, Sogdian script had already been used to spell the Turkic language by the Uighur. The Uighur language was also sometimes written in Manichaean script which employed Syriac Estrangelo to write the Iranian language. Manicheans as well as Nestorians brought the western culture and arts, e.g., Greek cultural elements, to Central and East Asia. From the wall paintings in Turfan, we can conclude that the art of illumination and wall-painting was introduced by the Manichean artists. From one of the Manichean miniature paintings found by von le Coq, one sees a mixture of Persian, Byzantine, Gandhara and Chinese elements.⁷² All these arts found refuge in Turfan and became the cultural wealth of the Uighur.

2.3. Buddhism

Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gautama, who attained enlightenment and then assumed the title of “Buddha” in the middle of the 6th century B.C. in northern India. Buddhism spread to Afghanistan at the time of the Kushan Dynasty (50-320), and then to Transoxiana and Ferghana. It is unclear when exactly Buddhism was introduced to Xinjiang. As early as the Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-25), Buddhism was already established in China.⁷³ The arrival of Buddhism on the inland territory of China must have been through Xinjiang. In other words, Buddhism reached Xinjiang earlier than it reached the inland territory of China. Buddhism had already taken root in the Tarim Basin before the Uighur migrated to the region. Although after the 14th century, Buddhist influence along the Silk Road was gradually replaced by Islam, its fascinating religious vestiges still remain a shining mirror of its glorious past. In Xinjiang alone, ancient Buddhist centers at Turfan and Kucha on the northern route of the Silk Road, and Khotan on the southern route, still present themselves today as cultural lands of Buddhist arts with their thousands of surviving Buddha grottos in which Buddhist canon, wall-paintings and literature have been found and preserved. Buddhist manuscripts were

⁷² Albert v. le Coq, *Die buddhistische Spätantike in Mittelasien*Ö *Die Manichaeischen Miniaturen*. 19-20.

⁷³ *Sui Shu*, Vol. 35.

written in many languages such as Sanskrit, Chinese, Tocharian, Sakish, Sogdian, Kucharian, Uighur, Tibetan and Mongolian. This shows that the religion had once taken strong root in the soil across Central Asia and East Asia and was richly established among the indigenous peoples.

Textual and archaeological evidence on Uighur Buddhism are extremely rich. Buddhism was popular among the Turkic tribes even before the time of the “Orkhon Uighur Khanate” in Inner Mongolia (8th century). The Chinese text *Wei Shu* records the tribute paid by the Turks: “In the nine month of the fourth year of the Yongping reign (511), the Rouran Khaghan Chounu sent Śramana (Monk) Hong Xuan to bring rosary and images to the court.”⁷⁴ From Chinese sources, it is known that during the 7th century, the Uighur sent envoys to the Tang court. The inscription of Karabalghasun includes the claims of repentance of the Uighur at the time of accepting Manichaeism as “being ignorant in the past, we called the devil Buddha. Now we understand the truth and will never repeat our errors.”⁷⁵ After their official conversion to Manichaeism, the Uighur abandoned Buddhism for the sake of the religion of light. As the Uighur migrated to the Tarim Basin, their nomadic way of life was transformed into a sedentary lifestyle. Gradually, with the Buddhist influence which had been there in the Turfan region before the large group of Uighur migrants arrived, the Uighur accepted Buddhism which in due course also replaced Manichaeism.

⁷⁴ *Wei Shu*, Vol. 103.

⁷⁵ The Chinese Inscription of Karabalghasun, collected in Li Wentian. *Helin jinshi lu* [A Collection of Stone and Metal Inscriptions of Helin (=Karakorum)] in *Shike shiliao xin bian* [A New Collection of Historical Stone Inscriptions] vol. 2. No. 15, edited by Luo Zhenyu. (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chubun gongsi, 1979):11466. 李文田, <和林金石录> 载罗振玉校正《石刻史料新编》第二辑 15. 台北:新文丰出版公司, 1979. 第 11466 页. This passage is translated by Li Tang.

2.3.1. Buddhist Centers along the Silk Road within Xinjiang

2.3.1.1. Kucha

Kucha 库车 lay at the heart of the ancient Kingdom of Qiuci 龟兹 in the “Western Regions” and is located on the northern Silk Road. Qiuci was originally occupied by an Indo-European people of green eyes and red hair, evidenced by both archaeological finds as well as Grotto paintings. Actually, the early settlers in the area were people of Indo-European origin, for instance, the Saka, Tocharians and Sogdians. Of course, early Chinese penetration into the area was also evident. The Han and Tang Dynasties had set up prefectures there. Kucha became part of the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho in the 9th century.

Buddhist missionaries and savants of different ethnicities such as Indian, Tocharian, Sogdian, Yuezhi, etc., traveling between Kushan and China took either the northern Silk Route which passed Shule, Kucha, Qocho and through Dunhuang into China or the Southern Silk Route which went through Khotan. Buddhist envoys from Greater Yuezhi (=Kushan) to China must have reached Qiuci first and left their influence behind before going to China. Kucha was also a centre where Buddhist savants gathered to translate Buddhist scriptures into Chinese. The first Kuchean monk who translated sutras at the White Horse Monastery in AD 257 was Van. In AD 307-12 Srimitra came. He was the one who translated the *Mahamayuri*. The most famous was Kumarajiva who translated the Lotus Sutra which is a marvel of trans-creation. He also translated a number of *Prajnaparamitas*. Sanskrit manuscripts used to come to China from Kucha, for instance, the *Avaivartika-cakra-sutra* was brought to Dharmaraksa by a Kuchean envoy.



Kirzil Buddhist Grottos near Kucha. Fig. 1.

Buddhism reached its peak in Qiuci from the 3rd to the 6th century and was fully established at the time of the Tang Dynasty. Buddhist temples were built there. The chapter in the *Jin Shu* [Book of Jin] on Qiuci describes that “in the city, there were thousands of Buddhist temples and stupas.”⁷⁶ Even the palace of the kingdom of Quici looked like a Buddhist temple. *Jiu Tangshu* noted that the people of Qiuci “learned the language and writing of Hu and Brahmi” and they “emphasized the Buddhist canon”.⁷⁷ Buddhist presence is further proved by extant the Grottos in Kirzil (Fig.1) and Qumutura with Buddhist wall-paintings. These grottoes, sometimes known as the second Dunhuang, were carved between the 3rd and the 13th century in the area of Kucha. From Buddhist relics in the Kucha area, it can be said that Kucha was once a flourishing pilgrimage center for Hīnayāna Buddhism along the Silk Road. Although some Uighur influence in Kirzil Grottos can be felt, this Tocharian Buddhist centre had a strong connection to Tibet.

The flourishing of Buddhism in Kucha was personally observed by the Chinese Buddhist monk Xuan Zang (602-664) who passed through Kucha as he made his pilgrimage to India between 627 and 743. Xuan Zang wrote a detailed account of what he saw along the Silk Road. In this work, entitled *Da Tang Xiyu Ji* [Records of the Western Regions of the Great Tang Dynasty 大唐西域记], he described Kucha to be a place where “there are hundreds of Buddhist temples with over five thousands Buddhist monks who practice Hinayana Buddhism”⁷⁸ Outside the west door of the city, there was a place for Buddhist gatherings. Every autumn, monks from all over the country came to gather here. From the kings on the top to the ordinary people at the bottom, everyone put aside his own affairs in order to observe the disciplines and to listen to the preaching.”⁷⁹

⁷⁶ *Jin Shu*. Vol. 97.

⁷⁷ *Jiu Tangshu* Vol. 210.

⁷⁸ Xuan Zang, *Da Tang Xiyu Ji* [Records of the Western Regions of the Great Tang Dynasty]. (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1977): 3. 玄藏, 《大唐西域记》, 上海: 上海人民出版社, 1977. 3 页.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 4.

By the 10th century, the Uighur seemed to have settled down well in the region, as the Chinese text *Song Shi* tells us that “Qiuci is another group of the Uighur and their king is called ‘Lion King’ (arslan, the totem name).”⁸⁰ They were called “the Uighur of Xizhou”, “the Qiuci of Xizhou” or “the Uighur of Qiuci”.⁸¹ Buddhism enjoyed a long flourishing period in Kucha until late 11th century when the city was finally attacked by the Muslim Karakhanids.

2.3.1.2. Turfan



Bazklik Buddhist Grottoes in Turfan. Fig. 2.

Turfan was another Buddhist centre along the northern Silk Road during the time of the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho. Before the Turfan Oasis was Turkicised or Uighurized, Buddhism had already penetrated into the area, especially the southern part of today’s Xinjiang. Although their Kaghan officially professed Manichaeism, the Uighur accepted Buddhism until the time of the Mongol conquest. After the 10th century, Buddhism was steadily enhanced and became the main religion of Qocho. Archaeological finds in Turfan, such as Buddhist manuscripts, the famous Bazklik Buddhist Grottoes (Fig. 2), as well as the ruins of ancient Qocho city all provide strong evidence of an ancient Uighur culture blended with Buddhist colour.

One of the unique characteristics of Uighur Buddhism was expressed in the carving of the Buddha Grottoes. The famous Bazklik Grottoes was the centre of a royal site which was sponsored by the Uighur Khaghans. At the same time, in Shengjinkou, Turoq, Yarhu, etc, there are also scattered grottoes with similar Buddhist wall-paintings.

⁸⁰ *Song Shi* Vol. 490.

⁸¹ *ibid.*

Qocho during the 10th century was already a Buddhist country. In the eleventh month of the third year of Qiande (965), the Khaghan of Xizhou (=Qocho) sent the monk Fayuan to offer a tooth relic of the Buddha, coloured-glaze wares and amber cups (to the Song court).⁸² This implies the official status of Buddhism in the kingdom and Buddhist monks already represented the Khaghan of the Uighur Kingdom. In 981, the Song court sent envoy Wang Yande to visit Qocho. Upon his return three years later, Wang Yande reported that Buddhist temples were built in over fifty regions, although some Manichaean and Persian (probably Nestorian) temples also existed. The Buddhist temples all had a horizontal tablet granted by the Tang court, and the entire Buddhist canon –the Tripitaka 大藏经-- was kept inside the temple.⁸³ From the excavated Buddhist fragments, it appears that most of the Tripitaka was translated into the Uighur language.

Like in Manichaeism, Buddhist monasteries played an important role in the economy of the country. The monastery became a self-reliant entity. It possessed land for cultivation and property for rent. Inside the monastery, there were wine gardens and small manufacturing houses. Many ancient Uighur Buddhist texts speak about merchants and trade.

2.3.1.3. Yutian (Khotan)

Yutian or Khotan (today's Hotian region) was an ancient kingdom in the south of the Taklamakan desert. Chinese historical records on Khotan commenced in the Former Han Dynasty (140-87 B.C.) when Khotan was first brought into political relations with China. However, Chinese sources did not mention the previous history of Khotan. A Tibetan legendary tradition which was recorded in *the Annals of Li-yul* between the 8th and the 9th century refers to the names of the early kings of Khotan as being of Indian

⁸² *Song Shi*, Vol. 490.

