

UIGHUR HISTORY

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GOVERNMENT

Political Structure

Much of the Uighur Empire's political structure was modelled on that of the Gök Türk state. However, there are few records from the time of the Uighur Empire itself which provide detailed information about the structure of their government. What is clear is that like the Gök Türk, the Uighur *kaghan* was the supreme ruler of all the tribes, and was initially from the dynastic clan of the Yaghlakar. Together with the other tribes of the Tokuz Oghuz, they formed the core of the empire. Since the Uighur state ruled overlands that roughly corresponded with the former Eastern Gök Türk state, there was no east-west division of the empire for administrative purposes.

One distinctive official among the Uighur was the *tutuk*, leaders of the eleven major tribes in the Uighur empire – the nine tribes of the Tokuz Oghuz, the Basmil, and the Karluk. The *tutuk* of the Uighur was generally a close relative of the *kaghan*, and all were considered the political leaders of their respective tribes and responsible for tax collection.

The Uighur Kingdom of Qocho established after the collapse of the Uighur Empire in 840 is far better documented, with the result that its political structure is better understood. The Uighur ruler of Qocho abandoned the title *kaghan*, and used the title *idikut*, a contraction of the words *idug qut*, “holy majesty/glory/wealth”. This title may have been adopted from the Basmil tribe that inhabited the region of Beshbalik prior to the Uighur's arrival there. Below the *idikut* were the ruler's ministers and other high-ranking officials, some of whose titles are known – *sängün*, *ülchi*, *tutuq*, *tarqan* – for example. Next came a variety of other officials from the middle and lower ranks, among them the *bägi* and *älchi*. However, while many titles have been recorded, the exact duties and responsibilities of some of these officials is not always clear.

Policy

By establishing their state on some of the same territories of the former Gök Türk Empire, the Uighur Empire and the later Uighur Kingdom of Qocho inherited many of the same opportunities, challenges and threats that the Gök Türk had confronted. In the period of the Uighur Empire (744-840) relations with three powers dominated the Uighur's political policy – Tang China, Tibet, and the Sogdians.

Relations with China were designed to maintain access to Chinese luxury goods, generally through the exchange of horses for silk, and to prevent Chinese meddling in the Uighur's internal affairs. The Uighur were fortunate in that the Tang began to suffer serious internal disturbances, the An Lu-Shan rebellion (755-763) being one of the most serious. The rebellion gave the Uighur the opportunity to make politically and commercially advantageous agreements with the Chinese in exchange for Uighur military assistance. The relations between the two only began to turn in China's favor around the beginning of the 9th century when it was the Uighur's turn to suffer internal divisions and eventually be overthrown in 840.

Uighur policy towards Tibet was generally one of either containment or expansion at Tibet's cost. The Tibetans had begun to create their own empire in the 7th century, and in the course of the 8th century it went through several periods of expansion and decline. Although the Tibetans had suffered a number of military setbacks around the time that the Uighur Empire was established, they were able to take advantage of developments following the Chinese defeat in the Battle of Talas (751) and the An Lu-Shan rebellion, putting them in conflict with the Uighur whose territory the Tibetans bordered on. The two sides fought one another several times through the late 8th century with the Uighur; eventually the border between the two states stabilized in the area of Qocho. In the 9th century both the Tibetans and Uighur began to suffer the effects of internal instability a both empires came to an end around the middle of the 9th century.

Relations with the Sogdians were unique in a number of respects. While their were small Sogdian states around the cities of Samarkand, Bokhara, and in the Zeravshan River valley, there were also Sogdian communities living in both Uighur territory and in China. However, the significance of the Sogdians was not their political power, but their commercial and, to some degree, cultural power. When many of the most important trade routes between China and the west came under Uighur control, the literate Sogdians moved quickly become advisors and officials of the Uighur in order to protect and further their trade. While this was generally to both parties benefit, Sogdian influence was resented by some sections of Uighur society. This was particularly true after Bögü Kaghan's conversion to Manichaeism in 762.

