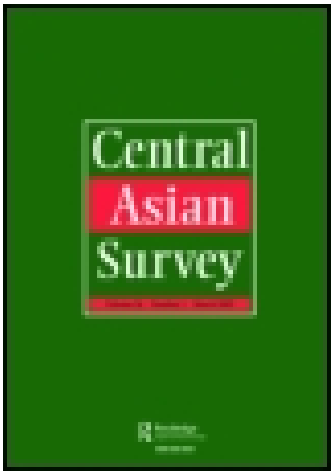
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A survey of Uyghur documents from Turpan and their importance for Asian and Central Eurasian history

DOLKUN KAMBERI

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Introduction

Since the end of the 19th century, numerous cultural relics and historical documents have been unearthed in the Turpan Basin in present-day northwestern China. Among them are medieval Uyghur manuscripts that provide invaluable historical material for scholars studying the history, literature, language, religion and arts of Uyghur civilization. The unearthed Turpan manuscripts and the discoveries of the ancient mummified human remains from the Tarim Basin in recent years have rekindled scholarly debate about Central Asian history in general and Uyghur history in particular. Coverage of these discoveries in the international media has captured not only the popular imagination but also the interest of scholars now engaged in heated debate about the origins and development of the Indo-European Uyghurs—the single most populous group in China's Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region.

But who are the Uyghurs? Where is the Turpan Basin? Where else have the Uyghurs lived in Central Eurasia? How, when, and why did they accept Buddhism, Manichaeism and, finally, Islam? By what names did neighbours to the east and west identity them in history? When did they become a part of China? How do we develop Uyghur historiography and how best to integrate newly unearthed archaeological evidence into Asian and Central Asian history? These important questions address such key historical issues as the spread of religious belief across cultures, migration across all of Eurasia, and cultural exchange over many centuries that linked the peoples of the vast Eurasian steppe.

Five hundred million years ago, there was only the land of the Tarim and Yarish in the centre of Eurasia, surrounded by the waters of an inland sea. After a crustal upheaval in the Paleozoic Era, the waters of the sea gradually disappeared. Approximately at the end of the third period of the Cenozoic Era,

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what was formerly the sea floor protruded and became the great mountain ranges that today surround the Tarim and Yarish [Jungarian] Basins.

According to Uyghur legends, this pre-historic period was 'the time when the three mountain ranges gripped the three basins'. Today, the Uyghur homeland encompasses the Tarim, Yarish and Turpan Basins. The three basins are surrounded by some of the world's highest mountain ranges: the Qurum (Karum), Qara-Qurum (Kara-Korum) and Altun mountains in the south; the 'roof of the world' Pamirs in the southwest; the Altay mountains of the north; and the Tängri (Tianshan) ranges which bisect today's Uyghur region. The latter separate the Yarish (Jungar) Basin of the north from the Tarim Basin of the south. The Turpan Basin lies to the east of the Tangri mountain ranges, contiguous to the famous Buddhist caves of Dunhuang.

Early in the century, German scholars published numerous scholarly works on Central Asia and on medieval Uyghur manuscripts in particular. The latter included such works as *Uigurica, Turkische Turpantexte*, *Deutsche Turpan Forschung*, *Berliner Turpantexte*, and the like. These works and research materials established the foundation for the field of Turkology; at the same time, they also stimulated explorers to search Central Asia for artefacts of past civilizations, resulting in a century of Silk Road archaeological exploration.

Building upon this base, in the past few decades the study of Turpan Uyghur manuscripts and Dunhuang documents has reached new heights. According to the character and specific achievements in archeological field work, I have divided a century of archeological explorations in the Turpan and surrounding area into four distinct periods. The first was between 1886 and 1935; the second from 1935 to 1955; the third 1955 to 1976; and the fourth from 1976 to 1996. During these four periods, archeologists discovered a range of manuscripts at Turpan and other sites written in a variety of ancient scripts. Among the most important were well-preserved ancient texts in Sanskrit, Sogdian, Karoshti, Khotan-Tumshuqese, Tokharian A, Tokharian B, and many medieval Uyghur texts as well (Kamberi, 1996).

Since 1975 I have been involved in archeological field work in the Turpan Basin—a rich archeological site where extreme aridity has preserved many important artefacts that include naturally mummified human remains, art work in bronze and gold, textiles, and numerous petroglyphs. It is also the site of discovery of numerous medieval Uyghur documents, charting both religious practice and economic development in the region. Religious documents include works of Uyghur Buddhist and Manicheaen literature, fragments of Manicheaen stories and poems, and Buddhist sutras, sutra colophons, dedicatory odes; there is also much evidence of socioeconomic development, including fragments of contracts, receipts for loans, official orders, government documents and the like. I have deciphered and translated many of these manuscripts, noting that each has its own characteristics in terms of ideology, language and culture. These materials provide first-hand data for the further study of Asian and Uyghur history.

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The Uyghurs

The basic meaning of the name Uyghur is unity, but it may also be translated as union, coalition or federation. The name appeared first in records of the Orkhun Kök Türk inscriptions and in early Uyghur. Later forms of the name can be found in medieval Uyghur script, the Manichaean's Sogdian script, and the Arabic script of the Qarakhanid and Chagatay period. Apart from these Inner Asian forms, the name can also be found in different periods and diverse texts in Chinese, appearing in more than 100 transliterated forms. The latter include such forms as *Die, Chidie, Hu Saka/Scythian, Hun, Uysun, Dingling, Qangqil, Sogdian*, and *Tokharian*.

The lands inhabited by the above groups were called the Western Regions, or the Western States in ancient Chinese records. Because of their location on the ancient trade routes between East and West, connecting the Greco-Roman world with Indian Buddhist culture and with the Central and East Asian traditions, the region that includes Turpan was very prosperous. Passing merchants' caravans and warrior parties made stops for extended periods of time, leaving behind their legacy of material wealth and cultural practices. In the process, they imparted to the region a cosmopolitan character, marked by linguistic, racial and religious tolerance. Uyghur culture and art at Turpan and other Silk Road sites thus developed not only on the basis of their own steppe traditions but was also influenced by cultural exchange between the East and West.

