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THE OLD UYGHURS BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

Abstract: *The fragments of Old Uyghur manuscripts discovered between 1902 and 1914 by the four German Turfan expeditions in the Turfan oasis are among the oldest written sources of the Turkish languages. Only the inscriptions in Old Turkic Runic script are older. They date from the end of the 7th century. Among the more than 40,000 fragments of manuscripts and block prints preserved in the Berlin Turfan collection there are more than 8,000 items in the Old Uyghur language. This paper shows the great variety of content of these fragments and presents their importance as the main source of information concerning the social and economic life of the Old Uyghurs in the West Uyghur Kingdom (from around the 9th to the 12th cc.) and under the Mongol rule (from around the 13th to the 14th cc.) and their religions, i. e. Manichaeism, Church of the East and, above all, Buddhism.*

Keywords: *Old Uyghurs, Eastern Turkestan, West Uyghur Kingdom, Mongol rule, Manichaeism, Church of the East, Buddhism*

The fragments of Old Uyghur texts discovered mostly by the Russian and German expeditions in Eastern Turkestan are among the oldest written sources of Turkic. They date from the 9th to the 14th centuries. The almost complete manuscript of the Old Uyghur version of the Sutra of Golden Light as one of the latest copies, preserved in St. Petersburg, even dates from 1687.

Only the inscriptions in Old Turkic Runic script preserved on monuments which were first discovered in Northern Mongolia are older. They date from the end of the 7th century. Our esteemed colleague Professor Doctor Sergey Grigoryevich Klyashtorny made a significant contribution to the discovery and study of the Old Turkic epigraphic monuments.

In this paper I will refer to the great variety of content of the Old Uyghur fragments and present some ideas related to the title of my paper: the Old Uyghurs between East and West.

What was the situation in the Turfan region when the Old Uyghurs arrived there around 840 and established their West Uyghur Kingdom?

In 640, at the moment when the army of the Chinese Tang dynasty captured Turfan — named Gaochang at this time — an official decree was issued in order to compile household registers. As a result we know that 8,046 households with 37,738 inhabitants and 4,300 horses were registered, living in 3 prefectures, 5 sub-prefectures and 22 cities.

Some years earlier (in 628, 629 or 630) the famous pilgrim Xuanzang was informed by the then-king Qu Wentai, who was an active Buddhist himself, that there were several thousand Buddhists living in his realm.

Xizhou, as Turfan was titled during the Tang rule, was among the most important trading centres on the famous Silk Road at that time, with a historically grown multi-cultural population. The high rate of Chinese among them shaped public life and the administration. The official language was Chinese.

Before dealing with the Old Uyghur staff in detail, I would like to stress that the results of the German Turfan expeditions would not have been possible without the support from their Russian colleagues, not only with regard to their organization and preparation, but also during the campaign and afterwards.

Today only in the Berlin Turfan collection around 8,000 Old Uyghur fragments are preserved. More than 4,000 are preserved in St. Petersburg, as I was just able to learn from the colleague in charge of the collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts (Russian Academy of Sciences), Olga Lundysheva. Further Old Uyghur fragments are spread in the Central Asian collections worldwide, amongst them, of course, also several important collections in China with more recently excavated manuscript finds.

They are the main and primary source of information concerning the social, economic and, above all, religious life of the Old Uyghurs in the West Uyghur Kingdom (from around the 9th to the 12th cc.) and during the time, when they were under Mongol rule (from around the 13th to the 14th cc.).

A high percentage of texts is of religious, i. e. Manichaeen, Nestorian, but first of all Buddhist content.

In contrast to the stone inscriptions in Runic script the most important writing material for the Old Uyghurs was paper and, of course, it was also paper which was used for producing the copies of the texts which were initially carved upon wooden blocks. The production of block prints came into use during the Mongol period. Among the more rare writing materials attested in the Berlin collection are birch bark (most surprisingly attested among the Old Uyghur documents), silk, ramie, cotton cloth and wood. Textiles as writing surfaces are mostly attested among the temple banners.

