

# **Buddhism in Central Asia 2.**

## **The Turkic peoples of Central Asia and Buddhism**

1046/144

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श्रीकृष्णाय नमः



# OLD TURKIC/UYGUR BUDDHISM

The Turkic period of the steppe (today Mongolia) and East Turkestan (today China)

- **First Turkic Khanate (552–630)**
- **Second Turkic Khanate (692–742)**
- **East Uygur Empire (744–840)**
- **West Uygur Kingdom (mid 9th c. – beginning of 13th c.)**

- In the middle of the 6th century, the Turks, coming probably from the area of the Altai mountains, made their appearance in the Central Asian steppes.
- By bringing down the power of the *Zhuan-zhuans* (*ruanruan*)
- they established a realm what is known as the First Turk Empire or First Turkic Khanate (552-612) in a vast region reaching from northwestern China to the area east of Caspian Lake.





Finnish Tribes

Ugrian Peoples

Siberian Peoples

Siberian Peoples

Samoyeds

Tungusic Peoples

Venedae (Slavs)

Proto-Magyars

Gaoche (Proto-Turks)

Kyrgyz Tribes

Venedae (Slavs)

Huns

Huns

Sabirs

Yuehban (Xiongnu)

Rouran or Juan-Juan Khaganate

Mukriz Tribes

Sarmatians

Alans

Goths

Visigoths

Empire

Sassanid Persian Empire

Chionites

Xiyu City-States

Zhang-Zhung?

Tibetan Tribes and Kingdoms

Eastern Jin Dynasty

Yamato (Japan)

Armenia

Albania

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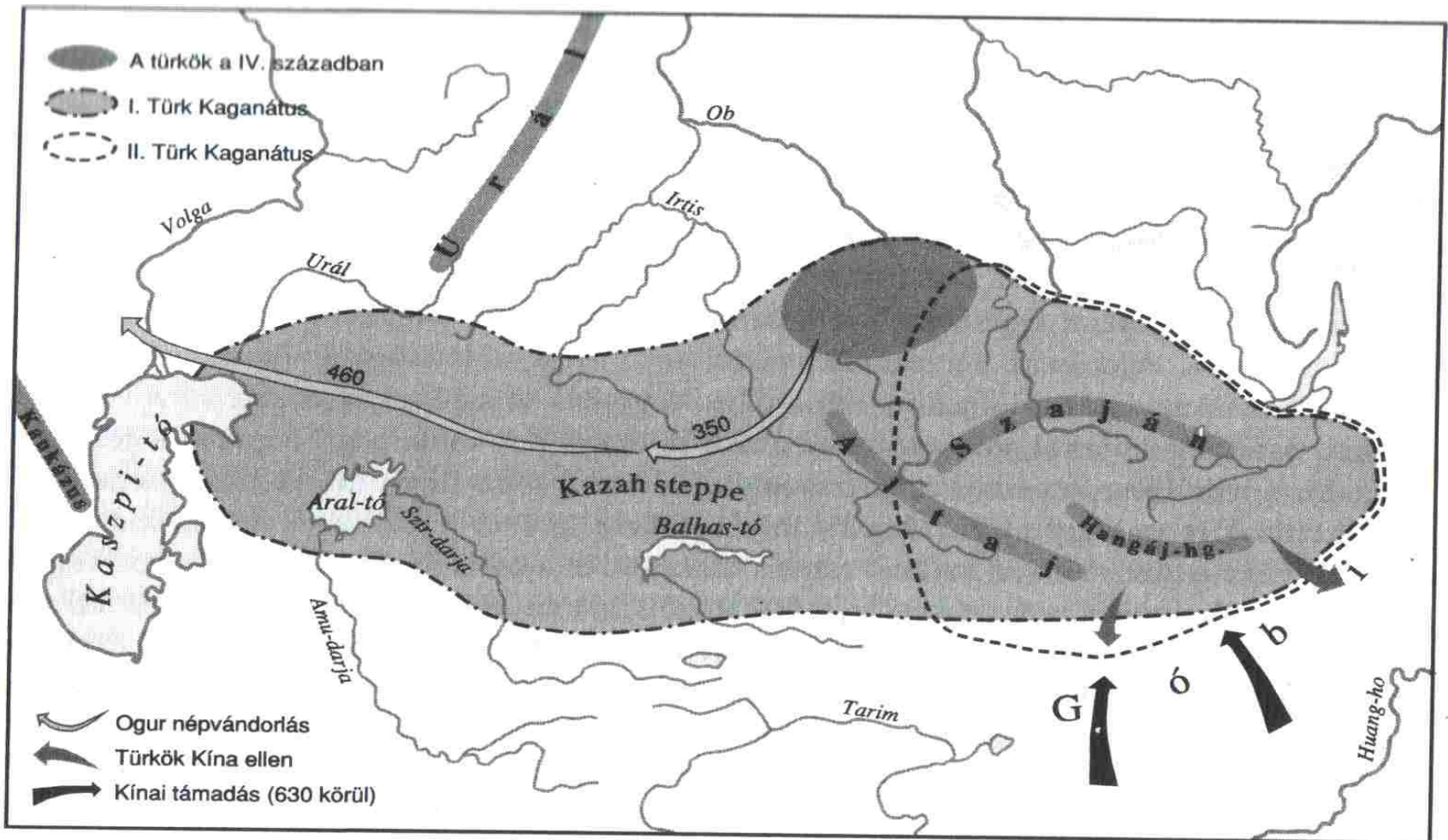
Armenia



# First Turkic Khanate (552-630)

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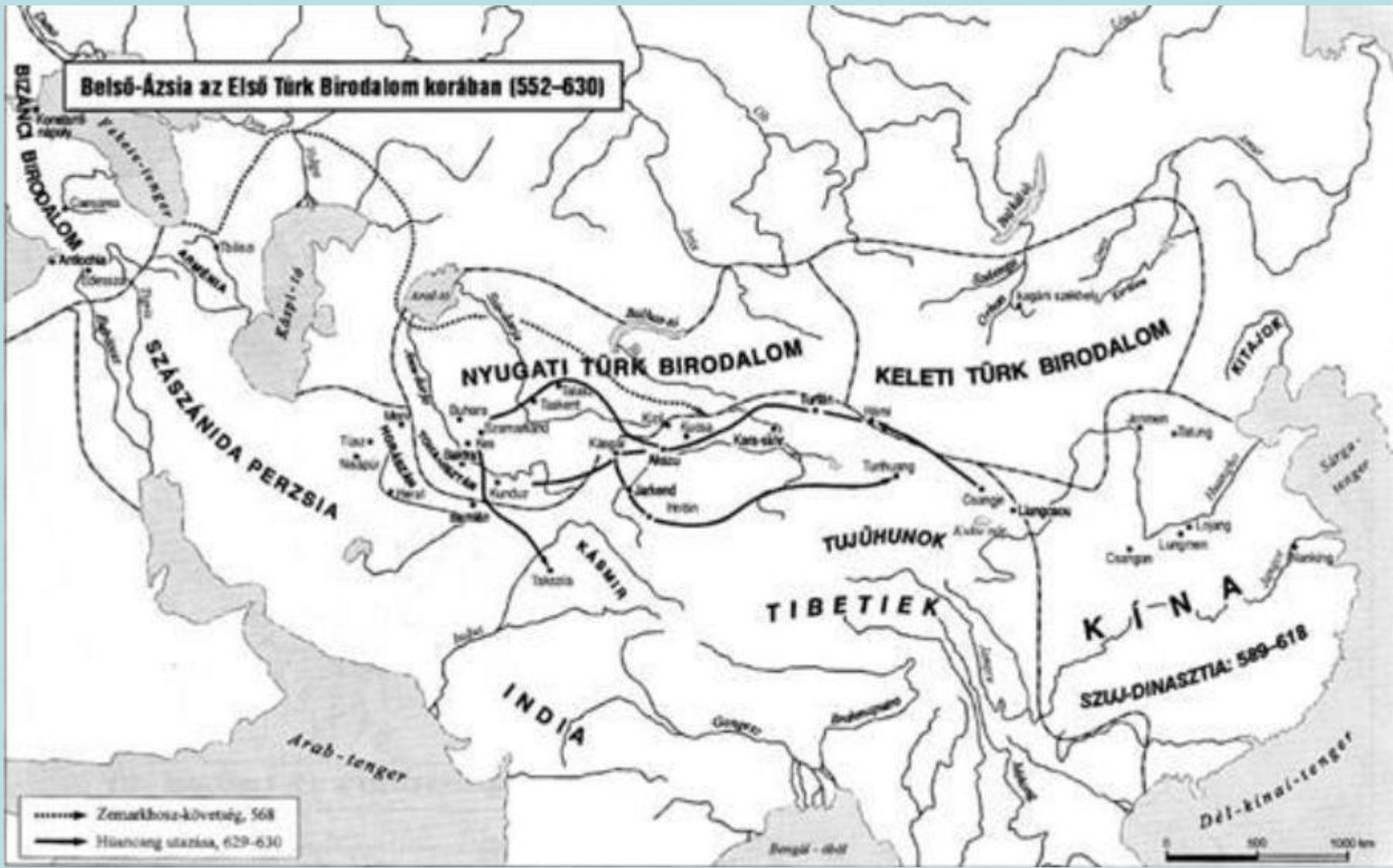


- The conquest of most western Central Asia by the Turks in the late sixth century was of fundamental economic importance because:
- a part of the Silk Roads came to under their control and
- it linked Central Asia to the major peripheral civilizations of Eurasia—Europe, Persia, India and China.
- But this conquest actually had very little effect on the ethnicity of the region, although it may have affected some other aspects of the indigenous culture.



