

THE QARAKHANIDS' EASTERN EXCHANGE: PRELIMINARY NOTES ON THE SILK ROADS IN THE ELEVENTH AND TWELFTH CENTURIES

Michal Biran

Despite the recent spike in Silk Road research, the period from the tenth to the twelfth century is often overlooked. Even recent studies, such as Liu Xinru's "The Silk Road in World History" (2010, 110–111) or Christopher Beckwith's voluminous "Empires of the Silk Roads" (2008, 165–175) dedicate only a few pages to this timespan¹. Squeezed in between the halcyon days of the Tang-Abbasid exchange and Mongol dominion, encumbered by political fragmentation, and sorely lacking in documentation, the years between the tenth and twelfth centuries indeed constitute one of the most neglected periods in the history of the Silk Roads.

Common wisdom holds that the collapse of the Tang dynasty in 907, the weakening of the Abbasid Caliphate from the ninth century on, and the downfall of the Uyghur confederation in the mid-800s disrupted trade across the continental Silk Roads. With the land routes largely cut off by hostile states to the north, China re-oriented its foreign commerce to the sea. Maritime trade with Japan, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean basin prospered throughout the Song period. In the process, the ports of Guangzhou and Quanzhou on China's southern coast became home to large communities of Arab, Persian, Malay, and Tamil traders (von Glahn forthcoming).

While the vim of the maritime routes is certainly well-documented, I argue that overland trade and cross-cultural exchanges not only endured throughout this period, but were substantial in their own right. Hints of these ties can be found, above all, in the archaeological record, especially the major excavations of Liao tombs in China. This hypothesis is corroborated by evidence of economic and urban growth in eleventh and twelfth-century Transoxania and Semirech'e, like the paintings in the newly excavated Qarakhanid palace in Samarqand (Grenet 2010; Karev 2005; 2013). Moreover, it is discernible in the literary works – incomplete as they may be – from the era under review.

The current paper concentrates on one facet of these contacts: the trade relations of the Qarakhanids – the first Turkic Muslim dynasty (ca. 950–1213) – with its neighbors to the east. At its height, the Qarakhanid realm stretched from the Tarim Basin (western Xinjiang) to the Oxus (the western border of Uzbekistan). Therefore, it is only natural that they were the principal Muslim partner in these exchanges. Over the next few pages, I will survey the Qarakhanids' ties with the Liao and the Northern Song through the 1100s and touch on their relations with the Xi Xia, the Jin, and the Mongol tribes during the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Following this general overview, the discussion will turn to the specific goods that were plied and the corresponding cultural exchange. Before we proceed, a few introductory words about the Qarakhanids are in order.

¹ Also see Liu Xinru/Shaffer 2007, 232. Biran 2001, 87 provides earlier examples.

THE QARAKHANIDS AND THEIR STUDY

The early history of the Qarakhanids – a confederation of Qarluq, Uyghur, Cigil, and Yaghma elements – is still a matter for conjecture. Satuq Bughra Khan, the first Qarakhanid to embrace Islam, is said to have died in 955. From this point on, we can talk of a Qarakhanid dynasty, the heart of which was initially the Kashgar region. The historical record of this group starts to come into focus over the last decades of the tenth century, when it was immersed in a two-front war against the Muslim Samanids in Transoxania and the Buddhist Khotan kingdom in the Tarim Basin. The Qarakhanids took over Transoxania in 999 and completed their conquest of Khotan seven years later. From the outset, however, the empire was bifurcated, and the western khan was answerable to his eastern counterpart. Various other members of the ruling clan held lesser titles and appanages. The Qarakhanid hierarchy was akin to the game of musical chairs, as aspirants moved up the ranks while changing their honorifics and sometimes even their fiefs (Biran 2005b). In consequence, tracking the careers of the dynasty's rulers is at times like searching for a needle in a haystack.

In 1040, the Qarakhanids' realm was officially divided into eastern and western khanates. By the end of the century, the western and then the eastern polity became a vassal of the rising Seljuqs (ca. 1055–1194). Within the next fifty years, both khanates – the eastern followed by the western – fell under Qara Khitai rule (1124–1218) (Figs. 1–2). The decline of the latter coincided with the demise of the Qarakhanids. Owing to an unsuccessful mutiny in Khotan and Kashgar against the Qara Khitai, the Eastern Khanate was rendered toothless in 1204. After the western Qarakhanids switched allegiances from the Qara Khitai to the Khwārazm Shāh, another rebellious vassal, the Khwārazm, Shāh Muḥammad, had his son-in-law, the last Qarakhanid ruler 'Uthmān, executed in 1213, thereby sealing the fate of this dynasty (Biran 2005b; Golden 1990, 343–370).

Given the lack of internal dynastic sources, tracking the Qarakhanids is quite a challenge. While several contemporaneous works on Qarakhanid history are known to have existed², none of these texts have survived and only a few paragraphs are cited in later sources. Consequently, we are forced to extract data from a variety of texts that center on neighboring dynasties (above all the Ghaznavids, Seljuqs, and Abbasids as well as the Song, Liao, and Jin), or from general histories of the Muslim world. In terms of material culture, the main source is the abundance of Qarakhanid coins that have been unearthed over the past decades. This humble reservoir of evidence is augmented by several documents and monuments³.

Although the Qarakhanids are now considered a Chinese dynasty⁴, their designation in the Chinese sources remains an open question. This ambiguity is closely linked to the ongoing debate over the Qarakhanids' origins, a discourse that is not without political implications. Most scholars agree that Dashi 大食 – the general term for Central Asian Muslims in pre-Mongol Chinese sources – refers to the Qarakhanids in Liao sources and to the Abbasid Caliphate in the Song literature. There is also a general consensus that the *Hei Han* (黑汗 Black Khan)

² E.g., al-Alma'ī's eleventh-century work "Ta'rīkh Kāshgar", or the twelfth-century "Akhbār Turkestan" by Majd al-Dīn 'Adnān al-Surkhakāī (the uncle of the renowned author Muḥammad 'Awfī). See Biran 2005b, 621–622.

³ Biran 2001; Kochnev 2006; Jiang Qixiang 1990; Fedorov 2005; 2006; Karev 2005.

⁴ Wei Liangtao's book on the Qarakhanids and the Qara Khitai came out in 2010, within the framework of the *Zhongguo tongshi* (中國通史 General History of China) series. The other volumes of this enterprise are devoted to the Song, Yuan, Ming, and other, more 'normative' Chinese dynasties.

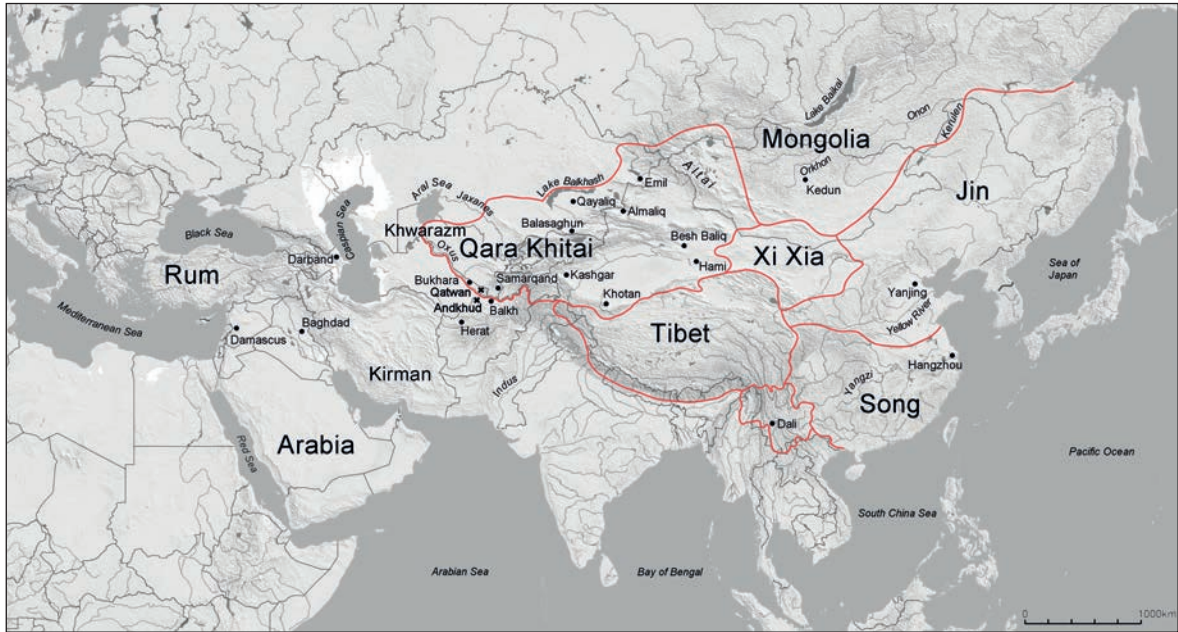


Fig. 1. Asia in 1142 CE with the Qara Khitai empire (after Biran 2005a, Map 3).

