

The Turkic Peoples of Central Asia and Buddhism

Tibor Porció

(University of Szeged, Hungary)

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Introduction

- If we speak of peoples and their worlds of belief in relationship to the Turkic peoples Buddhism would certainly not come to mind for most (or at least first of all),
- just as people speaking a Turkic language would hardly come to mind with the mention of Buddhism.

The main reason

- the majority of the Turkic peoples of today – in terms of their geography and their numbers – are followers of Islam.

It is precisely because of this fact that it is not well-known that

- in the course of their long history, the Turkic-speaking peoples came into contact with nearly all of the major religions
- even today we find among the Turkic peoples Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism as well.
- the last is found among the small ethnic group known as the Yellow Uighurs (the true descendants of the Old Uighurs)

Uigur, Uighur, Uygur, Uyghur etc.

In Sogdian-Uygur script: 'WYQWR

In Chinese: *hui-hu*

In Old Tibetan: *ho-yo-hor / hu-yi-gur*

(In the 7-8th c.: **huyugur*)

Historical Background

History of the Turkic Peoples in the Pre-Islamic Period.

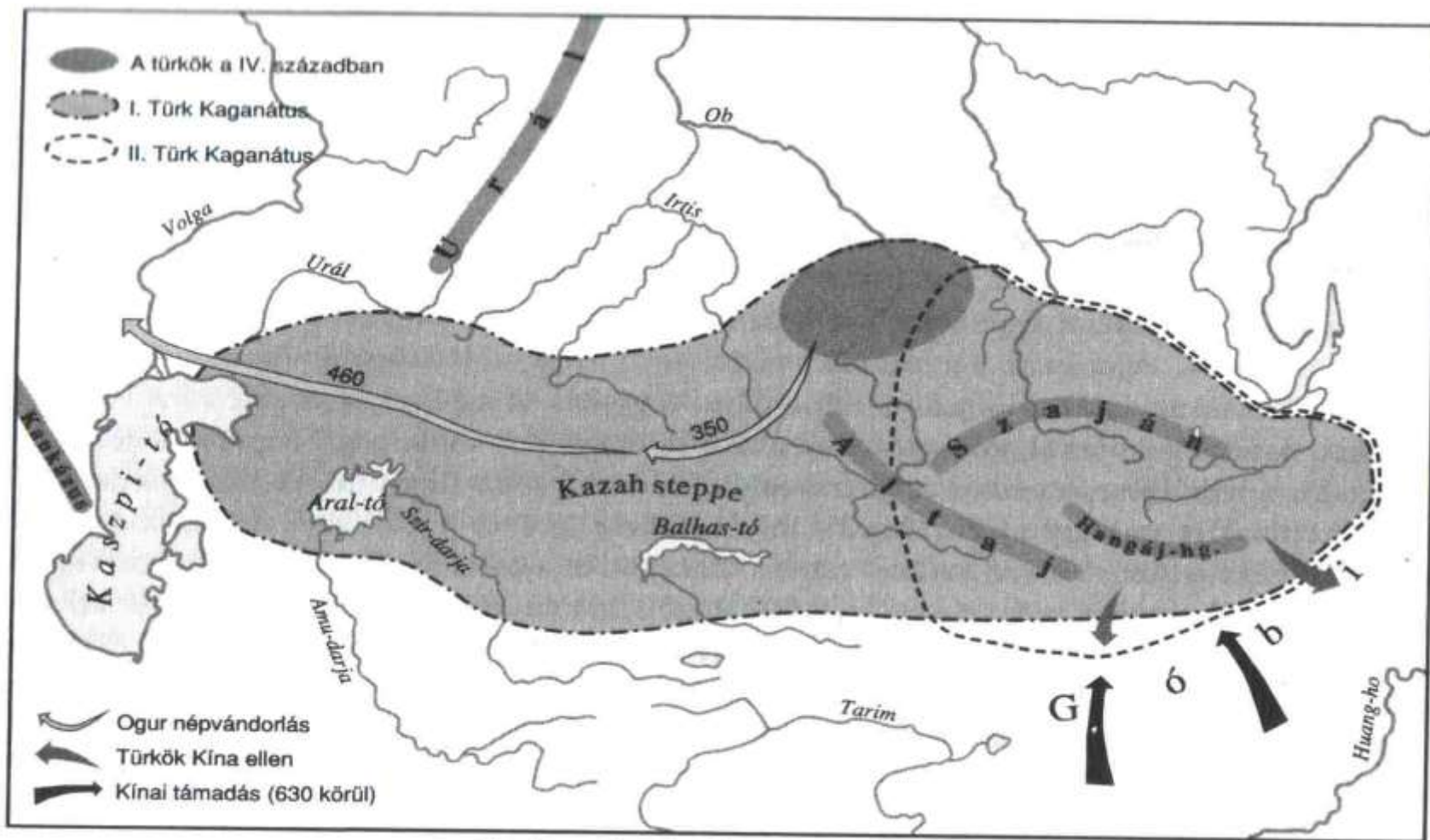
Ed. H. R. ROEMER with the assistance of
W.-E. SCHARLIPP. (Philologiae Turcicae
Fundamenta: T. III., Philologiae et historiae
Turcicae Fundamenta. T. I. Ed. L. BAZIN, Gy.
HAZAI. Berlin, 2000.)