As was the fate of many of empire of the steppes, the realm was soon divided into two parts, an eastern and a western one in the 80s of the 6th. c.

**Belső-Ázsia az Első Türk Birodalom korában (552-630)**



- The Western Turkic Khanate had a long period of wars and contacts both with the Byzantium and Persia.
- The Eastern Turks annually invaded the Chinese borders. The new dynasty, the T'ang which came into rule in 618, only slowly organized their defense but then moved to attack.

# The Collapse of the I. Turk Empire

- The Chinese made use of the dissent among the various Turkic groups and one after the other, Turkic groups were forced to acknowledge the sovereignty of the Chinese Emperor.



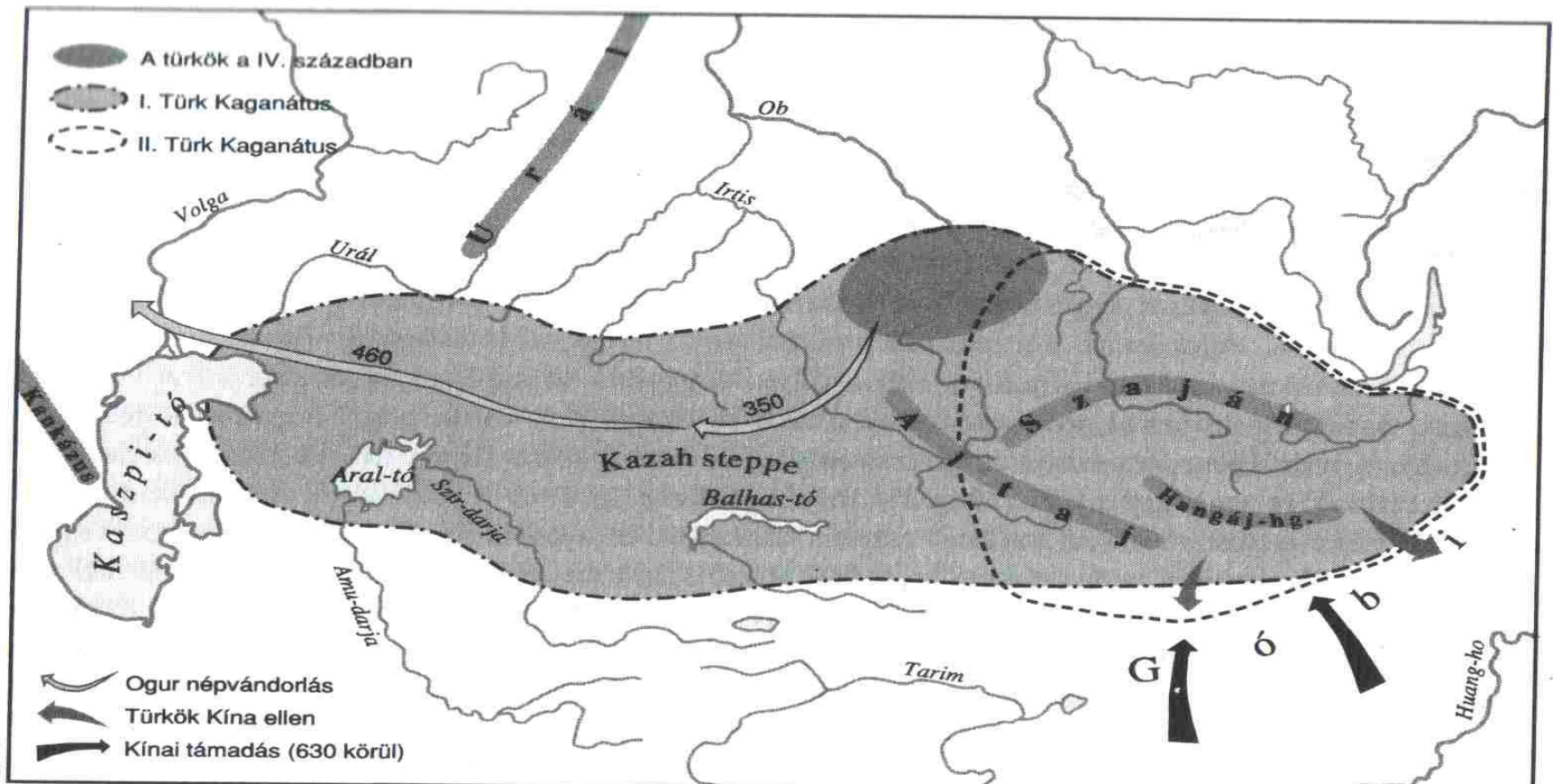
# The Collapse of the I. Turk Empire

- In 630 the Eastern realm collapsed
- the western confederation also lost its independence in 659.

## Second Turkic Khanate (692-742)

- In 692 a small group of Turks under Chinese rule led by Elterish khan rebelled. They soon united most of the Turkic groups and founded the Second Turkic Khanate (or the Second Turk Empire) (692-742).

# Second Turkic Khanate (692-742)



## Script and language

- In the first Turkic Khanate they had used the Sogdian language and script and/or „Para-Mongolic” in Brāhmī for chancellery purposes (?) and inscriptions.
- This was changed in the second Khanate and we dispose of inscriptions written first in the history in Turkic language and in the so called Runic script.



The Second Turkic Khanate was defeated by a coalition of three tribes, the Uygurs, the Qarluqs and the Basmlis.



Map 1. Uyghur Steppe Qaghanate (744-840 ce) in East and Central Asia



After Tan Qixiang, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji* V.36-37

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# Uygur Khanate or the Uygur Steppe Empire (744-840)

(thus being distinguished from the later settled Uygur kingdom)

- 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
- An Lushan rebellion (755-762) (himself was a general of Turco-Sogdian origin)
- In 757, the Uighurs helped in re-conquering the Chinese capitol (Chang'an)
- In 762 they occupied the strategically important Loyang and suppressed the last rebels

## Uygur Khanate or the Uygur Steppe Empire (744-840)

- Here Būgū Khagan (759-779) met with the members of the Sogdian colony, who were for the most part the followers of the teachings of Mani.
- In order to find protection for their ethnic and religious cohorts, they turned towards the Uighur Khagan
- Their endeavours met with success.



## Uygur Khanate or the Uygur Steppe Empire (744-840)

- an evident factor in this respect clearly being the Sogdians' possession of all those crucial abilities and experiences which they had already displayed under the First Turkic Khaganate, particularly in the areas of
- **diplomacy, public governance, merchant life, literacy and erudition.**
- These were necessary to the Uighur Khagan in the organization of his new empire.

## Uygur Khanate or the Uygur Steppe Empire (744-840)

- He therefore took a few Sogdian councillors with himself to his residence, located in Ordu-Balik.
- they were able not only to persuade the khagan himself to take up the Manichaeian faith,
- but persuaded him as well of the advantages of the introduction of a unifying faith.
- Būgū proclaimed Manichaeism the state religion around 762/63.
- The Uighur Khaganate has been the only country in the history of the world in which this religion of Persian origin received such status.

## Uygur Khanate or the Uygur Steppe Empire (744-840)

- 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.
- The religious – and of course political – rivalry proved to be fruitful, just as the simultaneous proximity of the Sogdian and Chinese cultures.
- 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.

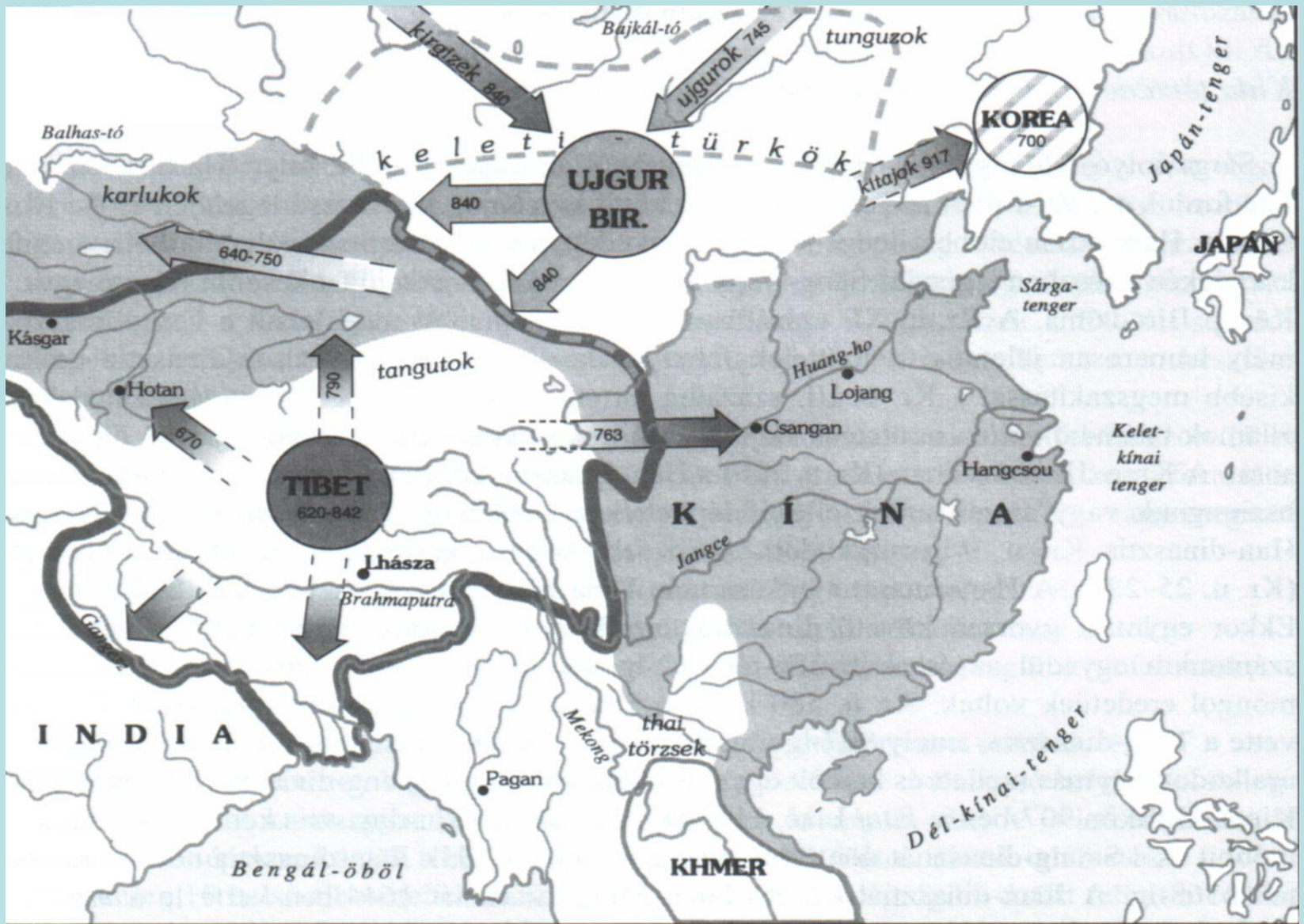
## Uygur Khanate or the Uygur Steppe Empire (744-840)

