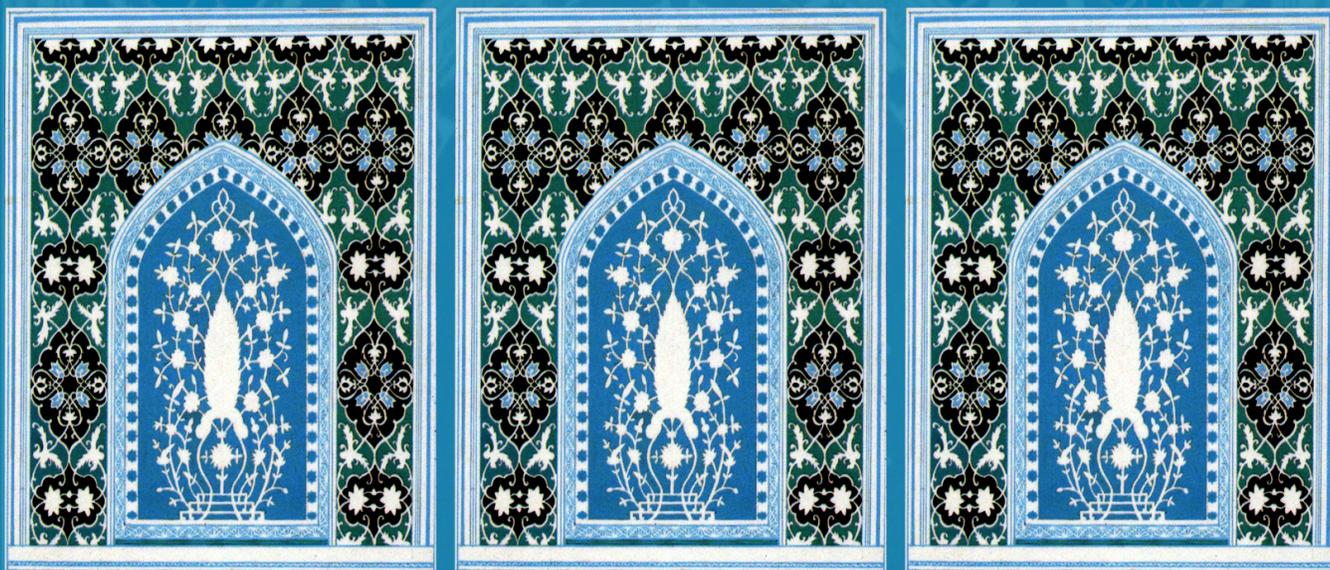


# Ancient Heritage of T aklimakan: Uyghur Urbiculture

Dr. Dolkun Kamberi



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# Introduction

During more than a century of exploration around the Tāklimakan, archeologists have discovered many ancient city sites, unearthing countless artistic archeological artifacts and various versions of ancient Uyghur literature, as well as Uyghur dramatic manuscripts. These have provided excellent evidence that Uyghur literature has had a long history and a close relationship with its neighbors in language, religion, literature, and arts.

This eBook examines and investigates the archeological, historical, and cultural background and urban life of the Uyghurs. It also interprets medieval Uyghur literature and dramatic cultural phenomena uncovered from the medieval period, thus helping to improve scholars' understanding of the ancient heritage of Tāklimakan and Uyghur urbiculture, language, literature, and arts.

This eBook contends that Uyghur urbiculture was firmly established on the foundation of the Tāklimakanians' and Uyghurs' cultural development. It will focus on the author's research of Uyghur manuscripts, and will attempt to examine archeological facts and the history of Uyghur culture from different angles in order to demonstrate the significant urbicultural and linguistic achievements of Uyghur society.

The author arrives at his conclusions based on his thorough study, research, analysis, decipherment, annotation, and translation of Uyghur manuscripts and other archeological artifacts and the remains of ancient cities, focusing especially on important dramatic cultural phenomena.

This study undertakes textual research in order to accurately date and explain the content and composition of certain Uyghur documents unearthed around the Tāklimakan. It analyzes and assesses selected aspects of Uyghur dramatic culture, history, language, art, and religion. It presents new information to intellectuals in the fields of the social sciences and the humanities. And it fills in gaps in historical data and the interpretation of Uyghur civilization in Central Asian cultural history.

This is important not only for understanding the ancient heritage of Tāklimakan and Uyghur urbiculture, but also for research into the general history of Uyghur civilization.

## Chapter 1

### **Ancient Heritage of Tāklimakan**

The Uyghur Autonomous Region is located in the center of Asia. Historically, culturally, linguistically, and economically it is an important part of Central Asia naturally divided into three basins and surrounded by three great mountain ranges. The Tängri Mountain has traditionally been worshiped by Hunic, Turkic, and Uyghur people, who have respectfully named it The Heavenly Mountain since ancient times. The Tarim Basin lies in the southern part of the Uyghur Region, and at the center of the Tarim Basin lies the great Tāklimakan Desert. The Tāklimakan is one of the world's driest and largest sandy deserts. Most of its vast expanse has never been settled. Among the Uyghur people there is a saying that "Tāklimakan" refers to a place where "If you go in, you will never come out." However, the original meaning of "Tāklimakan" in ancient Uyghur is "Vineyard," and the meaning of "Tarim" is "cultivated land." While the Tāklimakan's northern, western, and southern areas are bordered by mountains and highland oasis cities, only its eastern extremity connects openly to China's Hexi Corridor through the Lopnur territory (See Kamberi 1995).

The climate of the Tāklimakan has heavily impacted the main geomorphologic features of oasis cities in the Tarim Basin. It is also the second largest mobile sandy desert in the world. The Tāklimakan provides ideal conditions for the preservation of ancient city sites, artifacts, and cultural relics.

In the early part of the last century, intrepid foreign explorers explored ancient sites along the Silk Road. Their accounts, maps, and the materials they collected have formed the foundation for archeological collections after the establishment of the Uyghur Autonomous Regional Museum in 1953 (See Kamberi 1986).

Despite scattered archeological achievements in the eastern part of the Uyghur Region until the early 1980s, scholars have still been unable to recover all of the cultural treasures which remain deposited under the sands of the Tāklimakan. And though archeologists have uncovered invaluable cultural relics in the past from these regions, a big gap remains in the field of archeological culture studies in the larger part of the Tarim Basin.



