

Tibor Porció  
University of Szeged

## The Turkic Peoples of Central Asia and Buddhism

### *Introduction*

If we speak of peoples and their worlds of belief in relationship to the Turkic peoples Buddhism would certainly not come to mind for most (or at least first of all), just as Turkishness would hardly come to mind with the mention of Buddhism. This circumstance is not surprising, as the majority of the Turkic peoples of today – in terms of their geography and their numbers – are followers of Islam. It is precisely because of this fact that it is not well-known that, in the course of their long history, the Turkic-speaking peoples came into contact with nearly all of the major religions, and even today we find among the Turkic peoples Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism as well. As for this last faith, it is found among the small ethnic group known as the Yellow Uighurs, about whom we know that they are the descendents of the Old Uighurs, who at one time played a significant role in the history of Inner Asia. Today, there is a vast body of scholarly literature dealing with Inner Asian Buddhism, and within that, Turkic (Uighur) Buddhism, although this cannot be compared in scope to the available literature concerning Buddhism in Sri Lanka, China, Tibet or Japan.<sup>1</sup> As for the scholarly literature in Hungarian, in addition to other reasons, there is the fact that there are numerous Hungarian sources involving the discovery and research of Turkic Buddhist literature.

After the study of the catalogue (1285-1287) to the Chinese Buddhist canon ordered by Kubilai Khan (the *Tripitaka*), Stanislas Julien drew attention to the fact that, according to the evidence contained in the introduction and colophon of the catalogue, Uighurs were involved in its compilation, and certain texts were translated into Uighur.<sup>2</sup> He published his discovery in 1848, and the scholarly community considers this date and the name of Julien as connected to the first scholarly announcement of the then still-hypothetical existence of the Uighur Buddhist literature.<sup>3</sup> This hypothesis of existence was confirmed for the wider scholarly public when Berthold Laufer published his famous study in 1907, which already in its title spoke of “Uighur Buddhist literature”.<sup>4</sup> His knowledge is partially founded upon the published accounts of the disclosures by the Russian expeditions to Turfan at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>5</sup> but even more so upon the Tibetan version of the colophon of the so-called “Great Bear (constellation)” Sutra (Tib. *sme bdun zhes bya bskar mai mdo*, Uighur *Yitikän Sudur*); this colophon informs the reader that the sutra was also translated into Uighur.<sup>6</sup> It in no way lessens the contributions of these two renowned scholars that Sándor Csoma de Kőrös

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<sup>1</sup> For the possible reasons behind this situation, see Tremblay 2007: 78-79.

<sup>2</sup> Julien 1848:366-367.

<sup>3</sup> Franke 1990: 75-76; Elverskog 1997:1.

<sup>4</sup> Laufer 1907.

<sup>5</sup> Radlov – Klemenc 1899.

<sup>6</sup> Laufer 1907: 392.

was their true predecessor, both chronologically and in terms of the informative character of his sources.<sup>7</sup> In his letter to Captain C. P. Kennedy, dated May 5, 1825, from Sabathu (India, in the current state of Himachal Pradesh), Csoma describes how he discovered in the catalogue of the Tibetan Tangyur (Tib. *bstan 'gyur*) a “small treatise translated from the Yoogoor language, containing a short account on the wandering from one country to another of an original statue representing Shakya, and which is now kept at Lassa, brought thither from China by Kongcho, the wife of Srongtsan Gambo”.<sup>8</sup> Csoma, however, only published this information long after the appearance of Julien’s article, in 1895, and it has visibly evaded the attention of Orientalists.<sup>9</sup> In Hungary, Lajos Ligeti was the first to study,<sup>10</sup> yet with true understanding and scholarly consistency, Csoma’s “Yoogoor” data, and he has shown that the ethnonyms *yo/gur/yu-gur*, which are mentioned by both Csoma and Laufer as appearing in the Tibetan sources, designate the ancestors of the people known as the Yellow Uighurs, who live in Gansu province in China.

At the time of the publication of Laufer’s article, the expedition-fever for Inner Asia was in full swing. Groups of diplomats, travelers, and explorers set off for the territory, representing the most diverse of nations. Between 1889 and 1915, Russian, British, German, Japanese, and French (to mention only the most significant) contended with each other. As a result, today the greatest concentration of Uighur (and in general of Old Turkestan) materials can be found in Berlin, London, Paris, St. Petersburg, and individual Japanese collections.<sup>11</sup> The Hungarian Aurél Stein represented the British Empire; he learned about the existence of the Dunhuang temple caves from Lajos Lóczy, the geographer who took part in the expedition of Béla Széchenyi in 1879.<sup>12</sup> From here, as well as from the territories of Gansu and Xinjiang in China, manuscripts emerged one after the next, as well as fragments in various languages and scripts, amongst which more than one was completely unknown at that time. An enormous

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<sup>7</sup> It is well known that Csoma’s original goal was to search for the eastern origin of the Hungarians, and he did not even renounce this goal after he had written his works on Tibetan. Kara 1978: 161. Moreover, on his last journey he was headed towards the capital of Tibet, Lhasa, in order to gather further data about the “Jugur” country and its people. Róna-Tas 1984: 49. As is well known, the ethnonym of the Hungarians (*Hungarus*) refers to the name of a tribal association, which was known as *On Ogur/Ugur* (‘Ten Ugurs’). For the so-called “Jugria question”, see Róna-Tas 1996: 334-335. For the various designations of the Hungarians, see *ibid.* 209-250, particularly 217-221.

<sup>8</sup> Duka 1885a: 58 (Hungarian); Duka 1885b: 57-58 (English). Lajos Ligeti identified the text under question (Ligeti 1931: 304), and we know today that Csoma’s account of the text’s contents was riddled with inaccuracies. The Tibetan text was published and translated, and compared to its Chinese equivalent in Kudara 2004: 149-154. The Tibetan translation was made in 1263, and its particular value lies in its being the only Tibetan Buddhist text of which we know with certainty that the source language was Uighur (itself a translation as well from Chinese). Unfortunately, the Uighur text has not survived.

<sup>9</sup> Even Kudara does not make reference to it in his work (see previous footnote), which happens to be the only thorough publication of the text.

<sup>10</sup> Géza Kuun has shown that the so-called “Country of the Jugars” truly existed, and hypothesized that if Csoma had been able to complete his final journey, he might have reached the group known as the Yoghurs, who according to the Russian traveler Potanin, lived in China. Kuun 1990:47.