- Militarily, however, the Khanate was no longer strong enough to withstand the Kirgiz incursions from the north.
- In 840, the Uygur Khanate was overthrown by the Kirghiz.
- However, this collapse did not herald the decay of Uighur culture and erudition. Indeed, the true efflorescence occurred only afterwards.

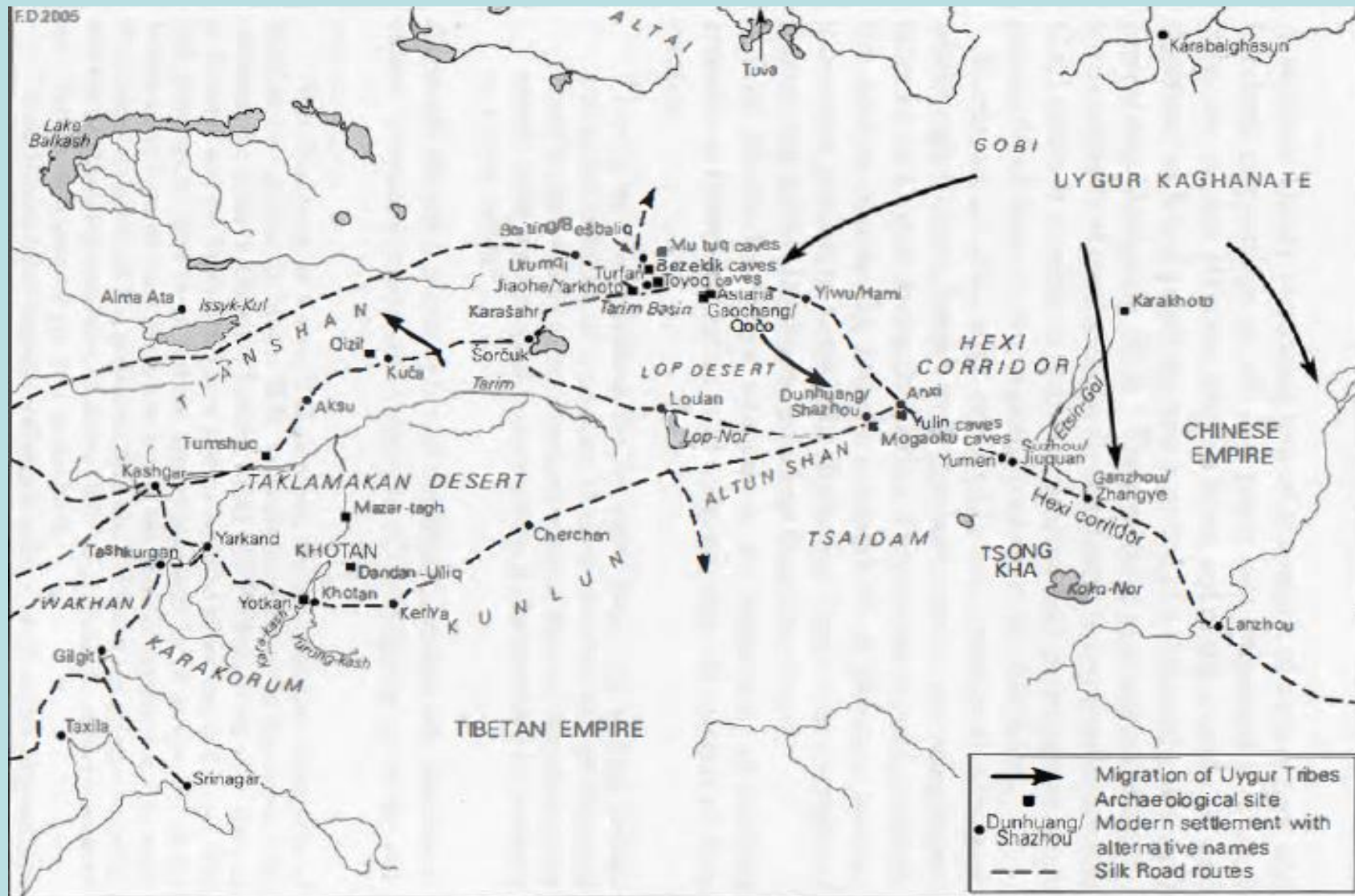
## Uygur Khanate or the Uygur Steppe Empire (744-840)

- The overthrow of earlier nomadic state-formations (the Ruanruans and the Turks) was in fact only followed by a change of elites and power.
- Most among their tribes did not wish to serve their new rulers, looking instead for a new home as they migrated to the south and the southwest.





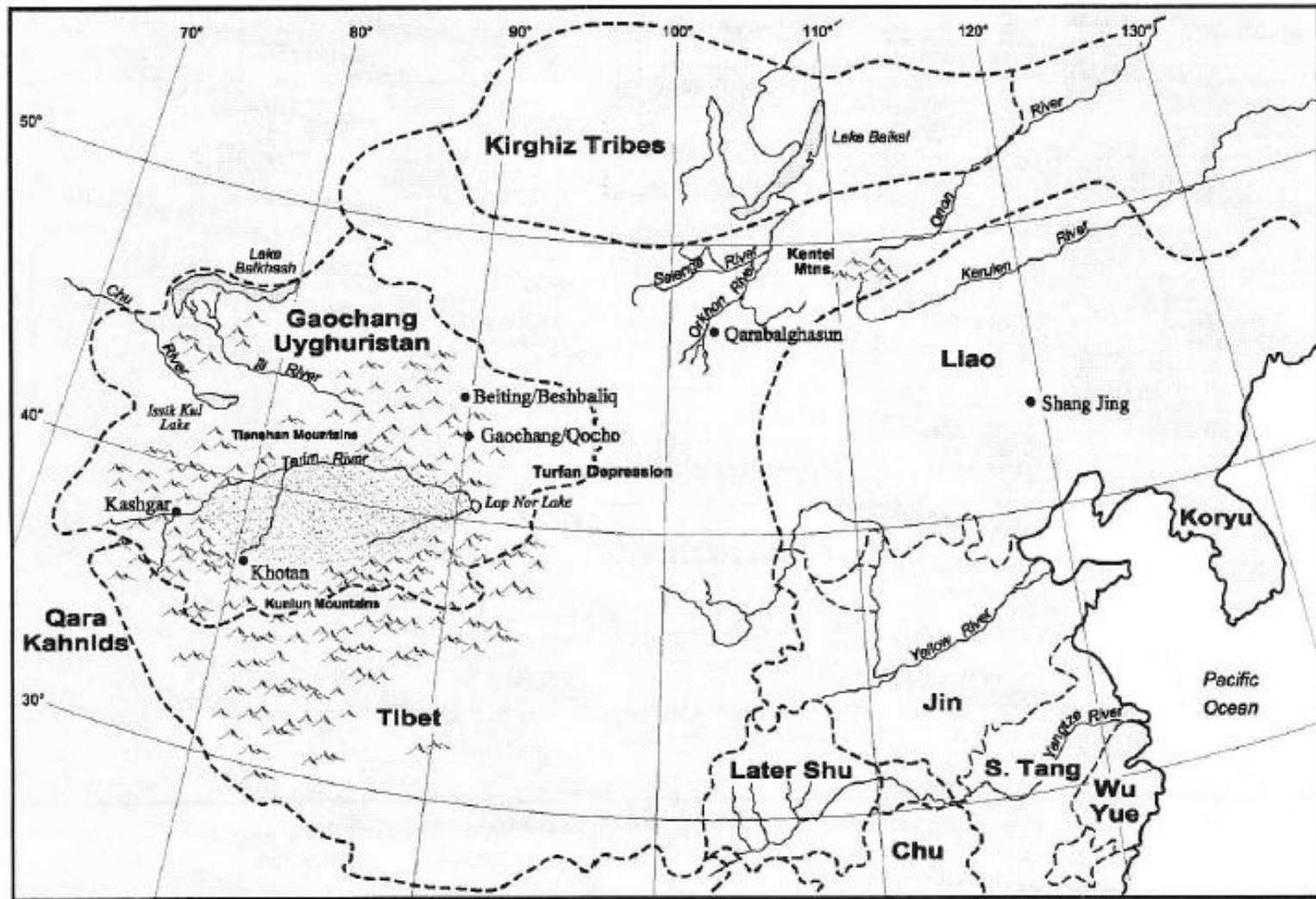
12. Belső-Ázsia és Kína a Tang-dinasztia (618–907) idején