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

Zsuanzsuanok és heftaliták a Kr. u. 5. században



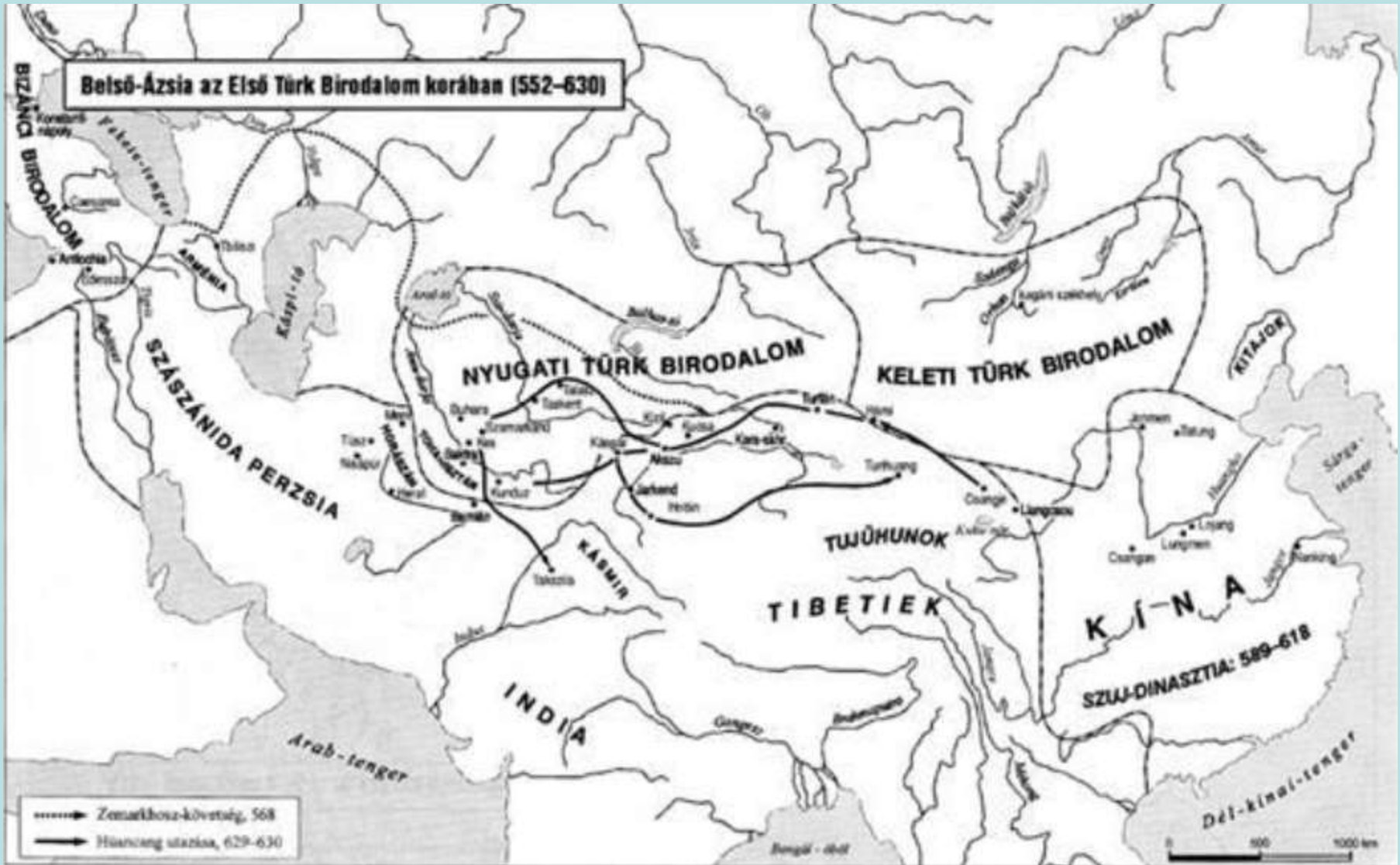
First Turkic Khanate (552-630)