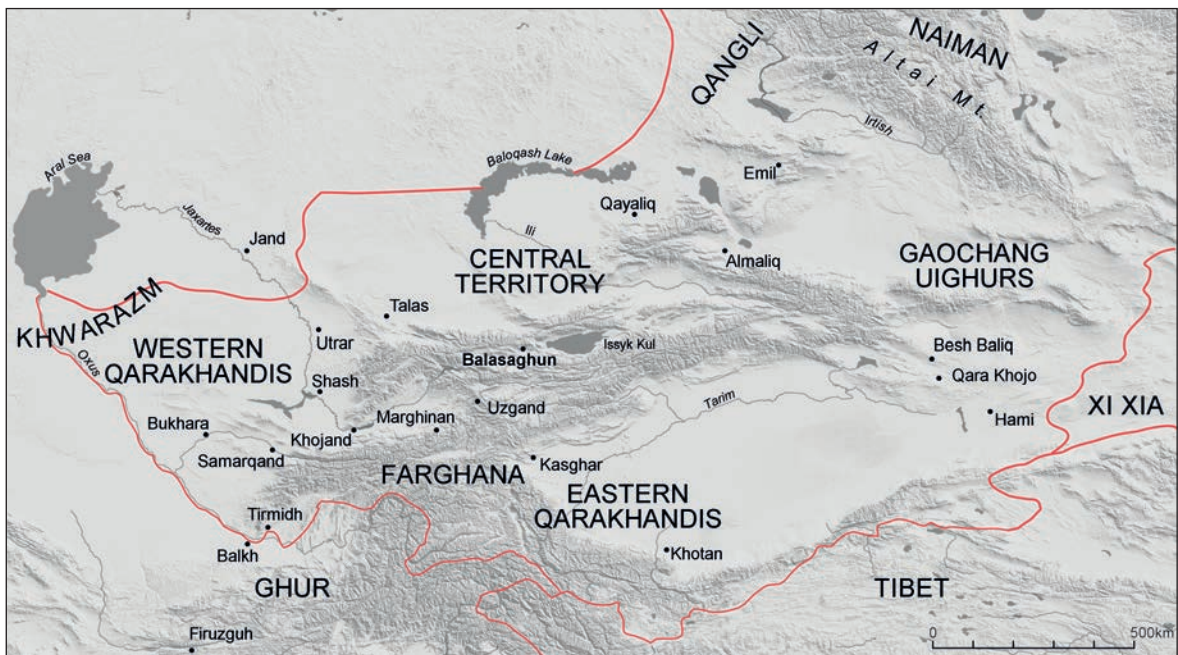


Fig. 2. The Qara Khitai empire (1142 CE). Internal division (after Biran 2005a, Map 4).

discussed in Song sources are the Qarakhanids. Conversely, *Heihan* (黑韓 Qaghan) denotes both the Qarakhanids – known as al-Khāqāniyya in Muslim sources – and various Uyghur rulers who also assumed the title Qaghan (Songshi 1977, 491: 14117). Wei Liangtao 魏良弢, one of the most prominent Qarakhanid historians in China, also identifies the *Asalan Huigu*

阿薩蘭回鶻 (the Arslan [Lion] Uyghurs) – a group that surfaces time and again in the official history of the Liao (*Liaoshi*) – with the Qarakhanids and their ‘infidel’ forefathers. This view, which dovetails neatly with the popular identification of the Qarakhanids as the predecessors of the modern-day Uyghurs in Xinjiang, is espoused by many other Chinese scholars. According to this school of thought, Liao relations with the Qarakhanids were extremely cordial⁵. However, this identification of the *Asalan Huigu* is rejected by several other distinguished historians, such as Hua Tao 華濤 and Liu Yingsheng 劉迎勝. Unlike Wei, these scholars have direct access to Muslim sources. Consequently, I am inclined to accept their view (and Wittfogel and Fêng’s) that *Asalan Huigu* refers to an Uyghur polity; in all likelihood that of the Gaochang 高昌 Uyghurs⁶.

The passages in the Chinese histories that deal with toponyms in the Qarakhanid lands are more straightforward. The most prominent examples are Khotan (Yutian 于闐), Qucha (Qiuci 龜茲), which was conquered in the latter half of the eleventh century, and Balasaghun (Husi woertuo 虎思斡耳朵, i.e., Quz Ordu or the strong camp). With these preliminaries behind us, let us turn to the Qarakhanids’ eastern trade.

Relations with the Liao (907–1125)⁷

The picture of the Liao’s relations with the Qarakhanids is rather vague. However, it appears as if their first encounter was on the battle pitch. According to Muslim sources, in roughly 1017, a huge army of “Turks of China, most of them Kitans”, marched on Balasaghun, in the hopes of exploiting the frail health of the Qarakhanids’ supreme ruler, Tughan Khan. With the “help of God” and many Muslim volunteers, Tughan managed to repel the invaders. Over-running their rear guard, the Qarakhanids took a great deal of prisoners and booty, not least Chinese goods⁸. Scholars are hard-pressed to determine who took part in this battle, as the existing accounts blur the boundaries between Turkestan and China and between Turks and Chinese in the Muslim world. That said, it is possible that these hostilities were connected to the quelling of the Zubu rebellion against the Kitan, which ranged from 1012 to 1013⁹. At any rate, soon after the battle, relations between the Liao and the Qarakhanids markedly improved. In 1020 and 1021, the latter sent envoys to the Liao court, and these diplomatic efforts begat a marriage between a Liao princess and the son of Qadr Khan, the Qarakhanid ruler of Khotan (*Liaoshi* 1976, 16: 188, 189; Marwazī/Minorsky 1942, 8; 20). Five years after the second visit, the Liao dispatched an embassy to the Ghaznavid court that passed through the Qarakhanid realm (Marwazī/Minorsky 1942, 7–9; 19–21; Gardīzī/Ḥabībī 1969, 191; 413). There is also evidence of a Khotan delegation to the Liao in 1015, but it is unclear as to whether it was sent by the Qarakhanids or by the remnants of their Buddhist adversaries, who had been eager for the Liao’s support towards the end of the tenth century (*Liaoshi* 1976, 12: 133, 134, 136; 13: 139; 70: 1140, 1141).

⁵ Wei Liangtao 1983, 212–223; 2010, 116–119; Ma Jianchun 2008, 25–48; Wang Jianbin 2010, 111–116.

⁶ Hua Tao 2000, 21–32; Liu Yingsheng 2001, 121; Wittfogel/Fêng 1949, 102; 320–324.

⁷ This part is described in more details in Biran forthcoming.

⁸ al-ʿUtbī/al-Thāmirī 2004, 385–387; Ibn al-Athīr 1965–1967, 9:297; al-Dhahabī/al-Arnāʾūt/al-Asad 1982–

1988, 17: 278–279; Bar Hebraeus/Budge 2003, 186; Ḥaydarī/Schefer 1892, 233; Mīrkhwānd 1960, 3: 352; Rashīd al-Dīn/Rawshan 2007, 60–61; Ibn Khaldūn 1957, 4: 386–387; Kochnev 2001, 52.

⁹ Wei Liangtao 1983, 219; 221; *Liaoshi* 1976, 15: 169, 171, 173, 174, 176, 178, 180; 94: 1381; Wittfogel/Fêng 1949, 587; Biran 2005a, 34–35.

While further specific information is missing, indirect evidence in both Chinese and Muslim sources suggest that the Liao and Qarakhanids continued to trade on a regular basis throughout the eleventh century. Moreover, there is evidence that a people identified in Muslim texts as Kitans emigrated to the Qarakhanid realm and joined its army. After the Liao's demise, these very relations and the presence of Kitan immigrants in Central Asia were among the factors that encouraged Yelü Dashi 耶律大石, a scion of the Kitan royal house, to move westwards and establish the Qara Khitai empire in Central Asia (Fig. 1)¹⁰.

Relations with the Song

While the source material on the Qarakhanids' relations with the Northern Song is much more extensive than those with the Liao, it only mentions residents of the Qarakhanid lands who reached the Song (i.e., there are no reports of movement in the opposite direction). Insofar as the relevant Chinese documents are concerned, most of them pertain to tributary missions. Conversely, the Muslim sources ignore these delegations, and the majority of their references to Qarakhanid relations with 'China' is indirect and turn up in literary works, such as mirror for princes or poetry, not chronicles.

Song sources record thirty-two Qarakhanid embassies from Khotan between 1009 and 1124, most of them from 1071 to 1098. In addition, these texts refer to a pair of overland missions from the Dashi in 1023–1024 and 1096 as well as three to five Qucha embassies after the 1070s (out of twenty-three *in toto*), when this polity was, according to Kāshgharī, a frontier post of the Qarakhanids (Kāshgharī/Dankoff 1982–85, 1: 279, 308). The two missions of Fulin 佛林, namely the Seljuqs, who were the Qarakhanids' overlords at the time, must have traversed the Qarakhanid realm as well (Hartwell 1983, 49–72). All told, there is evidence of approximately forty missions to the Song in 115 years.