<sup>11</sup> For the expeditions, the discoveries of the manuscripts, and further literature, see Elverskog 1997: 2-5; Shimin 2004; Zieme 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Miklos 1959: 9-17.

amount of the material is composed of the monuments of the once-flourishing Uighur Buddhism, including the very one cited in Laufer's Tibetan source.<sup>13</sup>

### Historical Background<sup>14</sup>

The Turks appeared on the historical stage in the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century, when around 552 they defeated the Ruanruan in the territory of today's Mongolia, consequently founding the First Turkic Khaganate (552-630). They quickly conquered the territories lying from the northwest borders of China all the way to the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea. Of fundamental economic and cultural significance was the fact that the most important trade routes of the territory (the Silk Road) fell under their control, and in addition the peripheries of their empire came into contact with all of the great political and civilizational powers of the time, such as Byzantium and the Persian Empire, India and China.<sup>15</sup> At the start of the 580s, the Khaganate broke into two parts, west and east; the western khaganate frequently went to war with Byzantium and Persia, while from time to time the eastern khaganate attacked China. After the formation of the Tang Dynasty (618) and the consolidation of its power, it moved to counterattack, and making use of intra-Turkic division it conquered the eastern tribes one by one. In 630, the Eastern Turkic empire collapsed, and not long afterwards the western confederation lost its independence.

After half a century of dependence on China, a group of the Eastern Turks rebelled, and then uniting with the other Turkic tribes, they founded the Second Turkic Khaganate (692-742). Around 740, the Uighurs coalesced with the Basmils and the Karluks, who were Turkic groups as well, and after many long battles they brought Turkic domination to an end. Then, with the expelling of their earlier allies, the Uighurs consolidated their own power. The state entity, known in the literature as the Uighur Khaganate (or the Steppe Uighur Empire), lasted for nearly a hundred years (788-840). It built strong trade, diplomatic and military ties with the Tang court. When the Chinese emperor was threatened by internal revolt, he turned to the Uighur rulers for help.<sup>16</sup> In 757, the Uighurs helped in reconquering the Chinese capitol (Chang'an), then in 762 they occupied the strategically important Loyang and suppressed the last rebels, while at the same time laying waste to the city.<sup>17</sup> Here, however, a more pious event took place as well, the significance and influence of which not only determined the Uighurs' fate in the short term, but for centuries to come. Khan Bügü (759-779) met with the members of the Sogdian colony, who were for the most part the followers of the teachings of Mani.<sup>18</sup> Among the leaders of the rebellion were foreigners living in China (Turks,

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<sup>13</sup> For the Chinese variations of the sutra see Franke 1990; Orzech-Sanford 2000; for the Tibetan translation Panglung 1991, for the Mongolian translation see Matsukawa 2004 and Elverskog 2006, for the Uighur translation see Zieme 2005: 115-149.

<sup>14</sup> As an introduction to the ancient history of Inner Asia (including the Turkic periods), I highly recommend Sinor 1990; Golden 1992, or in Hungarian Vászary 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Beckwith 1993: 9-10.

<sup>16</sup> For the relationship between the Tang emperor and his Inner Asian neighbors, as well as the relevant literature, see Beckwith 1993; Slobodnik 1995, 1997; MacKerras 2000.

<sup>17</sup> MacKerras 2000:225-226.

<sup>18</sup> For Manicheism, see Simon 2011.

Sogdians); the Sogdians were with good reason afraid of the anti-foreign reactions of the emperor. In order to find protection for their ethnic and religious cohorts, they turned towards the leaders of the Uighur Empire, who were at the height of their power.<sup>19</sup> Their endeavors met with success, an evident factor in this respect clearly being the Sogdians' possession of all those crucial abilities and experiences (particularly in the areas of diplomacy, public governance, merchant life, literacy and erudition) – which they had already displayed under the First Turkic Khaganate – and which now were necessary to the Uighur khan in the organization of his new empire. He therefore took a few Sogdian councilors with himself to his residence, located in Ordu-Balik,<sup>20</sup> who not only were able to persuade the khan himself to take up the Manichaeist faith,<sup>21</sup> but persuaded him as well of the advantages of the introduction of a unifying faith. Hence, in 763 the khan made Manicheism the official faith of the empire.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, not only in the Tang court but in the ruling Uighur circles as well, not everyone was pleased with the strengthening of Manichean and Sogdian influence and the anti-Chinese politics that accompanied it, and so the struggle of these two forces left its mark on the mechanisms of both internal and external politics.<sup>23</sup> The adoption of Manicheism in Uighur circles, however, proved to be much more than merely a momentary political act, and its dominance remained for a very long time.<sup>24</sup> According to the Karabalgasun inscription (see below), it can be seen as likely that the representatives of Buddhism and possibly other faiths (Nestorians, Zoroastrians) did not only exert their missionary activities among the warring nomads following in the footsteps of the Manichean priests, but were active even before their arrival. The religious – and of course political – rivalry proved to be fruitful, just as the simultaneous proximity of the Sogdian and Chinese cultures.<sup>25</sup> Literacy, and with it universal erudition, spread. In the first half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the news of Uighur wealth and cultivation extended far beyond the borders of Inner Asia. Militarily, however, the khaganate was no longer strong enough to withstand the Kirgiz incursions from the north, so that in 840 the Uighur steppe hegemony came to an end. However, this collapse did not herald the decay of Uighur culture and erudition. Indeed, the true efflorescence occurred only afterwards.

The overthrow of earlier nomadic state-formations (the Ruanruans and the Turks) was in fact only followed by a change of elites and power.<sup>26</sup> In this aspect, the Uighurs were different than their predecessors. Most among their tribes did not wish to serve their new rulers, looking instead for a new home as they nomadized to the south and the southwest. The sources note three differing groups. One part sought refuge in China, but they received a chilly reception and collapsed within a few years at the border. A larger group set off for the

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<sup>19</sup> The Sogdians were very happy to “use” the nomadic peoples to influence the internal politics of China. Beckwith 1993: 146, note 17.

<sup>20</sup> Known by its later Mongolian designation as Qarabalyasun (Khalkha: Kharbalgas).

<sup>21</sup> Kudara 2002:184.

<sup>22</sup> The Uighur Khaganate has been the only country in the history of the world in which this faith of Persian origin received such status. Nattier 1991: 780; MacKerras 2000: 224.