One of the most interesting facets of early Uyghur civilization is the development of a sophisticated urban culture. Although little attention has been paid to Uyghur urbiculture in scholarly research, there is, in fact, a good deal of documentation as well as archaeological relics that provide us with evidence of urban society. One of the earliest written texts referring specifically to cities in the early medieval period is the *Maitrisimit*, the Uyghur author of which wrote:

> Bu buyan ädgü qïlïnch küchintä tängridäm chogh yalïnlarï ashïlzun üstälzun ulusïmïn balïqlïrïmï közädü ichtin sïngar … migän bolmazun tashtïn sïngar yaghï böri bolmazun qamughun tïnlïghlar mängilig bolzunlar.
>
> With aid from the power of merit and virtuous doing, I hope that the dignity of the highest lords will be greatly raised. Let them protect our state and cities; let us live without internal misery, or the external world-like enemy; let all creatures be happy. (Kamberi, 1995)

Another important written source on Uyghur cities is the 11th-century encyclopedia *Diwan Lughatït Türk* by Uyghur scholar Mäkhmud Qäshqäri. In this work, the author writes that the Uyghurs have a 'long history of an urbanized lifestyle'. Under his entry for the name 'Uyghur', he records that the Uyghurs built five cities after Alexander the Great left his footprints in Central Asia; he indicated the position of these cities on his famous map of Asia. The following direct translation from the encyclopedia mentions the source of his information, a man of princely rank who acquired his information from his father, the Khan:

> Uyghur is the name of a state. It has five cities. These cities were built after Zulqarnäyin* reached an agreement with the Turk Khaqan. Nizamidin Israfil Tuqan Tigin, the son of

> Mäkhmud Chaqïr Tutqa Khan, told me what [information] he acquired from his father and said: When Zulqarnäyin arrived near the Uyghur state, the Turk Khaqan sent four thousand troop against him. The feathers of the troop's helmets are like the wings of an eagle. They shoot arrows forward as well as they do backward. Zulqarnäyin was amazed by their skill and said: 'They could find food for feeding themselves without depending on others; no bird and beast would escape from their hunting. Whenever they want food, they can hunt to eat'. Since that time the state was called Uyghur. (Kamberi, 1995)

*In Central Asia, Alexander the Great is known as Iskändär Zulqarnäyin.

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Clearly, by the 11th-century the Uyghurs were known as a Central Asian power. The encyclopedia notes that they have a 'strong army' with 'excellent military equipment', and are known to be 'courageous and skillful in battle'. These elements were no doubt one reason why Qäshqäri felt secure in describing them as a 'completely independent' people since the time of Alexander the Great. Interestingly, the words ascribed to Alexander have taken on new significance in light of recent archaeological discoveries: many of the recently unearthed mummies of the Tarim Basin wear hats trimmed with goose feathers, corroborating Qäshqäri's account of helmets decorated with feathers, as cited above.

Mäkhmud Qäshqäri also discussed the Uyghurs of his own era. He divided them into two groups according to their religious beliefs. Those living south of the Tängri [Tianshan] in the capital cities of Qäshqär and Balasaghun had already converted to Islam, as had Qäshqäri himself. Those living north of the Tängri, where the most important cities were Bäsh Balïq and Ïdqut, followed different faiths, including Buddhism, Manichaeanism and Nestorian Christianity, although the latter group was small. Because these Uyghurs were not Muslim, he defined them as 'the most infidel' of people. Specifically, of the contemporaneous northern Uyghurs, he wrote:

> The State of Uyghur has five cities. Their people are the most ferocious infidels, and the most skilful shooters. Those cities are Solmi, which Zulqarnäyin let them build, and Qochu, Jan Balïq and Yengi Balïq. (Kamberi, 1995)

More evidence of Uyghur urbiculture comes from the important observations found in the report of the medieval Arab traveller, Tamim Ibn Bahr, who visited Uyghur cities at the end of the 8th century. Of the Uyghur capital city he wrote:

> This is a great town, rich in agriculture and surrounded by rustaqs [villages] full of cultivation and villages lying close together. The town has twelve iron gates of huge size. The town is populous and thickly crowded and has markets and various trades. Among its population, the Zindiq (atheist, non-Muslim) religion prevails. (Minorsky, 1948)

One of the most important written descriptions of Uyghur urbiculture and civilization comes from a Chinese traveller, Wang Yande. Wang visited the Uyghurs in 981 CE and submitted a written report to the Song dynasty court upon his return. Because his account is written in great detail, presented in a coherent and clear writing style, his is among the most valuable written sources on 10th-century Uyghur culture. As he neared the town of Qumul (Hami), he wrote:

> We next passed through the I-li Wang-zi (Ellig Prince's) domain. There (we came to) the Helochuan (river). It is the place where the Uyghur princesses of the Tang period resided (618–907 CE). The foundation of the city wall still remains. There are lots of hot springs. Tradition has it that formerly the Kitan were herding sheep for the Uyghurs, and the Tatars were herding cattle for the Uyghurs. When the Uyghurs migrated to Gan Zhou, the Kitan and Tatar struggled for supremacy and fought among themselves. (Izgi, 1972)

Wang continues his account with a vivid depiction of a flourishing medieval Uyghur culture, describing an urban environment, textile production, irrigated fields with varied agricultural products, and many orchards. He notes that there is no poverty, suggesting good government and strong leadership in this affluent urban centre:

> The river which comes out of the Ching-ling mountain is led to encircle all the national city (capital) and to irrigate farms and orchards and to run water mills. This place produces the *wu-ku* (five grains) but no *ch'iao mai* (buckwheat). Rich people eat horse (meat). The rest eat beef and wild geese. In their music they use many *kung-hou* (ancient musical instrument). They produce sable skin pelts and cotton and embroidered-design blossom cloth. In this land there are no poor people. They give relief to those who lack food. People mostly live long, generally over a hundred years. There are not any at all who die young … We rested at the *Kao-tai* (high platform) monastery. Their king (Arslan Khan) cooked lambs and horses. The King, the princesses, and the heir-apparent each breed horses. They graze them in a flat valley which stretches out more than one thousand *li* (one li equals half a kilometre). They distinguish their herds by the colour of the coats (of the horses). Nobody knows the number of the herds (innumerable herds). The spread of the Pei-t'ing (Bäsh Balïq) valley is several thousand li. There are found eagles, kites, falcons and vultures. There is much nice grass, below which there are pebble-rats (gophers?) as big as hares. Birds of prey catch and eat them. (Izgi, 1972)

In addition to the textual evidence discussed above, information on Uyghur urbiculture also comes from the work of the medieval Uyghur thinker, Yüsüp Khas Hajip. This author of poetic dramas devoted the longest chapter of his work, *Outadghu Bilik*, to discussion of the qualifications and values of Uyghur leaders and professionals, confirming the existence of a rich urban culture in Inner Asia (*Outadghu Bilik*, 1984). From this and other texts noted above, it is evident that the medieval Uyghurs built cities and developed a distinctive cultural life, earning a place of importance within Central Asian history.