In analyzing the records of these embassies, the significance of those from the city of Khotan stands out. Situated in the southern Tarim Basin, Khotan was theoretically under the jurisdiction of the eastern Qarakhanid khan, whose capital was in Kashgar or Balasaghun. It was also the only major Qarakhanid city without a mint, so that little is known about its rulers. At any rate, Khotan's major role in the trade with China was predicated on its propitious location along the route connecting China, Tibet, India, and the Muslim world as well as its long-established commercial infrastructure that dates back to the tenth century, when the city was the crown jewel of a flourishing Buddhist kingdom. This pre-Qarakhanid regime paid tribute to China from the Five Dynasties period (906–960) to the early Song era (Bielenstein 2005, 306–314).

Khotan began to send embassies in 1009, soon after the city fell to the Qarakhanids. A Dashi mission arrived in 1023, which was reciprocated two years later. A gap of nearly 40 years separates the latter from the next Khotanese delegation. The reason for this stoppage was the western expansion of the Xi Xia 西夏 (982–1227). In the 1020s, the Xi Xia seized the Uyghur cities of Gansu on the main road to China. Upon discovering that the Dashi mission of 1023 had travelled via Xi Xia-controlled territory, the Song ordered future Dashi missions to come by sea via the port of Guangzhou 廣州¹¹. Of course, this maritime route was not accessible to the landlocked Qarakhanids. During this hiatus, Khotan appears to have established amiable relations with the

¹⁰ Qian Boquan 1995a, 1995b; Biran 2005a, 33–35; Biran forthcoming.

¹¹ Hartwell 1983, 71; Song hui yao 1957, Fanyi 4: 91b–92a; 7: 22b; Songshi 1977, 490: 14121.

Xi Xia: In 1038, the Xi Xia ruler even informed the Song that Khotan was his vassal; however, there is no indication that the Khotan regime accepted this status¹². Kāshgharī's homage to the Tanguts' for their military achievements (Dankoff 1979–1980, 162–165) may relate to this honeymoon. Moreover, the Song's ban against using the land routes might very well have been the catalyst behind the aforementioned marriage alliance between the Qarakhanid ruler of Khotan and the Liao. Scholars would be hard-pressed to explain why Song-Qarakhanid relations resumed specifically in 1063, with the dispatch of an embassy from Khotan, but this development may have been triggered by the consolidation of the rule of Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm (r. 553/1157–1158 to 575/1179–1180), a capable eastern Qarakhanid khan. In any event, 1068 marked the beginning of a thirty-year run in which Khotanese embassies are said to have arrived to the Song at least once a year (Songshi 1977, 490: 14108)¹³. From 1081 onwards, these embassies bypassed the Xi Xia's realm. Instead, they went through the Kokonor (the present-day Chinese province of Qinghai), which belonged to the Tsong Kha confederacy (eleventh century – ca. 1136). The Tsong Kha even provided guides to the Khotanese and living quarters for their merchants in the confederacy's capital of Qingtang 青唐. In fact, a Tsong Kha ruler, Aligu 阿里骨 (r. 1083–1096) was born to a Khotanese woman and adopted by his mother's second husband (namely Aligu's predecessor). The lady in question, however, appears to have been one of the Khotanese refugees who escaped from the Qarakhanids, rather than a member of the dynastic clan¹⁴. During their invasion of the Tsong Kha in 1099, the Song found Khotanese emissaries, Uyghurs, and a Kuchan princess (either a refugee or a Qarakhanid) in the territories that they occupied (Horlemann 2007, 95).

In any case, the tension between the Song and the Tsong Kha, which lasted until the early 1100s (Dunnell 1994, 195–196) and the Qarakhanids' conflict with the Tanguts at the tail end of the eleventh century (discussed below) probably slowed down the rate of delegations in the twelfth century. Five missions to the Northern Song are recorded up to 1124, and none into the Southern Song (1127–1276), that, however, received five maritime embassies from the Dashi (Hartwell 1983, 64–65; Bielenstein 2005, 363–365).

Trade was obviously the main *raison d'être* of these missions. This was apparent to and not always welcome by the Song authorities, who complained that many of these delegations arrived without proper diplomatic credentials. The Song dynasty indeed sought to limit the number of emissaries, their access to the capital city, and the length of their stay. This led to negotiations aimed at setting the parameters for these sorts of visits. A compromise was hammered out in 1079 according to which no more than a single Khotanese embassy was allowed into the capital every other year; however, unlimited access was granted to the border markets at Xizhou 熙州 and Qinzhou 秦州. Towards the end of the century, an emissary petitioned his Song hosts to lift these restrictions, on the grounds that the kingdoms of Dashi, Khotan, and Fulin (Syria) admire the righteousness of the Chinese emperor and that the supplicant's delegation, for instance, had travelled over 10,000 *li* (ca. 3,100 miles). By virtue of these arguments, the restrictions were indeed dropped for the rest of the Northern Song period (Songshi 1977, 491: 14109; Hartwell 1983, 58; 63). These measures aside, the ensuing political turmoil led to a decline in the number of embassies during the early twelfth century.

¹² Songshi 1976, 485: 13995–6; Dunnell 1994, 179; cf. Horlemann 2007, 94.

¹³ The next mission that is detailed in the sources, however, arrived in 1071; Hartwell 1983, 58.

¹⁴ Rong Xinjiang 1999–2000, 273; Dunnell 1994, 179; Horlemann 2007, 97. This woman, Zhangmou Xiabu, was initially classified as a mistress, servant, or secretary. In other words, she did not merit a royal marriage.

Besides commercial activity, the embassies filled political and cultural functions. In 1093, for example, a Khotan delegation suggested a joint attack against the Xi Xia, which the Song declined. However, four years later, when the dynasty was itself locked in combat with the Xi Xia, it rejoiced upon learning that the Qarakhanids had raided Tangut prefectures¹⁵. These missions also helped the polities familiarize themselves with each other. The Song emperor occasionally questioned the emissaries about their lands and even asked for a map. Moreover, the embassies that reached the capital were sometimes entrusted with the task of delivering edicts or symbols of rank to Qarakhanid rulers (Songshi 1976, 491: 14108, 14109; Hartwell 1983, 60–62).

Another interesting facet of the source material on these missions is the names of the delegates. In contrast to the Abbasid messengers whose Muslim names are discernible even in Chinese transcription (e.g., Bu 不 or Pu 浦 for Abu, see Hartwell 1983, 195–202), the names of the Qarakhanid delegates are much less revealing. The position of emissary was held in high regard by the Qarakhanids: in fact, few men possessed the requisite qualifications for the post as described by Yūsuf Khāṣṣ Ḥājib in his late eleventh-century mirror for princes (Ḥājib/Dankoff 1983, 125–127). It thus stands to reason that they would use professional emissaries. Members of the Lue 羅 clan, once described as Uyghur, served in multiple delegates and may have been professional messengers (e.g., Songshi 1976, 490: 14108–14109; Hartwell 1983, 57; 58; 63). Some of the embassies were probably headed by private merchants and were unaccompanied by an official diplomat. Since the missions from ‘the Western Regions’ usually arrived together, private Qarakhanid groups could have joined those from other countries (e.g., Goachang and Dunhuang). In any case, even emissaries that were specifically dispatched by the Qarakhanids bear non-Muslim names, although they may have been recent converts. Non-Muslim names also turn up among the Quchan emissaries. The mission of 1096 even presented a jade Buddha to the Song emperor (Hartwell 1983, 52–53). That said, it is uncertain if this embassy was sent by the Qarakhanids’ opponents or consisted of private merchants who were aware of the value of such an item in the Song market. Alternatively, a Qarakhanid representative could have given such an object; while known for their zealous destruction of idols, the Qarakhanids were more flexible when commercial interests were at stake.

Yet another possible scenario is that the Qarakhanids’ grip over their eastern frontier was precarious. In other words, these missions did not represent the khanate (Horlemann 2007, 95). Very little information is available on Qarakhanid rule in Khotan, which is described as the eastern fringe of the world in contemporaneous Muslim poetry (e.g., Sūzanī/Ḥusaynī 1959, 124–126; ‘Awfi/Nafīsī 1957, 56; 200; 396), and even less is known about its administration of Kucha. That said, both Muslim and Chinese sources indicate that by the time the Qarakhanids dispatched the embassies (1009–1025 and 1063–1125), they effectively ruled Khotan. Moreover, they even relocated Muslim scholars and dignitaries to the city¹⁶. The Islamization seemed to have been a gradual process, for instance, a deed from the Khotan area that was drafted in 501/1107, attest that the buyer, seller, and witnesses were all Muslims. Judging by their names (e.g., Ḥusayn b. Lingūkūhī), some of these individuals were probably second-generation adherents of Islam (Minorsky 1942, 184–187). Similarly, the first Khotanid scholar who is mentioned

¹⁵ Songshi 1977, 490: 14109; Hartwell 1983, 63–64; cf. Qian Boquan 2004. According to Qian Boquan, there was close cooperation between the Qarakhanids and the Song during the 1090s. Moreover, he claims that this war led to the sealing of the so-called “Library Cave” in Dunhuang. That said, most scholars date the

closure to the early 11th century, attributing it to the trauma of the Qarakhanid conquest of Khotan (Rong Xinjiang 1999–2000).