⁸³ *ibid.*

origin.⁸⁴ However, anthropological and philological observations also show the local population to be of mixed race, for instance, Tibetan with quasi-Mongolian.⁸⁵ The *Wei Shu* describes the country of Khotan saying that its people did not look like “Hu” (those of the Western Regions), rather they looked like Chinese.⁸⁶ Turkic influence was already mentioned in Chinese histories *Jiu Tangshu* and *Xin Tangshu*. Both records mention that the Khotanese submitted themselves to the rule of the Western Turks.⁸⁷ Chinese elements, especially silk, were present in Khotan. This was recorded by the 7th century Chinese Buddhist traveler Xuan Zang as he passed through Khotan in 644.⁸⁸ Xuan Zang also mentioned that the city had hundreds of Buddhist temples and over five thousand monks and disciples who all practices Mahāyāna Buddhism.⁸⁹ In the same time, Xuan Zang also described the Buddhist sites outside the royal city of Khotan.⁹⁰ The ancient trade route passed through the Khotan Oasis and it is likely that Buddhism penetrated from Gandhara, Punjab through Kashmir and around the Pamirs until it finally reached Khotan.

Through archaeological discoveries, especially those made by Albert von le Coq in the beginning of the 20th century, it is clear that Buddhism had been introduced to East Turkistan, especially to Khotan directly and indirectly from India, in the first half of the 1st century. The evidence for that is overwhelmingly seen in Kharaosthi documents on wood and leather discovered at the Niya Site. As Mark Aurel Stein noted from his first-hand experience in his archaeological exploration, there was a strong Indian influence on administration and daily life of this region during the early centuries of our era. In the meantime, from the excavation, it is obvious that Chinese political control was effective, and the influence of Chinese civilization had strongly asserted itself.⁹¹

⁸⁴ M.Aurel Stein, *Ancient Khotan: Detailed Report of Archaeological Explorations in Chinese Turkestan*. (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1981): 156.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 164.

⁸⁶ *Wei Shu* Vol. 120

⁸⁷ *Xin Tangshu* Vol. 221. *Jiu Tangshu* Vol. 198.

⁸⁸ Xuan Zang, *Da Tang Xiyu ji*, 301-302.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 296.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 297-301.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, viii.

The kingdom of Khotan had a long Buddhist tradition before the Uighur penetration of the area. In 401, when the Chinese Buddhist monk Fa Xian arrived in Khotan on his pilgrimage to India, he noticed that the most of the Khotanese believed in Mahayana Buddhism and there were some thousands of Buddhism monks in the city. Most of the families built a small stupa in front of their houses. Inside the stupa there was a room for the monks passing by.⁹² In the Chinese dynastic history *Sui Shu* we read that “the country of Yutian has five big cities and tens of small cities, and crack soldiers exceed several thousand. Their custom is to serve the Buddha and there are many Buddhist monks in the country. The king observes a diet refraining from meat and wine. Fifty *li* south of the city, there is a Buddhist monastery.”⁹³

The Buddhist country Yutian (Khotan) was finally conquered by the Karakhanids towards the beginning of the 11th century. Islam then replaced Buddhism as the main religion of the area.

2.3.1.4. The Uighur in the Hexi Corridor

During the period of the Orkhon Uighur Khanate, some individual Uighur had already immigrated to the Hexi Corridor (in today's Gansu Province). With the fall of the Orkhon Uighur Khanate in 840, one of those Uighur groups also moved to the Hexi Corridor. Based mainly around Ganzhou (today's Zhangye 张掖 in Gansu Province), the Uighur joined some of their earlier immigrants there. Ganzhou was at that time still under Tibetan rule. Chinese and Tibetans were the two main rivals there, both trying to control the region. In 851, Chinese regained the area and Ganzhou became part of the Tang Dynasty.

The Uighur then began to establish themselves in this area. With Ganzhou as their center, they gradually settled themselves around and by the end of the 9th century, in

⁹² Faxian, *Fo Guo Ji* [Notes on Countries of Buddha]. (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937): 1-2. 法显, 《佛国记》, 上海: 商务印书馆, 1937. 1-2 页.

⁹³ *Sui Shu* Vol. 83

the nearby Shazhou, Liagzhou, Suzhou and Heliangshan, traces of Uighur settlers were already clear. Later, the Uighur in all these areas seemed to have had their own territories, because they paid separate tribute to the Song court.

In 905, Chinese forces in Ganzhou under Zhang Chengfeng 张承奉 rose up against the Tang Dynasty and established their own small Jinshan Kingdom in the area. The Uighur therefore began to gather their military force and fought against the Jinshan Kingdom. Soon after, in 910, the Uighur, under the rule of Panteler, the nephew of their former Khaghan in Orkhon, established their own Uighur Khanate of Ganzhou which extended from Lingzhou 灵州 in the east to Yumen 玉门 and Anxi 安西 in the west. During this period, a new nomadic people –the Tangut-- rose in the north. This people formed their own dynasty, the Western Xia Dynasty in northwest China (today's Gansu and Ningxia provinces). Of course, this new force began to attack the Uighur of Ganzhou. In 1028, they captured Ganzhou. This Uighur Khanate fell, but the Uighur remained in the region.

The Uighur in Shazhou established their own Uighur Kingdom of Shazhou in 1036, but the kingdom was soon conquered by the Tangut in the 1060s. The Uighur of the Hexi Corridor practiced mainly Buddhism. The Hexi Corridor lay on the Silk Road. Merchants, monks and diplomats traveling to China all passed Dunhuang and the Hexi Corridor in order to reach the Chinese capital of Chang'an. Buddhist tradition had been predominant in Hexi before the Uighur established their communities in the area. Dunhuang was the main Buddhist center as the Thousands Buddha Grottos demonstrate. In the meantime, Hexi was also under Tibetan rule, Tibetan Buddhism prevailed in Hexi.

Hong Hao, the diplomat sent by the Song court to the Jurchen (Dynasty, 1115-1234) recorded his eye-witness experiences in Hexi in his *Songmo jiwen* [Notes on Missions to Songmo] 《松漠纪闻》. He wrote of the Uighur in the Hexi area as follows:

The Uighur believe mostly in Buddhism. They place the (Buddhist) sculptures in the hall. At each sacrifice, they must slaughter a lamb. Some drink alcohol

merrily. Then they dip their finger into the blood of the lamb and dye the mouth of the Buddha with blood. Some hold the foot of the Buddha screaming, which was meant to show intimacy and respect for the Buddha. When chanting the Scripture, they wore Kasāya (the monk's robe) and used the Indian language.⁹⁴

The Uighur Buddhists were also engaged in translating Buddhist sutras. From the Buddhists documents in Uighur translation discovered in Dunhuang, it can be seen that quite a few documents derived from the Uighur of Shazhou, for example, the *Säkiz Yükmäk* 八阳神咒经. Apart from Buddhist literature in Uighur, in Hexi region, many Buddhist temples and monasteries were built.

2.3.2. Uighur Buddhist Literature

Uighur Buddhist texts bear the elements of Mahāyāna Buddhism, although other types of Buddhist literature, e.g., of Hīnayāna Buddhism, also existed. The Uighur in Turfan replaced their original Old Turkish script with the Sogdian alphabet, and Uighur Buddhist monks and savants made a significant effort in translating Buddhist scriptures from other languages such as Tocharian, Chinese and Tibetan into their own language.

There are more than twenty extant Buddhist sutras and other works translated into Uighur. The main works among them are (1) **Suvarna-prahhāsa-uttamarāja sūtra** [the Golden-Light Sutra; altun önglög yaruq yatrıqlıy qopda kätürümış nom iligi atlıy nom bitig]. It was found in Qiuquan, Gansu Province by the Russian Malov in 1910; (2) **Bodistw taito samtso ačarining yorıgın uqıtmak atlıy tsi in čüin tigmä kwi nom bitig** [Biography of Xuan Zang], found in 1906; (3) **Kuan-ši-im pusar** [The Lotus Sutra]; (4) **Linhua čäčäk üzäki itigi yaratıy atlıy sudur nom bitig**; (5) **Kimqoqi** [the Diamond Sutra, vajracchedika sutra]; and (6) **Maitrisimit**, a Buddhist drama manuscript found in Turfan at the beginning of the 20th century, with another copy being found in 1959.

⁹⁴ Hong, Hao. *Song mo ji wen* [Notes on Missions to Songmo, Now the Country of Jin] *Bishuo xiaoshuo daguan* Vol. 3:3. (Taipei: Xinxin shuju, 1978): 1430-1431. (宋) 洪皓. <松漠记闻> 《笔说小说大观》 卷 3:3. 台北: 新兴书局影印, 1978. 1430-1431 页.

2.3.3. Buddhist Arts in East Turkistan

The art of Uighur mural paintings in Turfan was closely related to the spread of Buddhism in the region, and Buddhist art in East Turkistan is in exactly the style of the Gandhara sculptures.⁹⁵ The painting style in East Turkistan reflects the style of the religious art of the Gandhara School which had a Hellenistic origin but was filled with Indian spirit. This style in East Turkistan was later overlaid by Chinese art after the 7th century as the Tang Dynasty began to exercise stronger influence in the area. Due to its geographical location between the great cultures of Iran, the Roman Orient, India and China, East Turkistan was an environment of great cultural mixing. This mixed cultural background was important in shaping the religious arts in East Turkistan, which demonstrate a fusion of the western and eastern cultures. The content of the paintings in Buddhist Grottos in Kucha and Turfan not only expressed a Buddhist religious theme but also portrayed the life-style of the Uighur, for instance, the dress code, at that time. The paintings in Kirzil show western appearance and Indian hair decorations from which more historical information on the residents in the area can be obtained.

The mural paintings provide a vivid picture, in general, of ancient Uighur life. The people lived in courtyards surrounded by walls. Plants and flowers were grown in the yard. The aristocratic men were dressed up in Tang-style garb and women in a robe. Many pieces show the Uighur benefactors -- a woman, a man or a cavalier. The whole life of all the peoples there in East Turkistan from the royal family to ordinary people seemed to be centered on Buddhism.

After the fall of the Orkhon Uighur Khanate, the two big groups migrated to the west and were then scattered in Kucha, Yutian, Turfan and the Hexi Corridor. This majority of the Uighur tribe gradually accepted Buddhism which had long existed in these areas before the Uighur penetration. The newly-established Uighur Kingdoms in

⁹⁵Albert von Le Coq, *Die Buddhistische Späteantike in Mittelasien* Vol.3, 21.

these areas experienced, after the Uighur conversion to Buddhism, a flourishing of high Buddhist culture mingled with the culture of Uighur royalty from the 9th to the 15th century. This high civilization was represented in literature, arts, music and other forms of artistic expressions. A large portion of these pieces of Buddhist art were destroyed by either natural disasters or the Muslim conquest from the 10th century onwards. Buddhism in the Tarim Basin was finally replaced by Islam in the 15th century.

2.4. Nestorianism

2.4.1. Nestorians in Turfan

Uighur Nestorian communities, though small, did exist and survived up until the Mongol period. Sources on ancient Christian communities among the Uighur are extant although very scarce. However, Nestorian Christianity did leave traces in the Tarim Basin. Archaeological evidences are found in Albert von le Coq's reports of the German Turfan expeditions which described their discovery of a Nestorian ruin outside the northeast gate of Qočo and other Christian fragments. In the ruined city of Qočo, Albert von le Coq found a temple with wall frescos. One of the partially destroyed wall-paintings depicts a rider on a horse carrying a flagpole. On top of the flagpole there was a cross.⁹⁶ In the same temple, but on the other side of the wall, another wall-painting had been scratched out, but the lower part had survived. On the upper part of this half picture, there is the left-leg of a rider. Before the rider, there stands a tall man in red robe and with black curly hair, who looks like a Byzantine priest holding a censer and a holy-water container. On his right, there are two men and one woman, each holding a piece of green leaf. The picture seems to portray a Palm Sunday scene.⁹⁷ It is certainly not a Manichean scene as Manichaeans normally wore white robes. It is a Christian scene, but no other supporting evidence could be found around the temple or on the picture.