Furthermore, it has become clear that the famous wooden stake MIK III 4672 (T I D 91)¹, octagonal and pointed at the lower end, is an architectural element, i. e. a foundation pile (Old Uyghur: *šat ıgač*) made of poplar wood with the donor's inscription commemorating the construction of a Buddhist monastery. It was found in Kočo. Thanks to detailed studies by Takao Moriyasu [Moriyasu 2001, p. 149–223] and the late James Hamilton this inscription could be dated to the year 1008. Further wooden elements from the Turfan expeditions, some even

¹ This object is described in the catalogue of the Old Turkish manuscripts preserved in the Berlin Turfan collection [Raschmann 2009a, p. 34–35: № 288].

with scribblings (like MIK III 307), are preserved in the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin-Dahlem and at present a project sponsored by the Gerda Henkel Foundation is dealing with the “Medieval pre-Islamic Architecture in Qočo on the Northern Silk Road”.

We should also pay attention to the numerous Old Uyghur inscriptions on wall paintings. Often they were written down by pilgrims, some of them even in alliterative verses [Zieme 1985, p. 189–192; Zieme 2013, p. 181–195]. Mostly they do not refer to the content of the paintings, but they often deliver important information concerning the life of the laypeople and contribute to our knowledge of the Old Uyghur onomasticon.

One example is the also well-known wall painting with the depiction of scenes from the hells, excavated in temple no. 8 of Bāzāklik. The existing inscriptions on it do not only tell us the names of two Uyghur monks, one of Sanskrit origin, i. e. Dharmaśrī (*darmaśiri*) and one of Chinese origin, Taypodu (*taypodu*), but also mention the Old Chinese name of the location called Bāzāklik by the Uyghurs: Nišūng [Matsui 2011, p. 141–175].

The remains of Manichaean literature in Manichaean, Uyghur and Runic script from the Turfan oasis testify that the Manichaean religion remained alive among the Old Uyghurs even after the decline of their East Uyghur Kaganat and their spread westward into the Eastern Tianshan region, where they established their West Uyghur Kingdom. As it is well-known, the Sogdians played an important role in the transfer of the Manichaean religion to the Old Uyghurs. Documents preserved only as photographs in the Arat estate in Istanbul offer new details. For example, I would like to refer to an unpublished document here. It is preserved as a photograph only in the Arat estate in Istanbul under the Arat signature 109a,b/024 (*U 9340).¹ The site of excavation is unknown. There are two different texts present on this fragment, which are written by different hands. Of special interest is the text of side A which provides us with another attestation of the term of Sogdian origin *nwyd̐ma* < Sogd. *nwyδm*’ (*niwēδmā*) “invitation” [Sims-Williams/Durkin-Meisterernst 2012, p. 128b] in an Old Uyghur document. This term is attested in the Old Uyghur “Erlaß zur Wirtschaft manichäischer Klöster” [Moriyasu 2004a, p. 39–147]. Accepting Peter Zieme’s identification of *nwyδm*’ (*niwēδmā*) as a loanword, Takao Moriyasu explained it as an invitation for a meal addressed to the Manichaean clerics issued by high-ranking lay people [Moriyasu 2004a, p. 93, note 63a]. The document on hand is a register of delivered *liv* — a loanword from Chinese (**liap*) which means “food products” [Clauson 1972, p. 763; Zieme 1981, p. 252; Moriyasu 2004a, p. 69]

¹ A detailed description of this fragment is included in the catalogue of Old Turkish manuscripts preserved in the Berlin Turfan collection [Raschmann/Sertkaya, in print].

without any specification. This delivery is the result of a *yarlig* (“decree, order”) issued by a person whose name is only partly preserved at the beginning: *tāŋri* or *tāŋrim* — probably a high standing person or even a member of the ruler’s family. The amount of the delivered food on a certain number of consecutive days is registered. At certain positions of the register names of the persons who issued the “invitation” are mentioned. What is remarkable here is that all these persons have, as far as their names are preserved, elements which demonstrate their affiliation to the higher ranks in the society: *totok*, *tarhan*, *kunčuy*, *tāŋrim*. With regard to the above mentioned details the text of this document is very close to the related paragraph in the “Erlaß” and may contribute to the understanding of the attitudes within the Manichaean communities during the period of the West Uyghur Kingdom.