¹⁶ Ibn al-Athīr 1965–1967, 9: 191, 299, 302; 11: 82; Songshi 1977, 17: 349; 18: 346; 489: 14087–14089; 490: 14109.

in the Muslim biographical literature is Sulaymān son of Dāwud son of Sulaymān al-Khutanī (fl. 513/1119), whose family appears to have been Muslim – or at least not Chinese or Buddhist – for several generations (Yāqūt 1955–58, 2:347; Sam‘ānī/al-Bārūdī 1988, 2: 324–325). By the mid-twelfth century, the city had already produced several Islamic scholars; and by the early 1200s, Khotan was an entirely Muslim town boasting “3000 illustrious imams”¹⁷.

Trade with the Xi Xia, Jin, and Mongolia in the twelfth century

Between the early and mid-1100s, the regional balance of power was turned on its head. The Liao was replaced by the Jin 金 dynasty (1115–1234), which also conquered wide swathes of northern China. As a result, the Song were hemmed in to the south and forced to rely on maritime routes. Moreover, Liao fugitives escaped to Central Asia and established the Qara Khitai dynasty (1124–1218), which then subordinated the two Qarakhanid Khanates and the Gaochang Uyghurs. The Xi Xia exploited these upheavals to their own ends, taking over the Kokonor, eliminating the Tsong Kha, and strengthening their position in East-West commerce (Biran 2005a, 14–15).

Reconstructing the Qarakhanids’ trade relations during this period or distinguishing them from those of the Qara Khitai is no easy task, but the following narrative does emerge. Under the new geo-political circumstances, Khotan lost its prominent role in this commercial standing. That said, Muslims from the Qarakhanid realm continued to play an important part in the eastern exchange, which was in all likelihood buoyed by the Qara Khitai’s taste for Chinese goods (Biran 2005a, 100; 137–138). Most of the goods from Islamic Central Asia now passed through the Xi Xia, the markets of which became the usual final stop of the caravans. Only rarely Qarakhanid merchants continued to the Jin border markets (Jinshi 1975, 54: 1114; 121: 2637; 134: 2870; Biran 2005a, 137–138). The Xi Xia’s twelfth-century law code often weighs in on the matter of merchants and emissaries from the Dashi, a term that can refer to either the Qarakhanids or the Qara Khitai. This implies that visitors of this sort were hardly alien to the Tanguts (Shi Jinbo 1994, 284; 285; 320; 577; 578). Chinese researchers posit that the ongoing trade flow gave rise to a permanent settlement of Muslim merchants in the Xi Xia’s lands, but there is firm evidence of such a community only during the Mongol period (Chen Guangen 2005, 87–90; Jiang San 2005, 73–77). Most of the commerce further east, with the Jin or Song dynasty, was handled by the Gaochang Uyghurs. The Tanguts also controlled the trade in Gaochang, collecting a 10 % tax from the caravans (Kychanov 1986, 8). The inclusion of Gaochang in the Qara Khitai realm suggests that the latter (and perhaps also the Qarakhanids) had alternative, better situated, commercial experts to turn into, whose relations with the Xi Xia were more cordial, and the Khotanese therefore lost their prominent position in the East-West trade.

The northern route to Mongolia, which once led to the Liao Supreme capital, continued to be used in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as Muslim traders availed themselves of this road to reach the Mongols. There are reports from as early as 1203 of merchants from the Qarakhanid realm (Bukhara, Khujand, and Turkestan) in the camp of Temüjin, even before he was enthroned as Chinggis Khan (1206). The 100 or 450 predominately Muslim traders who took part in the

¹⁷ Sam‘ānī/al-Bārūdī 1988, 2:324; Juwaynī/Qazwīnī 1912–37, 1:53; Juvaini/Boyle 1997, 71.

famous embassy that Chinggis Khan dispatched to Utrār (in modern south Kazakhstan) in 1218 attest to the vitality of the commerce between the eastern Islamic world and the Far East (Allsen 1989, 86–94).

Whereas the data on East-West trade under the Qara Khitai is rather meager, the combined references together with the archaeologically-attested prosperity of Semirech'e and Transoxania during this time, strongly suggest that the Silk Roads continued to thrive as well (Biran 2005a, 138).

What was exchanged?

Although it is often difficult to establish what items arrived from where or by whom, the archaeological record and literary sources bear witness to the presence of Muslim goods in the Liao and Song as well as Chinese products in Muslim lands. With respect to the Liao, the majority of the Islamic findings in tombs and pagodas are dated from 1018 to 1058 that is after the signing of the Shaoyuan treaty between the Liao and the Song in 1005. Pursuant to this accord, the former received vast amounts of silk and silver from the Song on an annual basis. This sizable income enabled the Liao to export a great deal of Chinese goods – either local products or vendibles from the Song – to the West and import luxury items as well (Twitchett/Tietze 1994, 108–110; Wright 2005). The most prevalent Muslim exports to turn up in the Liao tombs are glass vessels.

Out of the forty articles of this sort that have been unearthed in China, at least eleven, opulent pieces were discovered in Inner Mongolia and Liaoning. This includes seven items in the tomb of Princess Chen, which is dated to 1018. A chemical analysis of these objects reveals that most of them were crafted in Nishapur, Eastern Iran, while some derive from Egypt or Syria. Insofar as Song sites are concerned, archeologists discovered a pair of similar Nishapuri glass vessels from the first half of the eleventh century¹⁸. Another distinctly Muslim product is metal bowls with Arabic inscriptions¹⁹. Many other findings – most notably Baltic amber, but also Byzantine jewelry – were produced further west and were probably transported eastwards, directly or otherwise, by Muslim merchants²⁰. As opposed to the Liao imports, there is a strong likelihood that those of the Song arrived via the maritime routes. Hence, they are beyond the purview of this article.

Turning our attention to Far Eastern exports, Liao porcelain has surfaced in a variety of western Muslim lands: Iran, particularly Nishapur, but also the Persian Gulf port of Siraf, Samarra in Iraq, and Fustāt (near Cairo), the capital of Fatimid Egypt (969–1171), where an even larger amount of Song porcelain was discovered²¹. Song coins have turned up in Muslim Central Asia: over a thousand bronze coins in the vicinity of Khotan, and quite a few early eleventh-century coins near Kashgar. This may suggest that Song coins were the common currency in Khotan (Biran 2001, 81).

¹⁸ An Jiayao 1991; 2003; Ma Wenkuan 1994; Jiang et al. 2005, 92; Shen Hsueh-man 2006, 330–334; Fu Ning 2006; Yang/Chen 2007, 36–39; Sun Hong 2009, 78–86; Qi Dongfang 2009, 119–122; Kroeger 1995, 33–37; Biran forthcoming.

¹⁹ Sun Hong 2009, 70–77; Zhang Jingming 2006, 41–46; Shen Hsueh-man 2006, 360.

²⁰ Xu Xiaodong 2005; Shen Hsueh-man 2006, 110–111; 152–153; 168–175; 182–183; 186–187; 284–285; Sun Hong 2009, 67–90; Hansen 2010, 414–421.

²¹ Kahle 1953, 218–233; Gray 1977, 232–234; Crowe 1977, 263–278; Kroeger 1995, 34; Yang/Chen 2007, 37.

Compared to the archaeological record, the literary sources unveil a much broader range of goods, many of which are perishable. An oft-cited paragraph in the *Qidan guozi* mentions the “Items presented” to the Liao “by the various small countries”, namely the polities to the west: Turfan, Kucha, Khotan, the Dashi (i.e., the Qarakhanids), Xiaoshi 小食 (or Hami)²², the Ganzhou 甘州 Uyghurs, the Dunhuang Uyghurs, and Liangzhou 凉州 (in Gansu). The list is comprised of jade, pearls, horns (*xi* 犀), frankincense, amber, agate vessels, wrought-iron weapons, cured hides, three types of silk, glass (*pali* 怕里), and ammonium chloride, which was used as a metallurgical flux and for treating leather (Ye Longli SKQS, 21.7a). Most of the non-perishables were indeed found in the excavations of Liao tombs²³. In addition, the Dashi embassy of 1020 presented an elephant (or ivory) to the Liao court (Liaoshi 1976, 16:188). Al-Bīrūnī, an eleventh-century Muslim polymath, commented on the Kitan’s desire for amber, jade, and *khutū* (rhinoceros horns or walrus ivory) (al-Bīrūnī/al-Hādī 1995, 317; 343). This is consistent with the exports to “China” that are cited in the work of Sharaf al-Zamān Marwazī, a twelfth-century physician: ivory, frankincense, genuine Slavonic amber, which was used for ornaments, and *khutū*, the most expensive item on his list (Marwazī/Minorsky 1942, 15; 23).