⁹⁶ Albert von le Coq, *Auf Hellas Spuren in Ostturkistan: Berichte und Abenteuer der II. Und III. Deutschen Turfan-Expedition*. (Leipzig, J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1926): 63.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, 64.

However, judging from the location of the Nestorian ruined temple and the few Nestorian frescos, a preliminary conclusion can be reached that Nestorians in the Uighur Qocho Kingdom were far outnumbered by Manichean and Buddhist adherents. The Manichean Temple was located in the centre of the ruined city which suggests a centralized and highlighted position, whereas the Nestorian ritual center was found outside the city, a little far from the centre of the Qocho world.

The German team also found Christian Sogdian fragments among other Manichaean and Buddhist manuscripts in Qocho. This means that Sogdian Nestorians were also present in the Uighur Kingdom side by side with other Sogdian religious groups. They were probably the ones who introduced Nestorian Christianity to the Uighur.

A limited number of Nestorian Uighur fragments have been found in the Turfan region. The exact dating of these fragments is difficult, but these Turfan fragments should fall between the 9th and 11th centuries, the time of the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho. The two main manuscripts are: *The Passion of St. George* and *Worship of the Three Magis* (TII B29). A Psalter in Middle-Persian language was also unearthed in Bulayig. Albert von le Coq also obtained a Nestorian Uighur fragment (T.II B.I) from Bulayig, in the northern part of Turfan in 1905, which is a literal translation from the Syriac.⁹⁸ The German Turkologist Peter Zieme made several studies on the Turfan Nestorian texts⁹⁹ including a fragment (TIII Kurutka 1857) of Uighur Nestorian wedding blessings. It was during the third German Expedition that the team found the wedding blessings of a Uighur Christian community of Quratqqa, a town north of Turfan.¹⁰⁰ In the text, there is

⁹⁸ Albert von le Coq, "Ein christliches und ein manichäisches Manuskriptfragment in türkischer Sprache aus Turfan Chinesisch-Turkistan" *Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (1909): 1202.

⁹⁹ Peter Zieme. "Zu den nestorianisch-türkischen Turfantexten." Georg Hazai and Peter Zieme, eds., *Sprachen, Geschichte und Kultur der altaischen Völker*, (Berlin, 1974): 661-668. Also by Peter Zieme, "Ein Hochzeitssegen uigurischer Christen" *Scholia: Beiträge zur Turkologie und Zentralasienkunde. Anne Marie von Gabain zum 80. Geburtstag am 4. Juli, 1981 dargebracht von Kollegen, Freunden, und Schülern*. Edited by Klaus Röhrborn. (Wiesbaden, Veröffentlichung der Societas Ural-Altaica, 1981): 221-232.

¹⁰⁰ Peter Zieme. "Ein Hochzeitssegen uigurischer Christen" *Scholia: Beiträge zur Turkologie und Zentralasienkunde. Anne Marie von Gabain zum 80. Geburtstag am 4. Juli, 1981 dargebracht von Kollegen, Freunden und Schülern*. Edited by Klaus Röhrborn. (Wiesbaden, 1981): 221-232.

a biblical quotation in Syriac, which suggests a Nestorian element in the community. It also used the word “ärkägün” in the seventh line of the fragment to designate Christians.¹⁰¹

2.4.2. Uighur Nestorians in the Mongol Period

In comparison to the Nestorianism of the Uighur Kingdom of Qočo, Uighur Nestorian presence during the Mongol period is better testified to by written sources of medieval western travelers to China as well as Nestorian relics, including Nestorian tombstones with Uighur inscriptions which have been unearthed in Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Quanzhou, Yangzhou, and so on. These inscriptions can be traced back to the Mongol period (12th to 13th century) which was after Nestorian Christianity revived in China.

Changchun Zhenren was a 13th-century Chinese traveller who went to the Western Regions, and the account of his journey was narrated and preserved in *Changchun Zhenren xiyou ji* (Changchun Zhenren's Journey to the West narrated by Li Zhichang). It records that on the second day of September (possibly in 1278) after four days travel towards the West, they lodged to the East of Luntai in the Uighur lands, and the leader of the Diexie (=Tarsa=Nestorian) came to welcome them.¹⁰² According to *The history of the Mongols* by John of Monte Corvino, Chingiz Khan conquered the Uighur who were “Christians of the Nestorian Sect”.¹⁰³ Marco Polo and medieval European travelers like William of Rubruck¹⁰⁴, and Plano Carpini all reported seeing Uighur Nestorians.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 223.

¹⁰² Li Zhichang, *Changchun Zhenren xiyou ji* [Changchun Zhenren's Journey to the West] Vol. 1 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1935): 7. 李志常, 《长春真人西游记》上海:中华书局, 1935. 第 7 页.

¹⁰³ Christopher Dawson. *The Mongol Mission: Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955): 20.

¹⁰⁴ ibid., 137.

2.4.3. Uighur Nestorian Monk Becoming Catholicus of the East

A special event whereby a Uighur monk became the Catholicus of the East was mentioned by Bar Hebraeus, in his *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*. He mentioned that two Uighur monks had been sent from China by the command of the great Mongol king Kublai Khan and ordered to go and worship in Jerusalem.¹⁰⁵ This event was confirmed by a Syriac manuscript found in Tekhama, Kurdistan in 1887. The manuscript tells of how two Uighur monks, Sawma and Markos, set off from Peking heading towards Jerusalem in the middle of the thirteenth century. However, they were prevented from going to Jerusalem due to difficulties and dangers on the way. They then encountered the Catholicus of the East, Mar Denha in Bagdad who, for reasons of his own, ordained one of the monks, Markos, as metropolitan of China with the name of Yahbhallaha III. Since the two monks could no longer go to Jerusalem, they prepared to go back to China in 1281. However, just at that time, Mar Denha died, and Yahbhallaha III was elected as Catholicus of the East with his seat in Celeucia-Cteciphon. He served there until his death in 1317.¹⁰⁶ This story shows us, from another angle, that the number of Uighur Nestorians multiplied in China during the Mongol period. Their traces can be found through unearthed tombstone inscriptions in the eastern coastal cities¹⁰⁷ as well as in northwestern part of China¹⁰⁸.

2.5. The Islamization of the Uighur

The exact date of the Uighur conversion to Islam is far from clear. Islamization began in the 10th century during the time of the Uighur Karakhanid Kingdom (9th -13th century) and, according to legend, was closely related to Satuq Bughra Khan (d. 955). After the Uighur Khanate in Upper Mongolia was destroyed by the Kirghiz in 840, the

¹⁰⁵ Abbeloos and Lamy, eds. *Chron. Eccles.* Tome iii, col. 451.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 3; 151-157.

¹⁰⁷ See, Niu Ruji, "Quanzhou faxian de Xuliyawen Huiguyu jingjiao beiming" [The Syrio-Uighur Nestorian Tomb-inscription Discovered in Quanzhou] in *Xiyu Yanjiu* [The Western Regions Studies] Vol. 3 (2004): 91-93. 牛汝极, <泉州新发现的叙利亚文回鹘语景教卑铭> 《西域研究》3 期, 2004. 91-93 页.

¹⁰⁸ See, Zhang Bosong, "Neimengu Chifeng shi songshan chutu de yelikewen jiao cizhi mubei" [The Yelikewen Porcelain Tomb-stone Unearthed in Songsan District of Chifeng City in Inner Mongolia] in *Haijiao shi yanjiu* [Studies in Maritime History] Vol.1 (1994): 117-118.

Uighur were scattered and divided into three main groups which fled in different directions. The first group, which was mentioned above, consisted of fifteen clans. They migrated westward to Central Asia and Kashgar, the land of the Karluk on the southern bank of the River Chu. Between the 10th and the 13th centuries, the Uighur together with the Karluk and other tribes established the Karakhanid Kingdom there. “Kara” means “black” which symbolizes the direction of “north” as this is represented by the colour black in Turkic symbolism. The Kingdom is called the Ilekkhan Kingdom in some historical sources, as many dynastic coins had a typical word “Ilek (Iilik, elik, etc)” on them. Islamic sources, for instance, that of al-Athir, called the Dynasty *al-Hāqaniya* or *al-Hāniya* or *al-Āfrāsiyā*.¹⁰⁹ The kingdom was divided into two sub-kingdoms according to the Altaic system of stems. The ruler of the eastern part, the greater khan, resided in Balasaghun or Kara Ordu with the title Arslan Kara Khan. Arslan means “lion” which was the totem of the Karluk’s Čigil clan. The ruler of the western part, the co-Karakhan, was based in Taraz and later on moved to Kashgar, then back to Taraz again. His title was Bughra Kara Khan. Bughra means camel which was the totem of the Karluk’s Yagma clan.¹¹⁰

The Chinese historical record named the kingdom Heihan Wangchao 黑汗王朝, i.e., the Black Khan Kingdom. It notes that the Uighur after the year 840 went to the land of the Karluk. The *Xin Tangshu* states:

In the fourth year of Kaicheng (839)...the great chief Julumoho 句禄莫和 and the Kirghiz gathered 100,000 cavaliers and attacked the Uighur city and killed their Khaghan, executed Jueluowu 掘罗勿 and burned their royal camp. Their tribe was thereby scattered. Their minister Sazhi 駸职 and Pang Tele (Tölö) 庞特勒 together with fifteen clans went to the land of the Karluk 葛逻禄 for refuge.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Omeljan Pritsak, “Die Karachaniden” *Der Islam* 31 (193-54): 17.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, 23.

¹¹¹ *Xin Tangshu* Vol. 217B.

Sometime after the beginning of the Zhide 至德 reign in 756, the Karluk occupied cities such as Suiye 碎叶 (today's Tokmak) and Taraz 怛逻斯 (today's Aulieata).¹¹² At the time when the Uighurs came to seek refuge, the Karluk dwelled in the area southwest of the Tianshan Mountains. The Uighur then united with the Karluk, Yaghma and other tribes and established the Karakhanid Kingdom which extended from the 9th to the 13th century.

2.5.1. Karakhanid Kingdom - the First Turkic Islamic State

The Uighur Karakhanid Kingdom was the first Muslim country among the Turkic nations. Its main centers were Balassaghun, Transoxiana and Kashgar. The early history of the Karakhanid kingdom has not been successfully reconstructed due to lack of clear primary sources, although historians have tried to use different and sometimes even vague sources to arrive at their different hypotheses about the origins of the dynasty.¹¹³ Nevertheless, we can affirm that the Islamic penetration into East Turkistan did come from the Karakhanid Kingdom.

The advent of Islam among the Karakhanids is as unclear as the early history of their Kingdom. Arab and Persian sources from the 11th to the 13th century pointed to a figure called Satuq Bughra Khan who was the first convert of Islam among the Turkic Khans. There are many versions of this conversion story which have been handed down to us, but they are often mixed with legendary elements. A late fragment in Chagatai language on the *Memory of Bughra Khan (Tazkirah Bughra Khan)* was found in 1889, which was a copy of another manuscript from the 17th century. The Uighur themselves also share a legendary oral tradition of this Satuq Bughra Khan.

¹¹² *ibid.*

¹¹³ For a detailed description of these hypotheses, see Omeljan Pritsak, "Die Karachaniden" *Der Islam* 31 (193-54): 21-22.