Archeological investigations and excavations along the ancient Silk Road of the Tarim Basin have uncovered many previously unknown civilizations and dozens of desiccated ancient corpses. Based on radiocarbon analysis, these ancient Tāklimakanians lived between 2000 BCE and 600 CE. Many of these corpses are startlingly well-preserved. Exploring many ancient city sites during my own archeological field work, I excavated numerous historical artifacts which have stirred excitement around the world. These discoveries have not only captured the popular imagination, they have also challenged the scholarly world by adding fuel to an already heated debate concerning the origins and development of the Tāklimakanians (Uyghurs) who inhabited the Tarim for thousands of years. Although the puzzle of the Tāklimakanians' civilization has been studied for more than a century under the lens of comparative linguists and historians, archeology has played an increasingly important role in aiding experts to construct a chronology of their presence in different regions of Eurasia.



Through my many years of archeological field work, study, analysis, and research on ancient Tāklimakanian civilization, it has become clear that the ancient Tāklimakanians, like the Central Asians who live there today, did not belong to a single homogeneous group. The Tarim Basin's unique

geographic environment and arid climate have enabled ancient tombs, mummies, petroglyphs, and city sites to survive. They have also permitted the continued survival of Buddhist caves, innumerable cultural relics, underground antiquities, and many other invaluable treasures. In addition, for scholars, there are scores of manuscripts using seventeen ancient languages written in 24 scripts which were unearthed along with the Tarim and Turpan Basin oasis cities, and which are well known to today's world (Kamberi 1996). These comprise one of the richest sources for research now available to world archeologists and linguists. Records of philosophy and the arts of Buddhism have also survived in this particular area, evidence of the diversity of Uyghur Buddhist cultures that flourished in this remote part of the globe approximately from the second century CE until the thirteenth century CE (Kamberi 1995).

Some of the world's oldest civilizations and richest city-kingdom urbicultures—such as ancient Niyä, Kroran, Lälälik, Aqsepil, Toquz Saray, and Miran—were buried under the Täklimakan sands. Based on my personal academic research, I have learned that the hundred years of archeological explorations along the ancient Silk Road can be grouped into four different periods of archeological field work. Before the 1980s, archeologists carried out numerous archeological excavations and investigations in the Tarim and Turpan Basins, and these uncovered many ancient tombs, settlements, remains of ancient cities, archeological sites, and monasteries dated approximately from 400 BCE to 1700 CE. Those expeditions not only satisfied the curiosity of each explorer, but also enriched the collections of some of the world's biggest museums, libraries, and universities. And their publications have become a critical resource for ancient Eurasian studies worldwide (Kamberi 1996). Since the 1980s, a new generation of archeologists has also discovered scores of prehistoric sites, artifacts, and desiccated corpses from Turpan, Qumul, Kroran, Chärchän, and Niyä and many oasis cities along the ancient Silk Road. Several full-scale archeological reports, books, and numerous research articles on special topics have since been published in various academic journals and by publishing houses (Kamberi 2012).

Here I would like to discuss a couple of ancient city sites as examples to support my academic argument. The first is the ancient Kroran kingdom, which covered approximately 900 square kilometers within today's Lopnur, Chärchän, and Niyä counties. Numerous ruins, sites, and ancient tombs of the kingdom still remain under the sands of the Täklimakan. Here, we have excavated many ancient city sites and several hundred ancient tombs which have yielded extraordinarily well-preserved artifacts, including woolen textiles, multicolored robes, trousers, boots, stockings, coats, various kinds of felt hats, golden ornaments, implements and tools made of wood, bone, and horn, stone arrowheads and wooden arrows, bronze and iron knives, as well as other objects.

In the Kroran kingdom there are about ten sites belonging to the Bronze Age and more than a hundred sites belonging to the Iron Age. Three sites in Kroran where such remains have been uncovered stand out: the Qäwrighul, Charwighul, and Zaghunluq cemeteries. Radiocarbon analyses of wood, animal skin, and woolen fabrics unearthed from these cemeteries indicate that their burial date was approximately 1800 BCE. The most characteristic artifacts among the implements unearthed from these tombs are pottery vessels, including different kinds of serving containers, cooking ware, bowls, and drinking vessels of various sizes. All of the textiles are woolen, but they are of various types, including plain weave and diagonal weave. Large quantities of bronze, stone, bone, and wooden spindle wheels were also unearthed, showing the level of development of the textile industry of the time. Other items of interest found in these tombs included wooden objects such as combs, a milking pail, some knitting needles, wooden arrows and ritual yarn that may have been used as fire symbols, bone objects like combs and drinking-cups, a horn hook that may have been used to hang up clothing, and a wide variety of fabrics.

Many of the artifacts found, such as the clothing and food items such as lamb-ribs kawap, are very similar to those used by modern Uyghurs today. In Zaghunluq Cemetery we found next to a cup an ancient “baby bottle” made of a sheep's teat that had been cut and sewn up in such a way as to allow it to contain milk (Kamberi 1994). The fabrics especially indicate a surprisingly advanced level of textile technology not often seen in other finds either in Central Asia or in the rest of China. Judging from the discoveries at these cemeteries, we know that the people who inhabited this region had an economy based on agriculture and

animal husbandry. They supplemented their diet by fishing and by growing wheat. Their primary crafts were leather-working; weaving woolen fabrics; felt-making; jade, wood, and bone-carving; and grass-weaving.

The second ancient kingdom is Khotan. The region of Khotan is located in the southwestern part of the Tarim Basin. Unearthed works of art and artifacts from the Aqsepil, Rawaq, Sampul, and Yotqan archeological sites lead us to believe that the kingdom of Khotan was established in approximately the third century BCE. The Khotan Yotqan site covers a surface area of 10 square kilometers. Some scholars believe the ancient site of Yotqan was the first capital city of the ancient kingdom of Khotan.