A similar repertoire informs about the stock of the Khotanese embassies to the Song. Among the goods that these delegations brought were jade items, pearls, coral, uncut gems, elephant tusks, kingfisher feathers, glass, frankincense, dragon salt (*longyan* 龍盐, a type of medicine), Central Asian (*hu* 胡) brocade, flowered cotton, camels, horses, donkeys, and a lion, which was turned down²⁴. From the standpoint of the Tanguts, the Dashi primarily supplied beasts of burden, not least camels, while the Qarakhanid main exports to Mongolia were textiles (Shi Jinbo 1994, 284; 577; 578; Ibn al-Athīr 1965–1967, 12: 362).

While their merchandise includes items of local Central Asian make, like jade, textiles, and animals, the lion’s share was imported for “resale”. Frankincense, which originated in southern Arabia, was an extremely popular item in the Song, but not among the Liao (So 2013, 87–88). Pearls, coral, ivory, and kingfisher feathers were probably Indian commodities, while the amber was transported from the Baltic region, apparently via Khwārazm. Thanks to its reputed ability to detect poison, there was a brisk demand for *khutū* or, in this context, walrus tusks, especially among the Kitans in northern China and Central Asia. In fact, *khutū* is the only Arabic word that apparently derives from the Kitan language. For the most part, this precious merchandise was acquired from the Yenisei Qirghiz and other northern tribes²⁵. Muslim literary sources indeed reveal that the Qarakhanid lands, especially Transoxania, had ties with India (by way of Balkh), Khurasan (especially Nishapur), Iraq, Egypt, Yemen, and even Muslim Spain in the eleventh and twelfth centuries²⁶. These contacts, as well as the 90 wealthy “merchants from various [i.e., foreign] places” that the Mongols found in Bukhara in 1220 (Juwaynī/Qazwīnī 1912–1937, 1: 81; Juvaini/Boyle 1997, 104–105), suggest that the Qarakhanid realm provided the East with the finest that western, southern, and northern Eurasia had to offer.

The next item on our agenda is the goods that the Qarakhanids imported for their own consumption. According to the *Qutadgu bilig*, silk, furs, and pearls were the chief products that

²² For more on the use of the term *Hami* as a synonym of *Xiaoshi*, see Hu Xiaopeng 2006, 11–15; Hansen 2010, 417.

²³ Hansen 2010, 415–420; Sun Hong 2009, 86–87; Yang/Chen 2007, 37.

²⁴ Ma Duanlin SKQS, 337:47a; Songshi 1977, 490:14109; Hartwell 1983, 56–69; Bielenstein 2005, 308–312; Yan Hongmei 2000, 61–66.

²⁵ Laufer 1913; 1916; Kāshānī/Afshār 1966, 126; King 2010, 393–395.

²⁶ E.g., al-Dhahabī/ al-Arnā`ūt/al-Asad 1982–1988, 63: 117; al-Dhahabī/al-Munjid 1960, 4:220; Balkhī/Ḥābībī 1972, 370; Niẓāmī `Arūḍī/Browne 1921, 9; Fedorov 2005; 2006.

merchants supplied to the Qarakhanid court, along with other “rare and wondrous things”. Furthermore, “the China caravan” was the principal source of “all sorts of silken stuff” (Ye Longli 1983, 184). In his report on the Kitan embassy to the Qarakhanids in 1027, Marwazī expands on the gifts that they presented to the court. He mentions an array of different suits: fifteen of raw silk, one of Chinese multi-colored brocade (*kaanzi*), and five composed of three unidentified fabrics. Among the other items on his list are two-hundred sable martens, a thousand gray squirrels, and an undisclosed number of sable marten furs for pelisses as well as thirty musk pods and a single bow with ten arrows (Marwazī/Minorsky 1942, 8; 20). Whereas the weapons’ significance probably rests in the authority they symbolized – the other items appear to be standard trade items. In any event, this selection is indicative of the goods that the Qarakhanids imported from the Liao.

From all these items, the one most identified with the Kitans in Muslim literature is musk. The first mention of Kitan musk (*al-misk al-khitā’ī*) in Muslim works on perfumes is in the late 900s, whereupon the fragrance’s popularity took off (King 2008–2009, 121–126). By the 1100s, it was indeed a common metaphor in Persian poetry (‘Awfī/Nafīsī 1957, 448, 494; 542; 558). That said musk from Tibet and even Khotan was no less famous. Other goods that the sources viewed as Kitan exports are silk, textiles, pearls, vessels of gold and silver, slaves (renowned for their beauty), and “Chinese goods”²⁷. The Qarakhanids often gave these items, especially the latter, as presents to their neighboring dynasties such as the Ghaznavids²⁸. However, it is impossible to ascertain whether these “Chinese” goods were produced by the Liao, the Song, or elsewhere; and the same can be said for the identity and number of middlemen that were involved in its shipment to the Qarakhanid realm. The general impression from the Song records is that the Khotanese were enthusiastic buyers of a wide assortment of Chinese goods, but few of these items are spelled out in these sources. The exceptions are silk, tea, and coins. Furthermore, the dynasty’s chroniclers surveyed the gifts that were presented by the Song emperor, including luxury textiles, gold belts, and other symbols of power (Bielenstein 2005, 311–312; Hartwell 1983, 58–61).

The twelfth-century records are even less detailed. However, there does not appear to be any substantial changes in the Muslim world’s imports from the Far East. From an archaeological standpoint, Jin and Song porcelain and Chinese mirrors were discovered in Samarqand and Balāsāghūn²⁹. In addition, two Kitan-Liao artifacts were recently unearthed in Central Asia: fragments of a gilded silver saddle ornament featuring a Liao dragon motif turned up in the twelfth-century Qarakhanid palace in Samarqand; and the only extant Kitan book, which was penned in the large Kitan script, was found in Kyrgyzstan (Zaitsev 2011, 130–150). Nevertheless, it is impossible to determine whether these objects were brought by the Qara Khitai, imported from elsewhere, or locally produced (Grenet 2004, 1064). According to the literary sources, robes and cloths known as *Khitā’ī* were also prized in the Muslim world (Biran 2005a, 137), but once again it is difficult to ascertain whether they were manufactured in the Qara Khitai realm or imported from one of the Chinese states (the Jin, Song, or Xi Xia).

Qarakhanid imports from Mongolia included furs, gold and silver ingots, *khutū*, musk vessels, jade, expensive clothes made of white camel felt, and animals (Nasawī/Ḥamdī 1953, 83–84;

²⁷ Niẓām al-Mulk/Darke 1960, 155–156; Niẓām al-Mulk/Darke 1962, 192–193; Bar Hebraeus/Budge 2003, 186; al-Birūnī/al-Ḥādī 1995, 212; Ibn al-Athīr 1965–1967, 9:297; Naṭanzī ms, fol. 157b; Rashīd al-Dīn/Rawshan 2007, 115.

²⁸ Rashīd al-Dīn 2007, 115; al-‘Utbi/al-Thāmīrī 2004, 257; Gardīzī/Ḥabībī 1969, 189.

²⁹ Sokolovskaia/Rougeulle 1992, 87–98; Bernshtam 1952, 169–172; 1943, 47–55; 139–42; Biran 2005a, 100; 137.

Allsen 1989, 83–94). This list is indeed quite similar to the aforementioned Liao vendibles. Consequently, there is reason to believe that by the early 1200s, the Mongols were apprised of the supply and demand in the Muslim world.

Up to this point, we have focused on inter-civilizational trade, but there was also a vibrant ecological exchange between the Qarakhanids and the nomads in their realm. The latter provided the rulers with “food and clothing, horses for the army and pack animals for transport, koumiss and milk, wool and butter, yoghurt and cheese, also carpets and felts” (Hājib/Dankoff 1983, 184). The persistent urban growth in twelfth-century Semirech’e on the crossroads between the steppe and the sown, and the discovery of zoomorphic designs catering to the nomads’ taste (Biran 2005a, 139) suggest that this trade was quite extensive. Moreover, some of the above-mentioned items, particularly the animals, were mainstays of East-West trade. As we have seen, both imperial nomads, such as the Liao, and their non-imperial counterparts, like the Qirghiz or the pre-Chinggisid Mongols, played a significant yet largely indirect role in ecological and inter-civilizational trade. Even nomads roaming further west, like the Ghuzz (who were mostly in Khurasan and Transoxania), are said to have maintained relations with China and India (Qazwīnī 1960, 588). These ties can partly account for the well-established prosperity of Central Asian nomads in the mid-1100s – a phenomenon that at times was a political thorn on the side of their post-nomadic rulers, not least the Qarakhanids (Biran 2005a, 139–142).