Archaeological evidence is another category of proof for the vitality of Uyghur urbiculture. Fieldwork in the present-day oasis of Turpan has deepened our understanding of medieval urban life through the discovery of new artefacts and written records. The results of some of this recent excavation work are summarized in the following sections.

Historic Turpan and environs

The name *Turpan* means settlement in medieval Uyghur. Turpan was once a strategic town on the Silk Road noted for its Buddhist culture during the medieval period. Chinese and Uyghur texts from the pre-Qangqil, Qocho,

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Western Uyghur, and Idïqut Uyghur Khanate all refer to the Turpan Basin of Uyghuristan. During medieval times, Turpan was the capital city of the Idïqut Uyghur Empire and one of the centres of Uyghur culture. The territory of this kingdom varied over time, but the city and its immediate environs remained the political and cultural centre of Uyghuristan throughout the 15th century. The important Bezeklik Buddhist cave complex, about 46 kilometres northeast of present-day Turpan and 3 kilometres from Murtuq village, is evidence of the area's importance as a religious centre. At Bezeklik, there are 84 cave grottoes carved into cliffs above a stream which flows along the floor of a deep gorge.

Turpan is also the name given to the Turpan Basin, located northeast of the larger Tarim Basin. The eastern reaches of the Tängri (Tianshan) Mountains are to the north of the basin which is 240 kilometres wide from north to south and 300 miles in length. The basin holds East Asia's lowest point, Ayding Lake, whose surface is 154 metres below sea level, second only to that of the Dead Sea in Jordan. The basin is also the hottest place in East Asia. Although it is extremely arid, with less than 16 millimetres of annual rainfall, it has plentiful water resources for irrigation as a result of rivers that run into the depression from the surrounding mountains. Since ancient times, this water has been accessible to cultivators via a unique irrigation system of deep, interconnected underground channels called *kariz*. The steady water supply has sustained Turpan oases' population whose cotton and grapevines have long been among the famous products of this productive area.

Human settlement of Turpan can be traced back to as early as 10,000 BCE, the late Paleolithic and Neolithic periods. Numerous stone implements have been unearthed to the west of the Yarghul River, in the desert northwest of Astana, and along the southern rim of the Turpan Basin. Archeological discoveries confirm ancient records that the Turpan region was settled and developed into a powerful kingdom by the Qangqil peoples in the first millennium BCE. They were followed by many kingdoms founded by such people as the Tölis, Turan, Hun, Jurjan (Ruan Ruan), Turk, and Uyghur peoples. Archeologists have uncovered numerous burial sites, Buddhist and Manichaean temples, and documents written in various scripts throughout the Turpan Basin. The burials, in particular, have yielded a fascinating array of items, including unique pottery vessels, sophisticated bronze weaponry and gold ornaments, and advanced woven woollen fabrics. Some of these are artefacts of the Qangqil, forerunners of the Uyghur who established their capital at Yarghul (referred to as Jiaohe by the Chinese), about 10 kilometres west of today's Turpan. Situated on a narrow plateau that rises some 30 metres above the river beds on either side, the plateau has a surface area of 49,000 square metres. This ancient city was inhabited from the 3rd century BCE to the 15th century CE and is now a UNESCO world heritage site.

In the beginning of the 5th century CE, the centre of political power in the Turpan area was shifted from Yarghul to the ancient city of Idiqut, by the king of the Qü family. Idiqut was a walled city, with an outside circumference of over 5 kilometres. The extant city walls are approximately 12 metres thick at the base

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and 11 metres high. The city is divided into three sections: the palace city; the inner city; and the outer city. From its founding in the 2nd century CE to the 10th century CE, it remained a strategically important site. Artefacts and textual sources indicate that it was an international, cosmopolitan centre with diverse peoples, religions and a well-developed culture. This is illustrated clearly by the rich and remarkable finds from graveyard sites near Idiqut. More than 450 graves have been excavated from the famous Astana and Qara-Khoja sites, from which over 10,000 cultural relics have been unearthed. Among the extraordinarily well-preserved artefacts from Astana are wooden figurines, paper documents, paintings on silk, a bouquet of funerary flowers made of silk, plaited silk slippers, a variety of dyed or embroidered silks, and bags of millet, wheat, cotton seed and fruit. Items of daily use include a wooden ruler, writing brushes, Persian silver coins, Roman golden coins, the dried remains of boiled dumplings, nan (flat bread that remains a staple of the diet today), dough patties, and flower-shaped cookies. All these different objects show various aspects of the social life and culture of the ancient Uyghur people (Kamberi, 1996).

Of special importance are the many written texts unearthed at Turpan. Many of these documents are so well preserved that even today they remain clear and easy to decipher. The majority of the manuscripts unearthed from Bezeklik were written in the old Uyghur language. Some are written in Chinese and others in Sanskrit, Sogdian, Tanghut and Tokarian. Among those I personally uncovered in Turpan is a Manichaean scripture written in the Sogdian language. The paper size is 268 cm $\times$ 26 cm. There are two musical figures painted in colour at the centre of the scroll. This is one of the most valuable historiographic treasures of Manichaeaism in the world, and I have described it in detail elsewhere (Kamberi, 1984).

Uyghur manuscripts of the Turpan area

Uyghur manuscripts unearthed from Turpan concern the religious, economic and cultural interaction of medieval Uyghurs with the peoples of neighbouring countries during the period from the 8th to the 11th centuries. These documents, detailed below, reveal that the Uyghurs continued to develop as a civilization and to expand their role as the leading cultural influence along the whole of the Silk Road in Central Asia.

Among the most important caches of such texts is the Buddhist site at Bezeklik. The name itself means 'a place being decorated'. 'Being decorated' can also be extended to mean 'wall painting' or 'the place with art' in medieval Uyghur. Many Bezeklik documents are preserved in museum collections in Germany, France, England, Japan and Russia; special items are today housed in Beijing, Urumchi and Turpan. These documents can be divided according to the medium used into two categories: written manuscripts and woodblock prints. The manuscripts are further divided into those written on one side and those written on both sides; printed documents are one-sided. There are also a few pages of Uyghur Buddhist sutras interspersed with Sanskrit, and small fragments

with the Chinese translation added. The following is a brief classification of these Uyghur documents unearthed from Turpan, in Uyghur script and Uyghur language, based on the medium used.