*A mummified woman, aged about 58 years, c. 1000 B.C., who was excavated in the Chinese village of Zaghunluq of Charchan county, China, in September 1985, is pictured in this undated handout photo. For up to 4,000 years, the salty sand of the Taklimakan Desert in China held a secret – unusually well preserved mummies still wearing the colorful robes, boots, stockings and hats the people took to their graves. More than 400 scholars from around the world are presenting papers on the “Mystery Mummies” the weekend of April 20, 1996, at the University of Pennsylvania. (AP Photo/Dolkun Kamberi, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology)*

The third ancient kingdom is Qāshqār. This was an important cultural and trade center of the ancient Tarim along the southern Silk Road. According to Chinese historical texts, it was known as Shule in the Han Dynasty, which may be a transcription of the ancient Uyghur word *suluq*, which means “rich with water.” During the Chinese envoy Zhang Qian’s journey to the west during the West Han dynasty, he visited ancient Qāshqār and left a record about the ancient city saying: “王治疏勒城”, “The King rules from Shule City.” According to East Han dynasty historical records, the kingdom of Qāshqār comprised three cities, with a population totaling nearly 100,000. And updated records written in Sui and Tang dynasty histories add: “疏勒国…其都城方五里。国内有大城十二，小城数十” which means: “The capital city of (疏勒国) ancient kingdom of Qāshqār covers about 5 square Li. The state has more than twelve big cities, and a couple of ten smaller cities.”[1] This indicates that since the beginning of the first century CE, the kingdom of Qāshqār extended its building of cities from three cities during the East Han dynasty period (1st CE) to more than twenty cities during the Sui Tang period (500-907 CE).

Because of its important location, the ancient kingdom of Qāshqār was a very prosperous trading city on the Silk Road. Qāshqār is also very proud of having been the home of the famous medieval Uyghur scholars Mākḥmud Qāshqāri and Yūsūf Khas Hajip in the eleventh century CE. Their works have been translated into many languages and studied all over the world.

The remains of the ancient city of Khan-Öy (Royal Palace) are situated about 32 kilometers northeast of Qāshqār and include the ruins of a Buddhist monastery. The remains of a Buddhist pagoda over thirteen meters high still stand there in desert. The site also contains the remains of city walls, houses, Buddhist temples, and an underground irrigation system called *kariz* which is still being used in Turpan today. We believe the city was originally built sometime in the second century BCE and was completely ruined after the thirteenth century CE.

The fourth group of ancient city sites are found in Turpan. The territory of the ancient kingdom of Turpan was sometimes bigger, sometimes smaller. But no matter how the size of its domain changed throughout history, the oasis cities of the Turpan Basin were always the political and cultural centers of its kingdom. The ancient city site of Yarghul grew considerably from the third century BCE to the fifteenth century CE. It is now a UNESCO world heritage site. In the beginning of the fifth century CE, the center of political power in the Turpan area was relocated from Yarghul to the ancient city of Idiqut by the king of the Qüü family.

Idiqut is a walled city with an outside circumference of over five kilometers and is divided into three sections: the palace city, the inner city, and the outer city. From its beginnings around the time of the second century CE to the tenth century CE, it remained a strategically important city and was an international cosmopolitan center with diverse peoples, religions, and a high level of culture. Here, we have excavated more than ten thousand cultural relics. Among the vast array of extraordinarily well-preserved artifacts are wooden figurines, paper documents, paintings on silk, a bouquet of funerary flowers made of silk, plaited silk slippers, a variety of dyed or embroidered silks, and even bags of millet and wheat, cotton seed, fruit, a wooden ruler, writing brushes, Persian silver coins, Roman golden coins, the dried remains of boiled dumplings, *Nan*, dough patties, and flower shaped cookies. These objects form a collection in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region museum collection revealing different aspects of the social life and culture of the ancient Idiqut people (Kamberi 1995).

As we have discussed above, using four ancient city sites as examples, we know from so many archeological findings that Uyghurs and their forerunners made outstanding achievements in culture, literature, and especially urbiculture. Many historical artifacts recovered during more than a hundred years of archeological expeditions in the Uyghur region all point to the origins of modern Uyghur arts, culture, music, daily life, dress and clothing, and styles of decorative designs.

[1]See Dolkun Kamberi, Mākḥmud Qāshqāri’s Work and His Home Town. 2010

## Chapter 2

### Ancient Uyghur Literature

Early and medieval Uyghur works of literature were inscriptions and manuscripts about social activities, including folk poetry and translations of Buddhist and Manichean books. During the last 100 years of archeological expeditions in the Uyghur region, many narrative, poetic, love-story, epic, and religious manuscripts written in medieval Uyghur were unearthed around the Turpan and Tarim basins. Early folk poetry and proverbs from Mähmut Kashgari's *Divan Lughatit Turk* and in other medieval Uyghur texts allude to the moral education, friendship, generosity, liberal hospitality, and rich life experience of Uyghur Turks, as well as their philosophic ideas. Uyghur folk poetry and folk songs very often consist of rhymed quatrains. Thousands of them are to be found in Mähmut Kashgari's *Divan*, in the medieval Turpan texts, and in other manuscripts.

Many centuries ago, when a famous medieval Uyghur king took the throne, he made a great proposal for his kingdom's future. In verse, he made a speech to his officials and people, which read: "I became a king for you. Please pick up your bows and shields. Make the blue wolf our totem. Let that symbol become our good fortune. Let our arms and armor be a forest. Let wild horses speed on our prairie. Let rivers and streams run in our land. May the sun be our emblem, and the blue sky our banner." He then wrote a declaration, decreeing that it be sent to all four corners of the earth. The declaration states, "I am a Uyghur king, the globe needs me, and I should be a king of the world's four corners."

This medieval Uyghur king's declaration at his coronation amounts to only eight lines of verse, plus another line giving the king's order to send the eight lines out to all other states. But its content is so rich that it includes everything important to a state. In my opinion, this is the shortest and best speech by any khan, king, emperor, chairman, or president throughout world history. Its implied concerns include strengthening the military, developing animal husbandry and the irrigation system for agriculture, faith, the environment, politics, and the Uyghur kingdom's foreign policy. Back then, every strong leader had the same foreign policy: expand and conquer. This is what we have learned throughout history from great conquerors such as Alexander the Great and Genghis Khan.