Map of the Silk Road in the ninth-tenth centuries



Map 2. Uyghur Gaochang Kingdom in Central and East Asia (943 ce)



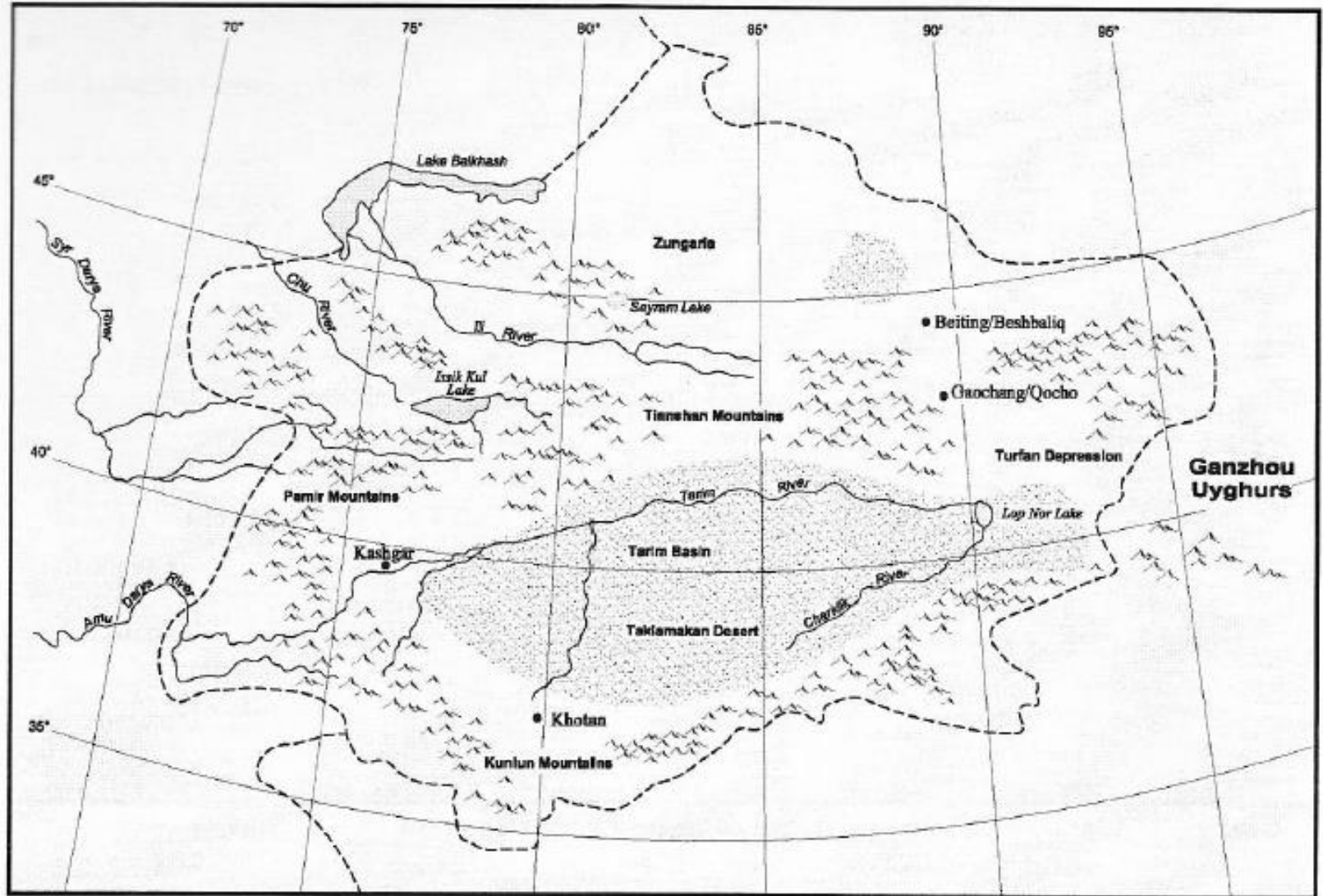
After Tan Qixiang, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji* V.82-83

©RHS/PAF-2

# Uygur Empire / Kingdom (cc. 850-1250)

- A part of them established a new kingdom in the Turfan oasis, in the vicinity of Qocho, which as a state continued to exist up to the end of the 13th century.
- A smaller group settled in the territory of today's Gansu (China), in the area of Ganzhou and Shazhou (Dunhuang). They came to be known as Yellow Uygurs. Subjugated by the Tangut (Xi-Xia) Empire during the first half of the 11th c.
- In their new homelands, both became adherents of Buddhism.
- The Uygur Buddhist literary remains of these two peoples date mainly from the 10th-14th century.

Map 3. Uyghur Gaochang Kingdom (943 ce)



After Tan Qixiang, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji* V.94



# Buddhism and the Turks

# Ancient beliefs

- totemic (?)
- shamanism
- tengrism (*kök tengri*)

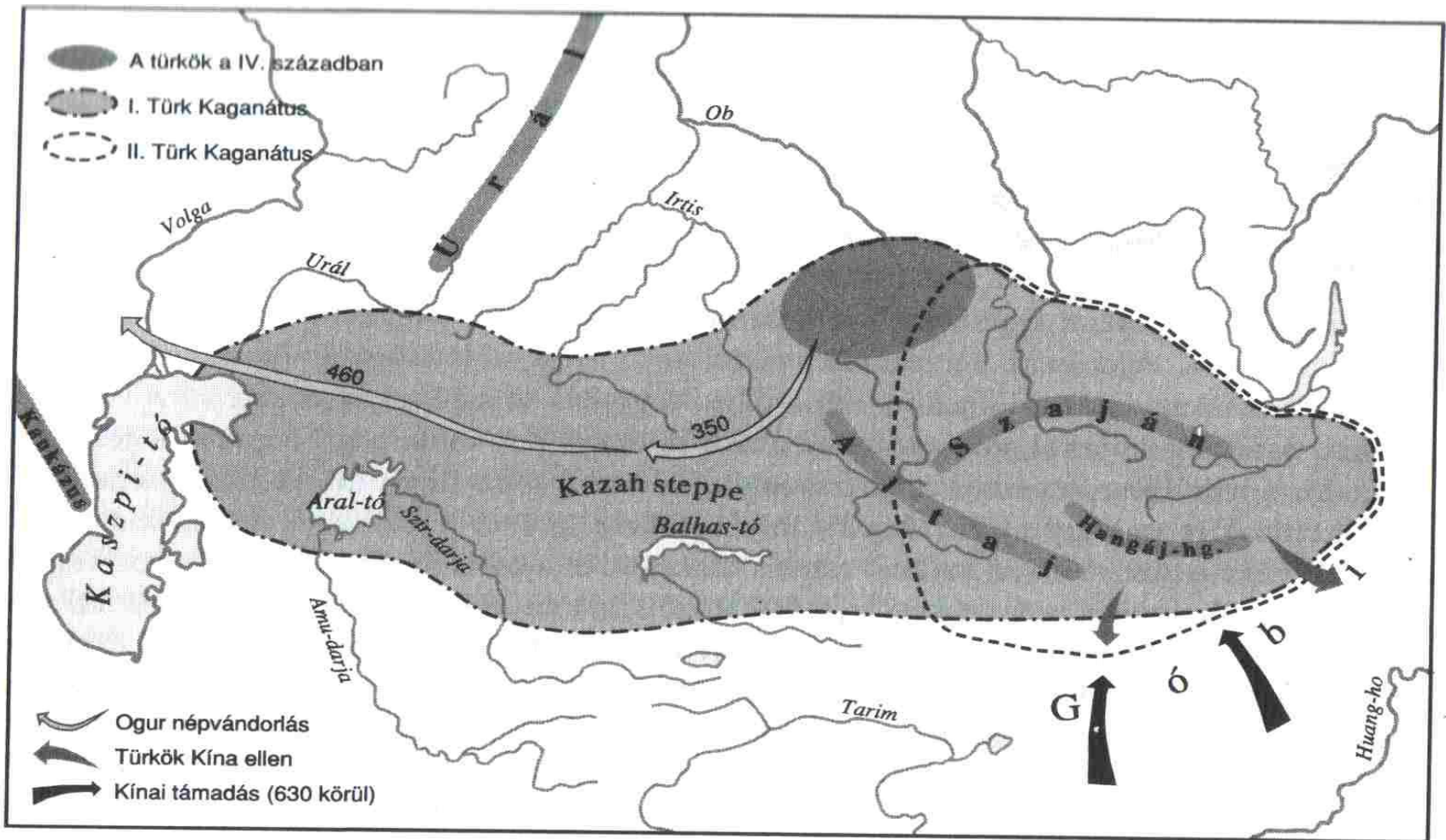
# Buddhism

- Many issues with regard to the history of the adoption of Buddhism by Turkic peoples remain unclear.

# Western Turks

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## Western Turks

- It is very probable that the Western Turks of the first empire came into contact with Buddhism, for that religion had by this time made inroads into that part of CA they occupied. But we have no evidence of conversion to Buddhism at this period. Xuanzang, who passed through CA in 629, does not make any mention of Buddhism among the Western Turks either. In so far as later Western Turks are concerned, we do hear of Buddhist sanctuaries established by the Turk royalty in the area of Kapiśa (Begram in today's Afghanistan). When the Chinese Buddhist monk Wu-kong visited Gandhara between 759 and 764, he found here Buddhist temples, which, as he thinks, were built at the expense of the Turkic kings.