I. Woodblock Print Documents (one side only).

A. Printed in Uyghur script.
B. Printed in Uyghur script with Chinese characters inserted.
C. Printed in Uyghur with Brahmi script inserted.

II. Written Manuscripts.

A. Formal style (Sutra writing style).

1. Written on one side (on thick or thin paper, in formal Uyghur script).
2. Written on both sides.

(a) Both sides in formal Uyghur script.
(b) One side in Uyghur, the other in Chinese.

B. Cursive style.

1. Written on one side.

(a) Written on thin paper in very cursive Uyghur script.
(b) All written in formal Uyghur.

2. Written on both sides.

(a) Both sides in Uyghur.
(b) One side in Uyghur, the other in Brahmi.
(c) Both sides in Uyghur, interspersed with Chinese.
(d) One side in Uyghur, the other in Chinese.
(e) Both sides in Chinese, with Uyghur written in columns in between.

The Chinese characters inserted in some texts are simply numbers in most instances, but some fragments with interspersed Chinese are the remnants of an Uyghur-Chinese dictionary. The Brahmi text consists of phonetic notes on Sanskrit Buddhist terms. Of the documents with writing on both sides, the content of the Uyghur text differs from the Chinese text. Documents in Chinese with Uyghur inserted in columns in between also have different contents on each side.

The unearthed evidence shows that the Idiqut Uyghur Kingdom was not only a Buddhist cultural centre, but was also a printing centre, producing literary works and documents of many kinds. Wooden movable type for medieval Uyghur discovered at Turpan dates back to the Idiqut Uyghur Khanate (605–1250 CE). The wooden type and the many documents from Turpan validate the theory that block printing was primarily a Uyghur or Central Asiatic invention (Carter and Goodrich, 1988). It is also significant that almost all the block printing of medieval Uyghur found thus far is used for Buddhist documents. These have been found at almost every site excavated in the Turpan Basin.

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Toqsun, at the western edge of the Turpan oasis, is the western-most point at which Central Asian block printing has been discovered.

Scholars know that the invention of printing from carved blocks made it possible to produce multiple copies of a text with only one set of carved blocks, thus increasing the quantity of books produced and facilitating the dissemination of knowledge. Turpan played an important role in extending knowledge of Buddhism as well as disseminating Buddhist learning for hundreds of years, proving that '… there was during the early Mongol times in the monasteries of the Turpan region a highly developed and widely extended printing industry, which had very likely been going on for several centuries' (Carter and Goodrich, 1988).

These early Uyghur printing techniques as well as the literature and the documents themselves provide historical evidence for social activities in medieval Uyghur cultural development. The texts can be classified into general categories based on their contents: (A) Buddhist manuscripts; (B) Literary documents; and (C) Manichaean manuscripts. Examples from each of the categories are detailed below.

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(A) Buddhist manuscripts

Although the early Buddhist teaching of Gautama Buddha (also known as Prince Siddhartha of the Sakya clan, and as Sakyamuni Sage of the Sakyas) probably began in the 6th century (C. 563–483 BCE), its oldest surviving remains and manuscripts are dated much later. The first independent evidence for Buddhism comes in the reign of the Maurya Emperor Asoka (273–232 BCE), whose stone inscriptions are the earliest Indian historical records. They mainly explain a benevolent creed which he called *dharma*, a word also used for Buddism. As the religion spread and developed, the belief in Maitreya, the future Buddha (or, the Buddha Yet to Come) emerged among many Buddhist communities. Among the important Turpan texts is a medieval manuscript in Uyghur, the *Maitrisimit*, which records the story of Sakyamuni anointing Maitreya as his successor. This document is also the oldest written source to suggest a specific age for the beginning of the Buddha's journey to enlightenment, as indicated in the following translation from the original text by the author:

Line 19: bu ödün ayaghqa tägimlig
Line 20: burkhan toquz otuz yashïnta kapilavas
Line 21: tu balïqtïn körünchüläyü ünüp nayanchan
Line 22: ögüz qïdïghïnta altï yïl alp qïlïshïgh
Line 24: ishläyür oghurda

> At the time that the respected Buddha was twenty-nine years old, he secretly went out of the Kapilavastu city, on the side of the Nairanjana River and practised his belief with devotion for six years … (Kamberi, 1988)

Other texts unearthed at Turpan indicate that medieval Uyghur Buddhist literature and art flourished during the period of the Idiqut Uyghur Khanate in

the Turpan Basin and spread throughout the Uyghur lands. These include Uyghur Buddhist literature, Buddhist sutras fragments, whole sutras, colophons, dedicatory odes, poems in praise of the Buddha, offering to the Buddha by sentient beings, as well as courteous Buddhist words that believers offered respectfully to the heavens. The two pieces of Buddhist writings selected here as examples were discovered in Turpan in the early 1980s. Both relate to teachings about the future Buddha, Maitreya.

The first item, which I have assigned the number 80 T.B. I, 598, consists of only one page with six lines of characters, comprising seven sentences. The paper size is 20.5 cm × 10 cm and the size of the script is 16 cm × 6.5 cm. The handwriting is ordinary, but the language is excellent. After deciphering these lines, it became clear that it was a Buddhist document, but it was unclear initially as to what sutra it might belong.

Further research, however, finally revealed that this page belongs to the third paragraph of the fourth *Saddharma* (Praising Maitreya), in the work *Vajracchedikaprajna Paramikta Sutra*. This medieval Uyghur version was translated from Sanskrit to Chinese by Fu Dashi, in the Liang Wudi period, 502–549 CE. The *Vajracchedikaprajna Paramikta Sutra* was translated into Chinese in several different versions. Three versions, translated by Kumarajiva, Bodhiruci, and Chen Zhendi in the period of the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420–589 CE), became known as the *Jingangjing*. In the Tang dynasty, new translations by Yi Jing and the monk Xuanzhang (Samszo) were known as the *Neng Duan Jingang Baropolomidojing*.