Among the major facilitators of the Qarakhanids’ trade interests were Muslims (from both within and beyond their clients’ realm), Uyghurs, Tanguts, and Khotanese. Furthermore, recent developments may ultimately point to a Jewish role in this commerce³⁰.

Despite the paucity of source material, this review firmly suggests that the Qarakhanids’ commercial ties with polities to the east were part and parcel of the far-reaching East-West contacts that prevailed during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The frameworks of exchange were diverse, as they included private merchants, tributes, princely gifts, and bounties. While much of the merchandise was shipped over the Silk Roads, the maritime routes also figured into the equation. For the most part, the exchange was indirect and multi-phased as the goods were constantly being recycled, enhanced, and redirected. Nevertheless, the Qarakhanids’ role in the eastern exchange sufficed for identifying them with China in the Muslim world, as will be discussed below.

Cultural exchange

Did these economic relations foment a cultural exchange? How much did the Muslim and Sinitic worlds actually know about each other? Straightforward as these questions may be, the answers are elusive. While there are a couple of extant Song works on the maritime trade, which describe the sea routes, goods, and destinations (e.g., Mecca, Baghdad, Egypt, and Yemen), there are no

³⁰ The recent discovery of the Afghan Geniza, a collection of Jewish documents, which are still in process of being acquired, preserved, and deciphered at the National Library of Israel, raises the possibility that Jewish merchants were part of the Silk Road nexus. Apart from sundry religious texts, the Geniza holds several commercial documents, like merchants’ notebooks and letters. Dated to the tenth and eleventh centuries, these items were written in Persian, Arabic, Judeo-Persian, and Judeo-Arabic. In March 2013, Shaul Shaked and

Ofir Hayim, scholars participating in the said preservation efforts, informed me that the documents which have already been deciphered primarily refer to small-scale trade within the Ghaznavid realm. However, the project is still at its nascency, and there are hundreds of documents yet to be processed. Since Jews lived in the Qarakhanid khanates, certainly in Samarqand and perhaps Khotan (Biran 2005a, 179), the Afghan Geniza has the potential of shedding new light on the Qarakhanids’ trade as well.

comparable sources on the land routes (see Park 2012, 20–55). Nor do we know what the Liao, Jin, or Xi Xia knew about the Muslim world. Although the Song emperor is said to have queried foreign emissaries about their lands, information on Khotan in Song sources is mostly limited to the above-cited descriptions of the embassies (e.g., Songshi 1977, 490:14106–14109).

On the other hand, accounts of China were indeed customary in Muslim geographical and literary works, but most of the pertinent eleventh- and twelfth-century sources merely recycle data from the heyday of the Tang-Abbasid exchange (Biran 2005a, 97–100; Park 2012, 56–90). Furthermore, even the most knowledgeable Muslim experts on post-Tang China, such as Kāshgharī, Marwazī, or al-Bīrūnī (who were well aware of the division of China into northern and southern dynasties from the 900s on), were extremely vague in all that concerns its geographical and cultural boundaries. This ambiguity may seem odd given the Muslim world's intensive commercial relations with the Chinese dynasties, but it held significant advantages for Muslim rulers and merchants in Central Asia. One must remember that in the Muslim world, China was a brand name for an exquisite material culture and royal prestige. According to al-Thaʿālibī (d. 1038), a prolific connoisseur of Arabic literature from Nishapur who also compiled various anthologies, “The Arabs used to call every delicately or curiously made vessel and such like, whatever its real origin, Chinese, because finely-made things are a specialty of China” (Thaʿālibī 1868, 127; Thaʿālibī/Bosworth 1968, 141). Both al-Thaʿālibī and Marwazī asserted that in comparison to Chinese artisans, all others are blind, except for the Byzantines or Babylonians who have but one eye³¹. Imitations of Chinese goods, some better than others, were not uncommon during the period at hand. In his book of gems, al-Bīrūnī mentioned poor Iranian-made replicas of Chinese porcelain, some of which indeed surfaced in Egypt, Iran, and Transoxania (al-Bīrūnī/al-Hādī 1995, 369–70; Gray 1977, 231–234). Another book on precious stones, which was written by al-Tifāshī (d. 1253) several years later, describes rather successful Egyptian imitations of jade work (al-Tifāshī/Ḥasan/Khafājī 1977, 195). Given the allure of the Chinese ‘brand’, it was more profitable for any trader plying Liao, Xi Xia, Uyghur, or Khotanid merchandise in the Muslim world to label it Chinese, rather than one of these lesser known names. Goods from disparate regions (be it the Song, Liao, Tibet, Xi Xia, and Eastern Turkistan) that ended up in the Muslim world were thus classified under the same artistic tradition – China (and later Khitāy). In a similar vein, Muslim exports to China were grouped with other ‘Western Regions’ goods (Biran forthcoming).

The Qarakhanids and subsequently the Qara Khitai tapped into this image of China for the sake of enhancing their own kingly reputation. Following the conquest of Khotan, many Qarakhanid rulers adopted the Arabic title *Malik al-Mashrik wa’il Sin* (Arabic: the king of the East and China) or *Tamghaj khan* (Turkic: the khan of China). Additionally, they encouraged the identification of Chinese Turkestan and even Transoxania with China. For instance, Mahmud Kāshgharī, a scion of the Qarakhanid royalty, described Kashgar as China. Under the Qara Khitai, Balāsāghūn and even Samarqand were placed under the same rubric, while accurate information as to developments in China proper were seldom recorded (Biran 2005a, 97–101).

With respect to the intellectual dialogue, some of the Qarakhanid emissaries to Song China were well-versed in Confucian phrases (e.g., Songshi 1977, 490:10491). Moreover, in his above-cited mirror for princes, which was offered to the Qarakhanid khan of Kashgar, Yūsuf Khāṣṣ Ḥājib insisted that “the sages of Chin and Machin” read his work and can vouch for its quality.

³¹ Thaʿālibī 1868, 127; Thaʿālibī/Bosworth 1968, 141; Marwazī/Minorsky 1942, 3; 14.

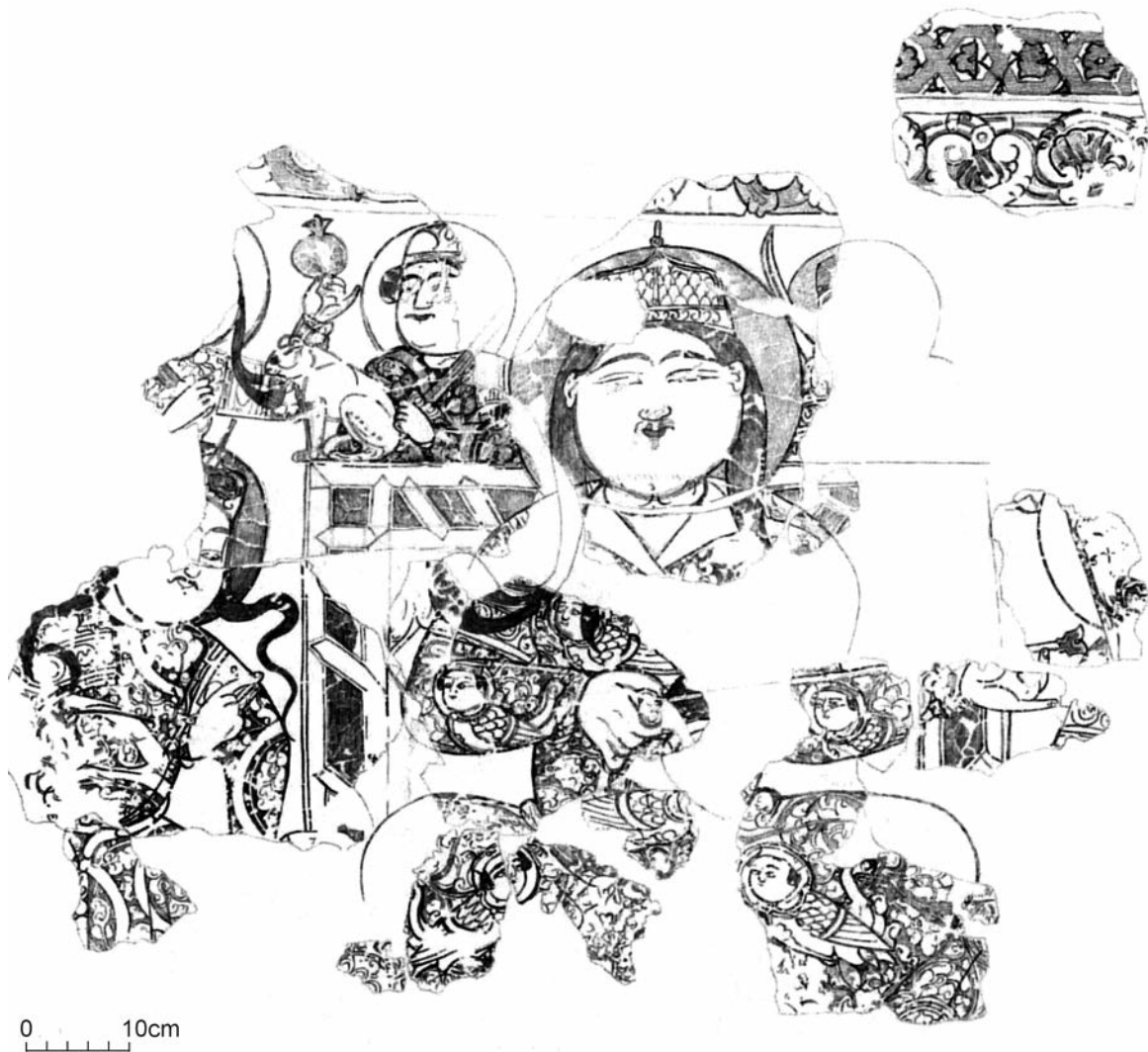


Fig. 3. Afrasiyab, Qarakhanid place near Samarqand. Mural, throne scene with portray of the khan (after Karev 2013, 114 Fig. 13).