# Buddhism and the Turks

## The Eastern Turks

- 'Turkish temple' in Chang'an (end of the 50s of the 6th c.)
- A Chinese source records that Muhan (*Bukan*) Khagan's (553-572) successor, named Tatpar Khagan (572-581) was converted to Buddhism by a Chinese monk named Hui Lin, a member of an embassy sent to the Turk's court by the Emperor of the Northern Qi dynasty.

## Turkic (?) *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*

According to a Chinese source, the *Beiqi shu* 北齊書 (“History of the Northern Qi”), in 574 A.D. the Emperor of the Northern Qi 北齊 (550-577) presented a text of this very *sūtra* (*Niepan jing* 涅槃經) translated from Chinese into “the Türk language (*tujue yu* 突厥語)” to the Türk ruler, Tatpar Khagan (r. 572-581).

# Buddhism and the Turks

## The Eastern Turks

- “Bugut Inscription” (between 572 -580/580-590)
- Persecution of Buddhists in Nord Zhou (574-577)
- Jñānagupta (528?-605?; Ch. *Shenajueduo* 闍那崛多 or *Zhi De* 志德) a monk from Kapiśa (Gandhāra; Begram in present-day Afghanistan), together with other monks from his native land, spent nearly a decade in the court of the Eastern Turks (ca. 574-584) during the rule of Tatpar Khagan, translating texts brought from India by Chinese monks.

# Buddhism in the II. Khanate

- In the Turkic inscriptions between 692 and 735 there is no trace of Buddhism.
- „Toñyuquq” inscription (726)
- Köl Tegin inscription (732)

# Buddhism in the II. Khanate

Qutlug Khagan's minister, the "wise Toñyuquq" (726), who was himself raised in China, warned the Turks about too close association with the Chinese. This warning echoed in the so-called Köl Tegin inscription (732) where the Turks are exhorted to return to their former way of life in the Ötükän mountains of present Mongolia.

This warning might also have implied a disassociation from Chinese Buddhism and a return to the native religion with its veneration of the Tengri Heaven and the Earth Mother Umay.



# Buddhism and the Turks

Uygur Khanate or the Uygur  
Steppe Empire (744-840)

# Uygur Khanate (744-840)

During the Uygur Steppe Empire, or in other words the Uygur Khanate (744-840), only a single reference occurs to the fact that Buddhism was also prevalent among the Turks of steppes before their immigration to regions mentioned. The famous trilingual Karabalgasun inscription, written in Chinese, Uygur and Sogdian, informs us about the Uygurs adopting Manichaeism, and there is a reference to “carved and painted images of demons” which were to be destroyed, and cannot be ruled out that some of these were Buddhist figures.

# Uygur Empire / Kingdom (cc. 850-1250)

From the time of their arrival until the 10th century it probable that the Uygur ruling elite in Qocho (near Turfan) continued to profess Manichaeism. However, towards the end of the 10th century there appears to have been a shift by the ruling elite away from Manichaeism towards Buddhism which was followed by the majority of the inhabitants of the northern Tarim Basin. When the Song Chinese envoy, Wang Yande visited the city of Qocho in 982, he noticed only one Manichaean temple in comparison with 50 Buddhist monasteries and a Chinese Buddhist library. This is also the time when the Uygur elite began to sponsor the translation of Buddhist scripture into their own language.

# The reasons for conversion by the Uygur rulers from Manichaeism to Buddhism

- Larry Clark (1984): it was an attempt to unify the kingdom, whose populace was in the majority Buddhist, against the expanding Islamic Krahānids.
- Kōgi Kudara: In order to establish and maintain their country in a respectable way in this area, they needed to adopt Buddhism at the state level. Perhaps they believed that by choosing Buddhism they could maintain friendly relations with China, the great Buddhist empire to the east.

# The Sources of Uygur Buddhism

The Turks of Central Asia must have been very susceptible to the culture and religions of those people with whom they lived or had long been in contact. Thus they adopted e.g. Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Islam. Among these religions it was undoubtedly Turkic Buddhism which developed to the most colorful stage. While e.g. Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism were transmitted to the Turks practically only by the Sogdians, Turkic Buddhism was influenced by several sources.

# The content of the texts

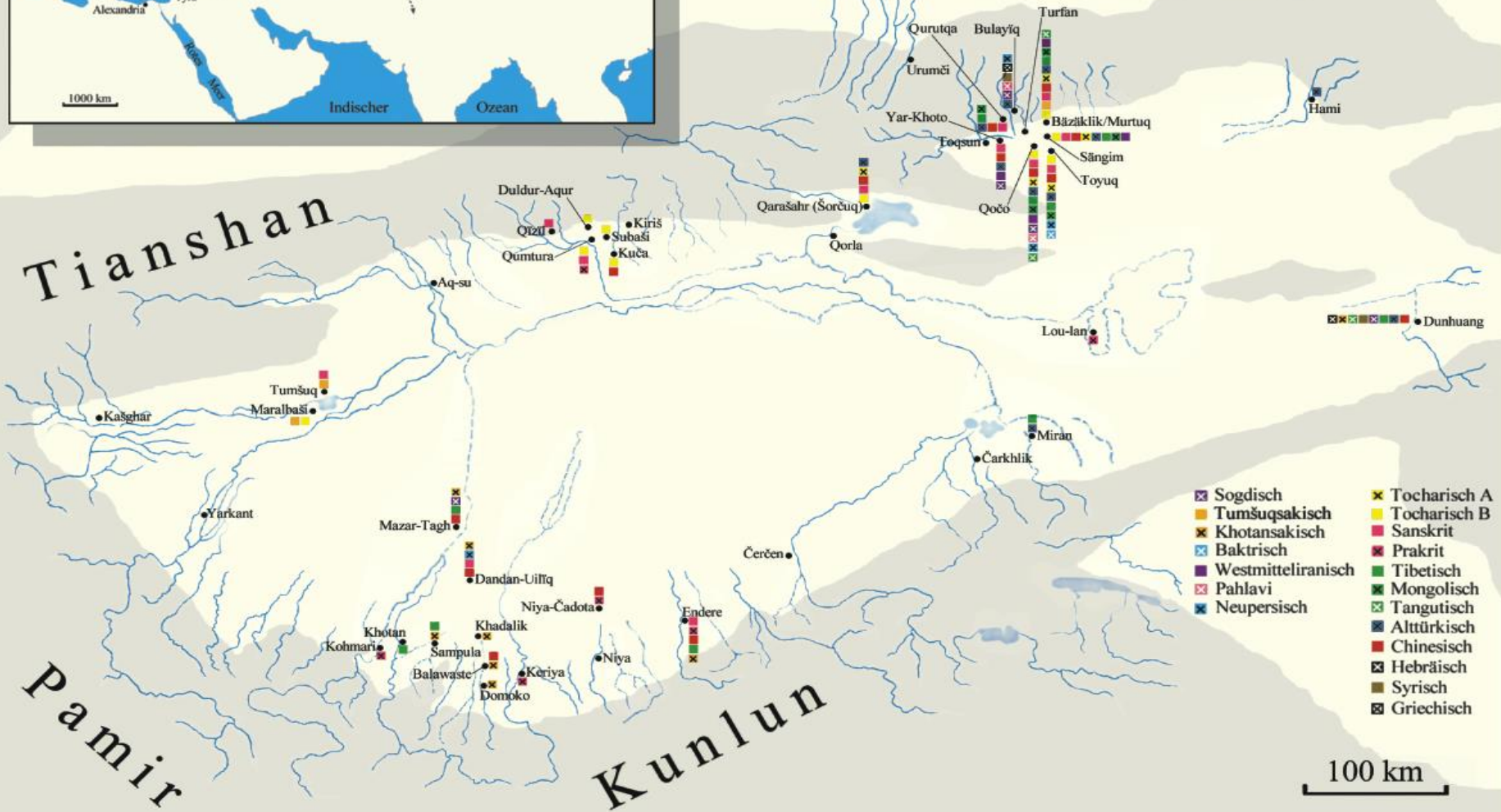
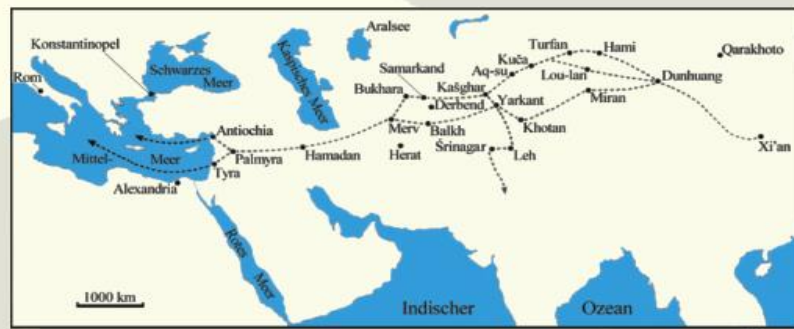
**Most of the texts are religious in content.**

- Three main religions: Buddhism, Manichaeism and Christianity. Most of them are translations.
- Scientific texts, e.g. medical or astronomical.
- Dream interpretations, divinations, calendars.
- Economic and legal notices.
- Tax bills, documents about buying and selling etc.