Under the influence of the Chinese, but also the Tokharians who were resident in this area for a long time, Buddhism spread among the Old Uyghurs in the West Uyghur Kingdom. Even if there is evidence that for instance the ruin α in Kočo functioned as a Manichaean monastery in 983, the above mentioned stake inscription clearly manifests the construction of a new Buddhist monastery sponsored by a high ranking Uyghur couple in 1008.

With regard to the just mentioned transformation stage, let me mention here a very remarkable Old Uyghur manuscript in the Berlin collection. It is the so-called “Manichaean Pothi book”, 40 folios and fragments of a folio are preserved.¹ Due to the content it is a so-called “Sammelhandschrift” — a collection of different Manichaean texts written in Manichaean script. The Pothi book format was known so far only from Buddhist texts. The first folio, which is preserved as well, has an illuminated front page. On the verso the “Great Hymn to Mani” starts, followed by a confession text and several Manichaean stories. Besides the format, there are two other special features: Firstly, there is a great amount of Buddhist terminology present in the Manichaean texts. And secondly, the second part of the text of the “Great Hymn to Mani”, the so-called “Hymn to Father Mani” is bilingual: Tokharian B/Old Uyghur (f. 25 verso — f. 27) [Clark 1982, p. 145–218; Pinault 2008, p. 93–120; Wilkens 2008, p. 209–231; Clark 2013, p. 112–120, p. 137–186].

Well known Old Uyghur Buddhist translation texts from Tokharian are the *Maitrisimit* and the *Daśakarmapathāvadānamālā* [Elverskog 1997, p. 139–145 (no. 81), p. 42–46 (no. 23)].

The strengthening of the relations between the West Uyghur Kingdom and Dunhuang, not only an important trading center on the Silk Road, but also the

¹ These fragments (M 1144, (MIK) III 189, (MIK) III 8260, U 75–U 77, U 79–U 110) are described in detail in the Catalogue of Old Turkish Manuscripts preserved in the Berlin Turfan collection [Wilkens 2000, p. 38–46, 318–338, 368–372].

Buddhist center of Northern China, highly promoted the influence of Chinese Buddhism. We have clear evidence for it, for instance the system of transcription used for Chinese terms in the Old Uyghur Buddhist texts at this time is based on the Hexi dialect, which was dominant in the Dunhuang area during the 10th century.

The Buddhist texts make up the majority among the Old Uyghur texts in the Berlin Turfan collection. Besides being aware of some randomness which is always present in the case of excavations, by identifying and analyzing the preserved texts we learn about the importance and role of different Buddhist schools spread among the Old Uyghur Buddhists. The number of fragments belonging to one and the same text or dealing with one and the same subject shows a strong influence of the cults developed around Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara as well as of the Pure Land School (also known as Amitābha Buddhism). Attested texts of the Vijnānavāda School trace back to the strong influence coming from Dunhuang.

At a rather late stage and as a Tibetan and Mongol influence, we can detect Tantric texts. Many of the Tantric text fragments stem from block prints and, concerning the book format, we find a lot of folded books amongst them.

Quite a small group of Old Uyghur manuscripts which belong to the Christian church of the East was excavated with only few exceptions in the small towns Bulayık and Kurutka in the so-called Turfaner Vorberge. According to their finding signatures some other were found in Kočo. Most of the Christian texts preserved in the Berlin Turfan collection are written in Syriac. Syriac was the official language of the Church. But there are certain hints, like the usage of Middle Persian loanwords, the presence of stories with an Iranian context and an excavated Middle Persian Psalter in Kočo, which led to the assumption that Christianity probably entered the Turfan oasis by the influence of Iran, and especially Merw as one of the centers of Christian missionary activities of the Church of the East. The Old Uyghur Christian texts excavated in Bulayık may give evidence that the monastery was used by Old Uyghur Christians at a late stage. Among the Old Uyghur Christian texts [Zieme in print] there are of course fragments of religious texts, like for instance a prayer book. A marriage blessing in Old Uyghur was excavated in Kurutka. Preserved documents and letters with a Christian background inform us about the life within the Christian communities [Raschmann 2009b, p. 408–425]. For example, one so far unpublished photo from the Arat estate in Istanbul (Arat signature 188/39: *U 9350) shows the fragment of an Old Uyghur contract for the rental of a piece of land for cotton planting (Cf. l. 2–3 *käpüz [tarıǵu yer kärgäk] boltı*). The contract dates from the period of the West Uyghur Kingdom. It is well-known from further preserved Old Uyghur documents that relatives, especially brothers, shared larger units of land and each of