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

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

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



..... Zemathosa-követség, 568
————— Huancang utazása, 629-630

0 500 1000 km

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

The Collapse of the I. Turk Empire

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

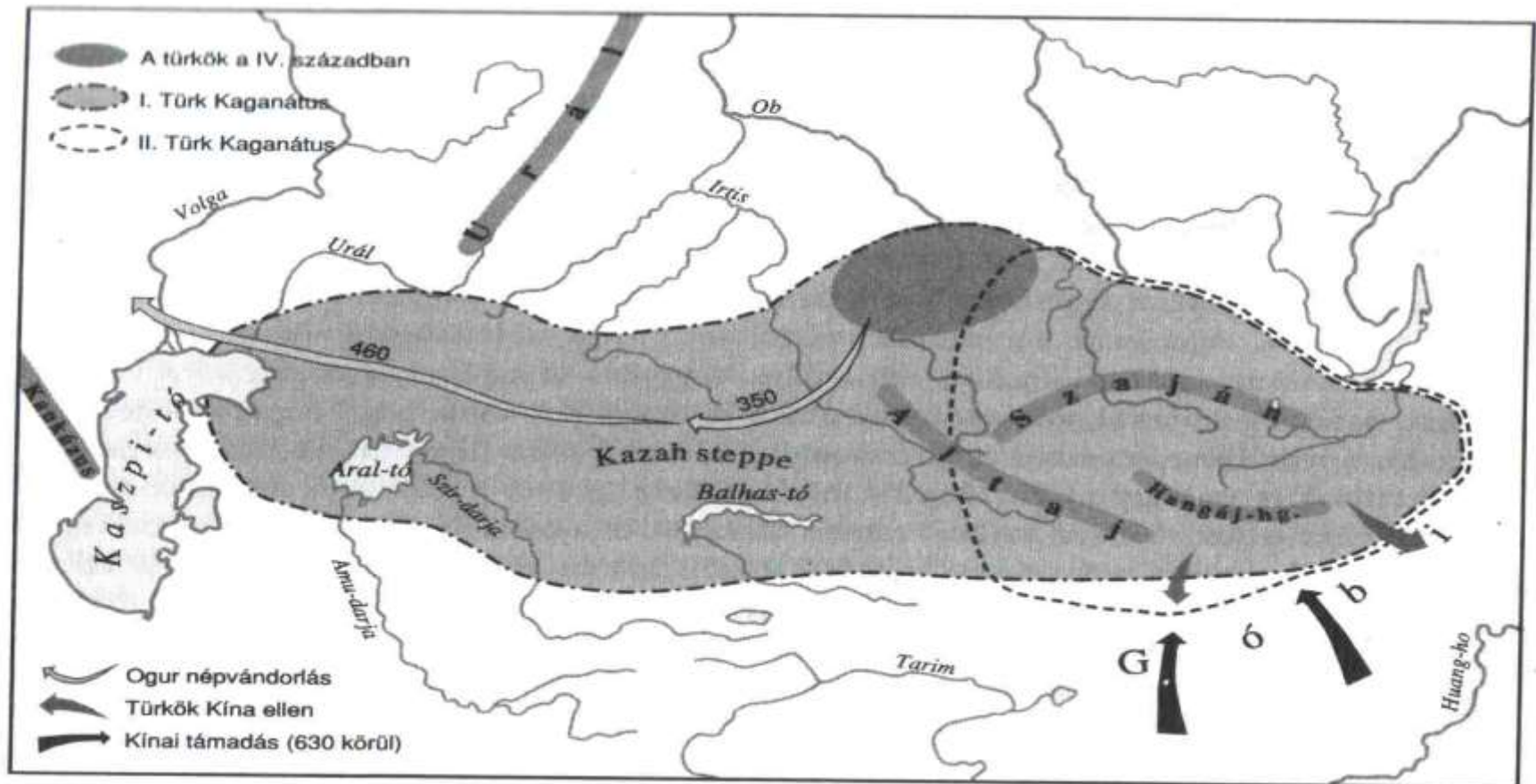
The Collapse of the I. Turk Empire

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

Second Turkic Khanate (692-742)

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

Second Turkic Khanate (692-742)



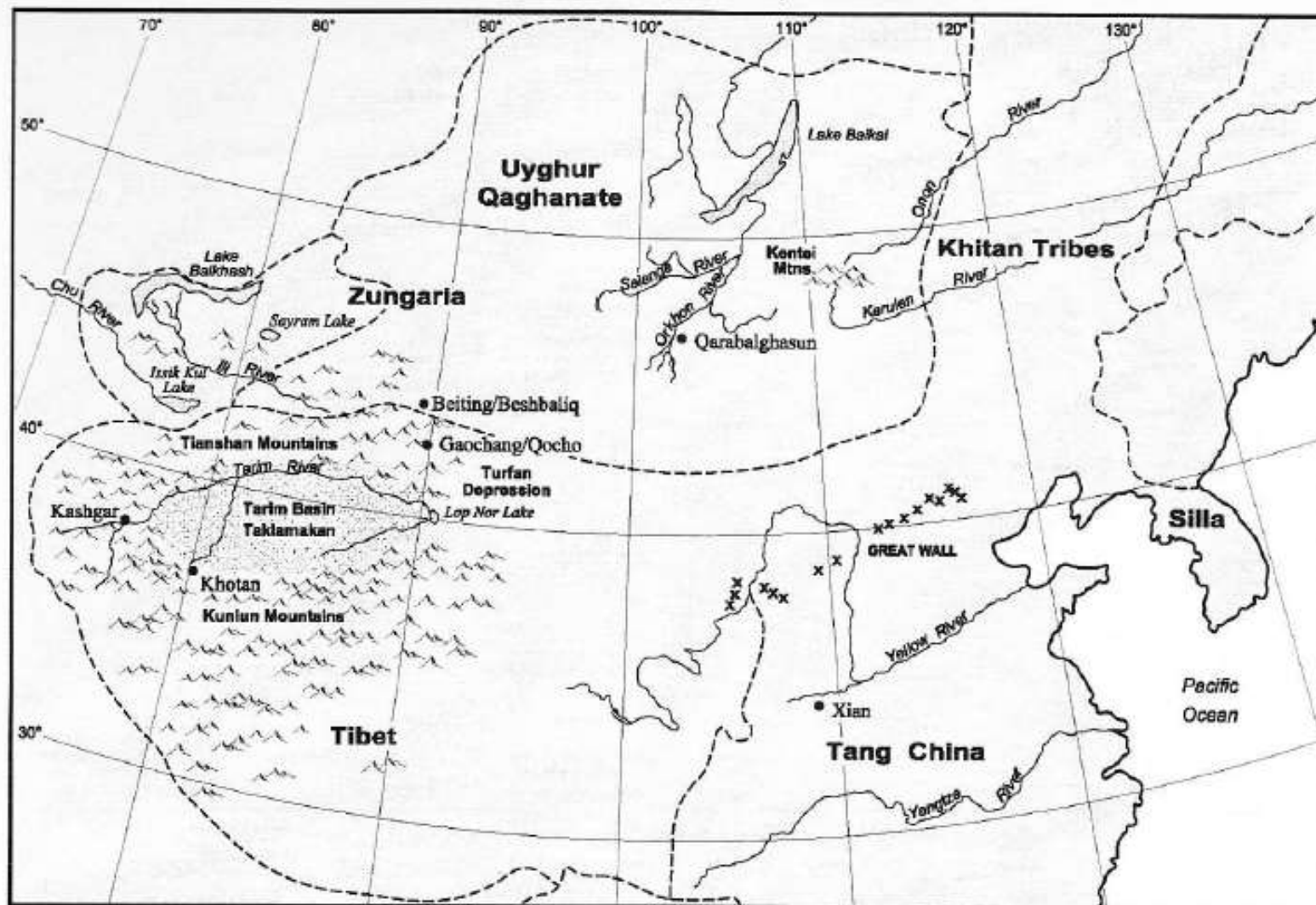
Script and language

- In the first Turkic Khanate they had used the Sogdian language and script for chancellery purposes and inscriptions.
- This was changed in the second Khanate and we dispose of inscriptions written first in the history in Turkic language and in the so called Runic script.