According to this sutra: 'All things are empty, illusory and without substance; what appears real is actual illusion.' It recommends one to 'extricate oneself from all of appearance' and become 'without abode', which means one should not rigidly cling to the 'real' world. Perhaps Uyghurs had received such ideas in the Idiqut Uyghur Khanate period, or earlier. The transliteration and translation of this fragment of the sutra reads as follows:

Transliteration in the first line. Translation in the second line.

1. (ülgüsüz) k(a) lplartïn[1] bärüki awant-lar tïltaghlar
1. Since time immemorial, predestined relationships were
2. igid saqïnch ärsär qaltï yawlagh yaghï täg ärür
2. wild fantasy and vain thought exactly like an evil enemy.
3. az amranmaq köngül ärsär aghulugh yïlanqa okhshayurc
3. A loveless and senseless heart is like a poisonous snake.
4. birök küsüsh-tä turup küsüsh-süz bulghalï usar
4. However, if one lives in an avaricious world without greed,
5. niz-wani-ta turup niz-waniqa yoqlunmasar
5. and lives in a vexed society uninfected by vexation,
6. yirtinchü üzä tayansar kkir-siz arïgh orunqa
6. standing firmly on the earth, one will reach the unblemished
7. timin ök tanuqlaghalï uyur nom khanïnïngätözin
7. pure land and immediately gain the body of the moral king.

This text is written in standard medieval Uyghur literary language. There is

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one Sanskrit loan word (kalp) which was commonly used in medieval Uyghur Buddhist documents, and there are three Sogdian loan words (awant, niz-wan, nom). These suggest that the piece was probably translated from the Sanskrit original or from a Sogdian text. The translator showed surprising skill, choosing words carefully to convey accurately abstract Buddhist philosophical concepts.

The second item, to which I have assigned the number 80 T.B. I, 596, consists of only three pages (numbered 596–1, 596–2, and 596–3). Each wood block printed page has five lines of medieval Uyghur script, with a few inserted Sanskrit characters. Because the three pages of the document come from different sections of the same sutra, I have selected only one page (596–1) for transliteration and translation, below. This page is on paper 28 cm × 11 cm, and the script is 19 cm × 7.4 cm in height.

Transliteration in first line. Translation in second line.

1. Bu anchulayu Kälmish-lä-gä yiti ärdini-
1. If one worships the Buddha using
2. lär tapïnsar udïnsar ol buyan
2. seven kinds of treasure, merits
3. ädgü qïlïnchï–nïng ülgüsin tägin
3. and good deeds would be measurable, but
4. ülgülägäli sanaghalï boghay … amita-
4. someone who respects the *Aparimitayuh*
5. ayusi sudur-qa tapïnmïsh udunmïs
5. *Sutra*, merit (would not be measurable)

From this single page, it appeared that the text was part of a postscript to the *Aparimitayuh Sutra*. The other two pages confirmed this assumption because of their content. One page states that if one respects the *Aparimitayuh Sutra*, that is equal to respect for all other Buddhist sutras. It even indicates that this Sutra can 'bring the dying back to life'.

The *Aparimitayuh Sutra* is called the *Maha-Aparimitayuh Sutra*, or the *Maha-sutra* in Sanskrit. In medieval Uyghur, the title was *Amita-Ayusi-Sudur*, and in Chinese it was known by several names, including the *Wulingshoujing*, *Dawulingshoujing*, *Dajing*, and *Dashuangjuanjing*. The Chinese version was translated by the Wei dynasty monk, Kang Sengyi during the Three Kingdoms period (220–265 CE).

This is one of the most important Sutras of the Sukhavati, or Pure Land, sect of Mahayana Buddhism. The story of the Sutra tells of a King named Dharma who became a monk. As a monk, he swore 48 vows, one of which was this: The creatures from 10 directions should believe in joy from the bottom of their hearts. One who wishes to be born in my country should obtain 10 *smrti* (memories). One who does not gain (this) level is one who will not reach the fruit of the Buddha (Kamberi, 1995). This monk finally became a Buddha called Aparimita. Because the land of this king who became a Buddha lay in the west, the sect based on his teachings became known as Sukhavati, the Pure Land or the Western Paradise.

The fragments translated above prove that this sutra was translated into Uyghur as early as the medieval period. And because the fragments include Sanskrit words inserted among the 15 lines of Uyghur text, it appears that the translator knew Sanskrit and most probably translated this from the original Sanskrit text.

Texts from Turpan and other archaeological discoveries in this century suggest that there were several thousand Buddhist monks in the capital of the Idiqut Kingdom.[2] These monks would have been responsible for the work of translation, and from the many fragments now collected from the Turpan area it is clear that virtually all of the *Tripitaka*—all the basic writings of Buddhism—were translated into Uyghur. Works for which fragments now exist include *Maitrisimit*, *Altun Yarug*, *Samso Acharining Tärjimali, Abidarim Koshvardi Sutra*, *Amitaba Sutra*, *Aryarajavavadaka Sutra*, *Mahamegha Sutra*, *Tishastwustik Sutra*, *Dashakrma Budaawtanamal Sutra*, *Mahamayuri Sutra*, and many, many others. This Buddhist heritage suggests an open, cosmopolitan life among Uyghurs at Turpan where learning and the printing of religious texts played an important role in medieval Uyghur urbiculture.

(B) Literary documents

The civilization of the medieval Uyghurs is reflected in the Buddhist religious literature that remains one of the civilization's most important legacies. Buddhist ideals are similar to those of other universal religions in that they include the teaching that there is a place of perfection, peacefulness, happiness, freedom and hope ahead in the future. Good deeds in this world mean a rebirth in the future. Many pious Buddhist believers at Turpan used various mediums to convey the idea of an infinitely merciful and kind future Buddha, Maitreya. As a result, many legends, myths, poetic eulogies, poetry, sutras, and Buddhist literary dramas about the future Buddha were created and/or recorded in Turpan, in various versions.