Many centuries later, in 1933, a new Uyghur flag was designed, and I ask myself if the flag designer had not perhaps read this paragraph of the medieval manuscript in Uyghur. In any case, his design of the new state flag corresponds very closely to the medieval Uyghur king's proposal. The first contemporary flag of the Republic of Eastern Turkestan is blue, but instead of the sun it features the moon.

Most modern scholars believe that the original meaning of the word "Uyghur" is "unity," "union," "coalition," or "federation." We can trace the name Uyghur back to the ancient handwriting of Uyghur Turkic inscriptions, to the documents of medieval Uyghur and Manichaeic scripts, and to writings in Persian, Khaqannid, and Chaghatay, and we can find it today in modern Uyghur scripts. In addition, more than one hundred forms of transliteration have been used for the word "Uyghur" throughout different periods of history and in diverse Chinese texts. Qāshqāri himself used the word "Uyghur." He wrote that "The State of Uyghur has five cities. Those cities are 'Solmi,' which Zulqarnāyin [Alexander the Great] let them build, 'Iduqut,' 'Jan Balīq,' 'Bāsh Balīq,' and 'Yengi Balīq.'" The Chinese *Twenty-Four Histories* contains historiographies of the Western States in which any Sinologist can research the history of the Uyghurs, their religious system, and their socio-economic background. But if scholars intend to deeply and carefully pursue the entire subject of Uyghur cultural history, they should also examine the medieval Uyghur literature that has been unearthed in Uyghur territory.

That Uyghur literary heritage may indeed provide the ultimate historical record for studying the Uyghur people. One very important source in medieval Uyghur literature is Yusuf Has Haji's *Qutadghu Bilik* (*Knowledge Brings Happiness*). This work claims that no matter who you are, you must study hard to gain knowledge, as only knowledge can bring happiness to people and society. It also states that, "The knowledgeable man carrying stone may turn it into gold; the illiterate man carrying gold may turn it into stone." The text asserts that the world is composed of earth, water, air, and fire – the four fundamental elements that constantly oppose each other yet unite, move, and are renewed. The work is based on four great philosophic concerns: "Justice and the Legal System," "Fortune and Happiness," "Intelligence and Wisdom," and "Awakened Mind and the Future."

The author uses each of four figures to raise the subject of seeking social happiness, which for him represents one of society's concerns. The first figure to speak in the dialogue is the King, whom the author names Kün Toghdī (Sunrise) and who represents justice and the legal system. The second figure is the prime minister, whom the author names Ay Toldī (Full Moon) and who represents happiness and fortune. The third figure is the son of the prime minister, whom the author names Ögdülmish (Sage), which means wisdom and knowledge. The fourth figure is Odghurmish (Enlightenment), who represents self-cultivation and an awakened mind as well as fulfillment.

By reading Uyghur literature, we learn that the Uyghurs are indigenous to Central Asia. They developed a unique culture and made significant contributions to Central Eurasian culture, history, literature, medicine, architecture, music, song, dance, and fine arts. Archaeological excavations and historical records show that Uyghur territory is the most important repository of Uyghur literary treasures. By examining early and medieval Uyghur works of literature, including religious manuscripts and historical and biographical inscriptions, it is easy to see that the Uyghur language that was used in the 8th century during the Uyghur Khanate is exactly the same as that used in the Orkhun-Yenisey inscription dating from the 6th to the 8th centuries, called ancient Türkic. In addition, there is no great difference between the literary language of the Iduqut Uyghur Khanate and the Uyghur literary language of the Qarakhanniyid.

This coincidence proves that the ancient Türkic literary language, which was in use before the 8th century, was indeed the literary language of the Uyghur. As we know, up until the 14th century the literary language of ancient Uyghur was in common use among Turkic peoples. Shämsidin Sami, the author of *Qamusul'Alam*, wrote that "The Uyghur people being the most advanced in cultural development, their language was the common literary language among the Türkic peoples, since at the period during which the Chaghatay Khan was in power, the Uyghur language, called Chaghatay Tili, was famous [1]." In the well-known *Diwan* of the Uyghur scholar Mahmud Kashgari, both Uyghur and Chinese historiographical sources show that due to cultural transitions in the 9th and 10th centuries, some of the Turkic people migrated westward to the lands between the Syr River (Darya) and the Amu River (Darya), and east of the Caspian Sea.

From medieval Uyghur literary works we learn that the Uyghur have traced their ancestry literarily to the legendary hero Alp Ar Tonga and Oghuz Khan (See the biography of Oghuz). That is verified through Turkologists' studies of the Uyghur manuscripts unearthed in the course of the last hundred years of archeological exploration in the Uyghur region. Furthermore, scholars have acknowledged that one of the most important supports for study is the language of medieval Uyghur, which served as the literary language for all the various groups of Turkic people during the Uyghur Empire and the Great Khannid (Qarakhannid), [2] Iduqut Uyghur Khannid, and Chaghatay Khannid periods. We have inherited countless literary works belonging to these eras. In addition, traditional Uyghur literature portrays the cultural history of the Uyghur people, their civilization, and their arts, as well as their well-established political systems, education, and customs, along with their high level of morality and religious faith, all of which made the Uyghur into the leading group among Turkic peoples in Central Eurasia during medieval times.

These peoples developed and cultivated the Uyghur language and writing system, continuing to use Uyghur script throughout history until the time of the Mongolian Empire. There is only one example of a

Muslim Uyghur people using a non-Arabic script in a part of Uyghur territory until the 16th century. The continuation of the medieval Uyghur cultural tradition occurred for some time after the completion of the Islamic cultural transition from medieval Uyghur script during the beginning of the Qarakhanid (Great Khanid) period. This involved, for example, using Uyghur literary language in medieval Uyghur script as the sole language of state until, via Persian, Arabic script was finally adopted.

Here, we clearly see that Qāshqāri expresses a rather different orientation on the question of linguistic scholarship, one that goes back to Uyghur Buddhist ideology, which spurred on the Uyghur philologists in their classical period. This movement is a stock of epic and historical traditions, which the linguists tried to coordinate with their inherited language of Uyghur Buddhist manuscripts. Here, let us briefly examine Uyghur literature to determine whether these traditions can be interpreted as an attempt to continue traditional Uyghur culture.