<sup>23</sup> MacKerras 2000: 223-226; La Vaissiere 2005: 223-225.

<sup>24</sup> For religious life in the Uighur Khaganate, see MacKerras 1990: 329-334; see review Nattier 1991: 780.

<sup>25</sup> MacKerras 1990: 340; Russell-Smith 2005: 46.

<sup>26</sup> Róna-Tas 1996: 295, Vásáry 2003: 88.

west, and then immediately split into two. One group withdrew to the Chinese borderlands, in today's Gansu province. Thanks to Chinese, Tibetan, Uighur and Hungarian sources, we can follow their history right up to the modern day. In time, they became the Yellow Uighurs; their language and their culture in many respects reflects that of the Uighurs of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The second and larger group founded a small empire in the northern parts of East Turkestan (in today's Xinjiang), in the areas between Kucha, Karasha, Turfan and Besbalik; the scholarly literature refers to this as the Uighur Kingdom, or the Turfan Principality.<sup>27</sup> In their new territories, both groups gradually converted to a settled agricultural lifestyle, and with time Buddhism became the dominant religion.

Since the beginning of the Common Era, smaller states had existed in East Turkestan, in particular the oases of the Tarim Basin, most of which were settled by Indo-European (Tocharian) and Persian (Sassanids, Sogdians) peoples. From the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the Turkic peoples were drawn into this territory, and a gradual Turkification commenced, the last stage of which was the mass nomadizing of the Uighur tribes.

Culturally, this region was influenced by the neighboring regions of Central Asia, northern India, northern China, and Tibet, as well as the peoples arriving from these areas from time to time. Buddhism had already begun to spread in the first century of the Common Era along the Silk Road, and reached China: in the meantime, it became for centuries a decisive religion in the region known as Turkestan.

### Religious Background

Among the great faiths, it is without a doubt Buddhism that was the first to come into contact with the Turkic peoples of the steppe. It is true that there are very few trustworthy facts at our disposal concerning the genesis and the stages of this process. We cannot exclude the possibility that Chinese Buddhist missionaries might have been active in the court of the Ruanruan.<sup>28</sup> As for the true scale and influence of this presence, we can only guess; what does however seem certain is that the Chinese did try to use Buddhism in the formation of their relations with the First Turkic Khaganate. On the basis of Chinese sources, it can be presumed that there was a large Turkic population in the Chinese capitol city, some of whom were Buddhist.<sup>29</sup> Towards the end of the 550s, the emperor ordered the building of a Buddhist temple for them.<sup>30</sup> With this pious act, they were not merely hoping to endear themselves to the Turks living in Chang-an, but rather they intended it as a friendly political gesture to Khan Muhan (Turkish: Bukan, 553-572), the son of Khan Bumin, founder of the empire and third in succession after the ruler.<sup>31</sup> The subsequent emperor mentioned the consecration of the temple in an inscription, the text of which enumerates the virtues of Muhan, one of them being his conversion to Buddhism. The truth of this statement, however, is questioned by many, according to whom this assertion is more reflective of Chinese

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<sup>27</sup> For the nomadizing of the Uighurs, see Vásáry 2003: 89-99, or in English Russell-Smith 2005: 53; for further literature see *ibid.* 120-122 note.

<sup>28</sup> Tremblay 2007: 107, see also footnote p. 156 for further literature.

<sup>29</sup> Gabain 1954: 161-167.

<sup>30</sup> Gabain 1954: 162-163; Liu Mau-Tsai 1958: 38-39.

<sup>31</sup> Tremblay 2007:107.

wishes.<sup>32</sup> After Muhan's death, his younger brother Tatpar (572-581) ascended to the throne, of whom Chinese sources state that he was converted by a Chinese monk named Hui Lin,<sup>33</sup> and that he built a shrine for the sake of Buddhist monks.<sup>34</sup> At his request, the ruler of the Northern Qi sent him in 578 the Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra translated into Turkish (in Chinese transcription, *tujue*).<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, the text has not survived, and is not mentioned in any other sources, so we cannot know what script it was written in, and whether it truly was translated into Turkish. In the German Turfan expedition materials, however, there remain two page-fragments in Old Turkish, written in Uighur script, variations of the previously mentioned Mahāyāna sūtra (the translation can be established as based upon a Chinese original). However, it has nothing to do with the hypothesized translation from 574.<sup>36</sup> In addition, we cannot speak of written Turkic language in this era, and it is very hard to imagine that Turkic religious vocabulary would have been capable of reflecting complicated Buddhist terminology in the 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>37</sup> Hence, if this translation really had existed, the target language certainly must have been Sogdian, just as the script would have been.<sup>38</sup> In short, this was the official language of the First Turkic Khaganate, the most concrete evidence of which is the Bugut grave inscription dated between 580 and 590.<sup>39</sup> On two sides of the stele, and in the front, a text written in Sogdian and with Sogdian script can be found, on the back side, however, is an inscription in Brahmi. The Brahmi inscription has disintegrated to the point where it is essentially indecipherable.<sup>40</sup> In addition to the fact that the text chiseled into the stone gives evidence of the use of the Sogdian language and script at that time, it is a frequently cited source of the presence of Buddhism and proof of Khan Tatpar's conversion. In light of recent research, however, this interpretation no longer seems quite so unambiguous. Even earlier researchers of the inscription hypothesized that the composer of the Sogdian text was most likely not Buddhist himself.<sup>41</sup> Concerning its content, the inscription stands as a monument to the Turkic rulers (in which it essentially does not differ from later Turkic runic inscriptions), and as such we can discern veneration for the ancestors as the chief concern. In addition, the epithet used to refer to the death of the ruler, according to which the deceased "returned to the Creator,"<sup>42</sup> is in line with ancient Turkic cosmology ('Tengerism'),<sup>43</sup> and at the same time notably alien to the origin-myth conceptions of Buddhism. Nonetheless, the inscription has become the most frequently cited primary historical source of early Turkic Buddhism. The reason for this is that in the Sogdian text there exists a section in which, according to the early decipherers of the inscription, Khan

<sup>32</sup> Gabain 1954: 163; Klimkeit 1990: 54; Elverskog 1997: 5.

<sup>33</sup> Gabain 1954: 165; Elverskog 1997: 5.