# Scripts and languages of the texts



100 km

# Uigur text in runes /Runic script (U 5)



Fragment of a Uygur text published in BTT XXIII. U 3832,  
probably from Murtuq,

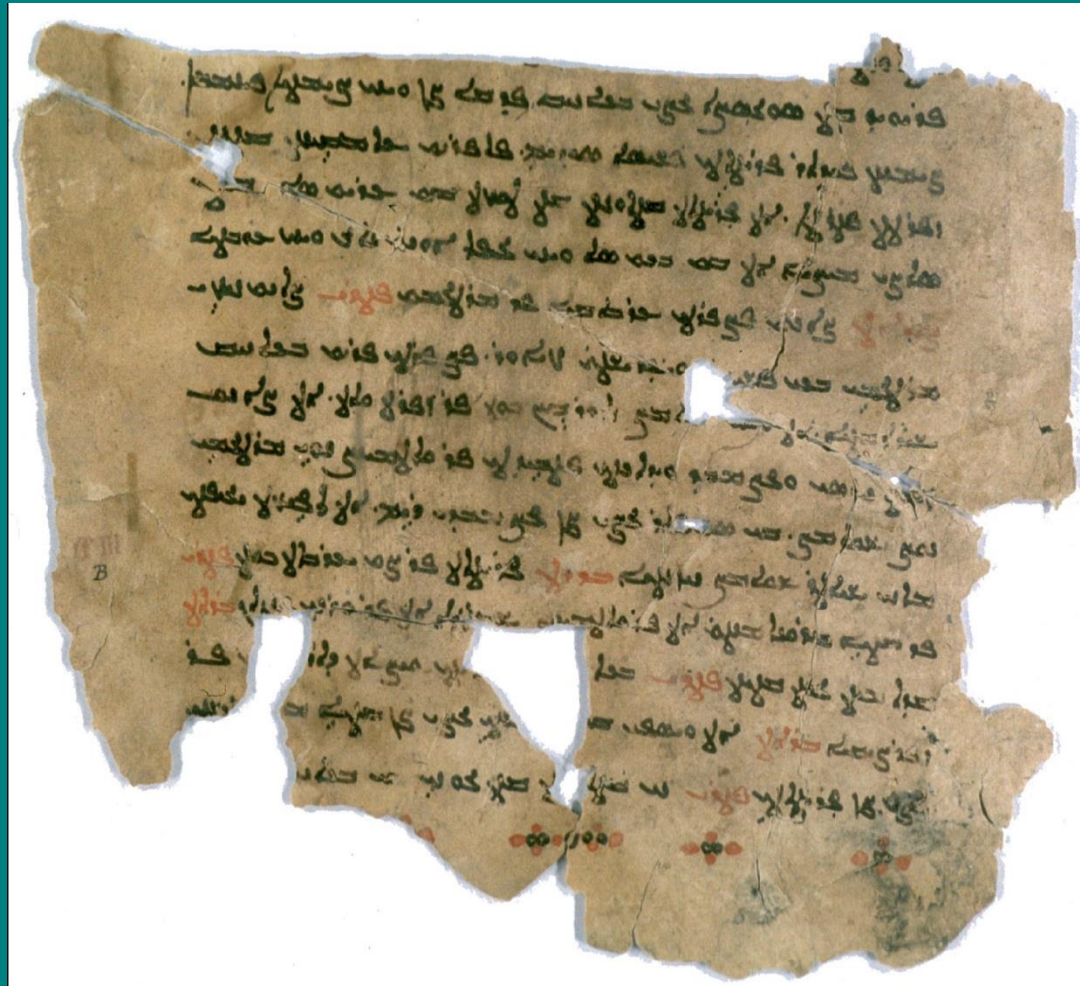




*Manichaeans scribes. Page from a book from Khocho.  
(unidentified Manichaean text).*

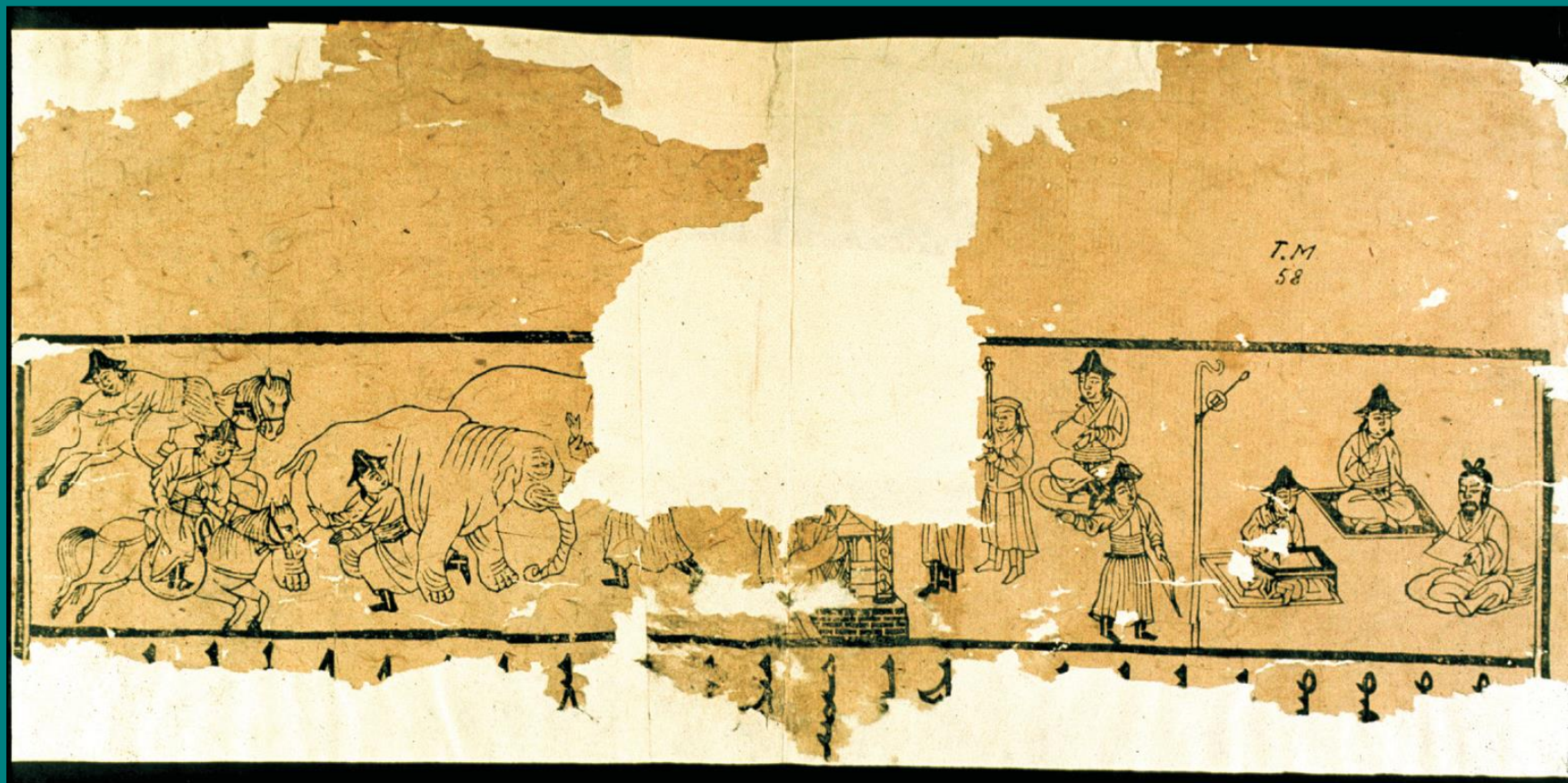


In slightly modified Syriac script (Estrangelo) and Christian Sogdian language. The page belongs to the large Sogdian codex and was edited by N. Sims-Williams (BTT XII: Folio 61 R on p. 129).





*Page of a block print of the Old Turkish version of Vi'svantara-Jataka.  
Illustrations in the Uigur-Mongolian style.*





# The Old Turkic Texts

(ca. 8000 fragments)

## *Old Turkic*

After the first stage of Old Turkic (runic inscriptions from many regions of Asia from Mongolia as far as the Carpathian Basin, ca. 6th – 10th c.) a second stage is represented by the pre-Islamic texts from Turfan and Dunhuang. This Central Asian Turkic is a koiné-type literary language that, on phonological and morphological criteria, is divided into about three dialects: Manichaean Turkic, early Buddhist Old Turkic [Uygur A] and Buddhist Old Turkic [Uygur].

# The Old Turkic Texts

## *Manichaean*

Apart from the early inscriptions from Karabalgasun of the 8th c., the literary remains of the Uygur Manichaeans date from the 10th and 11th centuries and are located in the Turfan oasis and Dunhuang.

# The Old Turkic Texts

## *Christian*

Christian manuscripts, dating probably from the 12th and 13th centuries, were found in Qocho, Bulayïq, Kurutka and further east in Qarakhoto.

# The Old Turkic Texts

## *Buddhist*

The Buddhist literature presents an entirely different picture. In the whole period from the 10th to the 14th centuries Buddhist works were read, copied, translated and modified. The texts were also geographically more widely spread than those of the other religious communities.