Uyghur literature can be divided into five major historical periods. The first period comprises Uyghur oral literature, idioms, idiomatic phrases, folk stories, folk songs, and the different stories that have come down to us through the oral narrative tradition, including ancient mythologies and legends. These were all recorded in written manuscripts in later periods, as well as in documents written in other languages. The second period comprises mostly pre-Islamic literature, whose influence spread from non-Altai languages. Some of them we can identify thanks to loan words from Tocharian and Soghdian. The third period stretches from the 10th to the 15th centuries C.E. This mostly comprises Islamic literature, which was strongly influenced by the Arabic and Persian languages. The fourth period lasts from the 16th century to the end of the 19th, while the fifth period stretches from the end of the 19th century to the present day.

The current generation of Uyghurs has inherited many excellent Uyghur literary works, including ancient inscriptions and many unearthed Uyghur medieval manuscripts. One unique encyclopedic work of a high academic standard is Mahmud Qāshqāri's *Divani Lughatit Turk*. Qāshqāri made a great contribution to Turkological and comparative linguistic studies. If we compare the Qarakhanid Turkic language, Orkhun-Runic Turk, and medieval Uyghur in Buddhist documents, we can say that all three were basically the same. In all probability we are able to affirm that the Qarakhanid language is the continuation of Orkhun-Runic Turk and of medieval Uyghur, though at a different stage of development.

The Qāshqār dialect of contemporary Uyghur still preserves some of the important linguistic characteristics of the Khaqannid that do not exist in other contemporary Turkic languages. One thousand years ago, the 11th century Uyghur scholar Māhmut Qāshqāri, who for the first time used historical comparative methods to research and classify the world's Turkic languages, made a great contribution to historical comparative linguistics through a careful analysis and comparison of the Turkic languages of his time. In his *Divani-Lughatit Turk*, he pointed out that "there is very little difference in the original vocabularies of Turkic people; differences occur only with some letter alternation or lost letters." From the examples of words that Qāshqāri provides, we can see that "letter alternation or loss" means "phonetic alternation or loss."

Hence, during Mahmud Qāshqāri's time, the differences among Turkic language dialects had mainly to do with phonetic alternation. He concluded that there were five main alternations. First is the alternation between the Y and J or CH; second between M and B; third between T and D; fourth between Z and Y; and fifth between Y and N. According to these five phonetic alternations along with other suffix phoneme alternations between Turkic language dialects, Mahmud Qāshqāri divided the Turkic languages of his time into two different language groups: the eastern Turkic language and the western Turkic language. The eastern Turkic language group was mainly represented by the Uyghur-Qaraluq language, and the western one by the Oghuz-Kipchaq language. He writes of the eastern language group as a Turkic, or Khaqannid, language. He said that "The most beautiful language is the Khaqannid language, and the people in the city of Qāshqār speak "Khaqannid Turkic [3]."

The literary form of folk poetry from Qāshqār's *Divan* spread far and wide among Central Asian people. Uyghur proverbs, oral literary traditions, poetry, folk songs, distinctive regional customs, and their

language constitute the uniqueness of Uyghur literature. New poems are constantly being written and old ones rewritten or altered to fit contemporary contexts, the writer's frame of mind, or to satisfy new needs or new feelings. A close examination of Uyghur poetry and proverbs reveals observations about men and things, Uyghur folk customs, their social activities, natural history, and literary and traditional culture [4]. Uyghur poetry and proverbs embody the crystal truth of real-life experience, based on long and painful ordeals, and this very popular oral literary tradition still persists among ordinary Uyghur people.

Beside excellent, representative early medieval Uyghur literary works such as *Tonyukuk*, *Kul-tekin*, and the *Bilge Uyghur Khaqan Inscriptions*, others that have come down to us include *Maitrisimit*, *Chashtani Ilig Beg*, *Oghuz Name*, *Altun Yaruk*, as well as many more literary manuscripts, all of which are generally well-known to newer Uyghur generations. Uyghur literary works that continue the tradition of works that have stood the test of time include *Qudatghu Bilik* and *Atabetul Hakayik*, as well as Sakaki's, Lutefi's, Alisher's, and Nawayi's works, and those of many contemporary Uyghur poets.

Medieval historical records and the history of Uyghur literature tell us that Uyghur civilization has a long history and its own traditions. One thing is certain: Uyghur literature including oral narratives, legendary myths, and other literary art forms all serve as invaluable sources of supplementary information for understanding Uyghur culture and for providing insights into the evolving stylistic and cultural trends of the Uyghur people. Orkhun inscriptions from the Turkic Empire, also known as the Orkhun-Yenisey inscriptions, were discovered in the late 19th century in the Orkhun and Yenisey River Valley in Mongolia. They comprise one of the earliest examples of writings in any Turkic language. The inscriptions tell the story of the reunification of the East and West Turkic Empires and date back to the early 8th century. They are written in runic form, an early form of old Uyghur script that once served as the literary language for all Central Asia. The Orkhun-Yenisey alphabet was eventually replaced by medieval Uyghur script, and the Uyghur language continued to transform as it became the literary language of many Turkic peoples, spreading widely during the period of the Iduqut Uyghur Khanate during the mid-8th to 9th centuries, that of the Qarakhannid Khanate (9th to the 13th centuries), and that of the Chagatai Khanate, which lasted up until the late 17th century.

I have deciphered and translated many ancient Orkhun inscriptions and medieval Uyghur Buddhist and Manichaean manuscripts, undertaking a careful analysis of, and comparison between, medieval Uyghur and the literary language of the Qarakhannid period. Using a comparative linguistic approach to my study, I find that the so-called Khaqannid language is a continuation of medieval Uyghur. The Khaqannid language used by Mahmud Qāshqāri and Yusuf Has Hajji has kept original medieval Uyghur characters and adopted some new linguistic elements from Arabic-Persian.

From the development of Uyghur history, we can clearly see that after the decline of the Uyghur Empire in the middle of the 9th century, the majority of the Uyghur people's faith started to change from Buddhism to Islam. The Uyghur region finally completed the transition from Buddhism to Islam around 960 after Sultan Sutuq Bughrakhan adopted Islam as the state religion. Islamic religious identity then replaced ethnic identity, and the Uyghur federation, which included the Qaraluq and other many Uyghur tribes, identified themselves as Qarakhannid, which means "belonging to the Great Khan." The only exceptions were some Uyghurs who lived in the East, that is, in the Turpan basin and the Gansu corridor, and who were still practicing their Buddhist faith until the 15th century.