<sup>34</sup> Gabain 1954: 164; Klimkeit 1990: 55; Tremblay 2007: 107.

<sup>35</sup> Gabain 1954; Liu Mau-Tsai 1958: 34; Klimkeit 1990: 55; Zieme 1992: 10-11.

<sup>36</sup> Zieme 1992: 11-12.

<sup>37</sup> Klimkeit 1990: 55.

<sup>38</sup> Klimkeit 1990: 55; Zieme 1992: 11-12; Kudara 2002: 184; Tremblay 2007: 108.

<sup>39</sup> It was discovered in Mongolia, 10km east to Bugut Mountain (in Bayan Cagaan Gol *aimag*), among the ruins of a one-time cemetery complex. The stone was moved from its place of discovery to the Regional Museum of Cecerleg, where it can be viewed.

<sup>40</sup> Yoshida – Moriyasu 1999: 125.

<sup>41</sup> Klyashtornyj – Livshitz 1972: 79; Bazin 1975: 41-43.

<sup>42</sup> Klyashtornyj – Livshitz 1972: 76, 86; Yoshida – Moriyasu 1999: 123-124.

<sup>43</sup> For the religious beliefs of the ancient Turks, see Roux 1984: 168-192; Scharlipp 1991.

Tatbar<sup>44</sup> ordered the “creation of a great new *sangha*” (*RBkw nwh snk* ‘*wst*).<sup>45</sup> Sogdian *nwh* ‘new’ is most likely an erroneous reading of *nwm*, which is the transcription for *nom* and which means ‘[legal] right, law, religion, Teaching’.

In reality, the expression in question (*nwh snk*’) features a few times in the inscription,<sup>46</sup> and can be read in two ways: *snk*’ is the equivalent of either Sanskrit *sangha*, ‘Buddhist community’, or Persian *sang*, ‘stone, cliff, stele’.<sup>47</sup> In favor of the latter reading, according to those who share it, the inscription has nothing to do with Buddhism.<sup>48</sup> It is true that the concept of the “stone of law” fits the context of the text much better,<sup>49</sup> although this hardly diminishes the significance of the presence on the fourth side of the stele of an inscription in Brahmi script, that is the script used in Inner Asia exclusively in Buddhist circles.<sup>50</sup> In any event, the Bugut inscription, even if demonstrative of Buddhist influence, denies rather than confirms that the ruling elite of the Turks, with the kagan foremost, would have broken with traditional Turkic religious belief. At the same time, other sources show that Buddhism was more than just a tolerated religion. During the persecutions of Buddhists (574-577) by the Northern Zhou dynasty, among the monks forced to leave northern China was a master from Gandhara named Jinagupta (528-605?), who with others was granted refuge in the Turkic court.<sup>51</sup> In the meantime, a few Chinese monks returning home from India joined them, as it was not safe for them to return to China. With Jinagupta, they studied the texts they had with them, catalogued them, translated them into Chinese, and returned to China only in 584.<sup>52</sup> Later, the Eastern Turkic khaganate warmly received the Chinese pilgrims Prabhakhamitra in 626 and Xuanzang in 630.<sup>53</sup>

Concerning the Western Turks, there are fewer concrete data. In 576-578, a mission arrived in Byzantium authorized by the first ruler of the western territories, Khagan Istemi.<sup>54</sup> The leader of the mission was the Sogdian Maniakh, who – judging from his name – might have been a Buddhist.<sup>55</sup> As his example demonstrates, there were close connections between the Turkic and the Sogdian aristocracies, and the Turks put the knowledge of the talented and educated Sogdian traders to good use. Whether this influence extended to religious life, we can only guess. However, it is certain that the Western Turkic authorities absorbed those regions of

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<sup>44</sup> Klyashtorny – Livshitz 1972. Instead of Tatpar, they read Taspar, erroneously.

<sup>45</sup> Klyashtorny – Livshitz 1972: 86; Roug 1982: 453.

<sup>46</sup> Yoshida – Moriyasu 1999: 123-124.

<sup>47</sup> Gharib 1995: 357.

<sup>48</sup> Erdal 2004: 35, note 47.

<sup>49</sup> According to Tremblay, *nwm snk*’ is a compound which regardless of its meaning is of Buddhist origin. Tremblay 2007: 108, note 164.

<sup>50</sup> Laut 1986: 4.

<sup>51</sup> Gabain 1954: 165; Klyashtorny – Livshitz 1972: 78.

<sup>52</sup> Gabain 1954: 165; Liu Mau-Tsai 1958: 37–39; Klimkeit 1990: 55.

<sup>53</sup> Tremblay 2007: 107.

<sup>54</sup> Róna-Tas 1996: 179; Vásáry 2003: 69.

<sup>55</sup> Lieu, S.N.C. 1985, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China. A Historical Survey*. Manchester University Press, Greater Manchester-Dover, N.H., USA., p. 185. For more detail about Maniakh, see: La Vaissi re, E. 2005, *Sogdian Traders: A History*. Brill, Leiden-Boston, pp. 165-167.

Central Asia where Buddhism had already been present since the 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>56</sup> Concerning later eras, the Chinese monk Wukong (751-790), writing of his time in Gandhara (759-764),<sup>57</sup> mentions Buddhist shrines which, according to him, were built with the material support of the Turkic rulers.

One characteristic of the second Turkic khaganate was the strengthening of political and cultural self-awareness and a distancing from foreign – that is, Chinese – influence.<sup>58</sup> As a matter of fact, one of the results, and at the same time proof, of these endeavors was the formation of the first independent writing system for Turkic, the so-called Turkish runes.<sup>59</sup> The more significant inscriptions dating from this time, inscribed with this script, incite the Turks to return to their ancient ways of life and systems of values.<sup>60</sup> For this reason, these inscriptions are our most ancient primary source in terms of ancient Turkic belief as well. And, in part, this knowledge is the foundation of the belief that the presence of Buddhism in the Second Turkic Khaganate could only have been negligible.<sup>61</sup> In any event, in the runic inscriptions in the last line the title, of Sanskrit origin, *isbara* (Sanskrit: *īsvara*), ‘ruler, prince’ – which came into Turkic either through transmission from Sogdian<sup>62</sup> or Tocharian<sup>63</sup> – is in any event Buddhist. The picture is given further nuance through the fact that at the beginning of his rule, in 716, Bilge kagan began to build cities surrounded by clay walls and Buddhist temples.<sup>64</sup>

The most decisive element of the religious history of the Uighur khaganate was the adoption of the Manichean faith and its gradual reinforcement in the leading circles of Uighur society. In addition to this, magicians and prophets continued to play a significant role.<sup>65</sup> Buddhism did not succeed in obtaining the patronage of the Uighur khagans, not even in the period between 779-808, when the political strategy of friendship with China was strengthened, and the official support for Manicheanism temporarily ceased.<sup>66</sup> We can, however, make deductions about its presence. From the previously mentioned inscription at Karabalgasun (810 or 821), we know<sup>67</sup> that the adoption of Manicheanism was accompanied by the burning

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<sup>56</sup> Klimkeit, H. 1990, "Buddhism in Turkish ..." p. 53; Kudara, K. 2002, A Rough Sketch of Central Asian Buddhism. In: *Pacific World. Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies*, vol. Third Series, no. 4, pp. 93-107 (pp. 97-8).