The following are extracts from *Tazkirah Bughra Khan* translated by R.B. Shaw and included in his article “A Grammar of the Language of East Turkistan”.¹¹⁴

After the Prophet of God shall have passed from the world three hundred and thirty-three years, in the land of Turkistan, one by name of the Holy Sultan Satuq Bughra Khan Ghazi, a noble person, shall come into existence; at the age of twelve he shall be acquired to the Faith. Thus they wrote. And again on the spot the Prophet of God spoke: “*Awwaly man aslama min at-Turk.*”¹¹⁵ (The first one who professed Islam among the Turks).

The man who converted Satuq Bughra Khan was reportedly Holy Kh’ajah Abu-an-nasr Samani who was on his journey to East Turkistan and met Satuq Bughra Khan in Artush when the Khan was 12 years old. After hearing the preaching of the Kh’ajah, the Sultan professed Islam.

Then the Sultan said to the Kh’ajah: “Oh (thou) who showest the way to those who have lost it, if there be any other thing to be taught beside the declaration of testimony, teach (me); that I also having learnt (it) may busy myself about the service of God.”¹¹⁶

The story continues to tell how Satuq Bughra Khan persuaded his friends to become Muslims if they wanted to remain his friends. However, Satuq Bughra Khan at that time kept secret about his faith until he had actually become the Khan. Then he began to engage himself in the Jihad. The *Tazkirah* reads that:

The Holy Sultan Satuq Bughra Khan, at the age of twelve and a half, became occupied in wars of religion. During the summer he made war on the infidels. In winter-time he performed the service and worship of God the Exalted...until his ninety-sixth year, as far as the River Amu that is before Balkh on this side towards sun-rising as far as the place called “Karak” on the north as far as the place called “Qara-qurdum...” Sultan, having converted the infidels to Islam by his sword, established the laws and religion of the Holy Muhammad...At the time of the Holy Sultan leaving this world, the date was four hundred and twenty-nine (1037).¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ R.B. Shaw, “A Grammar of the Language of East Turkistan” *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* Vol. XLVI (1887): 242-268.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 326.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 329.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 333-334.

The earliest source on Bughra Khan is found in *Zayn al-Akhbar* written by Persian historian Abu Said Abdol Hay Gardizi (died approx. 1061) in 1050. This is a historical record on the ancient kings of Persia, caliphs and governors in Inner Asia as well as information on the Turks in Central Asia. Gardizi mentioned that Satuk Kujah, the Turkish Khan was converted to Islam.¹¹⁸

Historical sources differ greatly with each other on the first Khans of the Karakhanid Kingdom, and the date and founder of the Karakhanid Kingdom have always been debated. As far as Islam in that kingdom is concerned, all sources seem to point to the same person, i.e., Satuq Bughra Khan. Only one historian, Abu'l-Futub 'Abd al-Ghafir b. Husayn al-Alma'i who lived in Kashgar in the fifth century of the Hijra (11th century A.D.) wrote a history of that town *Tarikh Kashghar* (as mentioned before) in which the conversion story of Satuq Bughra Khan was narrated. However, the original manuscript of this text was lost and this conversion account was only partially quoted by Jamal Qarshi in his *Mulhaqat al-Surah* [Supplement to the Dictionary "Surah"] written in the beginning of the 14th century. According to the legend quoted by Jamal Qarshi, Islam was first embraced by Satuq Bughra Khan 'Abd-al-Karim, grandfather of the first and great grandfather of the second conqueror of Transoxiana, who died in 344/955.¹¹⁹ Of course, the dating of Satuq Bughra Khan's death here differs from that in *Tazkirah Bughra Khan*.

According to Jamal Qarshi, the first Karakhan was Bilgä Kül Qadir Khan whose two sons succeeded him as Aslan and Bughra Khans. Satuq Bughra Khan was the third Khan of the Western Karakhanid Kingdom. The Karakhanids and the Samanids were at war in the later part of the ninth century. When Satuq was young, he encountered a Samanid refugee in Artush from whom he heard unofficial Sufi preaching.¹²⁰ After

¹¹⁸ See, Minhaj Sirak Juzjani, *Tabakat-i-Nasiri: A General History of the Muhammadan Dynasties of Asia Including Hindustan, from A.H. 194 (810A.D.) to A.H. 658 (1260A.D.), and the Irruption of the Infidel Mughals into Islam*, translated by H. G. Raverty. Bibliotheca Indica, 78. (London: 1881): 901-2.

¹¹⁹ W. Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*. Second edition (London: Messrs. Luzac and Co., Ltd., 1958): 255.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, 24-25.

Satuq became Satuq Bughra Khan with his Islamic name `Abd al-Karim, he professed Islam openly and propagated Islam until his death in A.H. 344 (= 955 C.E.). Although his history has not been fully reconstructed, he was considered a 10th century ruler in Kashgar and the first Turkic Khaghan who became a Muslim. His tomb can still be seen in today's Artush near Kashgar. Many historical sources mention Bughra Khan, but the dating of this Khan was inconsistent among these sources. What can be said is that during the tenth century there existed a Muslim dynasty somewhere in East Turkistan.

Satuq Bughra Khan was succeeded by his son Musa bin`abd al-Karim who bore the Turkish name Baytaš who became the next Bughra Khan. During his reign until A.H. 349 (=960 C.E.), he was assisted by a non-official Sufi missionary `Abu `l-Hasan Muhammad bin Sufyān al-Kalimāti who came from the city of Nishabur in the province of Khorasan (today's Neyshabur in northeastern Iran).

From the 7th Century, Islam had been winning converts and states in Central Asia. As early as 750, the Caliph's victory over the Chinese army during the battle at the Talas River already showed the power of Islam in Central Asia. The 9th Century saw the rise of Islamic kingdoms in Central Asia, especially the Samanid Dynasty, the first Iranian Dynasty after the conquest by Islamic Arabs. The Islamization process among the Turkic people which commenced during the 10th century was also victorious. The 10th century Arab traveler Ibn Fadlan reported that in 960, about 200,000 tents of Turks (Karakanids) were converted to Islam.¹²¹

Muslim missionaries had already been active in propagating the religion to the Turks even before Islam became the state religion of the Karakhanid Kingdom. Al-Nadim in his 10th-century survey of Muslim culture *al-Fihrist* spoke about a Muslim group called Islamiyah (i.e. the followers of Abu Muslim) in Khurasan who sent a missionary by the name of Ishaq to the Turks and this man" known as Ishaq went to the

¹²¹ Ibn al-Athir. *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*. VIII. Edited by C.J. Tornberg. (Beirut, 1965): 532.

Land beyond the River (Transoxiana), where he instituted propaganda for Abu Muslim.”¹²² Transoxiana belonged to the Karakhanid Kingdom.

2.5.2. Islamic Expansion toward the East

From the 9th to the 10th century, Islam took root in the Turkish Kingdom of Karakhanid and was successful in expansion to the rest of East Turkistan. Chinese and Arabic sources as well as local oral traditions on the success of Islam during these two hundreds years are all very scanty and far from clear. As far as Muslim Karakhanid's expansion toward the East, i.e. Yutian (Khotan), is concerned, we only know from Chinese historical record *Song Shi* that by the year 1009, the king of Yutian who sent envoys to the Chinese court changed to Karakhan. This means that Islam had already dominated the royal court of Yutian.

2.5.2.1. Muslim Conquest of Yutian (Khotan)

Sources concerning the history of Islamic expansion toward East Turkistan are very limited. The Chinese dynastic history *Song Shi* [History of the Song Dynasty] provides a short chapter on the country of Yutian (Khotan). The geographical location of Yutian as depicted in *Song Shi* describes Yutian as bordering India near Cong Ling Mountains in the southwest; Tibet in the South, Shule (a city of the Karakhanid) in the Northwest and being 9,900 *li*¹²³ away from the Chinese capital in the East.¹²⁴ This demonstrates that Yutian shared a border with the Karakhanid Kingdom in the Northwest.

The Zoroastrian tradition co-existed with the Buddhist one in Yutian in the pre-Islamic period, although the former was likely earlier in Yutian. The Chinese histories *Jiu Tangshu* and *Xin Tangshu* both described that the people of Yutian as liking to serve

¹²² B. Dodge, translated. *The Fihrist of al-Nadim: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*. (NY: Columbia University Press, 1970): 822-823.

¹²³ A Chinese unit of distance. A *li* is half a kilometer.

¹²⁴ Tuo Tuo, *Song Shi Vol. 490: Yutian*. [元]脱脱, 《宋史: 于阗》490.

the Zoroastrian gods, but at the same time also worshipping the Buddha.¹²⁵ Yutian was on the whole a Buddhist kingdom with a strong Indian influence.

The chapter on Yutian in the *Song Shi* concentrates only on the tribute which Yutian sent to the Chinese court. However, some indirect information does provide certain clues to the Karakhanid expansion towards the East. From *Song Shi*, we know that “in the twelfth month of the second year of Jianlong 建隆 (962), the king of Yutian Shengtian 圣天 (Visa Sambhava, reign 912-966) sent envoys to offer tribute which comprised a Gui圭.¹²⁶ The Manichean master of that country offered two glasses in colored glaze and one piece of Hu¹²⁷ brocade.”¹²⁸ The envoys also described to the Chinese court that in their country, one of the customs was to “worship local spirits.”¹²⁹ This piece of information tells us that in 961, Yutian was still a country where Buddhism prevailed, but where Manicheans was still active. The *Song Shi* continues to advise that between 965 and 969, two tribute missions arrived at the Song court, both led by Buddhist envoys of the country,¹³⁰ which means at this time, Buddhism was still a religion of the country. The gifts from Yutian were always things made of jade which Yutian had in abundance. However, judging from the invaluable presents which the King of Yutian presented to the Chinese court and the frequency of the tribute in the middle of the 10th century, it appears that Yutian was intent on seeking assistance from the Chinese court, probably in battling against the Karakhanids who were progressing towards the East. In the same chapter, another passage tells indirectly of the war between Yutian and the Karakhanids. It reads:

In the fourth year (of Kaibao 开宝, 971), this country’s monk Jixiang brought an official letter of his king (of Yutian) to the (Song) court. The letter said that Yutian defeated the country of Shule and obtained a dancing elephant from them

¹²⁵ *Jiu Tangshu* Vol. 210; *Xin Tangshu* Vol. 237.

¹²⁶ A *gui* is an elongated pointed tablet of jade held in the hands by ancient rulers on ceremonial occasions.

¹²⁷ *Hu* refers to the western regions in general, most of the time meaning Iranian or Sogdian.

¹²⁸ *Song Shi* Vol. 490.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

¹³⁰ *ibid.*

which is now offered as a tribute. The Song emperor issued an edict to accept it.¹³¹

The above passage, though indirect, is the only piece of information from Chinese historical texts on the Karakhanid-Yutian war. We know from this passage that shortly before their offering of tribute, i.e. before the year 971, the Karakhanid Muslims from Shule waged war against Yutian but were defeated. Yutian won this war and even obtained an symbol of victory, a dancing elephant. Some details of this war are described in a Khotanese fragment (categorized as P5538a) found in Dunhuang. This is a document of the Chancellery of Yutian in the 10th century. It was issued from the court of Yutian to the Ta-uang (great king) in Shazhou (today's Dunhuang area) in the fourth regnal year, horse year (970).¹³² According to the fragmentary text, the Yutian army went to Kashgar to attack the Karakhanids who together with the Arab troops (Tazik) seized the road. The Yutian army won the war and apparently occupied the city as the text mentions discussion about how to govern the city which they had seized.¹³³

Legendary traditions, like that of *Tazkirah*, as mentioned before, seem to paint a cruel picture of the wars between Yutian and the Karakhanid Kingdom. Hasan Bughra Khan, the son¹³⁴ of Satuq Bughra Khan, waged wars against the infidels in East Turkistan and the battles were victorious. Hasan Bughra Khan sent his brother Yusef Kadr Khan with 24,000 men to recapture Kashgar from the hands of the infidels who then had to withdraw to Yutian. The *Tazkirah* continues to tell that, after 24 years of combat, the Muslim Karakhanids occupied most of the regions around Kashgar and established Islam in the conquered areas.¹³⁵

¹³¹ *ibid.*

¹³² E. Pulleyblank dated this to the year 970. See E. Pulleyblank, "The Date of the Staël-Holstein Roll" *Asia Major* n.s. Vol. 9, part I (1954): 91-92.