them had the right to sell or lease his piece of land. But, as it is known, Buddhist or Manichaean monasteries also leased out land [Moriyasu 2004a, p. 102–103]. The rental payments meant an important source of revenue for the monasteries. The administration was handed over to the so-called *iš ayguči*, low ranking officials and mostly laypeople (secular people [Moriyasu 2003, p. 069]) that were in charge of the rental. In lines 8, 10 and 13 of the document in question we read the Sogdian loanword *swgb' r* (*sökβār*; *Old Uyghur writing: swkv' r*). According to the Sogdian Dictionary of Gharib it is the term for “monk” in Sogdian Christian texts [Gharib 2004, p. 365b: 9054 *swqb' r* C, S monk; Sims-Williams 2014, p. 126 (E 30/1 = n 220, f. 1), p. 192 (Glossary to the Sogdian texts in Syriac script)]. Even though some text is lost because of the document’s damage in this area, it seems to be clear that the Christian monks are directly involved in the lease of land during the period of the West Uyghur Kingdom. From the structure of the preserved Old Uyghur lease contracts we are able to conclude that the Christians monks are the recipients of the agreed rent for the piece of land in question. As I have mentioned before, the fact that Buddhist and Manichaean monasteries leased out land which was under their possession is already known from other sources. But here, for the first time, we find at least a hint that it was probably also common practice in the Christian monasteries during the period of the West Uyghur Kingdom.

Strengthened efforts in the field of research on the Old Uyghur documents formed the basis for the establishment of a relative chronology for this group of texts. Among the most important markers for the periodization are specific technical terms and loanwords [Moriyasu 2004b; Matsui 2006a, p. 44].

From these terms and loanwords, but also from the preserved bilingual Chinese/Old Uyghur contracts [Moriyasu/Zieme 1999] it became obvious that the system of administration as well as the legal and tax system in the West Uyghur Kingdom was built up on a Chinese model of the Tang and Song. Terms and institutions like for instance *baš bitig* (< Chin. 元券 *yuan quan* or 元契 *yuan qi* “original document, contract”), *ulug berim* (< Chin. 大稅 *da shui* “great tax”), *tintsui* (< Chin. 田租 a kind of land tax), the unit of weight *šig* < Chin. 石 *shi* and also the term *kuanpu* as a means of payment (< Chin. 官布 *guanbu* “official cloth”) show clear evidence.

Even though the system of taxes and labor services was not changed fundamentally during the Mongol period, the terminology was changed. For the late period (13th–14th cc.) a lot of Mongolian terms in the field of taxes are attested in the Old Uyghur documents, like *alban*, *kalan* and *kupčir*. But, Mongolian loanwords can be detected also in other fields, like among the legal terms (*yasa*, *yosun*) and concerning the social structure (*daruga*, *nökör*). Chinese and Persian sources of this period show an identical system of taxes and labor services,

which was regarded as clear evidence for the unification of this system within the whole Mongol Empire. The units of measurement and their scales had been standardized as well [Matsui 2004]. That the Old Uyghurs played an important role in the building up of the administration system of the Mongols does not need to be repeated here.

A new question is under discussion: who wrote the Sogdian texts discovered in the Turfan area? Not only the presence of a great number of Old Ughur personal names, but also some features in the Sogdian language may refer to Uyghur scribes [Reck 2013, p. 84–99].

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