<sup>57</sup> Gabain, A.v. 1954, "Türkenmission" pp. 166-7.

<sup>58</sup> Klimkeit, H. 1990, "Buddhism in Turkish ..." p. 56; Erdal, M. 2004, "A Grammar ..." p. 41.

<sup>59</sup> Róna-Tas, A. 1996, "A honfoglaló magyar nép ..." pp. 77-8, 333-341; Vásáry, I. 2003, "Belső-Ázsia" pp. 41-2.

<sup>60</sup> Tekin, T. 1997, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*. Routledge, London, p. 261f; Klimkeit, H. 1990, "Buddhism in Turkish ..." pp. 55-6.

<sup>61</sup> Elverskog, J. 1997, "Literature" p. 6.

<sup>62</sup> Tremblay, X. 2007, "Buddhism in Serindia" p. 108.

<sup>63</sup> Rybatzki, V. 2006, *Die Personennamen und Titel der mittelmongolischen Dokumente : eine lexikalische Untersuchung*. Institute for Asian and African Studies, Helsinki, p. 225.

<sup>64</sup> Tremblay, X. 2007, "Buddhism in Serindia" p. 108.

<sup>65</sup> MacKerras, C. 1990, "The Uighurs" pp. 333-335.

<sup>66</sup> Tremblay, X. 2007, "Buddhism in Serindia" p. 108, 112.

<sup>67</sup> The Chinese section is the best preserved (Gabain A.v. 1954, "Türkenmission" pp. 168-9.) For the Sogdian and the Uighur sections see the newer edition of Moriyasu, T. – Yoshida, Y. – Katayama, A. 1999, Qara-Balgasun Inscription. In: *Provisional Report of Researches on Historical Complexes and*



of the idols of other religion(s) – not concretely named in the text. Therefore, we have good reason to hypothesize that these painted or carved images were, most certainly, Buddhist creations.<sup>68</sup>

In the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the Uighurs fleeing from Kirgiz rule arrived into the Tibetan and Chinese milieus of Gansu, while the Turkestan Uighurs experienced areal contact with Iranian and Tocharian residents. In terms of religion, each region was a bastion of Buddhism, yet the Uighur elite maintained their Manichean faith for a long time. At the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century (998), the Gansu Uighur principality converted to Buddhism; the Turkestan principality did so at the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century (1008).<sup>69</sup> When the Chinese delegate of the Song dynasty, Wang Yande, visited Kuchu in 982, he spoke of one Manichean temple, in contrast to fifty Buddhist monasteries and a Chinese Buddhist library.<sup>70</sup> That is to say, the teachings of Buddha had already spread to a large degree under the Manichean rulers, and had become ever more popular in the circles of both the Uighur aristocracy and the common people.<sup>71</sup> It was in this period that the Uighur nobility began to sponsor the translation of Buddhist works into their own language. Three major sources are available, stemming from the Buddhist culture that flourished in the region: the Sogdian and the Tocharian (Kucha, Karasar, Turfan), as well as the Chinese (Besbalik, Turfan, Dunhuang).<sup>72</sup> To a greater or lesser degree, all of these three cultures had already played an earlier role in the formation and development of Turkic Buddhism.

For quite a long time, the hypothesis that the Turks' first Buddhist teachers were Sogdians (the so-called "Sogdian hypothesis")<sup>73</sup> seemed unassailable. Even from the brief summary above, the heightened significance of Sogdian-Turkic relations is conspicuous. Uighur writing developed from the cursive variation of Sogdian script. In addition, the basic vocabulary of Buddhism is partially of Sogdian origin, as well as of Sogdian transmission, and the proportion of these is higher in archaic (so-called 'pre-classical') texts than in later ('classical') ones. Certain Uighur Buddhist texts were written with Sogdian script. Unfortunately, we do not have at our disposal a Uighur translation that can be traced back beyond all doubts to a Sogdian original.<sup>74</sup> There are, however, other weaknesses to the 'Sogdian hypothesis.' It is true that the early texts – i.e. those demonstrating "pre-classical" characteristics<sup>75</sup> - contain a much larger number of Sogdian-derived expressions than the later translations, but the number of words derived from Tocharian is a good deal higher than the

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*Inscriptions in Mongolia from 1996 to 1998.* Szerk. T. Moriyasu – A. Ochir, The Society of Central Eurasian Studies, Osaka University, Toyonaka, pp. 209-224. For further literature see MacKerras 1990, "The Uighurs" p. 319 (note 4).

<sup>68</sup> Nattier, J. 1991, "Nomads ..." p. 780. A kínaiban a buddhizmust "képek vallásának" is nevezik (Gabain A.v. 1954, "Türkenmission" p. 169).

<sup>69</sup> Tremblay, X. 2007, "Buddhism in Serindia" p. 113.

<sup>70</sup> Elverskog, J. 1997, "Literature" p. 7.

<sup>71</sup> The aristocracy had in part been converted to Christianity by Sogdian Nestorians (Kudara, K. 2002, "Buddhist Culture" p. 186).

<sup>72</sup> Elverskog, J. 1997, "Literature" p. 8.

<sup>73</sup> Laut, J.P. 1986, "Der frühe türkische ..." pp. 1-12; Elverskog, J. 1997, "Literature" p. 8 (notes 29-30).

<sup>74</sup> Zieme, P. 1992, "Religion und Gesellschaft" p. 16.