In particular, the manuscript of *Maitrisimit* written in Uyghur has been found in seven different versions in Turpan. Six of these were discovered by a German archaeological team at the beginning of the 20th century, in the Singgim and Murtuq areas of the oasis. The two versions unearthed at the former site are now known as the Singgim versions, while another three, from Murtuq, are called the Murtuq versions. The place where the sixth version was discovered remains unknown.[3] The most valuable version was discovered in April 1959 by a Uyghur villager, Yähya Rehim, from the Bashtura village in the Tömirti Unit (three villages consist of one unit in the Chinese administrative system), on the Tängri Tagh Commune, Qumul (Hami) District. The villager was herding sheep on a hill near Tömirti Unit when he found the Uyghur manuscript in a hole covered by stones. The manuscript had been wrapped in a felt blanket and then hidden in the hole. Both the blanket and the manuscript itself had started to decay. Yähya Rehim presented the invaluable find to Ismayil, director of the cultural station of Qumul at that time. The manuscript was then transferred to a team of

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cultural relic investigators and it is now preserved in the regional museum at Urumchi. I call this the Qumul version of the *Maitrisimit*.

No original version in Sanskrit has been found thus far, but according to the conclusion of each of the acts of the Uyghur version that have survived (Acts 1, 2, 3, 10, 12, 16, 20, 23 and 25), there must be a Sanskrit original. Specifically, in the text of this Uyghur version the following clearly written line refers to such an original:

> The *Maitrisimit* was translated from the Sanskrit into the Tokharian language by Aryachantri who is from Qarashähär city of Uyghuristan, and then recreated in the Uyghur language by Pirtanrakshit, who is from El-Balïq (Idqut?) city of Uyghuristan. (Author's translation)

Having compared the published texts related to Maitreya Buddha, I believe that the content, artistic language, magic and metaphor, conception, composition and quality of this version of the *Maitrisimit* are better than in any of the Sutras mentioned above. In particular, the writing style of the other versions does not compare to that of this Uyghur version. As further evidence, I have deciphered and translated a medieval Uyghur poem from among the medieval documents I discovered at Bezeklik. Currently preserved in Turpan, the original assigned number of the document, is 80 T.B. I, 522, and it is on paper that is 37.5 cm × 3 cm. The content is a rhymed quatrain with the fifth line in prose as a postscript. There is no date or author's name, but the poem conveys the character of medieval Uyghur folk poetry in its harmonious rhythm and rhyme. Quatrains in early Uyghur carry an initial rhyme, and an escape line rhymes at the end, as shown in the example below.

Rhyme pattern:

1. a . . . . . a
2. a . . . . . b
3. a . . . . . a
4. a . . . . . b
5. prose postscript

Transliteration in first line. Translation in second line.

1. özüng-ning ögränmish yandïrlarta
1. No matter what subject, study by your own process.
2. öglinä ädgü-ki-mä busugh silikil
2. Think more, be aware, do not be a show-off.
3. öngi-mä nägü-kim yanglar-ta öslü-
3. Be careful and steady, whatever you do engage in.
4. nchü-singä tägi anchulayu ol umuq-
4. That is the only way to be outstanding.
5. luq közüm birlä oqïp sanga ïdïm.
5. I read it with my hopeful eyes and send it to you.

This poem presents the kindly feelings of its author for his relative, probably someone who lives far away. The author not only greets him, but he also

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encourages him to study hard, giving him good advice and wishing him great success when he returns. The poem also seems to reflect the general attitude of the medieval Uyghurs toward learning. They believed that knowledge brought happiness as well as great honour, and thus they took education very seriously.

One extremely rare document unearthed at Turpan refers to the visual arts which were also highly prized among the Buddhist community at Turpan. A medieval Uyghur document today preserved in the Turpan museum records an order for receiving seven Buddhist portraits, including embroidered depictions of Vajrapani, Samantabhadra, Manjusri and others. Collections in various countries preserve many such Buddhist images, and portraits and wall paintings are still to be seen in many places in the Uyghur region today, but documents concerning their acquisition are quite rare. Reading and interpreting this single document thus contributes to the study of Uyghur Buddhist art, Uyghur paleography and processional performance.

As indicated in the tenth and eleventh lines of the translation, below, this document refers to an order for seven religious pictures. The short sentence, 'bu chuv tamgha minig ol', means 'this receipt-seal is mine', suggesting that the order had been filled and the pictures received (Kamberi, Umemura, and Moriyasu, 1990). Probably the paintings and portraits were to be used in processional performances, which were commonly held during Buddhist festivals. The document is thus also the earliest recorded evidence regarding performance props.

Medieval Uyghur Order/Receipt for Buddhist Portraits

Transliteration:

1. yïlan yïl chakhsh [aput] ay yiti
2. yangïqa män äsän t[ughmï]sh buladan
3. chim-ning sü [a]l[ayï]n sinsidu
4. tan bir bash-balïq sü-si iki
5. vachirapan chigin sü iki vukin
6. manchushiri chigin sü yana iki
7. qapïghchï vachi[rapan] sü bilän
8. yiti sü alghïl buladan
9. chim kälmish-tä ök birz-ün
10. bu chuv tamgha [minin]g [ol]
11. äsän tughmïsh-tu öz-öm bi [tidi]m

Translation:

1. On December 7, the snake year
2. I, Asän Tughmïsh, will acquire portraits of
3. Buladan Chim. Please get one painting of
4. the Bash-Balïq (the Uyghur capital city), two
5. embroidered portraits of Vajrapani, and two
6. embroidered portraits of Majusri, another
7. two portraits of Gatekeeper Vajrapani (?), all
8. together seven pictures. When Buladan
9. Chim comes, he should give (them) to you.

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10. This receipt-seal is mine.
11. Asän Tughmïsh-Tu, myself, wrote this.

Processional performances remain a very popular part of Uyghur folk literature today and, as in the past, are performed as a kind of ritual drama. These occur during religious festivals, at great ceremonies of renewal, or sometimes in abbreviated from on other occasions. Drama is an important part of the procession, for which the participants dress up, carry artistic images, and act out a story to entertain their audience. These performances can be classified as ritual because the form and content are stereotyped, repetitive, condensed and conventionalized. The performances are offered both for divine as well as human enjoyment, and vary little as the troupes parade from temple to temple or from mosque to mosque. Most people who watch these say that it is all just fun, a local tradition without special meaning. Ethnographers have acknowledged the religious significance of the procession without suggesting systematic interpretation of its various components, but the standardization of the processional elements suggests a definite set of conventions; moreover, taboos and obligatory ritual greetings at the gods' temples visited indicate that what goes on is more than entertainment. Even taking into account the fact that some of these performances have lost their meaning and others have always been pure entertainment, ritual procession drama may nonetheless be seen as a fundamental form of cultural expression in which both the participants and the observers say something about themselves.