In conclusion, I have learned that Mahmud Qāshqāri and Yusuf Has Hajji's works actually belong to the transitional period between ancient Uyghur languages and the Chaghatay language. That is why we find only about 480 Arabic-Persian loan words in the more than thirteen thousand lines of classic epic in the *Qudatghu Bilik*, but more than 200 Arabic-Persian loan words in only about 484 lines of the *Etabetul-Heqayiq*, which were written during the 13th century. This indicates that the literary language of Chaghatay was not only developed on the basis of ancient and medieval Uyghur, but also enriched its vocabulary by adopting loan words and some grammatical forms from Arabic and Persian. The richness and diversity of Uyghur literature can be traced far back through the ages and seen as a continuous literary

tradition, one that evidences a vibrant, evolving civilization and urbiculture.

[1] Khämit Tömür, *Chghatay Tili* [Chaghatay Language](Qashqar: Qashqar Uyghur Näshiryati, 1987), p. 2.

[2] The word “Qara” has two meanings, both in medieval and contemporary Uyghur. The first meaning is “great”; the second “black.” The correct translation of the Qara-Khannid is not “Black Khannid,” as some historians have rendered it in the past, but “Great-Khannid.”

[3] Mahmud Qäshqäri, *Divani Lughatit Turk* (Xinjiang helq Neshriyati: Urumchi, 1983), p. 41.

[4] See Dolkun Kamberi and Jeffrey Yang’s ‘Focus on Uyghur Poetry’ section in *Some Kind of Beautiful Signal*, Issue 17, 2010, pp. 244-291.

## Chapter 3

### Uyghur Urbiculture

Urbiculture is the most important basis for higher cultural development in any society. For instance, without the universities, museums, theaters, and other institutions of higher in a modern city, that city would not be recognized as a cultural center. At the same time, without the highly developed modern urbiculture of a city, there would be no universities, big museums, and other exciting cultural institutions. There is a very close relationship between urbanization, cultural development, and higher education. These can hardly exist without each other. Medieval Uyghur urbiculture is crucial to an understanding of the dissemination of Uyghur civilization and lifestyles, as well as their dramatic cultural activities throughout all of Uyghur history.

We all know that the world's longest early medieval dramatic manuscript was unearthed in the Uyghur region, dating to 767. This was a direct result of the well-developed Uyghur urbiculture in the medieval period. Dramatic culture emerges from a given space and special social environment, and each society has its own unique cultural and artistic historical background for the appearance of drama. As archeological examples we have already mentioned two ancient city sites, Idikut and Yarghul, in which the remains of two performing stages can still be seen today. This study contends that medieval Uyghur urbiculture established a solid basis for Uyghur cultural development and for the appearance of Uyghur drama.

Medieval Uyghurs built a number of cities and developed their own urban civilization. Because of a lack of systematic study and of original primary sources, however, there is much misunderstanding about medieval Uyghur urbiculture. In fact, no satisfactory research regarding Uyghur urbiculture has ever been done. The present study will therefore discuss the urbiculture of medieval Uyghurs as an important factor in the emergence of Uyghur dramatic culture. Concerning the fact that the Uyghurs began to build cities in the early medieval period, the Uyghur sponsor of the *Maitrisimit* wrote in a prologue to the text in 767:

“With aid from the power of merit and virtuous activity, I hope that the dignity of the highest lord will be greatly raised. May he protect our state and cities. May we live free from internal misery and the external wolf-like enemy. May all creatures be happy.” This medieval Uyghur statement confirmed the existence of Uyghur urbiculture when it referred to “our state and cities,” and not to a “semi-sedentary” life. In addition to this, the eleventh-century Uyghur scholar Mäkhmud Qäshqäri in his encyclopedia *Diwan Lughatit Turk* describes the urban life of the early medieval Uyghurs. In his book, he says that Uyghurs have had a “long history of an urbanized life style,” a “strong army” and “excellent military equipment,” are “courageous and skillful in battle,” and have been “completely independent” from the time that Alexander the Great arrived in Central Asia.

The following statement is directly translated from Qäshqäri's annotation of the *Diwan Lughatit Turk* in the item regarding the word “Uyghur”: “Uyghur is the name of a state. It has five cities. These cities were built after the Zulqarnäyin reached an agreement with the Turk Khaqan. Nizamidin Israfil Tuqan Tigin, the son of Mäkhmud Chaqir Tutqa Khan, told me what [information] he acquired from his father, and said: When Zulqarnäyin arrived near the Uyghur State, the Turk Khaqan sent four thousand troops against him. The feathers of the troops' helmets were like the wings of an eagle. They shot arrows forward as well as they did backward. Zulqarnäyin was amazed by their skill and said: “They could find food to feed themselves without depending on others. No bird or beast could escape from their hunting. Whenever they wanted food, they would hunt to eat.” Since that time, the state was called Uyghur”[1].

Mäkhmud Qäshqäri defines the “Uyghur” in history from reports seen through the admiring eyes of Alexander the Great that gave the Uyghurs historical credit. The name of Alexander the Great, known as Iskändär Zulqarnäyin, has remained very popular among Central Asians and Uyghurs even today. He has long been regarded as an important symbol of sovereignty in Uyghur literature throughout Central Asian history[2].

Here, Qäshqäri uses historical evidence which he obtained from his friend, a noble prince. And that prince obtained the information from his father, the king. Mäkhmud Qäshqäri says that the Uyghurs had built five cities after Alexander the Great left his footprints in Central Asia. Mäkhmud Qäshqäri has also located the position of the cities in his famous historical Asian map. (At the left, see the map, which was produced in the 11th century). The statement cited from Mäkhmud Qäshqäri’s work in the previous paragraph provides information concerning the original appearance of the name “Uyghur” in history. Mäkhmud Qäshqäri also noted that the name “Uyghur” was used in his own era.