¹³³ H.W. Bailey. "Śrī Viśa Śūra and the Ta-uang" *Asia Major* Vol. 11 (1964): 17-18.

¹³⁴ According to Jamal Qarshi, Hasan Bughra Khan was the grandson of Satuq Bughra Khan. See Pritsak, "Die Karakhaniden", p. 25.

¹³⁵ M. Grenard, "La Légende de Satok Boghra Khan et L'Histoire" *Journal Asiatique* Vol. 9 (1900) : 12-15.

Another version of *Tazkirah* (which R.B. Shaw translated) describes that the blood of thousands of infidels (Buddhists) was flowing like the river Jaihun (Oxus).¹³⁶ Even Muslim women entered the battle. The manuscript portrays a Muslim lady Mariam Khanem, with several of her maids drawing a sigh of grief, entering the battle.¹³⁷

It is obvious that the Karakhanids were already waging wars against their neighbors, the Samanid Kingdom (Iran) and Yutian Kingdom 于阗, at the time of Satuq Bughra Khan although not successfully. His successors continued the war. His grandson Abu' l-Hasan 'Ali b. Musa was regarded as an Islamic martyr and bore the epithet "Sa'id al-Hariq" and "aš-Šahid".¹³⁸

The war against Yutian failed yet again. Nevertheless, the Karakhanids were very ambitious to conquer Yutian in the name of Jihad and must have again resumed attacks. According to the *Song Shi*, Yutian was already under Karakhanid control in the year 1009 when the king of Yutian sent Uighur envoys to pay tribute to the Song court. The reference reads: "In the second year of Dazhongxiangfu (1009), the king (of Yutian) Karakhan sent Uighur Luosiwen 罗厮温 and others to pay tribute."¹³⁹ This shows that in the beginning of the 11th century, the Buddhist Kingdom Yutian was already under Karakhanid Islamic control although Chinese sources are silent about how this process of change from a Buddhist Kingdom to an Islamic Khanate took place.

If the Chinese historical record *Song Shi* advises only the result of the successful Islamic expansion of the Karakhanid to East Turkistan, the oral traditions unveil a far-from-peaceful process of this expansion which was in reality very bloody. The introduction of Islam to East Turkistan, e.g., to Yutian, as far as historical records are concerned, was for the most part, through repeated military conquests. Nevertheless, the *Tazkirah* tradition also gives occasionally some scenes of a peaceful conversion:

¹³⁶ R.B. Shaw. "A Grammar of the Language of East Turkistan" *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* Vol. 44 (1877): 335.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, 337.

¹³⁸ Pritsak, "Die Karakhaniden", 25-26.

¹³⁹ *Song Shi* 490.

The Holy Yusef Qadir Khan Ghazi and the Holy Hasan Bughra Khan Ghazai came to the town of Yarkend and dwelt (there). They persuaded the people towards Islam. By the point of the tongue they became Musalmans, and professed the Faith. The people made an offering of their money and goods, their lives and bodies. They gave all of them to the poor.¹⁴⁰

In general, it can be said that after a prolonged war against Yutian, the triumph of Islam in East Turkistan in the pre-Mongol period (before the 13th century) was mainly seen in the areas between Kashgar, Yutian and Yarkend, i.e. the western part of East Turkistan (today's Xinjiang). The Turfan region remained Manichean, although Muslims had already penetrated into Turfan. The following century saw the continued eastward expansion of Islam.

2.5.2.2. The Beginning of Uighur Islamic Culture

The Chinese Turkic philologist Geng Shimin defined the Karakhanid Dynasty as the period marked by the beginning of Turkicization of South Xinjiang and the rise of Uighur Islamic Literature.¹⁴¹ A new Turkic *adab* was created with three distinguishing elements, as Rober Dankoff put it: "First, the mastery of the language; second, the transmission of profane wisdom, particularly as attached to the royal courts, and third, pride in the national legends, customs and traditions."¹⁴² With the advent of Islam, the Karakhanids began to adopt the Arabic alphabet to write Uighur, although Uighur script was still in use. Therefore, in South Xinjiang or East Turkistan, two branches of literary development were seen: one was the Karakhanid literature beginning to be influenced by Arabic and Persian elements and centred on Kashgar; the other was the traditional Uighur Literature with its center in Turfan.

¹⁴⁰ R.B. Shaw, 338.

¹⁴¹ Geng Shimin. *Xinjiang wenshi lunji* [A Collection of the Papers on Languages-Literature and History of Xinjiang] (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe, 2001): 80. 耿世民, 《新疆文史论集》北京: 中央民族大学出版社, 2001. 80 页.

¹⁴² Robert Dankoff, "Qarakhanid Literature and the Beginnings of the Turco-Islamic Culture" in *Central Asian Monuments* edited by H.B. Paksoy (Istanbul: ISIS Press, 1992): 2. www.ku.edu/carrie/texts/carrie_books/paksoy-2/cam4.html.

Two monumental works of this period are representative of this character: *Diwan Lughat at-Turk* [Compendium of the Turkic Dialects 《突厥语大辞典》] by Mahmud al-Kāshyari and *Qutadghu Bilig* [Wisdom of Royal Glory 《福乐智慧》] composed by Yusuf Khas Hajib of Balsaghun in 1069.

2.5.2.2.1. *Dīwan Luyāt at-Turk*

This manuscript was found shortly before 1917 by Ali Emiri Efendi in Istanbul and was subsequently published by Turkish scholar Kilisli Rifat. The manuscript was hand-copied in 1296 from the original by a certain Muhammad b. Abūbakr. “Dīwan” means “encyclopaedic lexicon”. However, *Dīwan Luyāt at-Turk*, i.e., compendium of the Turkic dialects, is not merely a lexicon. It is more like a typical Arabic lexicon which illustrates certain words by quoting Bedouin usage as preserved in proverbs and old verses. The work provides abundant information on the world and culture of the medieval Turks. The author Mahmud al-Kāshyari followed the model of Arabic lexicographers and explained the words by citing many Turkic proverbs and verses of poetry. It also provided the geographic location of the dialects spoken as well as ethno-religious information.

Mahmud al-Kāshyari was a scion of the Karakhanid dynasty. He was brought up in Turkic tradition and also had education in Arabic. To compose his lexicon, he traveled throughout the Turkic lands and learned their dialects. Islamic influence of his work was obvious already in the author’s statement of *Dīwan Luyāt at-Turk* that “God the most high had caused the Sun of Fortune to rise in the Zodiac of the Turks” (MS p.2).¹⁴³ The work was dedicated to the caliph al-Muqtadi (1075-1094) at the Abbasid court in Bagdad. Through this Turkic lexicon, Al-Kāshyari wanted the non-Turkic Muslims to learn the language of their Turkic brothers in the Islamic Faith. This suggests that at the end of the 11th century, Turkic/Uighur Muslims exercised a great role in Central Asia and learning

¹⁴³ The verse is translated by Robert Dankoff in his *Mahmud al-Kāshyari : Compendium of the Turkic Dialects (Dīwan Luyāt at-Turk)* (Cambridge/MA: Harvard University Press, 1982): 4.

Turkic was, in the eyes of al-Kāšyari, already a religious duty. Al-Kāšyari deemed it necessary to keep the Turkic dialects equal to Arabic.

2.5.2.2.2. *Qutadeghu Bilig*



Yusef of Balasaghun (1018-1069) was another medieval Turkic literature giant who intended, like Mahmud al-Kāšyari, to “establish the Central Asiatic Turkic tradition as a legitimate element within the parameters of Islamic culture”¹⁴⁴ His long poetic and deductive piece *Qutadeghu Bilig* [Wisdom of Royal Glory] was completed in A.H. 462 (1069). As a chamberlain, he dedicated his work to the Kashgar ruler Bughra Karakhan Abu `Ali al-Hasan b. Sulaiman and therefore obtained the official name Hass Hajib (Fig. 4), meaning “top advisor”.

Qutadeghu Bilig is a kind of literature of wisdom which served as a Turco-Islamic mirror for the conduct of royal princes. Written in Uighur, it adopted Arabic rhythms and some Arabic and Persian loan-words. Like a normal classical Turkish poem, the work starts by praising Allah and Muhammad. It is the earliest monumental work in a Turkish language in the Islamic period. *Qutadeghu Bilig* has survived in three manuscripts: the Vienna MS written in Uighur alphabet was found in Herat in 1439 and is now kept in National Library of Vienna; the Cairo MS written in Arabic was found in 1896 in a library in Cairo; and the Ferghana MS written in Arabic was found in Neymongha, Ferghana, and Turkistan.

¹⁴⁴ Robert Dankoff, “Qarakhanid Literature and the Beginnings of Turco-Islamic Culture” in *Central Asian Monuments* edited by H.B. Paksoy (Istanbul: ISIS Press, 1992): 4.
www.ku.edu/carrie/texts/carrie_books/paksoy-2/cam4.html.

2.5.3 Uighur Muslims under the Kara Kitai (Western Liao Dynasty)

The Kitan, a nomadic Mongol people in northeastern China came onto the scene after the 10th century. In 947, the Kitan established their own dynasty named “Liao” which ruled areas from northeast China and part of the Mongolian steppe to the Hebei and Shanxi areas. However, this short-lived dynasty was soon under threat from the Jurchen in the north. In 1124, as the Liao Empire was conquered by the Jurchen, the Liao officer Yelu Dashi 耶律大石, after some disagreement with the Liao Emperor, gathered his own force and withdrew to Zhenzhou 镇州 in the west (today’s Mongolia). However, the Jurchen traced him to Mongolia. Yelu Dashi assembled his troops again to flee westwards. He wrote a letter to the Uighur Khaghan Bilege 毕勒哥 in Qocho asking permission to pass through their territory. The permission was soon granted and the Uighur Khaghan not only welcomed him but also gave him horses, camels and sheep for the journey. What is more, the Uighur Khaghan also promised that his posterity would submit to Yelu Dashi.¹⁴⁵ Yelu Dashi continued his journey of conquest to the West. His people were called Kara Kitai in Arab sources. Many small Muslim countries in Transoxiana fell under the Kara Kitai. In 1130, his troop arrived in Chu River (Amu Darya) and Yelu Dashi established his own empire, the “Western Liao” and called himself Gur Khan 菊儿汗.

2.5.3.1. Muslims in Turkistan under non-Muslim Rule

The Chinese historical text *Liao Shi* [History of the Liao Dynasty] vol. 30 does make reference to the founder of Western Liao -- that is, Yelu Dashi -- but the information only covers the early stage of his political career. The Persian historian Juvaini in his *The History of the World Conqueror*¹⁴⁶ provides some extra information on the conquests by Yelu Dashi in Central Asia. Since Juvaini’s work was compiled a

¹⁴⁵ *Liao Shi* Vol. 30. [History of Liao].