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



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



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

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

(thus being distinguished from the later settled Uygur kingdom)

- It built strong trade, diplomatic and military ties with the Tang court.
- When the Chinese emperor was threatened by internal revolt, he turned to the Uighur rulers for help
- An Lushan rebellion (755-762) (himself was a general of Turco-Sogdian origin)
- In 757, the Uighurs helped in re-conquering the Chinese capitol (Chang'an)
- In 762 they occupied the strategically important Loyang and suppressed the last rebels

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

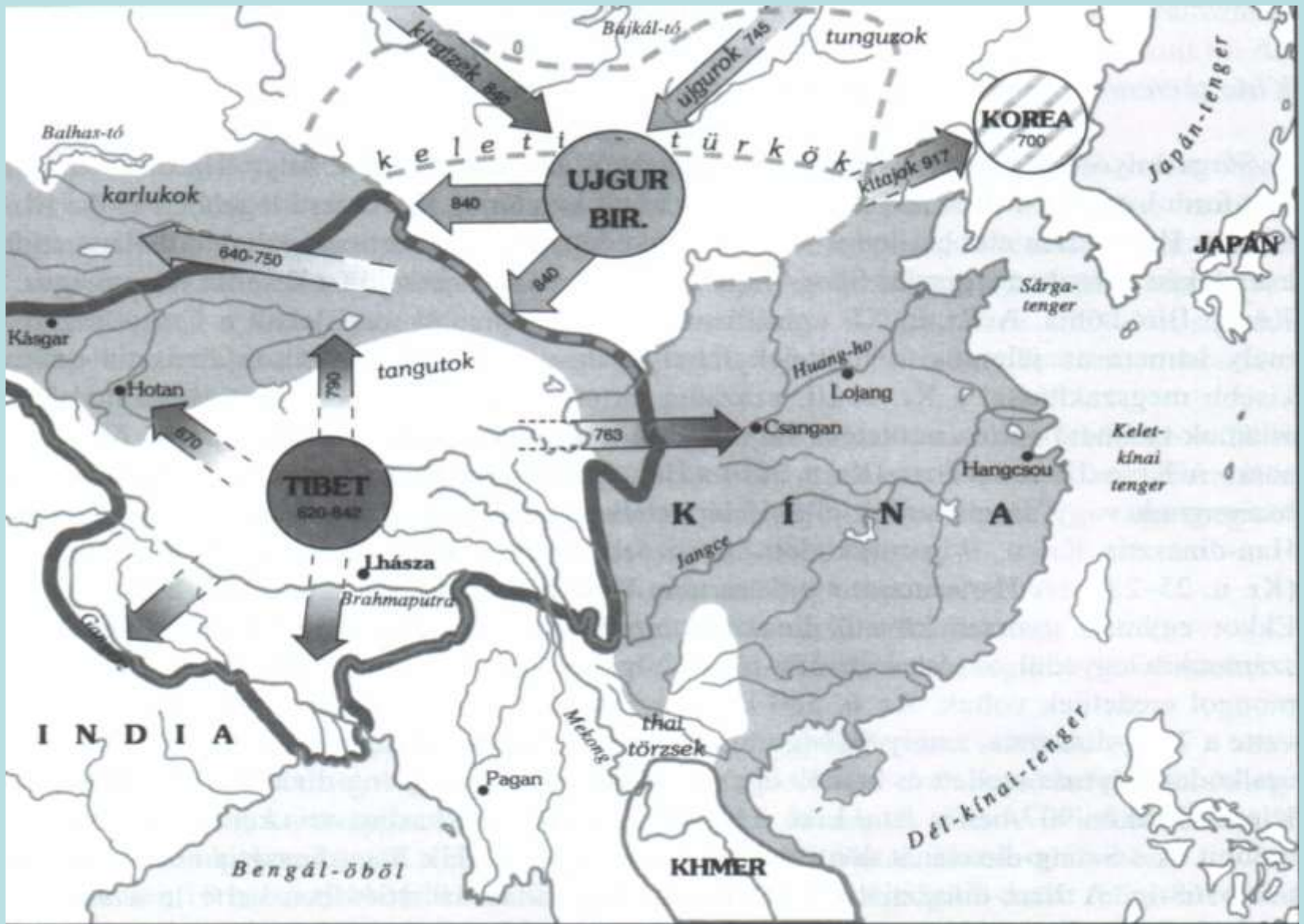
- Not only in the Tang court but in the ruling Uighur circles as well, not everyone was pleased with the strengthening of Manichean and Sogdian influence and the anti-Chinese politics that accompanied it.
- The religious – and of course political – rivalry proved to be fruitful, just as the simultaneous proximity of the Sogdian and Chinese cultures.
- Literacy, and with it universal erudition, spread. In the first half of the 9th century, the news of Uighur wealth and cultivation extended far beyond the borders of Inner Asia.