At the time of Mäkhmud Qäshqäri, Uyghurs were divided into two large groups according to their beliefs. In the region of the southern part of Uyghur, with capitals in the cities of Qäshqär and Balasaghun, Uyghurs, including Mäkhmud Qäshqäri himself, by the tenth and eleventh centuries had already converted to Islam. But in the northeastern part of Uyghur, whose capitals were located in the cities Bāsh Balıq and Idiqut, Uyghurs still believed in Buddhism, with some of them worshipping as Manicheans and a few as Nestorian Christians. That is why the work offers a slightly different and shorter statement regarding the word “Uyghur” in his own time, as compared to the previous paragraph about the appearance of the name “Uyghur” in history. He said: “The State of Uyghur has five cities. Their people are the most ferocious infidels and the most skillful shooters. Those cities are Solmi, which Zulqarnäyin let them build, Qochu, Jan Balıq, Bāsh Balıq, and Yengi Balıq”[3].

Most Central Asian authors in the medieval period believed that a great leader could build a strong country and beautiful cities and bring a better life to his people. The earliest writings of medieval Uyghurs devoted many lines to the merits of the ideal Uyghur ruler. One Uyghur writer in 767 composed a verse which appeared in the prologue of the Uyghur *Maitrisimit*. In lines 22-26 of the book’s preface, the governor of Idiqut, Tash Ygän Tutuq, praises the greatest medieval Uyghur Khan as follows:



“For our heavenly wise, state wisdom, lion throne Uyghur Emperor Excellency, ten praiseworthy Uyghur States, thirty princes, wisdom of nine Envoys, a thousand courtiers, ten thousand imperial kinsmen...”

Above, I have provided the earliest available historical evidence about Uyghur from non-Chinese sources, specifically showing how medieval Uyghurs used their terminology when referring to themselves in Uyghur: “On Uyghur Āli” [Ten Uyghur States], “Otuz Tägit Oghlani” [Thirty Princes], “Toquz Ālchi Bilgäsi” [Wisdom of Nine Envoys].

The deciphering and annotation of the text from the original medieval Uyghur manuscript offered above has clarified arguments for over a hundred years among Central Asian historians, philologists, and sinologists trying to analyze the terminology in Chinese historical documents concerning the medieval Uyghurs. Chinese terms such as “Ju Xing Hu,” “Ju Xing Hui Hu,” “Shi Xing Hui Gu,” and the like have been translated as “Ten Uyghur Tribes” and “Nine Uyghur Tribes,” or “Ten Uyghur Surnames” and “Nine Uyghur Surnames” by many contemporary historians. Everyone can still understand these terms taken from the early medieval period, which should be translated into English as “the ten Uyghur States,” and “wisdom of nine envoys” or “nine wise [Uyghur] envoys.”

Besides the evidence presented above, my research also probes other primary non-Chinese sources regarding early medieval Uyghur urbiculture. Among them, several Uyghur inscriptions and an important eighth-century Arab traveler’s report deserve special attention. The traveler, Tamim Ibn Bahr, visited Uyghur cities at the end of the eighth century and wrote concerning medieval Uyghur urbiculture and trades: “This is a great city, rich in agriculture and surrounded by villages full of cultivation and lying close together. The city has twelve iron gates of huge size. It is populous and thickly crowded and supports markets and various trades. Among its population, the non-Muslim religion prevails”[3].

In addition, after analyzing many Chinese sources, I find Wang Yande’s *Journey to Idiqt Uyghur* particularly interesting and useful. The report was written by Wang Yande after he finished his journey to the Uyghurs and returned to China’s Sung dynasty court in the tenth century. Because the reporter recorded what he saw during his journey, his work is more dependable, its dating more precise, its style more coherent and clear, and its descriptions of cultural events more detailed. It would be very hard to find comparable evidence concerning medieval Uyghur urbiculture from the other Chinese works. As he moved westward after departing from the capital city of the Sung dynasty, and began to approach Qumul, Wang Yande wrote: “We next passed through the Ellig Prince’s domain (Il-Wangzi). There is the Qara Su [(He-Lo-Chuan river) located on the southeastern border of Qumul]. It is the place where the Uyghur princesses of the Tang period resided [from 618-907] The foundation of the city wall still remains. There are also hot spring ponds. Regarding the flourishing medieval Uyghur culture, and their relaxing urban life, environment, irrigation system, agriculture, and orchards the traveler Wang Yande wrote in 981: “Flying birds flock together on the river banks. The houses are painted in white. The river which comes out of the Shurman Mountain, they [the Uyghurs] divert to encircle the entire capital city in order to irrigate farms and orchards and run water mills. This place produces the five grains. Rich people eat horse [meat], the rest eat beef and wild geese. In this land there are no poor people, and they provide relief to those who lack

food. People mostly live long lives, generally for over a hundred years. No one there dies young, and people can always be seen gathering at monasteries on the heights. Their king [Arslan Khan] cooked lambs and horses. The king and princesses all breed horses, and they distinguish their herds by the color of the horses' coats. Nobody knows the number of their herds. The spread of the Bāsh Baliq (Pei-t'ing) valley is several thousand li.[5]"

In addition to the evidence discussed above, information about the urbiculture of the Uyghurs and their court life comes from the medieval Uyghur thinker Yüsüp Khas Hajip's poetic drama. The author devoted his longest chapter, the twenty-eighth, to discussing the qualifications and values of Uyghur professionals as well as their urbiculture in his *Qutadghu Bilik* [Kamberi 1995]. Historian Colin Mackerras also has described evidence of early medieval Uyghur urbiculture, stating in his work *The Uighur Empire*: "There were among the Uyghurs groups such as metallurgists, potters, engravers, blacksmiths, sculptors, stone-masons, weavers, and jewelers, They also seem to have mined iron-ore, copper, gold, and silver." [6] And he goes on: "Archaeologists have found evidence of irrigation and the use of millstones and pestles in Qarabalghasun. They have even discovered signs that grain, such as millet, was buried with the corpses of some Uyghurs." [7]

Studying the development of Uyghur urbiculture requires a wide approach. Uyghur urbiculture and its early dramatic culture formed around Uyghurs' culture, civilization, literature, arts, folklore, myth, historical epics, music, dance, painting, social activities, and religious rituals. Dramatic culture is a composite art and culturally and artistically very complex. Without an urbiculture environment, it would not exist. Thus, evidence suggests that the Uyghurs' open cosmopolitan life and favorable attitude toward diligent learning led to their significant achievements in the cultural realm over the centuries. Uyghur urban life and dramatic culture continuously flourished from the time [the seventh century] that the Uyghur Empire was centralized at the capital of Qarabalghasun, to the Qarakhannid period [eleventh century] with its capital cities at Qāshqār and Idiqut.