¹⁴⁶ ‘Ala-ad-Din, ‘Ata-Malik Juvaini, *History of the World Conqueror*. Translated from the Text of Mirza Muhammad Qazvini by John A. Boyle, Vol. 1 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958): 354-361.

century later than the founding of the Western Liao Dynasty, some confusion of names did occur in his work.

The Western Liao was established *vis-à-vis* the Karakhanid Kingdom, and the new target of Yelu Sashi was the Karluk tribe in the Eastern Karakhanate. In 1131, the Kara Kitai troops captured Balasaghun, and the Eastern Karakhanate became subject to the Western Liao. Following this victory, Yelu Dashi continued to attack the Western Karakhanate. His troops defeated the Karakhanids in Karshgar, Yarkend, and Khotan, and the rest of Karakhanate in Transoxiana then came under attack.

In 1141, conflict arose between the Karluk, the military class, and the court of the Karakhan Mahmud. Mahmud Khan appealed to the Saljuqid Sultan Sinjar in Transoxiana for military assistance and the Karluk appealed to the Gurkhan of the Kara Kitai. Yelu Dashi wrote to Sinjar asking him for tolerance towards the Karluk. Surprisingly, Sinjar refused Gurkhan's appeal and in return asked him to become a Muslim. The insulting reply invoked a fresh military invasion of Transoxiana by the Kara Khitai. As a result, Saljuq's army was completely defeated, and 30,000 Muslim soldiers fell in the battle. Mahmud Khan fled from his city which was then occupied by the Kara Kitai. The Gurkhan's army went on occupying Buhkara and Khorezmia.¹⁴⁷ The Western Liao now became the overlord across Central Asia., and the Eastern and Western Karakhanates, the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho and Khorezmia all became subject to the Western Liao Empire.

2.5.3.1.1. Religious Tolerance at the beginning of the Gurkhan Rule

Yelu Dashi was an idolater or infidel in the eyes of the Muslims. His religion was probably a kind of tribalised Shamanism as Chinese historical sources indicated. The *Liao Shi* [History of the Liao] describes that before his military campaign to the west, "Yelu Dashi sacrificed a black bull and a white horse in order to worship the heaven and

¹⁴⁷ Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*, 325-326.

earth and his ancestors.”¹⁴⁸ This ritual was also practiced by his officers at the point of taking military actions. This form of traditional tribal ceremony together with drum-beating and flag-raising was performed at the time of a national crisis.¹⁴⁹ Black bull and white horse symbolize the origin of the Kitai race as its oral tradition tells: a young boy on a white horse met a young girl on a black bull. The two married and had eight sons who later became the head of eight Kitai tribes. Therefore, these two animals, a black bull and a white horse represent also their ancestors. What Yelu Dashi and his officers engaged in was thus simply ancestor worship. Chinese sources of the Song Dynasty noted that the Kitai liked to worship devils and the Sun.¹⁵⁰ In addition, the Kitai were also partially influenced by Turkic elements.¹⁵¹ When the Kitai migrated to the Yellow River region, they were gradually converted to Buddhism.

As Yelu Dashi conquered Central Asia and East Turkistan, where Islam had been the state religion for more than a century, the Muslims in these areas had to submit themselves to a non-Muslim ruler, or in their eyes, an infidel. In the meantime, Qocho where Buddhism still dominated also fell under the Western Liao. Therefore religious issues became complicated. Most Khitai people had already accepted Buddhism, although their tribal religious practices were still maintained. Among the Kitai army, there were not only the Kitayans, but also Chinese and Mongols. The Kitai employed many Chinese in their service. Many Kitayans including Yelu Dashi himself could speak Chinese.¹⁵²

During the course of their military campaign in Central Asia, the Kara Kitai killed many Muslims and their Imams, destroyed their mosques and tombs. Sometimes whole villages were slaughtered. This caused great fear among the Muslims at the beginning of Gurkhan's rule. However, after the conquest, the Kara Kitai rulers realized the importance of religious tolerance. They therefore adopted a lenient policy towards the peoples in their empire. The Gurkan allowed those conquered countries to exist as they

¹⁴⁸ *Liao Shi* vol. 30.

¹⁴⁹ *Xin Wudai shi* [History of the New Five Dynasties]

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Jiu Tangshu* Vol. 199

¹⁵² *Xin Wudai shi* and *Liao Shi*, vol. 30

were, but they were required to pay taxes to the Western Liao. As a result, the Islamic court could still function according to the Sharia to deal with religious affairs such as collecting religious tax, handling civil affairs like marriage and divorce, solving disputes, etc. As for the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho, Yelu Dashi was very friendly towards it and exercised only indirect control over it, because the Uighur Khaghan once welcomed and supported him as he passed through their land. Khorazmia and the Saljuq Dynasty in Central Asia were also subjugated to Western Liao. Within the empire, there were different ethnic peoples with different religious backgrounds, and at the beginning, all religions including Islam, Nestorian Christianity, Buddhism, etc. could survive. In Kashgar at this time, there was a Christian Bishop See.¹⁵³ Many languages such as Chinese, Kitan, Uighur, Arabic and Persian were also used as official languages. The Empire employed many Muslims in their service.

2.5.3.1.2. Küchlüg, the Persecutor of Muslims

This religious tolerance came to an end when Küchlüg 屈出律 usurped power in Western Liao. Kuchlug was a Naiman ruler of Kara Kitai. Since the Naiman tribe was one of the few Nestorian Christian tribes in the Steppe, Küchlüg was originally a Nestorian Christian. *Liao Shi* named him “The King of Naiman”.¹⁵⁴ He was the son of the Naiman ruler Tayang Khan 太阳汗. After his father died, he fled to his uncle Buiruq. Upon Buiruq’s death, Küchlüg joined Toqto’a of the Merkit. In 1208, as Toqto’a was killed by the Mongols, Küchlüg together with some of his followers, struck out on the road for Beshbaligh, and from thence he came to Kucha, where he wandered in the mountains without food or sustenance, while those of his tribe that had accompanied him were scattered far and wide. He finally fled to the Gurkhan of the Kara Kitai in 1208.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Barthold, *Zur Geschichte des Christentums in Mittelasien bis zur Mongolischen Eroberungen*. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1901): 58

¹⁵⁴ *Liao Shi*, Vol. 30.

¹⁵⁵ Juvaini, *History of the World Conqueror*, 62.

According to Juvaini's record, as Sultan Muhammad Khorazm-Shah began to revolt against the Gurkhan, the princes in Qocho also responded in revolt. Küchlüg took the chance to show off before the Gurkhan by promising him that he would gather his forces to assist the Gurkhan. The Gurkhan, after being deceived by Küchlüg's words, presented Küchlüg with many gifts and bestowed upon him the title "Küchlüg Khan". Küchlüg's name was soon popular around the region and he succeeded in gathering his own forces which soon became a huge army. Küchlüg soon plotted against the Gurkhan by asking the Sultan's army to make a pincer attack on the Gurkhan. Küchlüg made an oath to the Sultan that if the Sultan was the first to conquer the territory of the Gurkhan, the Gurkhan's entire kingdom would be surrendered to him and if Küchlüg took the lead, then all the territory to the River of Fanakat should be his. But the war resulted in the victory of the Gurkhan.¹⁵⁶

However, the Gurkhan in his course committed excesses against his people and destroyed their homes. This aroused great resentment among the population. Küchlüg by taking advantage of the emotional crises of the population captured the Gurkhan and put him into prison. He subsequently seized the kingdom and its army,¹⁵⁷ and Küchlüg became the ruler of Western Liao in 1313.

The fate of Muslims in the Western Liao soon changed as Küchlüg assumed power. Küchlüg took Qunqu, the maiden of the Gurkhan to wife. However, Qunqu who happened to be a Buddhist persuaded Küchlüg to give up his Christian faith and become a Buddhist. Küchlüg then abandoned the Christian faith. According to Juvaini, the injustice, oppression and cruelty began as Küchlüg and his army plundered and trampled on the people in Kashgar, most of them Muslims, and devoured the crops of the peasants and consumed them with fire. The people were left in hunger.¹⁵⁸

Küchlüg began to attack Khotan (Yutian) where he commanded the people there to abjure Islam, giving them three choices: adopting Christianity or Buddhism; or putting

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 63-64.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 64.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 65.

on the garb of the Kitayans. The Muslims in Khotan chose to wear Kitayan garb instead of changing their religion. Muslim prayers were forbidden; their schools were closed and destroyed. The peak of this persecution was reached when all the imams in town were asked to wear Kitayan garb and to assemble on the plain. Küchlüg asked them to debate with him on the issue of religion. Imam ‘Ala-adin Muhammad of Khotan ventured to come out and dispute with Küchlüg. Being furious about the accusations of the imam, Küchlüg crucified the imam upon the door of the Islamic college right after severe torture.¹⁵⁹

Küchlüg’s cruel rule was soon threatened by the Mongols. Chinghiz Khan set out to attack the countries of the Sultan and also dispatched a group of his soldiers to remove Küchlüg from power in 1218. Küchlüg immediately fled, but the Mongols pursued him to a valley where Küchlüg was finally captured by hunters there. These hunters handed Küchlüg over to the Mongols who later beheaded him..

Chinghiz Khan gave permission to Muslims to resume their recitation of *takbir* and *azan* and caused a herald to proclaim in the town that each should abide by his own religion and follow his own creed.¹⁶⁰ The Mongol army continued their victory in Central Asia and East Turkistan. The region of Kashgar and Khotan as well as all territories of the Sultan thereby became subject to Mongol rule.

2.5.4 Uighur Muslims under Mongol Rule

In 1209, the *idi-qut*¹⁶¹ of the Qočo Uighur Kingdom was subjugated to Chinghiz Khan. Qočo under the Western Liao was already a subjugated country. From 1209 to 1275, the Mongol exercised suzerainty over Qočo. They sent their own governor

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 66.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 67.

¹⁶¹ Idi-qut: the Uighur called their ruler idi-qut, meaning the “lord of the fortune”.

Darugbachi 达鲁花赤 to oversee the political, economic and military situation in Qočo which was at that time only a quasi-independent state.

2.5.4.1. Religious Plurality in the Initial Period of the Mongol Rule

After Chinghiz Khan attacked the Western Liao, he gave permission to all religious adherents to continue practicing their own religion. At the beginning of Mongol rule, this kind of tolerance was still maintained by the Mongol ruler. Therefore, there appeared under the Mongol Empire a religious plurality. In various Uighur regions, Buddhists, Muslims, Nestorian Christians plus traditional Shamanists all enjoyed a religious stability. The Uighur region at this time could be divided into three parts according to religious practice. In the south of the Tianshan Mountains, Muslim Uighurs were still the dominant inhabitants, whereas on the northern side of the mountain range, there lived Nestorians and traditional Shamanists. South of the Tarim Basin, Buddhism continued to flourish in Qočo. At this time, Khotan was still a Buddhist-influenced country although Islam dominated the area from the 11th century. The Buddhist scene was described by the Yuan envoy to foreign countries Zhou Zhizhong 周致中 in his *Yi Yu Zhi* [Records of Foreign Regions].¹⁶²

The co-existence of all religions was witnessed by the Franciscan missionary William of Rubruck as he passed through the Uighur lands. He saw both Nestorians and Muslims in their cities. Meanwhile, he also described the idolator's (probably Buddhist) temples.¹⁶³

¹⁶² Zhou, Zhizhong. *Yi Yu Zhi* [Records of Foreign Regions]. Edited by Lu Junling. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981): 15. (元)周致中,《异域志》,陆峻嶺校注,北京:中华书局,1981.15页.