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

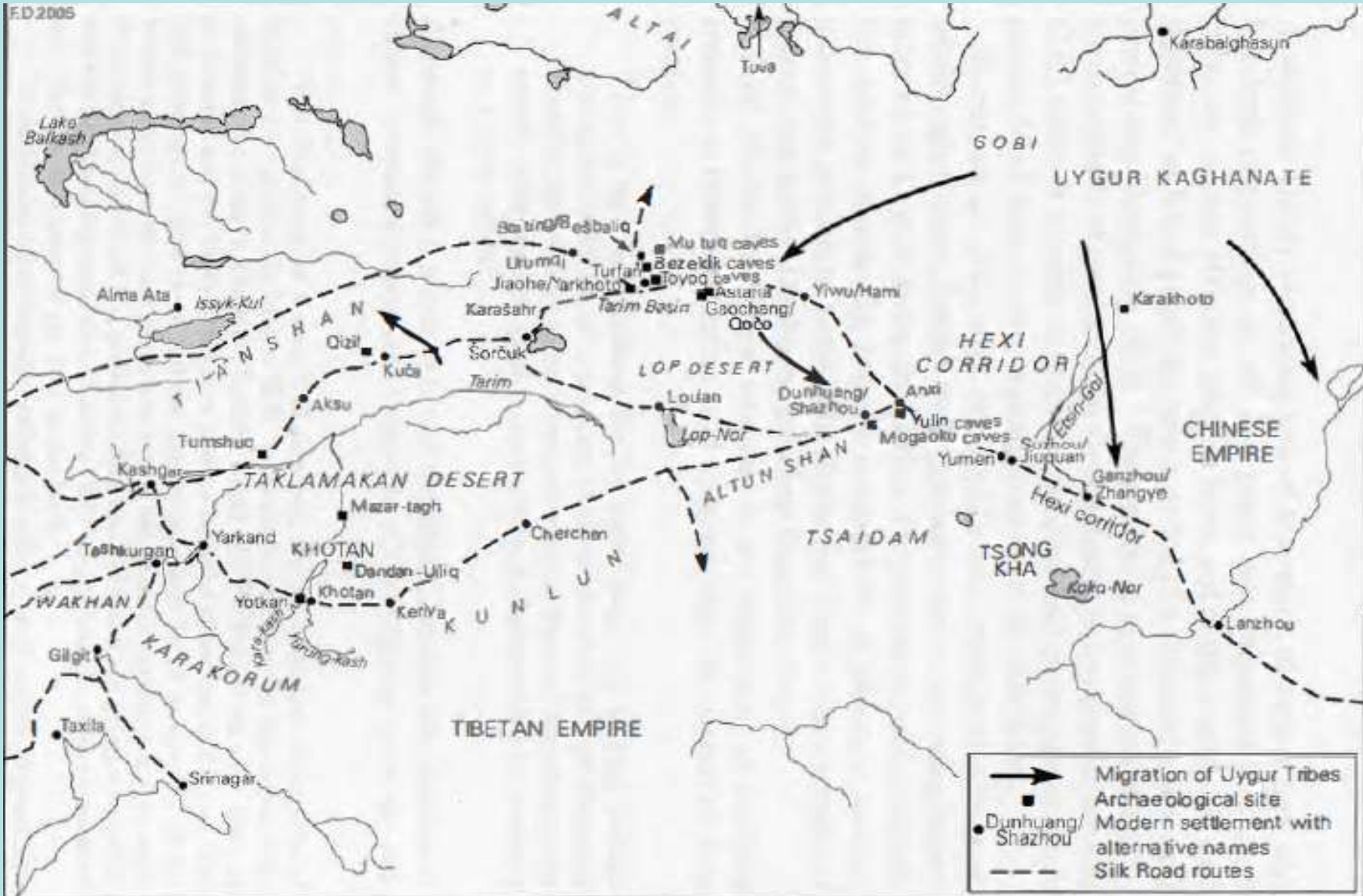
- Militarily, however, the Khanate was no longer strong enough to withstand the Kirgiz incursions from the north.
- In 840, the Uygur Khanate was overthrown by the Kirghiz.
- However, this collapse did not herald the decay of Uighur culture and erudition. Indeed, the true efflorescence occurred only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