For decades, some specialists in Central Asian studies in studying Uyghur history have focused their research on how Chinese cultural influences contributed to the blossoming of Uyghur culture. Those studies have proposed that nomadic Uyghurs turned toward semi-sedentary life in a city only around the tenth century and argued that the Uyghurs' ancestors did not live around the Tarim and Turpan Basin oasis cities until the end of the ninth century. Some contemporary researchers, including a few politicized historians, either could not acquire evidence from indigenous primary sources or used the historical materials of the Tang dynasty in their writings in an incomplete way. For example, in one original document it is written that "Tāngri Khaqan began building a palace for the princess to live in." Several modern scholars have added a modified opinion as a note to the historical text: "Thereafter, Uyghurs began to build cities and gradually turned to a semi-sedentary life." [8] Though the original writing reads "building a palace," the additional note says "began to build cities." The note thus tries to establish a theory for further discourse: that Uyghurs as nomadic refugees moved into the present-day Uyghur Region after 840 and started to live in cities, and that they then adopted Buddhist culture and began to live a semi-sedentary life. [9] Studies of this kind have had an impact on many of the writings of younger historians in China. [10]

In conclusion, the Uyghurs, as a part of Central Asia, have had their own distinguished civilization, well-developed society, and urbiculture since ancient times. In this research, I have presented archeological and historical evidence for a Bronze Age and Iron Age in Tāklimakānian civilization and Uyghur urbiculture. Often, a lack of knowledge of key primary sources impedes a significant understanding of Uyghur civilization. Before the 1980s, many scholars thought that there were many Neolithic and Chalcolithic cultures, but no Bronze or Iron Age cultures, in the Tarim Basin and surrounding areas. But recent studies have shown that many remains formerly supposed to be Neolithic or Chalcolithic should actually be identified as belonging to Bronze or Iron Age cultures. According to these updated archeological materials, there are still not too many Bronze Age remains which exist in the Uyghur Region. There are about ten or more localities in all, which were mainly distributed in the Turpan Basin and along the northern edge of

the Tarim Basin. According to the features of the archeological remains, radiocarbon dates of the cemeteries and ancient sites, and a comparison of local Bronze Age culture with unearthed materials from surrounding areas, the Bronze Age in the Uyghur Region can be dated from about 2000 BCE to 1000 BCE. And the early Iron Age in the Uyghur Region dates from approximately the first millennium BCE to about the fourth century CE. Judging from updated materials, there are about 100 sites belonging to this period distributed throughout the Tarim and Turpan Basins. All of them used iron tools, bronze weapons, bronze ornaments, and bronze ritual vessels. Pottery consisted mainly of household utensils, and many vessels were painted. People during the Iron Age had permanent settlements, and were mostly farmers who also practiced some animal husbandry. Animal husbandry was probably independent from agriculture by that time. According to radiocarbon dating, the Iron Age in the Uyghur Region began around 1000 BCE, which is about 400 years earlier than the Iron Age in mainland China.

The Tarim Basin exhibits many cultural features identical or similar to those found in surrounding areas, with this resulting from cultural exchange with neighboring peoples. But this does not mean that the Bronze and Iron Age cultures in the Tarim Basin originated from outside the area or under the dominant influence of other cultures. In fact, the Bronze and Iron Age cultures in the Tarim Basin and surrounding areas possessed distinct native features. After carefully examining all archeological discoveries around the Tarim and Turpan Basins unearthed during the past hundred years, I feel that even before the Han dynasty government officer Zhang Qian appeared there in 138 BCE, the ancient caravan road of Central Asia, called the Silk Road in much later days, had already provided not only a path for immigration and trade, but also a route for cultural exchanges between East and West. The Uyghur area was the main region through which the ancient road had to pass. Discoveries like the Tarim Basin's many ancient city sites and tombs provide a great deal of information regarding the early history, religion, ethnology, culture, and technology of the region and the ancient Tāklimakanian people.

Finally, I would like to repeat the predictions I made in 1995. Culturally, Central Asia will once again become a dream-field for archeologists in the twenty-first century. Economically, oil production in the Tarim Basin will have a serious impact on the world's economy. And politically, Chinese ethnic minorities policy and nuclear weapons testing in the Kroran area will become very serious issues.

[1] Mäkhmud Qāshqāri, *Türki Tillar Diwani*, (Diwan Lughatit Türk), [Modern Uyghur Version], Ürümchi, Xinjiang Khälq Näshriyati, 1981, Vol I, p. 151.

[2] Perhaps Alexander the Great did not know anything about "Uyghur," but the myth lasted until Mäkhmud Qāshqāri's time. It is very hard to verify the origin of the myth, but the myth can at least provide the information concerning Uyghurs having a long history of building cities and settled civilization.

[3] Mäkhmud Qāshqāri, p. 152.

[4] "Tamim Ibn Bahr's Journey to the Uyghurs" by V. Minorsky, in *The School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, 1948, p. 283.

[5] See özkan Izgi, p. 9.

[6] Colin Mackerras, *The Uighur Empire, According to the T'ang Dynastic Histories*, Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1972, p. 11.

[7] Colin Mackerras, p. 12.

[8] Feng Jiasheng, Cheng Suo Lo, Mu Guang Wen, *Wei Wu Er Zu Shi Liao Jian Bian*, Beijing, Ming Zu Chu Ban She, 1955, p. 31.

[9] See Feng Jiasheng, Cheng Suo Lo, Mu Gaung Wen, p. 24, p. 12, pp. 39-43.

[10] Xinjiang Jian Shi, (The Brief History of Xinjiang), written by a group Chinese Han historians, organized by the Government, Ürümchi, Xinjiang Ren Ming Chu Ban She, 1982, 2 Volumes.

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