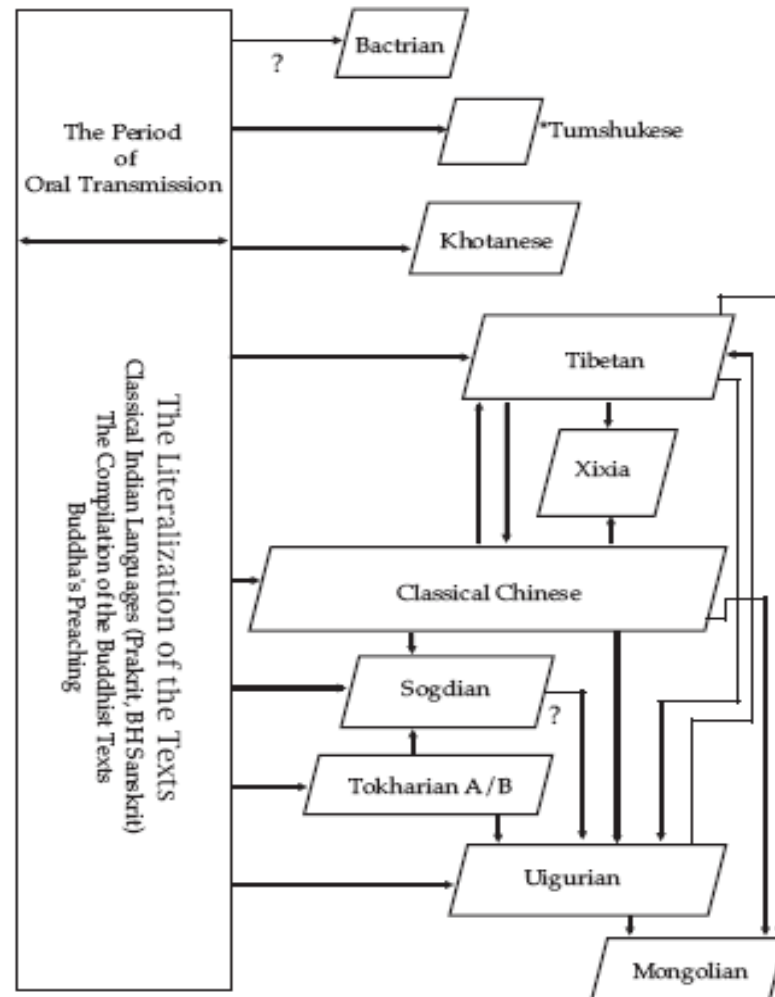
# The Old Turkic Texts

## *Buddhist*

The number of fragments illustrating all the facets of Buddhism amongst the Uygurs rises to thousands and forms the major part of the ca. 8000 Old Turkic fragments. When we consider that this is only a small part of what was once translated and written down then we must recognize that Buddhism really flourished in the later phase of the Uygur kingdom.

Chart A: Outlook of the Translation Relationship of the Buddhist Texts in Central Asia

	0																			
CE	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15



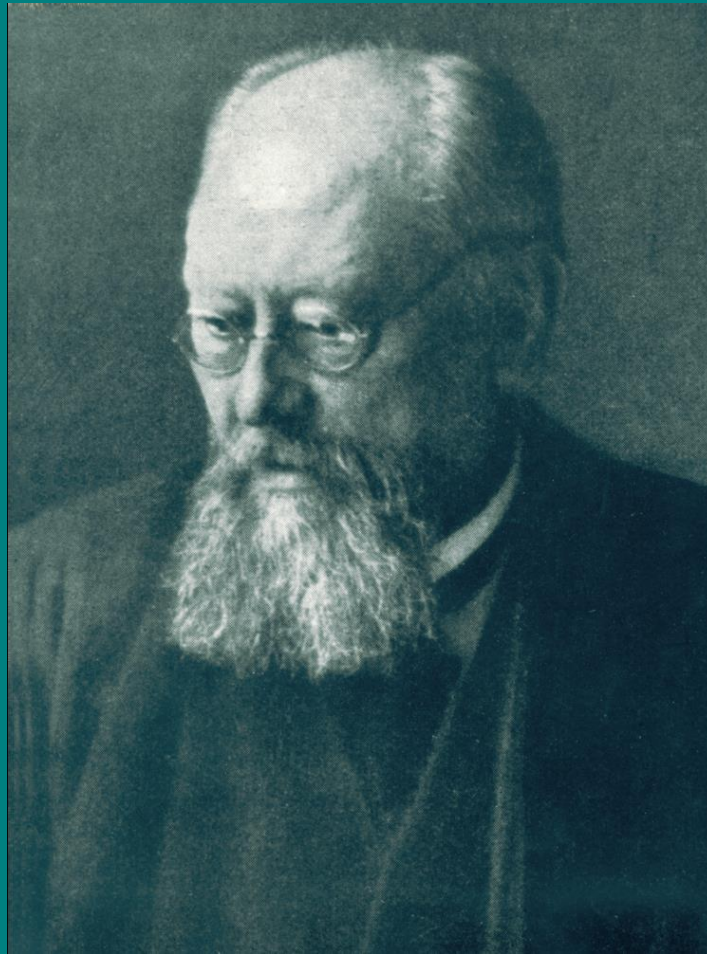


Upon the discovery of these manuscripts scholars took up the philological endeavor of deciphering and translating them almost immediately.

# Pioneering works

- Wilhelm Radloff (Russian)
- Sergej Malov (Russian)
- F.W.K. Müller (German)
- Paul Pelliot (French)
- James Hamilton (French-Canadian)
- and many others representing many nations.

*F. W. K. Müller (1863 – 1930)*



# Denis Sinor

*A középázsiai török buddhizmusról* [On Turkic  
Buddhism in Central Asia.]

in: Kőrösi-Csoma Archive 1. Budapest, 1937

pp. 353-390

Johan Elverskog

Uyghur Buddhist Literature  
in: Silk Road Studies I.  
1997

It details 83 works and since then the numbers of works identified has risen.

# The Sources of Uygur Buddhism

They turned to the three Buddhist cultures extant in their

area:

Kucha-Karashar-Turfan

region:

- Sogdian
- Tokharian

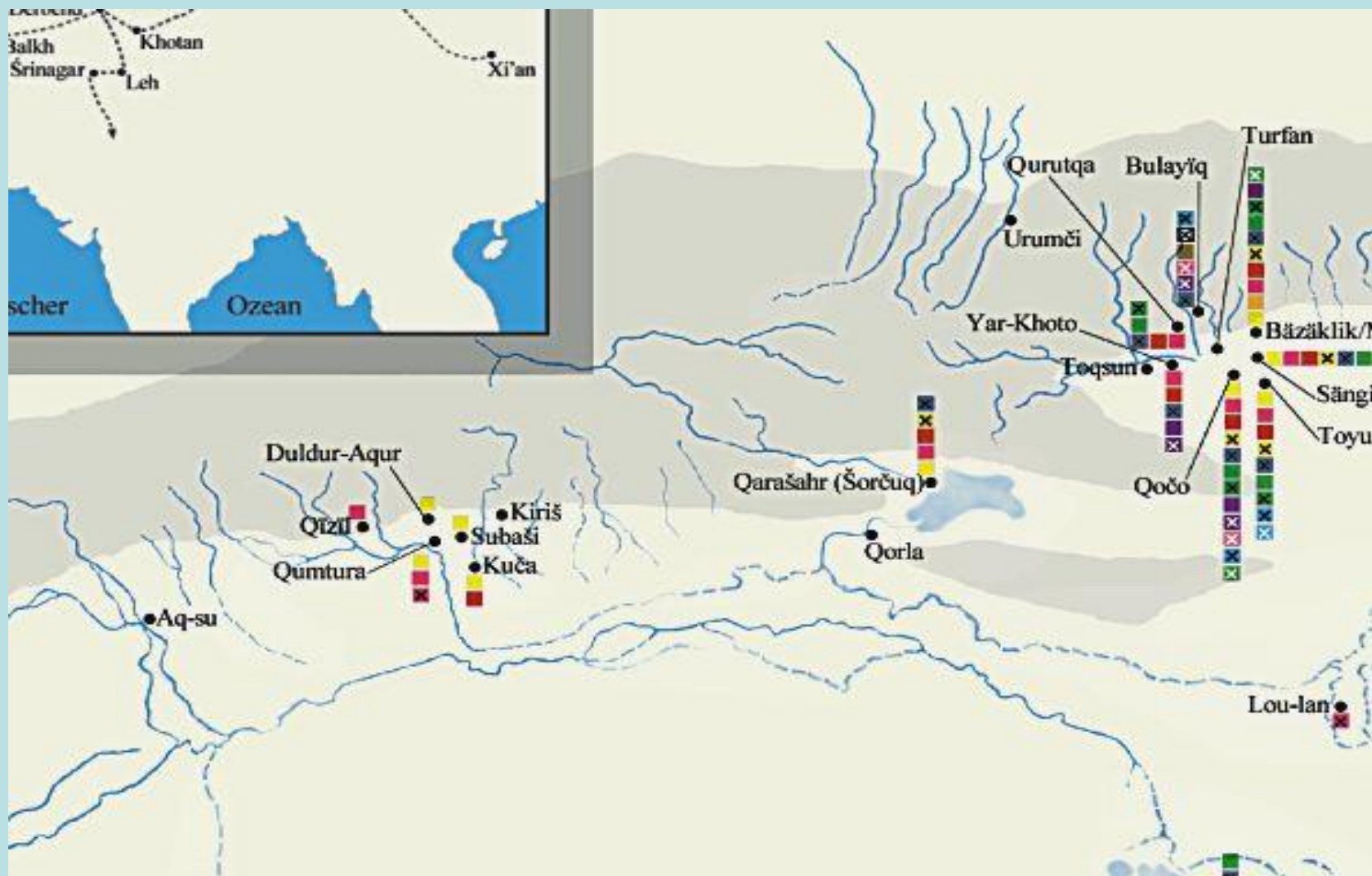
Beshbalik-Turfan-Dunhuang

area:

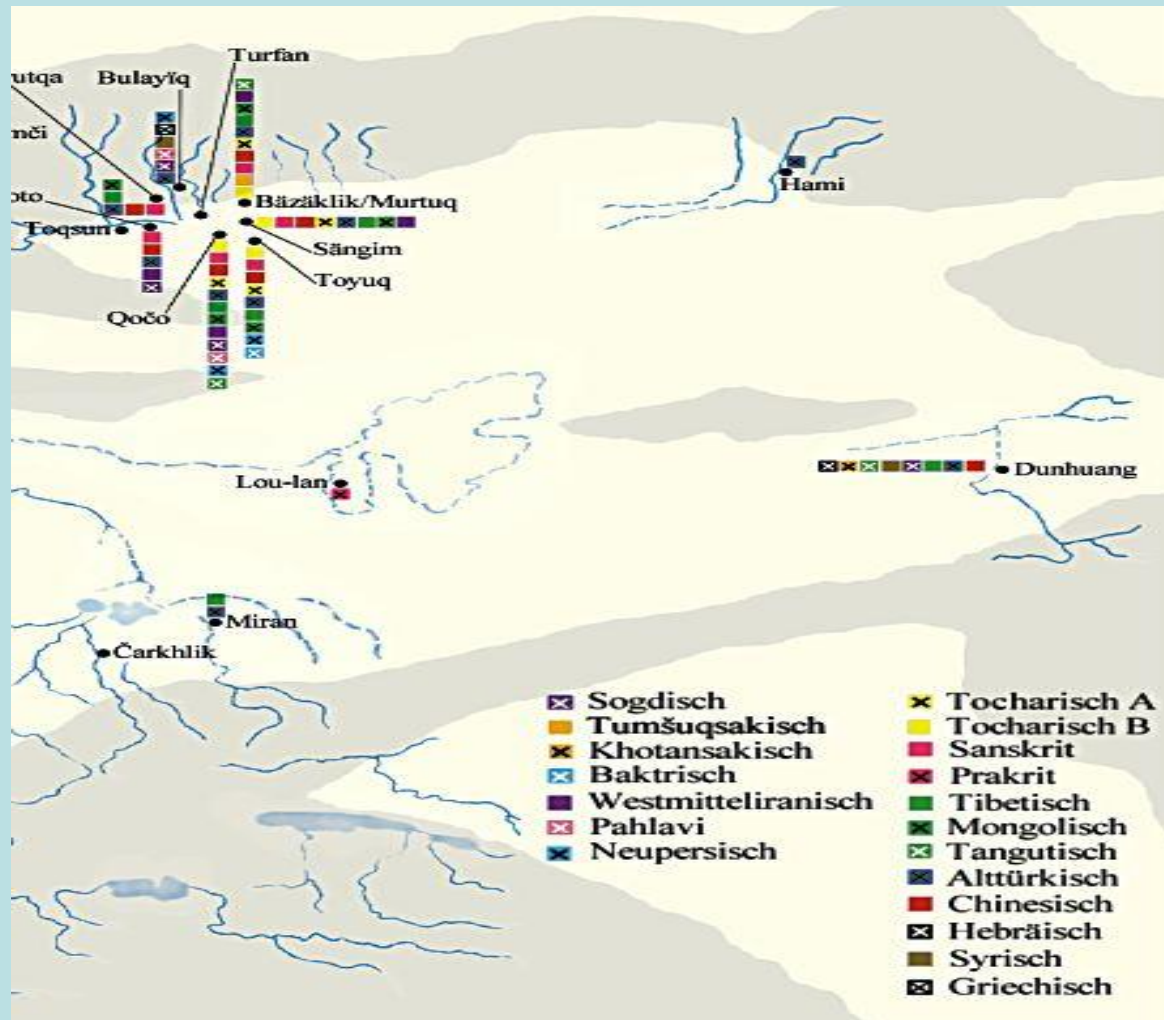
- Chinese
- (Tibetan in the Yuan era)



# Sogdian, Tokharian Kucha-Karashar-Turfan



# Chinese (and Tibetan) Beshbalik-Turfan-Dunhuang



# The Sogdian influence

## Difficulties:

- no extant translation from Sogdian into Uygur
- the general scarcity of texts from the earliest formative period

# The Sogdian influence

## Support:

- the role of the Sogdians in the spread of Buddhism in Central Asia (also Manichaeism and Nestorianism);
- ~ were among the early translators from Sanskrit into Chinese;
- ~ engaged in the Turkic chancellery and diplomatic activities;
- the inscription of Bugut;
- the use of Sogdian script by the early Turks;
- the vast majority of Uygur literature written in the Sogdian-Uygur script;
- some of the basic Buddhist terms in Uygur are of Sogdian origin.

# The Tokharian influence

- colophons: translated from Tokharian into Turkic (*toxri tilintin ... türkčä ävirmiš*);
- a bilingual Tokharian-Turkic hymn (10th/11th. c.);
- large group of Sanskrit loanwords came into Uygur via Tokharian;
- many loan-words of Sogdian origin were replaced with Sanskrit words in Tokharian form;
- the introduction and the use of Brāhmī script.

# The Chinese Buddhist influence

- From the 9th/10th century, if not earlier, Buddhist texts were rendered in Turkic from Chinese. The Chinese Buddhist influence became especially apparent from the early 11th century translations of Šingqo Šäli Tutung (from Beshbalik) , whose various translations also include the biography of Xuanzang, and other activities.

# Tibetan influence

During the Yuan dynasty (1280-1368)  
Tibetan also became an important source  
for Uygur Buddhism.



# Scripts used

- Sogdian-Uygur (Uygur): a modified form of the Sogdian cursive script.
- Sogdian script
- Brāhmī script
- Tibetan script
- Sometimes the Uygur text is accompanied by Brāhmī glosses or by Chinese characters.



# The forms of the texts

- *pustaka* format
- Chinese book-roll
- folding book
- xylographs printed from carved blocks

# The origins of the texts

(Elverskog 1997)

- largest number were translated from Chinese
- 16 texts were translated from Tibetan
- 3 texts presumably were based on Tokharian originals
- 9 from Sanskrit
- 3 are original Uygur compositions
- not determined at present

# Phases of translation

# According to Peter Zieme

1992. *Religion und Gesellschaft im uigurischen Königreich von Qočo*. Opladen.

## Pre-Mongolian (9-12. c. AD)

- Tokharian
- Chinese

## Mongolian (13-14. c. AD)

- Chinese
- Tibetan
- Sanskrit

# According to Moriyasu Takao

1990. „L'origine du bouddhisme chez les Turcs et l'apparition des textes bouddhiques en turc ancien”. *ACFJ* Kyoto: 147-165.

last decades of 10th-the 1st decades of 11th c.	11th-beginning of 13th c.	Mongol period (13-14th c)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Sogdian (?)</li><li>•Tokharian</li><li>•Chinese</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Chinese</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Chinese</li><li>•Tibetan</li></ul> <p>(+ the use of blockprinting)</p>



## According to Kōgi Kudara

2002. „The Buddhist Culture of the Old Uigur Peoples”, Pacific World: 183-195

„Since at that time people lived in multi-lingual and multi-ethnic communities around Turfan and Kucha, I think that it is not necessary to identify a single source of initial Buddhist influence upon the Uigur people.”  
(p. 188)

# Who were the first Buddhist teachers of the Turkic-speaking peoples ?

- 1. According to “Sogdian hypothesis” the technical terms which came from Sogdian constitute the oldest strata of the Uygur Buddhist vocabulary and subsequently these were partly and gradually replaced by their Tokharian counterparts.
- 2. According to “Tokharian hypothesis” the Sogdian elements in the early Uygur Buddhist lexicon largely originated not from Buddhists but from the Manichean Sogdians who converted the ruler of the East Uygur Khanate in the second half of the 8th century, where it soon was elevated to the rank of the state religion.

# Skt. *śikṣāpada*

- Buddhist Sogdian *škš'(')pt*
- the Manichaean form *čxš'(')pδ*
- Uygur Man./Bud. *čxš'pt* (with various spellings)
- Parthian \**čxš'pt/δ*

Tremblay, X., 2007, *The Spread of Buddhism in Serindia* , p. 111.

3. In the Sogdian texts, the notion of *kleśa* is expressed by *wytγwey sr'yβt'm* “pain and suffering”, whereas in Uighur it is rendered by the Sogdian loan word *nyzb'ny* “desire”. According to T. Moriyasu, this again contradicts the “Sogdian hypothesis”. But actually, the Sogdian dual term translates the Chinese equivalent for *kleśa*: *fan nao* 煩惱, “trouble and disturbance”. The scholarly Sogdian translation abides so slavishly to the Chinese original that at face value it makes no sense at all.<sup>174</sup> Missionaries could not use it, but must have recourse to a simpler explanation for the impurity that causes all rebirths. The term “desire” is by no means an absurd equivalence.

## According to Kōgi Kudara

2002. „The Buddhist Culture of the Old Uigur Peoples”, Pacific World: 183-195

„Since at that time people lived in multi-lingual and multi-ethnic communities around Turfan and Kucha, I think that it is not necessary to identify a single source of initial Buddhist influence upon the Uigur people.”  
(p. 188)

# The technique of translation of Buddhists texts in Central Asia

“Sie ist nicht das Werk eines Kopfes, der die Schöpfung eines zusammenhängende Ganzen vor Auge hatte. Stil und Qualität der Übersetzungen werden wahrscheinlich erheblich variieren, weil man damit rechnen muß, das Šingqo Šäli mit verschiedenen Kollegen und mit verschiedenen „Wortübersetzern“ zusammengearbeitet hat.“

(Klaus Röhrborn)

- Many Buddhist grottoes such as those in Bezeklik, Toyuk, Kizil and Kumtura testifies that Buddhism flourished extensively in the Khocho Uygur Kingdom



## Bezeklik Thousand Buddha Caves



# Toyok caves



# Dunhuang Mogaoku Caves





# Yulin caves