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

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

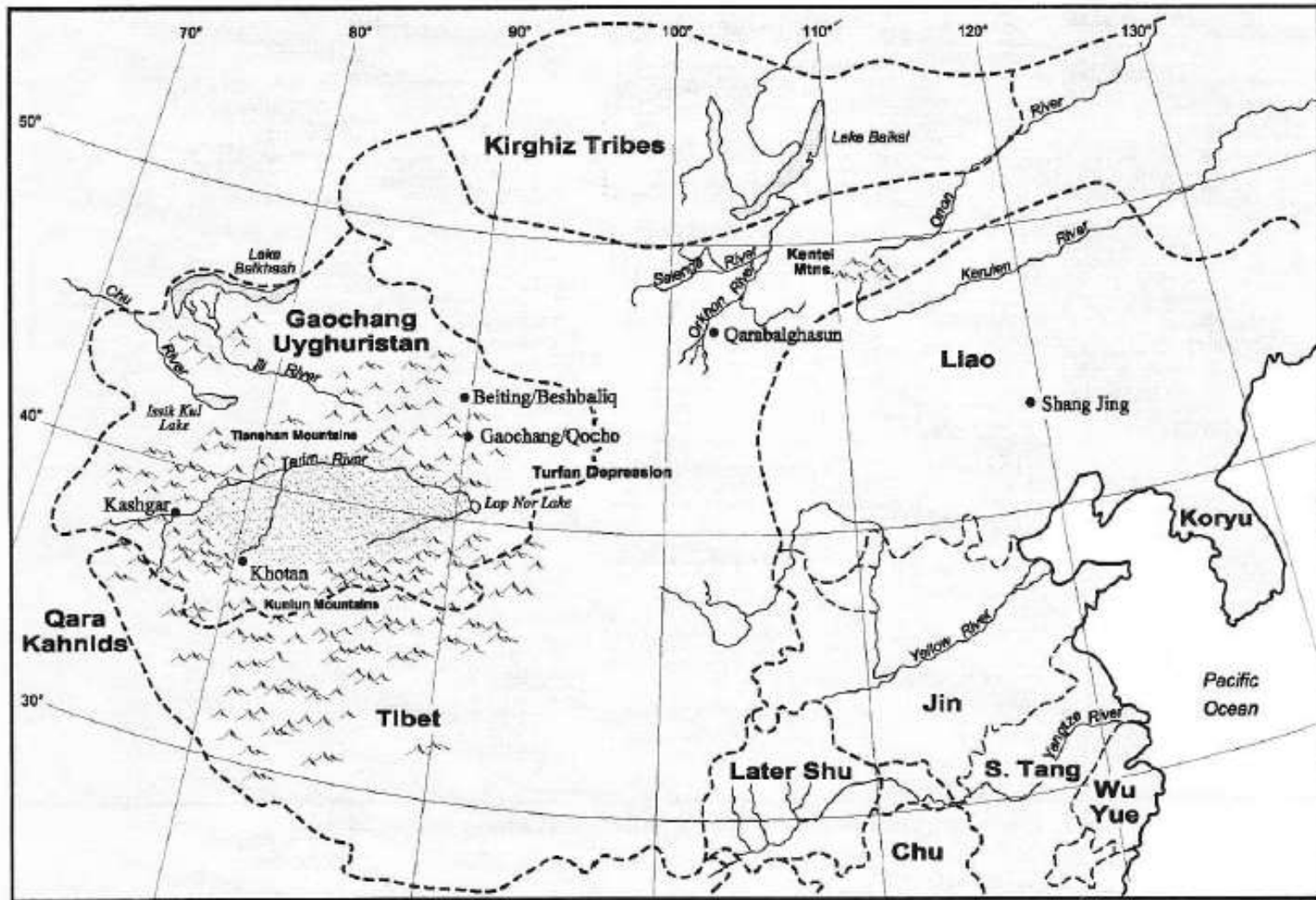


12. Belső-Ázsia és Kína a Tang-dinasztia (618–907) idején



Map of the Silk Road in the ninth-tenth centuries

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



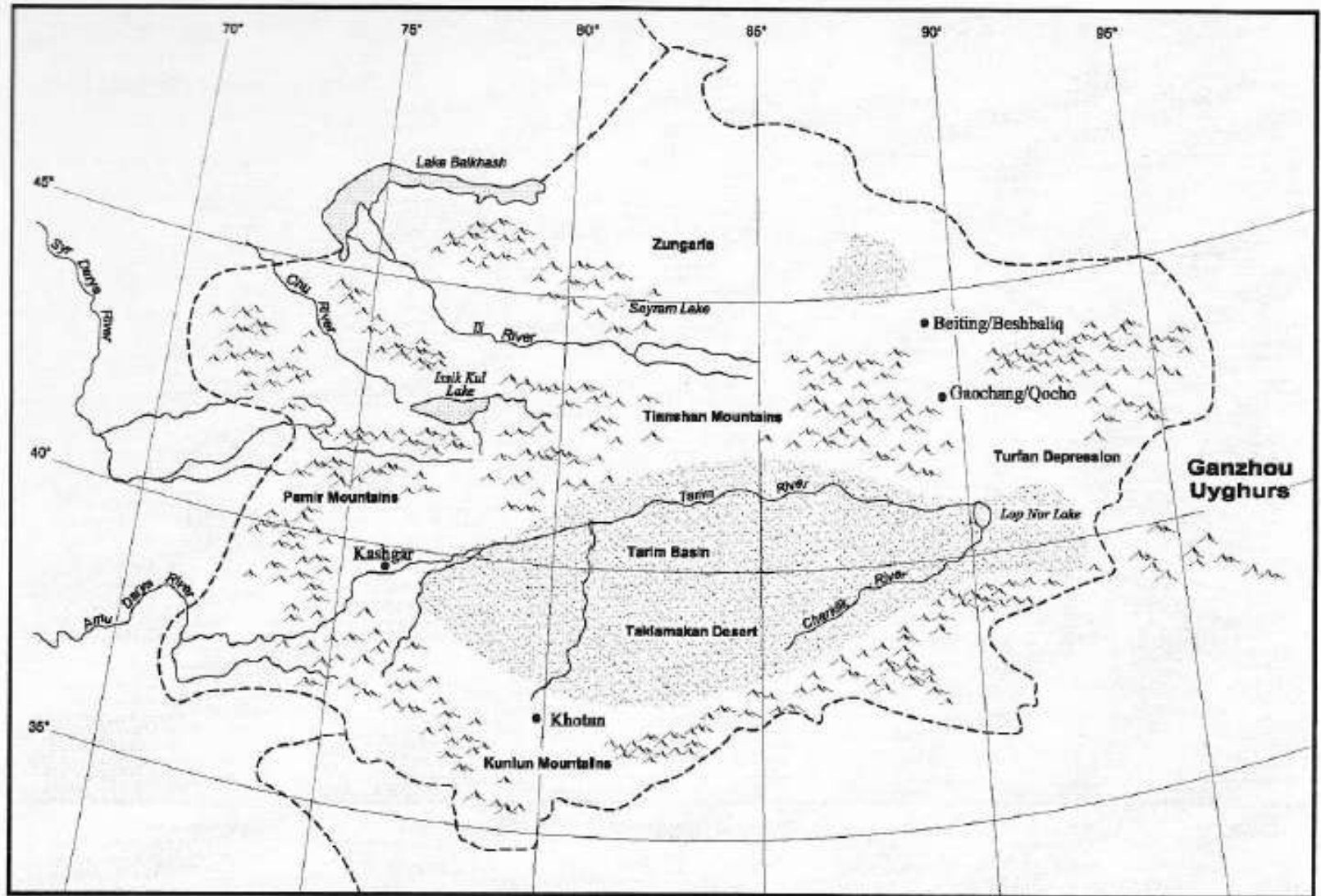
After Yan Qixiang, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji* V.82-83

©1996 PMP 2

Uygur Empire / Kingdom (cc. 850-1250)

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

Map 3. Uyghur Gaochang Kingdom (943 ce)