<sup>75</sup> Laut, J.P. 1986, "Der frühe türkische ..." pp. 59-148

derivations from Sogdian. According to Moriyasu, this finding would be one of the explanations for why, in comparison to Manicheism, the influence of Sogdian Buddhism on the Turks of the steppe was only sporadic and superficial.<sup>76</sup> When in 791 the Uighur khaganate took back from the Tibetans, for a time, the control over the northeastern oasis cities of the Tarim basin,<sup>77</sup> the local Tocharian Buddhists began to translate their religious texts into Turkic. For this, they used the Turkic religious lexicon, which already had been enriched by the loans of Sogdian terminology. That is to say, the numerous Sogdian elements in the early Uighur Buddhist lexicon largely originated from the Manicheans. This analysis (the “Tocharian hypothesis”)<sup>78</sup> is supported as well by the Sogdian loans in Uighur Buddhist texts that are, for the most part, not identical with the ones that can be found in the actual Sogdian Buddhist literature.<sup>79</sup> We must, however, look elsewhere for the explanation behind this finding. Tremblay, who denies the contentions of Moriyasu, has shown that the Old Sogdian terminology of Uighur Buddhism is not Manichean in origin, but emerges from the koiné, and as such only entered into Turkic through oral teachings and predictions. At the same time, this fact proves that despite the court support for Manicheism (or in addition to it), Buddhism in the Khaganate was not at all insignificant, and this – just as in the case of Manicheism – was thanks to Sogdian missionaries arriving from China. These missionaries, however, were for the most part addressing the lay public, and in accordance with this they avoided the affected “monastery language”, difficult to understand by the average person.<sup>80</sup>

The influence of Tocharian can best be seen in how the great majority of Buddhist terminology and expressions originating from India came into Uighur via Tocharian transmission. There are texts about which we know from their colophons or through other sources that they were prepared from Tocharian;<sup>81</sup> and so there remains to us a bilingual prayer in Tocharian and Turkic from the late 10<sup>th</sup> or early 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>82</sup> And there is yet another important proof: the Uighurs adopted the use of the Brahmi script only from the Tocharians.<sup>83</sup>

Buddhism, for the courts of the Eastern Turks and the Uighurs, meant above all the prestigious lifestyle of the Chinese. Thus they continually petitioned the Chinese for sacred texts, just as for silk and other luxury items. Due to anti-China policies, the Second Turkic Khaganate as well as the Uighur Empire (with the exception of the period of 779-808) chose non-Chinese religions: in the first instance Tengerism, in the second Manicheism. In the

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<sup>76</sup> Moriyasu, T. 1990, "L'origine du bouddhisme chez les Turcs et l'apparition des textes bouddhiques en turc ancien" in *Documents et archives provenant de l'Asie Centrale. Actes du Colloque Franco-Japonais organisé par l'Association Franco-Japonais des Études Orientales*, ed. Akira Haneda, Kyoto, pp. 147-165.

<sup>77</sup> Beckwith, C. 1993, "Tibetan Empire" pp. 155-157.

<sup>78</sup> Tremblay, X. 2007, "Buddhism in Serindia" p. 110.

<sup>79</sup> For the most part, these are word-for-word translations of Chinese terminology (Tremblay, X. 2007, "Buddhism in Serindia" p. 111).

<sup>80</sup> Tremblay, X. 2007, "Buddhism in Serindia" pp. 109-113.

<sup>81</sup> Kasai, Y. 2008, *Die uigurischen buddhistischen Kolophone*, Brepols, Turnhout, 157-206

<sup>82</sup> Elverskog, J. 1997, "Literature" pp. 8-9.

<sup>83</sup> Porció T. 2003, On the Brāhmī Glosses of the ygur 'Sitapatra' Text. In: *Central Asiatic Journal* 47/1. pp. 91-109.

wake of Buddhist missionaries active during the First Turkic Khaganate, smaller communities remained, from which locals could obtain a certain knowledge of Buddhism, but we cannot safely assume the existence of a written tradition and translations, as at the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century there still was no written Turkic language. If monasteries existed, their scriptures must have been in Chinese or possibly in Sogdian.<sup>84</sup>

In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, with the gradual cessation of direct Tocharian influence, Chinese formed nearly the only remaining source for Uighur Buddhists, and the situation remained the same until the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Before the Mongol invasions, Tibetan influence was marginal.

We do not know exactly what reasons led the Uighur rulers to turn their backs, at the turn of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, on the religion of their predecessors and convert to Buddhism. In any event, it could not have appeared negligible that most of the inhabitants practiced this faith. According to L. Clark, it is because of this that the elevation of Buddhism to the state level would have appeared as an expedient tool for uniting the kingdom in the face of the expansion of the Islamic Karahanids.<sup>85</sup> According to Kudara, with this “civilizing” development, on the one hand the state tried to increase its outward prestige, and on the other it might have been thought that in this way a friendly relationship could be maintained with the great neighbor to the east, China.<sup>86</sup> The two analyses do not exclude each other: each one has its basis. In any event, the course of history eventually turned out differently.

In the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Uighurs of Gansu subjugated the Tanguts; the Turfan Uighurs, however, towards the end of the 1120s became the vassals of the Karakitays. Most likely, this circumstance is the reason as well as to why the kingdom of Turfan in 1209 voluntarily surrendered to the head of the expanding Mongolian Empire, Chinghis Khan. For the Uighurs, there was no other rational choice in terms of survival. We could say that they might have been able to maintain a kind of semi-independence through exchanging their quasi-dependency on the Karakitays for that of the Mongols. This second factor came just in time. The Uighurs, well acquainted with both nomad and urban lifestyles, were in possession of knowledge which was lacking in the Mongolian power structures and political elite. Very similarly as to when, at an earlier time, the nomadic Turks and the half-nomad, half-settled Uighurs could rely upon the abilities and experiences of the Sogdians – beginning with trade and continuing through diplomacy up to the fields of erudition and culture – now the new nomadic Mongolian Empire was in need of precisely the same thing. It could be said that the Uighurs became the Mongols’ “Sogdians”.<sup>87</sup>

This process is well illustrated by the example of writing. The Mongolians took up the Sogdian-Uighur script. Nothing can serve as stronger proof of the Uighurs having been the first Buddhist masters for the Mongolians than the fact that the greater part of the Mongolian

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<sup>84</sup> Tremblay, X. 2007, "Buddhism in Serindia" p. 112.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted in Elverskog, J. 1997, "Literature" p. 9.