He also claimed that the book includes some of their aphorisms (Ḥājib/Dankoff 1983, 258; 260). A certain Buddhist influence is indeed discernible in this work, but neither its provenance nor the exact identity of these “sages” is clear. In any event, Greek and Perso-Muslim influences run far deeper in this mirror for princes than do those from China (Ḥājib/Dankoff 1983, 11–17 [Dankoff’s introduction]). In sum, the East-West exchange under review does not appear to have had an enduring impact on the intellectual discourse, although it played an important part in the Qarakhanid identity.

Material culture and especially artistic forms spread more easily than philosophy. Chinese Porcelain along with Muslim glass and metalwork were indeed emulated by their respective host cultures³². Likewise, Jade artifacts from Qarakhanid and Qara Khitai Semirech’e contain

³² Gray 1977, 233; Crowe 1977, 271; Ma Wenkuan 1994, 739; Yang/Chen 2007, 39; Jiang et al. 2005, 2.



Fig. 4. Afrasiyab, Qarakhanid place near Samarqand. Mural, turkic archer brandishing an arrow (after Karev 2013, 116 Fig. 15).

Chinese motifs (Biran 2005a, 100). Far Eastern influences are also evident in the paintings at the Qarakhanid place near Samarqand. This compound, which was unearthed in Afrasiyab (pre-Mongol Samarqand) by a French-Uzbek team in 2000, is dated to around the turn of the thirteenth century (Karev 2005; Grenet 2010). It is comprised of six pavilions that are spread over what was probably the khan's private garden. Only the largest pavilion, which was in all likeli-

hood used by the ruler, is decorated with murals. Partly reconstructed by Yuri Karev and his assistants, some of these murals, such as the hunting and dancing scenes, celebrate the good life; others portray the khan – a beautiful moon-faced Turk (Fig. 3) – and his court. One of the dignitaries, a Turkic archer brandishing an arrow (Fig. 4), is the khan's *silāhdār* (military commander). This figure is reminiscent of the Dunhuang models, and even the ruler sports a robe and locks that betray a certain Buddhist Turkestan sensibility (Karev 2005). In fact, Grenet claims that the murals resemble early examples of Ilkhanid painting, which indeed draw heavily on the Chinese tradition (Grenet 2010).

In summation, the Qarakhanids' eastern trade played a key role in the local economy and identity, and appreciably enhanced the regime's legitimacy and prestige. Although the sea routes were the foundation stone of East-West contacts between the tenth and twelfth centuries, the continental Silk Roads were alive, complex, and functioning during this era, and deserve to be studied on their own right. This challenging task can best be achieved by a group endeavor that will include archaeologists, numismatists, and historians. Apart from illuminating a lesser known chapter in the history of the Silk Roads, this sort of venture promises to enhance our understanding of the Mongol period, the Tang Abbasid exchange, and the connections between the two. It is bound to shed light on the elements that the Mongols adopted from the commercial and artistic cross-pollination that preceded their ascent, and to give the Qarakhanids and other contemporaneous polities their proper due in the East-West exchange.

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ALONG THE EURASIAN STEPPE ZONE
IN THE FIRST MILLENNIUM CE

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PREFACE

This volume combines contributions to a conference of the same title which was held February 9 to 11, 2012, in Bonn. Idea and format of the meeting had been developed through a process of intensive discussions among the editors in close cooperation with Dieter Quast, RGZM Mainz. Our original intention was to organize a conference with a focus on archaeology, bearing in mind questions concerning mobility and communication or – stated differently – exchange patterns in Eurasia. After having recognized that research in Eurasia is still dominated by site centric approaches which makes vast overviews as we imagined them somewhat cumbersome we deviated from our first outline.

As a consequence, we broadened the field for two further aspects which had been nearly neglected thus far. First, there are West–East ranging communications in the Eurasian steppe zone which lie beyond the overarching term “Silk Roads”. As written sources rarely throw light on interactions among steppe polities, these interactions are markedly less frequently subject to scientific discussions. This question is best approached via archaeological analyses with a wide focus in geographical terms. North–South contacts are by far more commonly discussed than West–East communications, as they encompass interactions between states with foremost sedentary population and nomads who live north of these territories. As a rule, it is the sedentary viewpoint which is being told, as these cultures opposed to the nomads left numerous written accounts¹. At the same time we wanted to encourage comparative perspectives. Characteristics often assumed to be typical of the relations between sedentary people and nomads are also true in comparable measures of those between Rome/Byzantium and their “barbaric” neighbors. What they all have in common is at least a distinct mobility in space, even though to varying forms and degrees. Furthermore, questions and themes long discussed in European archaeology and history entered the research of Inner Asia and Central Asia only recently, as, for example, identity, the emergence of new ethnic groups, frontiers, frontier societies, contact zones, elites, economies of prestige goods. We therefore wanted to invite colleagues of different disciplines and regions to join in a scientific dispute. Lively discussions during the conference and positive feedback by attendees show that this idea was appreciated.

The second aspect to be included can be summarized under the term “complexity”, which in this context should not be understood as a concept from the social sciences but metaphorically. Over long periods of time simple explanations of cultural phenomena were favored, be it statements on pure and poor nomads, the dependency theory or the bad habit of explaining every cultural change with large-scale migrations. “Complexity” is meant as a signal and reminder that the simplest explanations are not always the best, which is reflected by the contributions in this volume.

¹ Numerous projects within the framework of the Collaborative Research Center (Sonderforschungsbereich) 586 “Difference and Integration” at the University Leipzig and the Martin-Luther University Halle-Wittenberg dealt intensively with interactions between

nomads and settled people, a good overview of publications thus far is given by the center’s website <http://nomadsed.de/home/>.

We consciously limited the temporal scope of the papers to the time after the Scyths and before the Mongols, somewhat clumsily described as the “first millennium CE”, because these two eras have been traditionally paid enormous attention to and are represented in a corresponding flood of publications². At the same time interactions in the steppe zone witnessed only during the centuries around the turn of the era a hitherto unknown rise in intensity and dynamics.

Not all of the works presented at the conference are included in this volume as they were already noted for publications elsewhere. This applies to the presentations given by Enno Giele, Valentina Mordvintseva, and Matthias Pfisterer. However, other colleagues who could not attend the conference were invited to hand in manuscripts. All contributions were revised and partly expanded, which to our delight resulted in this comprehensive volume. We would have loved to have included a paper on the consequences of climate change and meteorological events on the politics of the Eurasian steppe as such conditions win more and more popularity as *explanans* of significant changes³, but it did not work out. To our dismay and because of different reasons the western steppes and Central Asia are less represented than we wished for.