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

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Buddhism and the Turks

Ancient beliefs

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

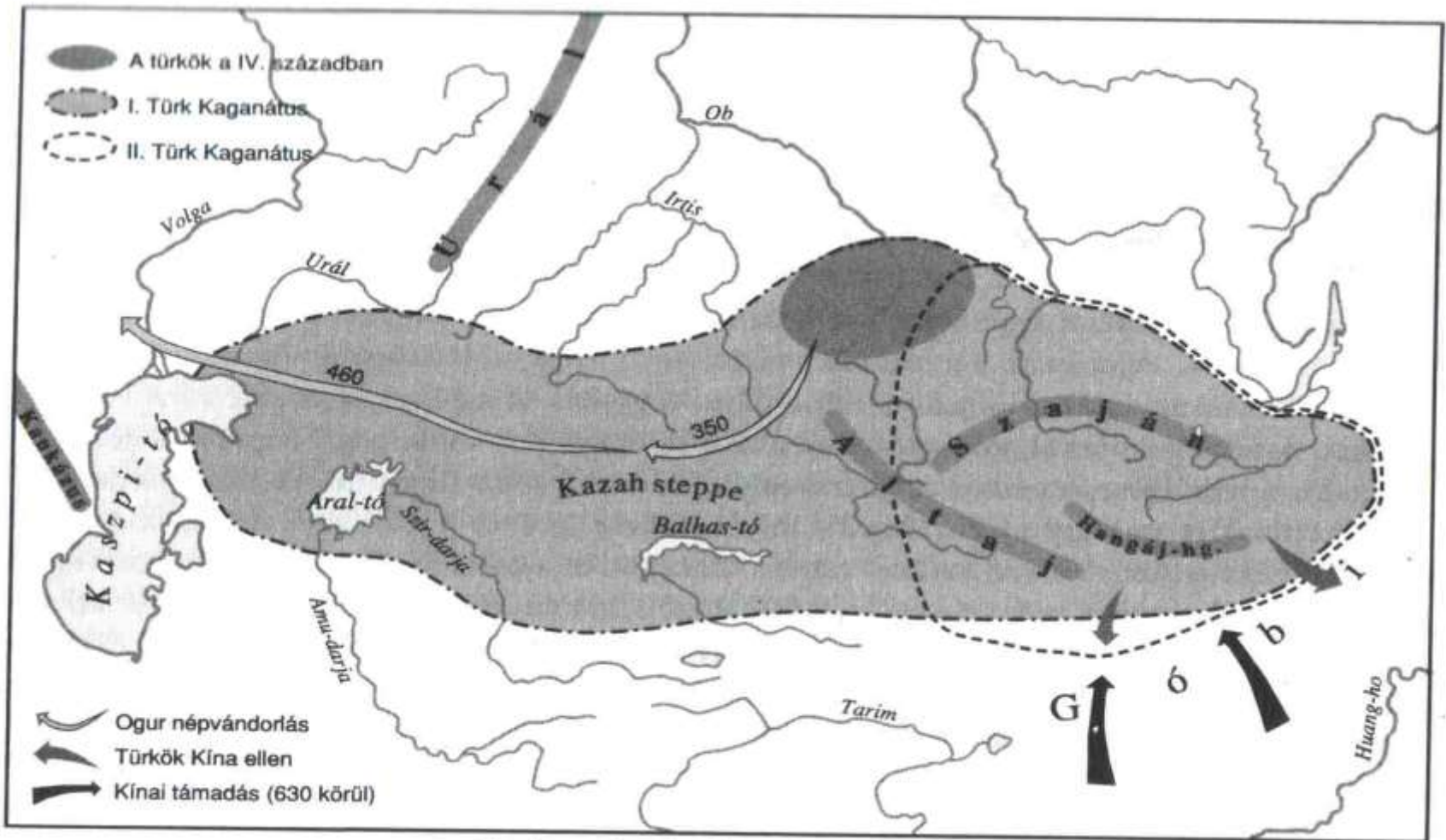
Buddhism

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

Western Turks

IV. A SZOMSZÉDOK

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Western Turks

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

Buddhism and the Turks

The Eastern Turks

- 'Turkish temple' in Chang'an (end of the 50s of the 6th c.)
- A Chinese source records that Muhan (*Bukan*) Khagan's (553-572) successor, named Tatpar Khagan (572-581) was converted to Buddhism by a Chinese monk named Hui Lin, a member of an embassy sent to the Turk's court by the Emperor of the Northern Qi dynasty.
- In response to the request of Tatpar Khagan for a Buddhist text, the ruler of the Northern Qi presented the *Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra* to him. It is unclear, however, whether the text was in Chinese or in translation, but if the latter, then it most probably would have been translated into Sogdian.

Buddhism and the Turks

The Eastern Turks

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

Buddhism in the II. Khanate

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

Buddhism in the II. Khanate

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

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

Buddhism and the Turks

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

Uygur Khanate (744-840)

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

Uygur Empire / Kingdom (cc. 850-1250)

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

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

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

The Sources of Uygur Buddhism

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

The Sources of Uygur Buddhism

They turned to the three Buddhist cultures extant in their
area:

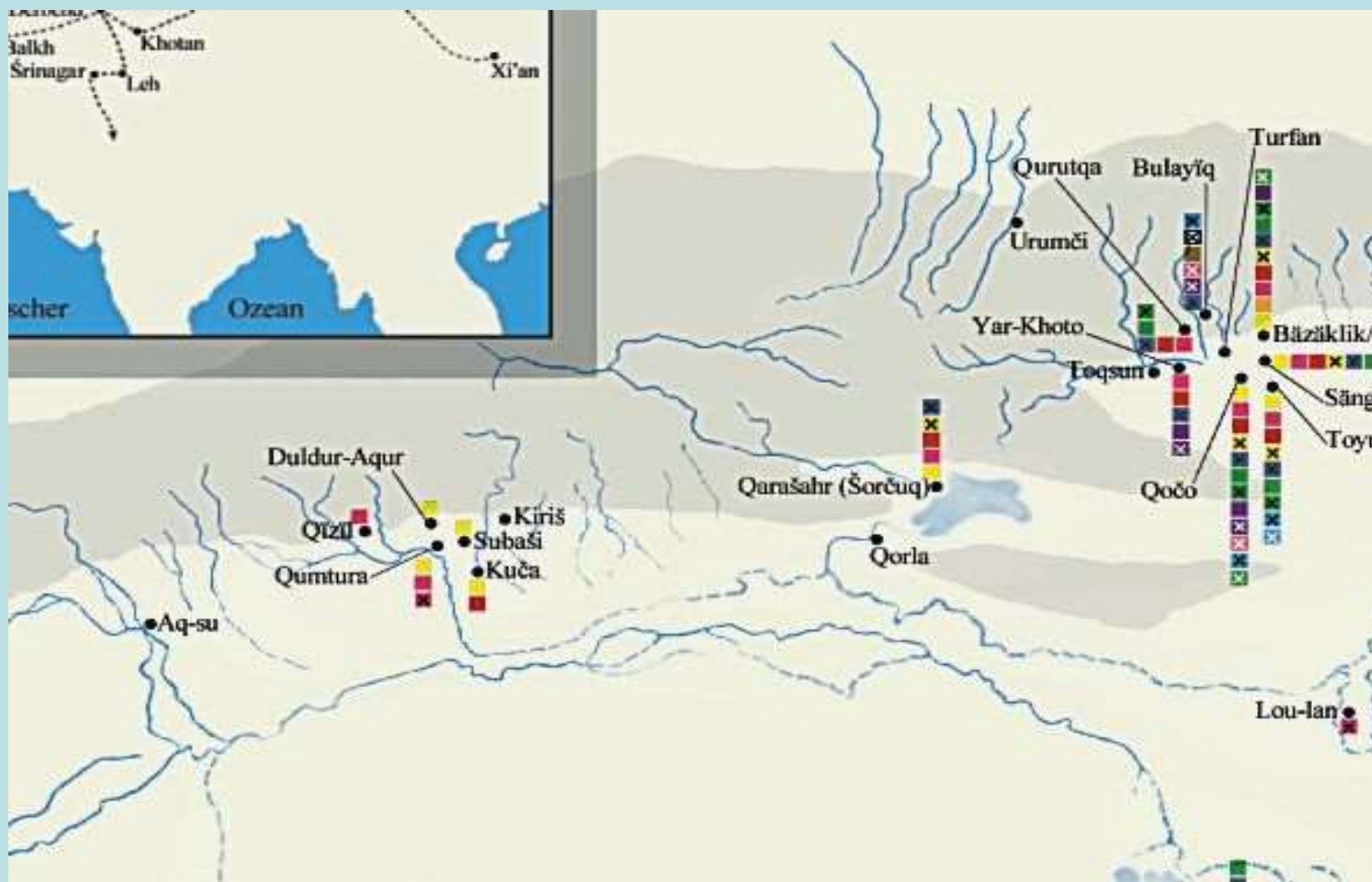
Kucha-Karashar-Turfan
region:

- Sogdian
- Tokharian

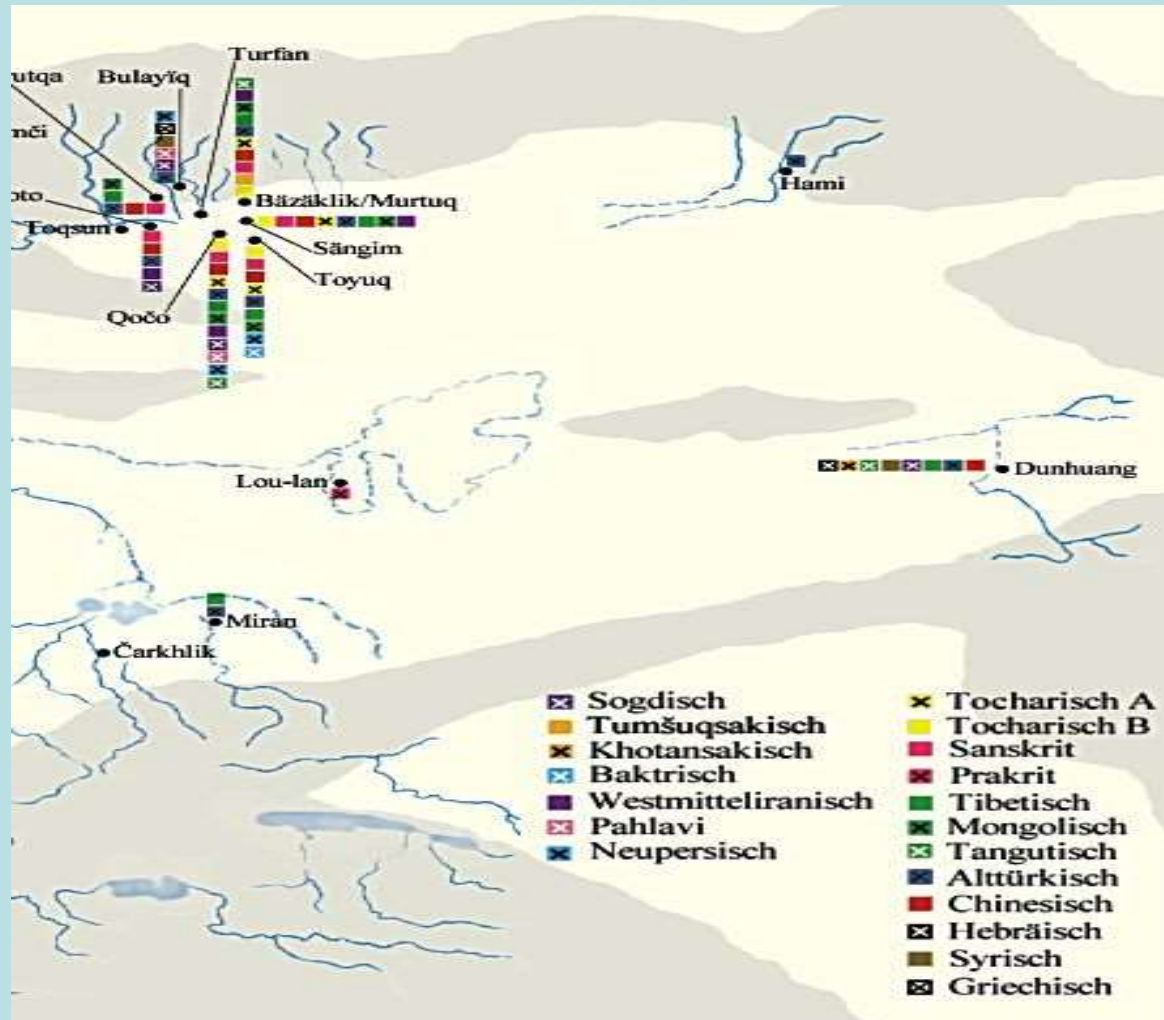
Beshbalik-Turfan-Dunhuang
area:

- Chinese
- (Tibetan in the Yuan era)

Sogdian, Tokharian Kucha-Karashar-Turfan



Chinese (and Tibetan) Beshbalik-Turfan-Dunhuang



The Sogdian influence

Difficulties:

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

The Sogdian influence

Support:

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

The Tokharian influence

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

The Chinese Buddhist influence

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

Tibetan influence

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

Scripts used

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

The forms of the texts

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

The origins of the texts

(Elverskog 1997)

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

Phases of translation

According to Peter Zieme

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

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

- Tokharian
- Chinese

Mongolian (13-14. c. AD)

- Chinese
- Tibetan
- Sanskrit

According to Moriyasu Takao

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

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

According to Kōgi Kudara

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

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

The technique of translation of Buddhists texts in Central Asia

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

(Klaus Röhrborn)

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

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