<sup>86</sup> Kudara, K. 2002, "Buddhist Culture" p. 187.

<sup>87</sup> Brose, M.C. 2008, *Subjects and Masters Uyghurs in the Mongol Empire*, Western Washington University, Bellingham, pp. 54, 77.

religious vocabulary came from Uighur.<sup>88</sup> The Uighur aristocracy and intelligentsia (i.e. the monastics) kept their favored position until the era of Kubilai Khan (reigned 1260-1294) and of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). It is true that by then they had to share the role of religious mentor with Tibetan lamas and, to a lesser degree, scholarly Confucian civil servants.<sup>89</sup> It is no accident that Julien's, Csoma de Kőrös's and Laufer's data, mentioned in the introduction, all date from the Mongolian era, and that two among them originate from Tibetan sources. Although in the history of Uighur Buddhism this era is considered as late, in terms of its religious and cultural history it is all the more fascinating.

At that time, the Uighurs begin to translate the sacred Tibetan texts (mainly Tantric in nature)<sup>90</sup> into their own language and introduced wood-block printing for the reproduction of texts.<sup>91</sup> Chinese remained a decisive source, but in addition to Tibetan there was an old-new presence: this being Sanskrit. This was in part thanks to the Indian monks who, fleeing Muslim invasions, brought original Sanskrit works with themselves in order to save them from destruction.<sup>92</sup> In the Mongolian era, the Uighur translators, inasmuch as the texts were available to them, made use of variations in several languages for their work. Hence, for example, it might happen that for a Uighur Buddhist translation, the Chinese, Tibetan and/or Sanskrit variations might all be used (and this has caused not a little mental exertion for today's researchers dealing with these texts).<sup>93</sup> This circumstance is not surprising, as the situation mirrors in microcosm the same complexity that characterized the age not only in terms of religion, but politically, socially and in general culturally. The reason for this state of

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<sup>88</sup> For details see: Shogaito, M. 1991, On Uighur Elements in Buddhist Mongolian Texts. In: *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 49, pp. 28-49, as well as 2003, Uighur Influence on Indian words in Mongolian Buddhist Texts. In: *Indien und Zentralasien – Sprach- und Kulturkontakt. Vorträge des Göttinger Symposions vom 7. bis 10. Mai 2001*. Ed. S. Bretfeld – J. Wilkens, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, pp. 119-143; Matsukawa, T. 2004, "Some Uighur Elements".

<sup>89</sup> Zieme, P. 1992, "Religion und Gesellschaft" p. 14.

<sup>90</sup> Kara, G. – Zieme, P. 1976, *Fragmente Tantrischer Werke in igitischer bersetzung*. Akademie-Verlag, Berlin; Kara, G. – Zieme, P. 1977, *Die uigurischen bersetzen des Guruyogas Tiefer Weg von Sa-Skya Pa ita und der Ma juśrīnāmasaṃgīti*. Akademie-Verlag, Berlin; Zieme, P. – Kara, G. 1978, *Ein igitisches Totenbuch: Nāropas Lehre in igitischer bersetzung von vier tibetischen Traktaten nach der Sammelhandschrift aus Dunhuang, British Museum Or. 8212 (109)*. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest .

<sup>91</sup> Zieme 1992, "Religion und Gesellschaft" pp. 40-42. For the significance of texts translated from Tibetan into Uighur see Kara, G. 1978, iguro-Tibetica. In: *Proceedings of the Csoma de Kőrös Memorial Symposium: held at Mátrafüred, Hungary, 24-30 September 1976*. Szerk. Ligeti L., Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, pp. 161-167, as well as Scharlipp, W. 1996, Zur Terminologie in den lamaistisch-türkischen Texten. In: *Turfan, Khotan und Dunhuang. Vorträge der Tagung "Annemarie v. Gabain und die Turfanforschung", veranstaltet von der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin (9.–12.12.1994)*. Ed. R.E. Emmerick et al., Harrassowitz, Berlin, pp. 259-268.

<sup>92</sup> One of the characteristic features of the late Mongolian era is the renewed spread of Sanskrit erudition (Zieme 1992, "Religion und Gesellschaft" p. 42). See also Oda, J. 2003, Indian Buddhist Missions to Uighuristan, Based on Chinese Sources. In: *Indien und Zentralasien – Sprach- und Kulturkontakt. Vorträge des Göttinger Symposions vom 7. bis 10. Mai 2001*. Ed. S. Bretfeld – J. Wilkens, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, pp. 25-43; and in the same volume Porció T. 2003, On the Technique of Translating Buddhist Texts into Uygur., pp. 85-94.

<sup>93</sup> Porció, T. 2003, "On the Technique ...".

affairs is nothing else than the intensive mutual influences between the Chinese, the Tibetans, the Uighurs and the Mongolians (to mention only the most significant).

The Uighurs survived the downfall of the Yuan Dynasty, moreover in the Uighur regions of East Turkestan Buddhist culture flourished until 1430, when their kingdom was converted to Islam by the Chagatayids.<sup>94</sup> Those Uighurs who did not wish to renounce their old faith found refuge among their brethren in Gansu. From here, in Gansu, there originates the very latest Uighur Buddhist manuscript known to us, a copy from 1687 of the Golden Beam Sutra (Sanskrit *Suvaranaprabhāsasutra*, Turkic *Altun Yaruk*).<sup>95</sup>

### Uighur Buddhist Literature

The great majority of texts originate from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. Most of the manuscripts are in a particular kind of book-form, an imitation of palm leaves (Sanskrit *pustaka*), Chinese-type book scrolls, folded books, as well as zylographs prepared from wooden blocks. Most of them contain Sogdian-Uighur script, some are in Sogdian script; in addition, we find the Brahmi and Tibetan scripts as well.<sup>96</sup> It is not infrequent to find interlinear glosses written in Brahmi script in a Uighur text, dating from the Yuan era, while the pagination is in Chinese.<sup>97</sup>

In 1997, Johan Elverskog published his indispensable reference work containing a nearly complete list of the reference literature to date, along with a comprehensive overview of Uighur Buddhist texts published in whole or part, or at least known in the scholarly literature. The first – and until the publication of Elverskog's book, the only – comprehensive study was completed in the 1930s, and is connected with the name of a Hungarian scholar, Denis Sinor.<sup>98</sup> Elverskog enumerates 81 works, yet since this date the number of identified manuscripts, as well as fragments, has grown, and newer texts have emerged. Most likely, we have still at our disposal only a small percentage of what might have existed at one time. If the hypothesis is true that similar to their great Buddhist neighbors, the Uighurs also had the

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<sup>94</sup> Tremblay, X. 2007, "Buddhism in Serindia" p. 114.