We subdivided the contributions into four parts: “Nomadic Empires – Modes of Analysis” encompasses highly different approaches to interpretations and analyses of nomadic empires, ranging from computational agent-based models, over anthropological to historical methodology. Better than any perfect introduction this multi-faceted research shows how exciting it is to deal with this area much neglected in World History. Although the section “Xiongnu, the Han Empire and the Oriental Koine” assembles merely three contributions, it covers more than 260 pages. If nothing else, this certainly echoes the boom of Xiongnu archaeology of the past decades. By taking into account enormous amounts of archaeological, art historical, and written sources the authors surmount traditional and often too static schemes of interpretation. These new analyses detect an astonishing variety of interactions during the centuries around the turn of the era, which broadens our understanding of this epoch and provides new avenues for other regions and periods at the same time. In the third section, “Inner and Central Asia from the Türks to the Mongols”, nine contributions exemplify a multicolored and almost continuously changing picture of languages, ethnicities, and political affinities for Inner and Central Asia from the sixth to the twelfth centuries. Political affinities, however, were changing so quickly due to situational demands as to almost refute all efforts to retrace them within the archaeological record. Decision makers were astonishingly well informed about even distant regions and they acted accordingly over vast distances. The studies at hand analyze exchange processes on varying

² See for the Scyths for example W. Menghin/H. Parzinger/A. Nagler/M. Nawroth (eds.), *Im Zeichen des goldenen Greifen. Königsgräber der Skythen. Begleitband zur gleichnamigen Ausstellung*: Berlin, Martin-Gropius-Bau, 6. Juli – 1. Oktober 2007; München, Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulturstiftung, 26. Oktober 2007 – 20. Januar 2008; Hamburg, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg, 15. Februar – 25. Mai 2008 (München, Berlin 2007); H. Parzinger, *Die Skythen*. 3rd ed. (München 2009); J. Aruz (ed.), *The Golden Deer of Eurasia: Scythian and Sarmatian Treasures from the Russian Steppes* (New York, New Haven 2000); J. Aruz/A. Farkas/A. Alekseev/E. Korolkova (eds.), *The Golden Deer of Eurasia. Perspectives on the Steppe Nomads of the Ancient World*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Symposia (New Haven 2006). See

for the Mongol period *Dschingis Khan und seine Erben. Das Weltreich der Mongolen* (2005); W. W. Fitzhugh/M. Rossabi/W. Honeychurch (eds.), *Genghis Khan and the Mongol Empire* (Seattle 2009); see also the website of the European Research Council Grant “Mobility, Empire and Cross Cultural Contacts in Mongol Eurasia” <http://mongol.huji.ac.il/>, which provides an extensive bibliography.

³ N. Pederson/A. Hessel/N. Baatarbileg/K. Anchukaitis/N. Di Cosmo, *Pluvials, Droughts, the Mongol Empire, and Modern Mongolia*. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111, 2014, 4375–4379; J. Fei/J. Zhou/Y. Hou, *Circa A.D. 626 Volcanic Eruption, Climatic Cooling, and the Collapse of the Eastern Turkic Empire*. *Climatic Change* 81, 2007, 469–475.

levels – from language to embassies – as well as aspects of mobility, from the integration of foreign symbols of power to large-scale migrations, or methods of state-building to the strategic destruction of complex states. The last section combines papers that focus on “Nomadic Interaction with the Roman and Byzantine West” traversing the Eurasian steppe zone from east to west. These case studies, either already comparative or suitable for further comparisons, give reason to assume that although there are certain encompassing communalities every conquest and struggle with the empires of the West is historically unique. At the same time it becomes apparent that the knowledge base of the decision makers in the Roman Empire had been greater than hitherto thought.

The variety of studies assembled in this volume leaves no doubt as to how dynamically and diversely the interactions, processes, and transformations developed in the Eurasian steppe zone. These changes cannot be studied under common schemes of interpretation which are more often than not inseparable from overcome clichés.

Chinese names and terms have been transliterated according to the Pinyin system, Russian names and references according to the system of the Library of Congress. Arabic, Persian, and Turkic names and terms appear in the form chosen by the authors of the individual chapters.

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Jan Bemann, Michael Schmauder

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INDEX OF AUTHORS

Prof. Dr. Jan Bemann
Prehistory and Early Historical Archaeology
University of Bonn
Regina-Pacis-Weg 7
53113 Bonn, Germany
E-Mail: jan.bemann@uni-bonn.de

Prof. Dr. Michal Biran
Institute of Asian and African Studies
The Louis Frieberg Center for East Asian
Studies
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Mt. Scopus
Jerusalem, 91905, Israel
E-Mail: biranm@mail.huji.ac.il

Dr. Ursula B. Brosseder
Prehistory and Early Historical Archaeology
University of Bonn
Regina-Pacis-Weg 7
53113 Bonn, Germany
E-Mail: ursula.brosseder@uni-bonn.de

Prof. Dr. Claudio Cioffi-Revilla
Krasnow Institute for Advanced Study
Computational Social Science, Center for
Social Complexity
George Mason University
Research-1 Bldg MS 6B2,
4400 University Drive
Fairfax, VA 22030, USA
E-Mail: ccioffi@gmu.edu

Prof. Dr. Nicola Di Cosmo
Henry Luce Foundation Professor of
East Asian Studies
School of Historical Studies
Institute for Advanced Study
Einstein Drive
Princeton, NJ 08540, USA
E-Mail: ndc@ias.edu

Prof. Dr. Michael R. Drompp
Department of History
Rhodes College
2000 North Parkway
Memphis, TN 38112, USA
E-Mail: drompp@rhodes.edu

Prof. Dr. Peter B. Golden
Center for Middle Eastern Studies
Rutgers University
Lucy Stone Hall B-316
54 Joyce Kilmer Avenue
Piscataway, NJ 08854, USA
E-Mail: pgolden@andromeda.rutgers.edu

Prof. Dr. Thomas O. Höllmann
Institute for Chinese Studies
Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich
Kaulbachstr. 51a
80539 München, Germany
E-Mail: thomas.hoellmann@lrz.uni-
muenchen.de

Ass. Prof. Dr. William Honeychurch
 Department of Anthropology
 Yale University
 51 Hillhouse Avenue
 New Haven, CN 06511, USA
 E-Mail: william.honeychurch@yale.edu

Prof. Dr. Nikolai N. Kradin
 Russian Academy of Sciences,
 Far Eastern Branch
 Institute of History, Archaeology and
 Ethnography
 Pushkinskaia Ul. 10
 Vladivostok, 690950, Russia
 E-Mail: kradin@mail.ru

Prof. Dr. Étienne de la Vaissière
 École des hautes études en sciences sociales
 (EHESS)
 Centre d'Études Turques, Ottomanes, Balka-
 niques et Centrasiatiques (CETOBaC)
 190-198, Avenue de France
 75244 Paris Cedex 13, France
 E-Mail: vaissier@ens.fr

Prof. Dr. Mischa Meier
 Department of History
 University of Tübingen
 Wilhelmstr. 36
 72074 Tübingen, Germany
 E-Mail: mischa.meier@uni-tuebingen.de

Dr. Bryan K. Miller
 Faculty of History
 University of Oxford
 George Street
 Oxford OX1 2RL, United Kingdom
 E-Mail: millerbryank@gmail.com

Prof. Dr. Marek Jan Olbrycht
 Institute of History
 University of Rzeszów
 Ul. Rejtana 16c
 35-959 Rzeszów, Poland
 E-Mail: marekolbrycht@wp.pl

Prof. Dr. Jürgen Paul
 Institute for Oriental Studies
 Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg
 Mühlweg 15
 06114 Halle/Saale, Germany
 E-Mail: juergen.paul@orientphil.uni-halle.de

Prof. Dr. Walter Pohl
 Institute for Medieval Research
 Austrian Academy of Sciences
 Wohllebengasse 12-14
 1040 Wien, Austria
 E-Mail: walter.pohl@oeaw.ac.at

Dr. J. Daniel Rogers
 Smithsonian Institution
 National Museum of Natural History
 Department of Anthropology, NHB 112
 PO Box 37012
 Washington, DC 20013, USA
 E-Mail: rogersd@si.edu

Prof. Dr. Michael Schmauder
 LVR-LandesMuseum Bonn
 Colmantstr. 14-16
 53115 Bonn, Germany
 E-Mail: michael.schmauder@lvr.de

Prof. Dr. Tatiana Skrynnikova
 The Department of Central Asian and South
 Asian Studies
 Institute of Oriental Manuscripts
 Russian Academy of Sciences
 Dvortsovaya Emb. 18
 Sankt-Petersburg 191186, Russia
 E-Mail: skryta999@mail.ru

Ass. Prof. Dr. Sören Stark
 Institute for the Study of the Ancient World
 New York University
 15 East 84th St.
 New York City, NY 10028, USA
 E-Mail: soeren.stark@nyu.edu

Prof. Dr. Timo Stickler
Department of Ancient Studies
Friedrich Schiller University Jena
Fürstengraben 1
07743 Jena, Germany
E-Mail: timo.stickler@uni-jena.de

Prof. Dr. Pavel E. Tarasov
Institute of Geological Sciences, Palaeontology
Freie Universität Berlin
Malteserstr. 74-100, Haus D
12249 Berlin, Germany
E-Mail: ptarasov@zedat.fu-berlin.de

Dr. Sergey Aleksandrovich Vasyutin
Department of the History of Civilizations
and Socio-Cultural Communications
Kemerovo State University
Krasnya 6
650043 Kemerovo, Russia
E-Mail: vasutin2012@list.ru

Prof. Dr. Mayke Wagner
Branch office of the Eurasia Department in
Beijing
German Archaeological Institute
Im Dol 2-6, Haus II
14195 Berlin, Germany
E-Mail: mwa@zedat.fu-berlin.de;
mw@eurasien.dainst.de

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