(C) Manichaean manuscripts

Manichaeism was an important component in medieval Uyghur cultural development. This ancient religious belief originated with the Persian, Mani (216–274? CE), under the influence of Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Christianity. Dualist in nature, Manichaeism postulates the struggle between Light (Good) and Dark (Evil). It came under the protection of Shapur I (r. 241–272 CE) of the Sassanian Empire, but it was banished by his successor, Bahram I [r. 273–293 CE] as heresy and, as a result, Mani himself was executed. During Mani's lifetime and soon after his death, his religion spread to Egypt, Syria, and North Africa and later reached Europe.[4] According to a single reference in Chinese records, Manichaeism spread to the Uyghurs of the Orkhun River area in 762 CE. But the Uyghur Manichaean documents discovered in the Turpan Basin date from a period earlier than this, to approximately the middle of the 6th century CE. In the 7th century CE Manichaeism extended into China from Uyghuristan, specifically in the first year of the reign of Empress Wu Zetian of the Tang dynasty. Manichaean beliefs were spread by a stratified clergy, called in Uyghur *dintar*, a term that originated from the Sogdian, meaning 'the elect'. The dintar were required to observe celibacy, to fast, abstain from alcohol and to be strict vegetarians. Laymen, or auditors, were allowed to marry and eat as they wished,

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but they were also supposed to be fairly abstemious and to be generous in giving alms.

The basic teachings of the Manichaeans lent themselves to dramatization. The two opposing principals of Light and Dark each had their own nature. Darkness was assisted by the material world and, especially, the human body. Mani taught that time should be viewed in three phases: in the first, good and evil were separated; in the second, the two mingled; and in the third, each was again distinct. The human existed as a physical body and spirit only in the middle phase, and it was therefore each person's duty to separate from all physical matter. This would bring on a cleansing process, which Mani believed would then usher in the third phase. When that time arrived, those who had succeeded in freeing themselves from the material world would live on in the realm of light, while those who failed were doomed to the realm of darkness.[5] This belief in dualities suggests a foundation for characterizing good and bad as antagonistic forces and lends itself to vivid portrayals of theatrical conflict.

In addition to the Uyghur Manichaean manuscript translated in this article, there are other such documents which have been published, including *Iki Yiltiz Nom*, *Huastwanivt*,[6] and *Manichaean Poems* (Le Coq 1911, 1919, 1922). A newly discovered Manichaean document was recently published by Professor Geng Shimin as *Notes on an Ancient Uyghur Official Decree Issued to a Manichaean Monastery*. Huang Wenbi acquired this document during his fieldwork in the Uyghur region.[7] The first part, unfortunately, is missing, but some 125 lines remain. The extant part is 270 cm long and 29.5 cm wide. Owing to damage and mistakes in mounting, some of the lines are now hard to decipher. However, the meaning as a whole is clear enough for this study. It is a decree issued to a Manichaean monastery by the Uyghur government of the Qocho region. Eleven red seals with Chinese characters are affixed to the document. They are all of the same size, namely 10 cm $\times$ 9.5 cm. The Chinese characters are arranged in four lines. Huang Wenbi has not been successful in deciphering the third line, but the whole of the seal text can be read as follows: Seal of the cabinet minister and of the Il Ugäsi ministers of the great, fortunate Uyghur government. The document itself is definitely written in the early Uyghur script. Judging from the form of the letters and the characteristics of the language, this Manichaean decree belongs to approximately the 9th century (Geng, 1991).

A new addition to translated Manichaean documents appears below. I discovered this text at Bezeklik, Turpan, in the early 1980s. The manuscript is written on paper sheets 25 cm $\times$ 11 cm and consists of five leaves written on both sides, for a total of 10 pages of text. Each page has 20 lines written in beautiful medieval Uyghur calligraphy. The first two leaves (four sides) have 80 complete lines of writing. The other three leaves are fragmented. At the beginning of each page is a title, written in different coloured ink, but unfortunately some parts of the titles are indiscernible. Today the manuscript, number 80 T.B. I, 542, is in the Turpan Museum.

I deciphered this document and have translated it into modern Uyghur, Chinese and English. The story tells of how Mani presented his teachings to a

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prince, Hormizd, and although the plot is simple, it is nonetheless conveyed through dialogue which adds dramatic tension. Mani advises the Prince that he should worship the Lord every day, regardless of where he is or what he is doing. He should always keep four words in mind: lord, light, strength, and wisdom. When Prince Hormizd asks what kind of benefits this might bring, Mani explains, but the Prince nonetheless decides to challenge Mani's power, providing the story with its dramatic moment. The following is my translation from the original medieval Uyghur manuscript of the dialogue between Mani and Prince Hormizd:

> 'Now you should worship and praise the Lord—the sun and the Moon every day. You should respect the five Lords. No matter where you are walking, travelling, entering, or exiting, you should always keep these four words in your mouth (mind): they are Lord, Light, Strength, and Wisdom.' Then the hostile Hormizd said to the Lord Mani Burkhan, 'What kind of benefit can one get if one keeps saying these four words?' And then the Lord Mani Burkhan said to the Prince, 'The way should be like that—do not mix any other words into these four words. Valiancy and virtue, a special personal tethered horse, solid knowledge, a brave army, (and) the powerful value of you (yourself) (are yours) only when you keep these four words in your mouth (mind). Then (can) you deliver all of them from the abyss of misery.' Since then, the hostile Hormizd Prince kept these four words in his mind. Wherever he travelled back and forth on the routes, or entered, exited, sat, stood, he kept these four words in his mouth. The *Bagh*, *Rosn*, *Zawr*, *Zirivt*, *Tängri*, *Yaruq*, *Küchlük*, and *Bilgä*.[8] One day, the hostile Horzmid said to the Lord Mani Burkhan, 'My Lord, you are so attractive and handsome. You are also lovely, pure and sweet. I know, you are powerful, too. So, I want to compete for power between us. Let us see who is the stronger of the two of us.' Then the Lord Mani Burkhan said to the hostile Hormizd, 'You originated from the root of the crowned Kings. All people think that their leader is powerful and merciful. They hold great respect for you. I am a messenger of God. Hostility is not necessary between us. You ask why? If I throw you down, or despise you, you will lose the respect of numerous people and you will become worthless. People will say it was a person without drinking wine, without eating meat, who caused the hostile Hormizd Prince to fall on the ground. But if you throw me down, all people will say that the messenger of God, Mani Burkhan, is defeated by a man. He has become powerless and worthless. If you agree, we do not have to compete. There is no necessity to be hostile to each other.' After the hostile Hormizd heard these words, he was not happy in his mind. He still boasted and showed off. The Lord Mani Burkhan said, 'If you are not happy in your mind, we should go to the place of tigers and elephants. We should go to the top of where an arrow can reach. We two shall go there without company. We can compete there.' After the hostile Hormizd heard these words, he was glad from his heart. The messenger of God, Mani Burkhan, took the hand of the hostile Hormizd. The two went to the place which has tigers and elephants.[9]