¹⁶³ Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 137.

2.5.4.2. Uighur Muslims under the Chagatai Khanate (1225-mid 13th century)

After the death of Chinghiz Khan in 1227, his empire was divided among his sons Ögödei and Chagatai. Ögödei received most of the Mongol Empire, whereas Chagatai controlled Transoxiana and Turkistan. The Uighur lands fell under Chagatai's rule, as the Khanate of Chagatai extended, according to Juvaini's description, from Besh-Baligh to Samarqand,¹⁶⁴ an area populated mostly by Turkish Muslims at that time.

Chagatai was very strict in abiding by the Mongol law known as "Yasa" which Chinghiz Khan laid down and charged him with administering. Yasa was a set of regulations which governed the Mongol Empire. Since the rules gave detailed descriptions of certain way of practice in daily life, it caused Muslims some problems in implementing the Yasa. For instance, the Mongol rule forbade the killing of animals by slitting the throat which was a Muslim practice when slaughtering animals. Rather, according to the Yasa, animals should be slaughtered by cutting the belly. In the meantime, washing in running water, which Muslims do for ritual cleansing before prayers, was also forbidden by the Mongol laws which were laid down according to Mongol traditional practices. For a time, Muslims were afraid to slaughter sheep openly and were forced to eat carrion.¹⁶⁵ Muslims in Chagatai Khanate were under pressure and they were on the brink of rebellion against Chagatai.

Chagatai died in 1241. Succession struggles among his sons and grandsons weakened the Khanate. In the following years, the Chagatai Khanate began to have conflict with the other Mongol Khanate, now the Yuan Dynasty. In 1320, the Chagatai Khanate was divided into the eastern and the western parts. The area of the Rivers Ili and Chu, Tianshan and Tarim Basin belonged to the East Chagatai Khanate, while Samarqand and Transoxiana were included in the West Chagatai Khanate.

¹⁶⁴ Boyle, translator, *History of the World Conqueror*, 271.

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 272

2.5.4.3. Islam in the East Chagatai Khanate (748/1347-956/1570)

The Eastern Chagatai Khanate was also called Moghulistan, meaning “the land of the Mongols). The term “Moghul” was used to refer to the Mongols who were separated from the Mongols of Mongolia proper and who lived in close proximity to the Muslims in Turkistan and Central Asia. The East Chagatai Khanate was a politically unstable Khanate. One native writer from Turkistan in the first half of the 14th century penned a few lines on Turkistan in his day, “Since the region has been devastated by the arms of the Tatars, it is inhabited only by a scanty population”.¹⁶⁶ After the death of Chagatai, the power struggle among his children became intense. This caused tension between the East Chagatai Khanate and the Mongolia proper.

In terms of religion, this period saw the Turkicisation and the Islamization of the Mongols in the East Chagatai Khanate and the process of Islamization was closely related to the rise of Tughluk Timur (reign 1347-1362).

2.5.4.3.1. The Conversion of Tughluk Timur to Islam

A history of the East Chagatai Khanate and of Tughluk Timur was written by a contemporary historian Mirza Haider who both witnessed many events in the Khanate and collected accounts from many oral traditions. According to his *Tarikh-i-Rashidi*, Tughluk Timur was brought to the city of Aksu when he was 16. Two years later, in Aksu he met the Sufi missionary Shaikh Jamal-ud-Din who originally came from Bukhara. Tughluk was feeding his dog and then entered into a conversation with the Shaikh. He reportedly asked the Shaikh: “Are you better than this dog or is this dog better than you?” The Shaikh answered: “If I have faith, I am better than this dog; if I do not have faith, this dog is better than I am.” Tughluk was very impressed with his answer. The Shaikh continued to explain to Tughluk that faith is the duty of a Musulman.

¹⁶⁶ N. Elias, ed. *A History of the Moghuls of Central Asia Being the Tarikh-I-Rashidi of Mirza Muhammad Haidar*, Dughlat. Translated by E.D. Ross. (London: Curzon Press, 1895): 57.

Tughluk replied: “If I ever become Khan, and obtain absolute authority, you must, without fail, come to me and I promise you I will become a Musulman.”¹⁶⁷

The Shaikh died before Tughluk became Khan. Before his death, the Shaikh entrusted the mission to his son Mauláná Arshad-ud-Din. When Tughluk rose to the throne, Mauláná Arshad-ud-Din came to remind Tughluk of his promise. Tughluk welcomed him and professed Islam. In the following days, Tughluk’s officers also did the same. Actually, some of them had already converted secretly to Islam. However, there was only one officer who refused to accept Islam. He gave one condition, that is, if Mauláná Arshad-ud-Din could overthrow one of the strong men he brought, then he would become a believer. The wrestling started. Mauláná Arshad-ud-Din, though small, struck the man full in the chest and the man fell senseless. The crowd applauded and on that day 160,000 persons cut off the hair on their heads and became Muslims collectively. Tughluk Khan and other new converts soon received circumcision.¹⁶⁸

2.5.4.3.2. Turkicization and Islamization of the Mongol

During the East Chagatai period, the Mongols on both sides of the Tianshan Mountains were experiencing two kinds of change. First, their way of life was gradually being transformed from a nomadic life-style to that of a sedentary world. Secondly, as the Mongols lived among the Uighur who already a sedentary people and who had built up their civilization for the past centuries, the influence of the Uighur on the Mongols was significant. A process of Turkicization among the Mongol gradually took place.

However, the process of Islamization of the Moghul in East Chagatai was sometimes forced by the ruling Khans after Tughluk. The grandson of Tughluk, Muhammad Khwaja Khan forced the Moghul to wear a turban, which was a symbol of being a Muslim. Whoever refused would have a horseshoe nail driven into his head. Such

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 13.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.* 14-15.

a treatment was very common according to Mirza Haidar.¹⁶⁹ In the meantime, mosques were built.

Among the Uighur themselves, two cultural regions co-existed at this time: the Islamic cultural area with Kashgar as its center and the Buddhist cultural area based in Turfan. Islam was already widely spread within the East Chagatai Khanate, and the Arabic language was used by many writers in the Islamic cultural area. In the Buddhist cultural area, Old Turkish (Uighur) was still employed. The Uighur culture actually influenced the Mongol Empire at large. The Mongol adopted the Uighur alphabet to write their language. When Tughluk's son Khizir Khwaja came to reign, he forced the whole Khanate to use the Arabic language.

In the same time, another form of language developed. It is called the "Chagatai" language which was a mixture of the languages around the Tianshan Mountains and in the area of Transoxiana. The structure of the language is based on the Uighur language and its vocabulary includes Uighur, Arabic, Persian and Mongol. Later, many of the Uighur masterpieces were written in the Chagatai language. However, it still belonged to the Turkic language family, and thus the Uighur element is seen as dominant in this language.

2.5.5. Islamic Theological Education

Islam in East Turkistan and Transoxiana was spread not only through military conquest, but also through trade. In addition, the role of Sufi missionaries was crucial in terms of spreading Islam among the local folks and nomads. Military expeditions decided the religious status of states, whereas among the nomadic folks in Central Asia and Turkistan, Sufi missionaries shuttled from one nomadic group to another.

As Islam was gradually established in the East Turkistan and Central Asian areas, formal Islamic theological schools came into existence. Juvaini tells us that in the middle

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 58.

of the 13th century, two outstanding schools were built in Bukhara for training Muslim students: The Madrasa-yi-Khani and the Madrasa-yi-Mas'udiya. The former was even sponsored by the Mother of the Mongol Kublai Khan, Sorqotani Beki; the later was directed by emir Mas'ud Beg from 1255 to 1289. As Juvaini wrote:

In each of which (these schools) every day a thousand students are engaged in profitable studies, while the professors are the greatest scholars of the age and the wonders of their day. And indeed these two buildings with their lofty pillars and trim courts at once adorn and dignify Bokhara, nay they are an ornament and delight to all Islam.¹⁷⁰

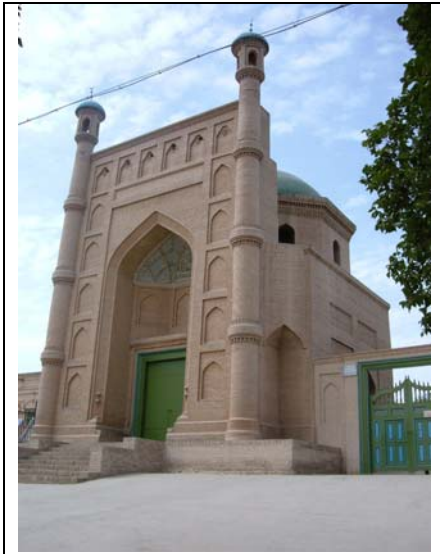
As also mentioned before, in Khotan there was also an Islamic school directed by Imam 'Ala-adin Muhammad of Khotan. This very imam ventured to debate with Küchlüg, but was crucified by him right in front of the door of his college.

This indicates that Islam already took root in these areas and the status of this religion was so systematically and politically established that Islamic theological education was already in agenda. At college, students learned not only Islamic theology but also western, especially Greek philosophy. The curriculum also included language courses, for instance, Arabic, Persian and Urdu.

2.5.6. East Turkistan Becoming Islamized

During the Mongol period, Islamic territory stopped at East of Kucha and in the Turfan Buddhist Uighur Kingdom, the front line was strong. However, this scene changed when Tughluk Timur Khan professed Islam.

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 108.



The Mosque in Kucha. Fig. 5.

Kucha was traditionally a Buddhist country. For a long time, Kucha had remained a Buddhist frontier, even if it was close to the Karakhanid territory. However, then Sufi missionaries reached Kucha. The Sufi missionary Maulana Ashad-ud-Din who converted Tughluk Timur to Islam also went to Kucha for further mission work. Tughluk sent Ashad-ud-Din to Kucha to set up an Islamic centre which was directed by Ashad-ud-Din himself. The Ashad-ud-Din family was given privileges and began to have a hereditary system. Muslim missionaries in Kucha soon gained success which aroused conflicts between Muslims and Buddhists. Buddhist adherents rose up against the Muslims, but their rebellion was soon put down by the army of Tughluk Timur. Thousands of Buddhist believers were driven out of Kucha, and the city became a Muslim city (Fig. 5). Buddhists fled to Yutian and then to Afghanistan. Buddhist sculptures and paintings in the grottos of Kizil were destroyed.

Tughluk Timur was the first Mongol ruler to become a Muslim. A large number of Mongols within the Khanate followed suit. After the death of Tughluk Timur, his successors continued to proclaim Islam. His son Khizir Khwaja Khan (reign 791/1389-806/1403) conquered Karahoja and Turfan from 1392 to 1393 and forced the inhabitants there to become Muslims. The region was then called *Dar al Islam* (the Seat of Islam). The region was then divided up in the manner of the ordained Holy Shariat. In the following years, Khizir Khwaja Khan attacked Hami and enforced Islam in that area, too.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*, 52.

With the conquest of Kucha and Turfan by the East Chagatai Muslim army, the last two Buddhist fortresses of East Turkistan collapsed. Although in the early 15th century, Buddhists were still present in Turfan, their control of the region was gradually being replaced by that of the Muslims (Fig. 6). According to *Ming Shi* [History of the Ming Dynasty], in 1408, the



The Mosque of King Amin in Turfan. Fig. 6

tributary envoy from Turfan was still a Buddhist monk.¹⁷² But by 1465, the ruler of Turfan was called Ali Sultan¹⁷³, obviously a Muslim ruler.