<sup>95</sup> Elverskog, J. 1997, "Literature" pp. 65-71.

<sup>96</sup> Elverskog, J. 1997, "Literature" p. 10; Maue, D. – Röhrborn, K. 1984, Ein "buddhistischer Katechismus" in alttürkischer Sprache und tibetischer Schrift (Teil I). In: *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 134, pp. 286-313, Maue, D. – Röhrborn, K. 1985, Ein "buddhistischer Katechismus" in alttürkischer Sprache und tibetischer Schrift (Teil II). In: *ZDMG* 135, pp. 68-91; Maue, D. 1996, *Dokumente in Brāhmī und tibetischer Schrift*. Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart; Maue, D. 2009, Uigurisches in Brāhmī in nicht-uigurischen Brāhmī-Handschriften. In: *AOH* 62/1, pp. 1-36; Róna-Tas A. 1991, *An Introduction to Turkology*. József Attila Tudományegyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kar, Szeged.

<sup>97</sup> Röhrborn, K. – Róna-Tas A. 2005, *Spätformen des zentralasiatischen Buddhismus : die altuigurische Sitātapatrā-dhāranī*. Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, Göttingen.

<sup>98</sup> Sinor D. 1939, A középázsiai török buddhizmusról. In: *Kőrösi Csoma-Archivum* 1. Szerk. Németh Gy., pp. 353-390.

canonical works in their own language,<sup>99</sup> then we can conjecture just how extensive and rich this legacy must have been.<sup>100</sup>

Still, we must mention that of course it is not only manuscripts that give witness to the once-flourishing culture of Uighur Buddhism. From Kizil to Dunhuang, many ruined monasteries and cave-temples have been excavated, with the remains of their refined artistic iconography and rich ornamentation.<sup>101</sup> The inscriptions of pilgrims found on these walls reveal that the seats of Uighur governance, while geographically distant, nurtured strong religious bonds.<sup>102</sup>

## Summary

Although the sources concerning the beginnings of the relationship between the Turks and Buddhism are extraordinarily sparse and reticent, it can be stated that the nomadic empires existing in the territories of today's Mongolia, beginning with the Ruanruan era, were in some kind of relation with this religion. It might have been absorbed through cultural contact on the peripheral territories, or the transmitters of this religion (for example, traders, diplomats, monks) might have remained in the nomads' dwellings for longer or shorter periods of time, just as they might have spent time in the ruling court as well. Perhaps we should not be mistaken if we assert that Buddhism was in the field of vision of the steppe nomads nearly continuously: the question always remains as to the existence of the willingness (or the lack thereof) to embrace the faith. We can follow this process in its larger contours in the case of the rulers; however, as concerns their "subjects" and the common people, we do not have enough materials at our disposal to create a realistic picture. The Karabalgasun inscription indirectly betrays that the empire was not unified religiously (as it was also neither unified ethnically nor linguistically); therefore, the religion of the ruler, or the ruler's tribe, was not necessarily the ruling religion. The religious loan words bear witness to the role of the Sogdians as the first people to spread the teachings of Buddha among the steppe Turks. They only could have been successful by preaching to everyday people in an everyday language, as they had to render the Buddhist mode of thought comprehensible. We know from the history of religion that, as an essentially monastic belief, Buddhism – even in its country of origin, India – was not able to survive for longer periods without generous support from the ruling

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<sup>99</sup> Zieme, P. 1992 "Religion und Gesellschaft" p.10.; Elverskog, J. 1997 "Literature" p. 14.

<sup>100</sup> Nearly all of the materials from Turfan in the Berlin Academy can be viewed in digital form: (<http://www.bbaw.de/bbaw/Forschung/Forschungsprojekte/turfanforschung/de/DigitalesTurfanArchiv>), and the digitalization of the collections of the *International Dunhuang Project* (<http://idp.bl.uk/>) is proceeding at a good pace.

<sup>101</sup> Miklós P. 1959 "A tunhuangi Ezer Buddha ..."; Russell-Smith, L. 2005, "Uyghur Patronage".

<sup>102</sup> For publication of the pilgrims' inscriptions: Kara, G. 1976, *Petites inscriptions ouigoures de Touenhouang*. In: *Hungaro-Turcica: Studies in Honour of Julius Németh*. Szerk. Káldy-Nagy G., Lóránd Eötvös University, Budapest, pp. 55-59; Zieme, P. 1985, *Buddhistische Stabreimdichtungen der Uiguren*. Akademie-Verlag, Berlin, pp. 189-192; Maue, D. 1996, "Dokumente in ..." pp. 202-3; Hamilton, J. – Niu, R. 1998, *Inscriptions ouigoures des grottes bouddhiques de Yulin*. In: *JA* 286, pp. 127-210; Matsui, D. 2008, *Revising the Uigur Inscriptions of the Yulin Caves*. In: *Studies on the Inner Asian Languages* 23, pp. 17-33.

class and wealthy lay circles. At the same time, referring to the history of religion again, we can state that Buddhism is an adaptable religion, one that accepts local traditions relatively easily, and this characteristic played a great role in its being able to sink deep roots in cultures and societies radically different from that of India. Nomadic, semi-nomadic and semi-settled societies are undoubtedly such instances, and an excellent example of this is the Buddhism of the Tibetans and Mongolians. In addition, both of these peoples may thank this religion for its rich written tradition, as can, and not to a small degree, the one-time Uighurs as well. And – to remain with our examples – the support of the prevailing powers and the political elite proved to be essential in maintaining and spreading Buddhism amid the Tibetan and Mongolian peoples, just as Uighur Buddhism itself only truly began to reach its culmination when it was able to enjoy the patronage of the ruling elite. This fulfillment can also be demonstrated in how it became a religion transmitted from its converts to the Mongolian era. As can be seen from this brief overview, this transmission was the outcome of long and complex historical processes, the threads of which can be traced back, either faintly or more distinctly, to the era of the First Turkic Khaganate.

*Translated by Rachel Mikos*

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