The Manichaean story translated above is one of the most important medieval Uyghur documents dating from the end of the 6th century. Such a manuscript, written in dialogue form and full of dramatic elements, provides first-hand material for studying medieval Uyghur literature and history. In addition to the various manuscripts discussed here, many other documents unearthed from Bezeklik survive, but unfortunately the majority are only in fragments making it

most difficult to understand their complete content. Nonetheless, even these fragments can be categorized, and today we know that these include such documents as contracts, receipts for loans, official orders, government documents and the like. Together, they attest to the rich cultural life of the Turpan Uyghurs' medieval society.

Conclusion

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At the beginning of the 20th century, European explorers on the Silk Road made some of the first discoveries of artefacts and ancient texts from the Turpan area. German archaeologist Albert von Le Coq discovered numerous Uyghur manuscripts, and even cut away important Buddhist frescoes, several hundred cases of which were shipped back to Berlin. The British archaeologist, M. Aurel Stein, visited Bezeklik and, as a result, came to believe that no other finds from similar sites in the Turpan Basin could match these, which he considered parallel to the rich ancient paintings of the Dunhuang 'Thousand Buddha Caves' (Stein, 1912). Professor Albert Grünwedel (1856–1935) wrote in a letter dated 2 April 1906: 'For years, I have been endeavouring to find a credible thesis for the development of Buddhist art and primarily to trace the ancient route by which the art of imperial Rome, etc., reached the Far East (Turpan and Kucha). What I have seen here goes beyond my wildest dream.' (*Along the Ancient Silk Routes*, 1982). As a result of these discoveries, the world was surprised by the aesthetics of Uyghur Buddhist civilization. The consensus was that the literary art of the Turpan Basin is the most representative and the best preserved of medieval Uyghur Buddhist culture.

The discoveries from Turpan—artefacts, texts, and extensive remains of ancient towns and Buddhist sites—have re-ignited discussion of cultural evolutionism and diffusionist theories (Taylor, 1924; Rogers, 1926). In fact, neither theory can essentially solve the theoretical problem of national cultural development in Central Asia. This is because neither adequately explains the development of both traditional culture and cultural traditions of a nation. The research presented above suggests another theory, one concerned with the mixture of different cultures and with the many levels of national cultural development. This theory arises from my many years of study and includes the following basic tenets: All national culture consists of traditional culture and also cultural traditions and is therefore not 'pure'. In any space/region the cultural structure is always plural, mixed; over time, a structure exists on many levels, and thus the development of traditional culture is steady, slow and sometimes resistant to external influence, depending on internal cultural structural development. The development of a cultural tradition, on the other hand, is active, rapid and absorbing. It depends on the processes of external environmental development. Regardless of the level or the rate of natural (environmental) development a nation undergoes, all nations have the potential to develop as a national culture and may also become a universal influence affecting many other cultures. Scholars cannot divide humankind into 'civilizing' nations—those who seek to

spread their culture across continents—and 'natural' nations that simply absorb outside influences, as suggested in diffusionist theory. Such theories are still in need of reliable evidence and cannot adequately explain developments in Central Asian history.

To conclude, I staunchly believe that early in the next century Central Asia will once more become one of the most exciting sites for research in archaeology and cultural anthropology. However, I also feel a growing urgency to carry out such research as the lands of the ancient—and modern—Uyghurs are rapidly changing. Oil production in the Tarim Basin will soon have an impact on the international economy but may also hinder future excavations; and issues raised by Chinese minority policy objectives and environmental problems resulting from nuclear testing in the Kroran (Lop Nor) area are other matters of growing concern in the region. Further exploration of the Uyghur past must not whither, for I deeply believe that without Uyghur history there can be no Central Asian history; without Central Asian history, there can be no Asian history; and without Asian history there can be no true history of the world.

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Notes and references

1. *Kalp* originated from the Sanskrit word used for measuring time.
2. The term *idqut* means 'happy king' or 'happy lord'. This is translated into Chinese as *gaochang*. After the 11th century, the word appears as *iduq-qut*, which is still used to refer to a Uyghur governor. But the word also means 'once we were happy'. The kingdom of Idqut was occupied by the Ling dynasty in 327 CE, and later became the seat of the Qü family kingdom in 460 CE. From the time of the Idqut Uyghur Khanate onwards, Buddhist culture flourished there.
3. See A. von Gabain, *Maitrisimit II*, Berlin, 1961.
4. Ren Ju Yu. *Zong jiao zidian* (A Dictionary of Religions). Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1981, 1140.
5. Ibid.
6. The original Uyghur title is *Nihussäklärning Suyïn Yazuqïn öküngü Haustuanivt*. This is one of the most important and longest Uyghur Manichaen texts. It has attracted worldwide scholarly attention since first translated in 1911; the text, 221 lines long, has been translated into German, English, French, Russian and Chinese.
7. This document was reproduced in the 1954 edition of *Turpan kaogu diaocha* (Explorations in the Archaeology of Turpan) (plates 89–94). The original, in the form of a scroll, is in the collection of the Beijing History Museum (Serial No. Zong 8782 T, 82).
8. The original Uyghur document presents the four words first in their Persian form and then in Uyghur. This document shows us that scholars who believed that the Turkic or Uyghur word *bäg* originated from the Persian word *bagh* are correct.
9. In line 71 of the original text, the origin of the word *äsbir* is unknown. From the context, it seems it could be translated as 'a place which has tigers and elephants', but it is not clear why Mani would suggest that the two go to such a place. The translation of the term is made more problematic by Mani's statement that they should go to the highest point which an arrow can reach. The latter is suggestive of other stories of the period which tell of shooting an arrow to decide borders. The phrase might also refer to determining the limit of power between Manichaeism and secular kingship; alternatively it could also mean to go without any precondition. A definitive translation must await further research.

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