3. Conclusion:

The Uighur were known in ancient times as an Eastern Asiatic nation of Turkish race. Up until the 9th century, the Uighur were nomadic people within the Tiele tribe moving about in search of pastures in north-west of the Orkhon River in Upper Mongolia. Sources on the early history of the Uighur are found mainly in Chinese historical annals. Information in the Old Uighur language is only available in the form of inscriptions. During the 7th and 8th centuries, the Uighur grew to be a powerful nation and established their own Khanate on the Orkhon River, which was named “the Orkhon Uighur Khanate.” Chinese sources of the Tang period give ample accounts on this Uighur Khanate which maintained a close relationship with the Chinese Tang court.

The Uighur have been a religious people throughout the history. However, they were never attached to only one religion. In the course of history, Uighur belief systems and patterns experienced a series of changes.

¹⁷² *Ming Shi*. Vol. 329.

¹⁷³ *ibid.*

Shamanism was the primal religion of the Altaic peoples including the Uighur. Before the 9th century, Shamanism was very prominent in Uighur life, influencing their military campaigns and later their politics. The Shaman performed rituals and healings on various important decisive occasions in the history of the Uighur nation. However, the influence of Shamanism declined, although was not eliminated, when the Uighur Bögü Khaghan was converted to Manichaeism while he was in the Chinese city of Luoyang in the year 762. This was a crucial event in Uighur history. When Bögü Khaghan returned to Upper Mongolia with a few Manichaean monks, he caused the whole nation to accept Manichaeism. For the first and the only time in the history of the world, Manichaeism, a world religion with its origins in Persia, became a state religion. The main missionaries of this religion were Sogdian merchants.

Uighur migration in the 9th century caused a dramatic change of their life-style and also paved the way for their assimilating into different religions. The conquest of the Orkhon Uighur Khanate by the Kirghiz in 840 scattered the whole Uighur tribe, beginning a period of repeated migrations. The Uighur was divided into three main groups fleeing in different directions. As they finally settled down in different areas, they no longer remained in union in terms of religious belief.

The two groups of the Uighur who migrated to the Hexi Corridor and to the Turfan region respectively, soon adopted Buddhism, a religion which had been in existence in these two areas long before the arrival of the Uighur migrants. The Uighur in Turfan conquered the Tibetans there and re-established their Uighur Kingdom of Qocho in the 9th century. Before the conquest of the Uighur in the 9th century, the Turfan region was already a multi-cultural melting place where East Iranian, Indian, Tocharian, as well as Siberian nomadic cultures met. Buddhism was the main religion there. Turfan was also a melting pot of religious culture and arts. After the 9th century, a Turkicization process took place in the oasis of Turfan. With the Uighur conquest of the Turfan region, the Khaghan family continued to profess Manichaeism as the state religion although local folks practiced Buddhism. Limited and small traces of Nestorian influence were also seen in the region.

Manichaeism was still a dominant religion in the early part of the Qocho Kingdom and lasted for another century. This is testified to by the Manichaean paintings and manuscripts discovered in the ruin of Qocho. However, Buddhist influence overshadowed Manichaeism in the end. During the 10th century, Turfan was in general a Buddhist kingdom with a splendid high Uighur civilization. The second Uighur migrant group moved to the Hexi Corridor. There they encountered Buddhism which was brought there either by Tibetans or Chinese.

Another area in the south of the Tarim Basin was Yutian (sometimes called Khotan). The indigenous people were Tibetan folk mixed with quasi-Mongolian people. They seemed to have been influenced strongly by Indian culture. The main Uighur penetration into Yutian occurred when the Muslim Uighur conquered the area in the 11th century.

Traces of Uighur Nestorians have been found in the Turfan Basin. However, the influence was very limited, and was only heard during the Mongol period when Uighur Nestorians became Mongol officers. In the northern and eastern part of China, Nestorian tombstones with Old Uighur inscriptions have been unearthed.

The last migrant group went far west near Kashgar and joined the Karluk there. In the tenth century, they established the Karakhanid Kingdom, the first Turkish Kingdom to embrace Islam. The early history of the Karakhanid Kingdom is very vague, but fragmentary information has been preserved. There was only one local historian from Kashgar who wrote a history of that town, in a work entitled *Tarikh Kashgar*. Unfortunately, the work was lost but part of it was copied by a 14th-century historian Jamal Qarshi into his *Mulhaqat al-Surah* [Supplement to the Dictionary “Surah”]. The advent of Islam in Karakhanid Kingdom occurred in the 10th century but, again, how Islam was introduced to the region is still far from clear. Oral traditions do exist and these were later recorded in the *Tazkirah Bughra Khan*. Historical sources seem to contradict each other as to the names of the early Karakhans as well as the conversion of

Bughra Khan. In spite of this confusion, the main clue points to the major figure being Bughra Khan. It was he who became a Muslim and he who enhanced the status of Islam to a state religion.

The power of Islam was strengthened by the Karakhanid's military campaigns against its neighbouring countries in the name of the Jihad, and the Muslim conquest therefore began. The Karakhanids conquered the Buddhist kingdom of Yutian at the beginning of the 11th century. Chinese sources on the Karakhanid and Eastern part of the Tarim Basin from the 10th century to the Mongol period are limited. Only Arab and Persian sources provide some detailed information.

The process of Islamization also gave rise to a Turco-Islamic culture, and many Uighur literary masterpieces were produced during this period. The most representative of these in the 11th century are: *Diwan Lugat at-Turk* [Compendium of the Turkic Dialects 《突厥语大辞典》] by Mahmud al-Kāshgari and *Kutadghu Bilig* [Wisdom of Royal Glory 《福乐智慧》] composed by Yusuf Khass Hajib of Balsaghun in 1069. Arabic also became an official language of the Karakhanid Kingdom.

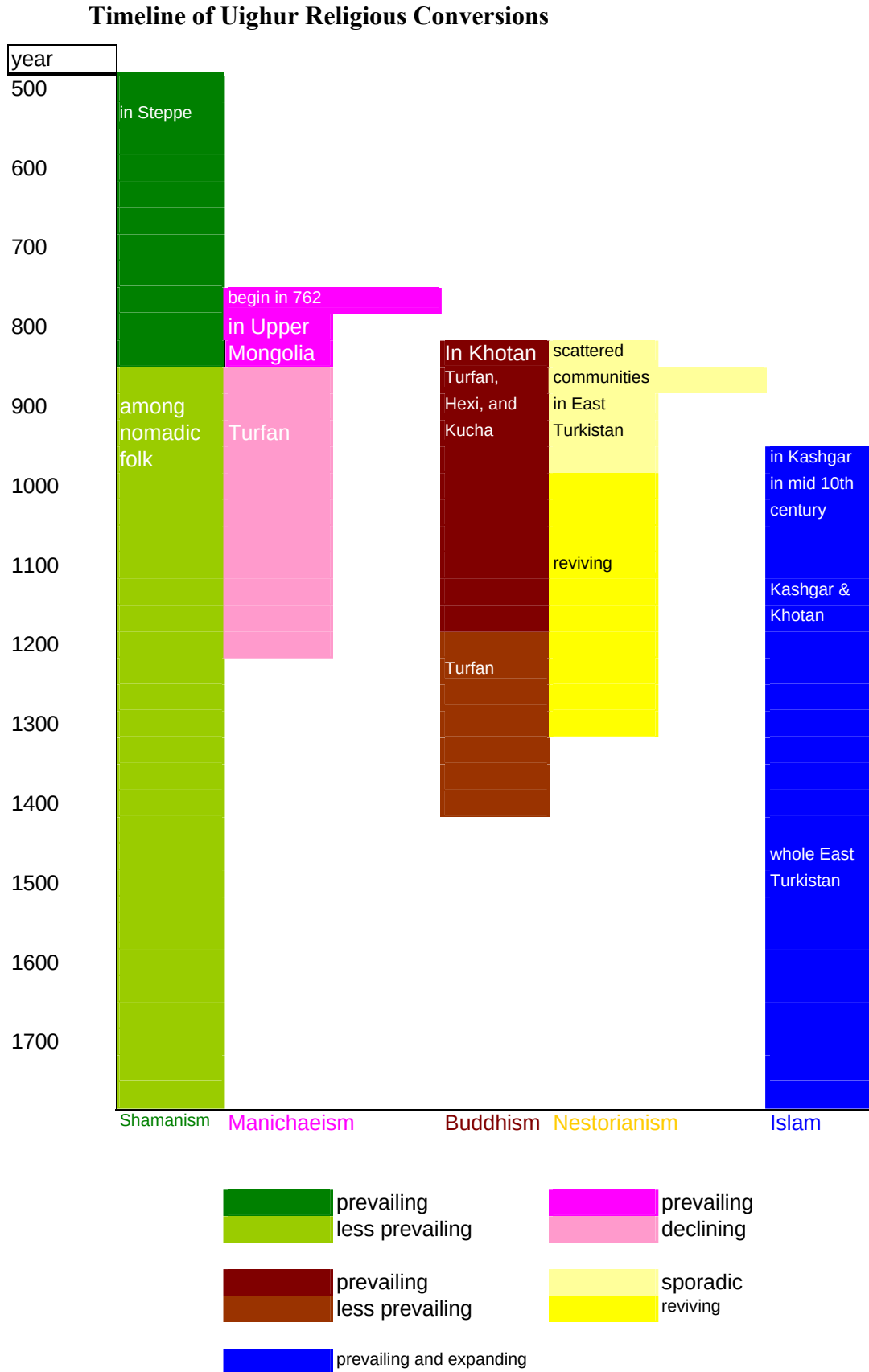
The Karakhanid Kingdom was destroyed by the newly-arisen power in the Steppes: the Kara Kitai who conquered the Karakhanid Kingdom and the area of Transoxiana in the 12th century. Muslims in these areas became for a short period subjects of non-Muslim rulers. However, the Kara Kitai Dynasty was short lived, and soon they were swept away by the Mongols. Chinghiz Khan granted the areas of former Karakhanid Kingdom and Transoxiana to his son Chagatai, and Muslims enjoyed a period of tolerance under Mongol rule. After the death of Chagatai, his Khanate was divided into Eastern and Western parts.

The status of Uighur Muslims changed dramatically at the time of the East Chagatai Period as their Khan, Tughlug Timur, became a Muslim in the middle of the 14th century after being encouraged to the religion by Sufi missionaries. Tughluk Timur

Khan soon put forward a nation-wide conversion movement and called on all the Mongols in his Khanate to profess Islam. Thus the Mongols in these areas underwent a process of Turkicization and Islamization, although the later process was sometimes forced. The successors of Tughluk Timur were all devout Muslims. They began to launch attacks towards the East and finally the last two Buddhist fortresses of Kucha and Turfan were conquered by the Chagatai descendents. In the middle of the 15th century, East Turkistan became a Muslim territory. The Uighur were thus finally united in their religious belief.

The spread of Islam among the Uighur was on the one hand pushed by Muslim military conquest, and on the other hand realized by Sufi missionaries and Muslim merchants. Islamic areas were expanded among loose Turkic communities as Muslim merchants exchanged goods with them. Although Islam has remained the religion of the Uighur, the ancient Turkic shamanistic traditions still influence the Muslim Uighurs in the way of Islamic mysticism or pseudo-mysticism even today.

The impact of Uighur religious tradition is deeply felt and expressed through arts as portrayed in grotto paintings, sculptures and religious writings. Most of the Uighur religious heritage has been preserved in artistic forms. As the Uighur finally became Muslims, Islam was deeply assimilated into their culture and life-style, and it has become equated with the Uighur identity and ethnicity.



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