For the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho policy towards China had the same commercial and political goals as that of the Uighur Empire, but with new dynasties, the Liao (遼朝, 907-1125) and the Sung (or Song 宋朝, 960-1279), until it came under the domination of the Western Liao at the start of the 12th century. However, the Kingdom of Qocho was faced with a new rival, the Turkic khanate of the Karakhanids. Despite their linguistic and ethnic links, the Muslim Karakhanids and the Buddhist Uighurs were bitter rivals, with the Uighur successfully resisting Karakhanid expansion into the territories around Qocho.

Readings

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Discussion Question

1. In what ways was the Uighur Empire different from the Gök Türk Empire?

MILITARY

Overview Although much of what is known about the military organization, weapons and tactics of the Gök Türk and the Uighur indicates that they closely resembled those of other pastoral peoples of the Eurasian steppes. Nonetheless, there are some features of these peoples' militaries that are unique.

Uighur Like the earlier Gök Türk armies, information on the armies of the Uighur Empire and the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho is limited, and almost entirely from non-Uighurs. Nonetheless, considering that the Uighur Empire was in many aspects a continuation of the Gök Türk states, and the close linguistic and cultural links between the two peoples, it is highly likely that their army was much like that of the Gök Türks.

There is information that the units in the Uighur Empire's cavalry were organized on a tribal basis. According to the Arab traveler Tamim ibn Bahr who visited the Uighurs around 821, approximately 12,000 Uighur soldiers surrounded the tent of the Uighur *kaghan*. In the vicinity there were also seventeen tribal chieftains who each commanded 13,000 men. However, cavalry units from the subjugated Karluk and Basmil tribes were not among the *kaghan's* troops, but were put in the more dangerous and less prestigious forward guard of the Uighur army.

The most unique feature of the Uighur Empire's army is the presence of cavalry units that consisted of female warriors. These women were said to be skillful riders and archers, and were among the troops that the Uighur provided to the Tang dynasty. However, the exact function of these women's units is unknown.

Functions of the Gök Türk and Uighur Armies The armies of both the Gök Türks and the Uighurs were used in all the expected roles for armies of their time – territorial expansion, subjugation of neighboring peoples, maintaining control over the conquered territories and peoples, as a threat in diplomatic relations with other states, and border defense. However, in addition to all of these functions the Turkic armies were important element in their states' commercial relations *vis a vis* China. Like the earlier Hsiung-nu, both the Gök Türk and the Uighur sought to maintain the flow of Chinese luxury goods, and silk in particular, into their empires either for redistribution as gifts for the higher levels of society, or for foreign trade. The use of military force in varying degrees from cross border booty raids to large scale invasions, or sometimes the mere threat of military force, was one way to guarantee access to these highly-desired Chinese products.

Readings

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Discussion Questions

1. What were the unique features of the Gök Türk and Uighur militaries in comparison to other steppe peoples?
2. Why did both the Gök Türk and the Uighur need the threat of credible military force in their dealings with China?

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Overview Many aspects of the ancient Uighur states' social structure were very similar that of the previous Gök Türk states. However, because Uighur society was more settled and urban than Gök Türk society, and had members who were followers of major world religions, some new social classes emerged and new social divisions developed, giving Uighur society distinctive characteristics.

Nobility As in the Gök Türk Empire, nobility in the Uighur Empire was a matter of being a member of the *kaghan's* clan, the Yaghlakar (followed by the Ädiz around 809), or one of the other tribes of the Tokuz Oghuz. Lack of records makes it more difficult to fully reconstruct the social classes in the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho, but it is logical to assume that the *idikut* as well as his top officials and ministers made up the nobility in Qocho. Whether the middle and lower rank officials were considered members of the nobility or ranked among the common people is unclear.

Common People In the period of the Uighur Empire, the Uighur appear to have remained predominantly pastoral, and it is likely that the divisions found among the free members of the tribes in the Gök Türk state were also present in the Uighur Empire. However, as the Uighur became an increasingly settled society documents make mention of craftsmen and merchants, as well as landlords whose lands were worked by poor farmers or tenant farmers.

In addition to larger settled classes, urban and rural, another difference in Uighur social structure began during the period of the Uighur Empire and became quite distinctive in the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho, namely the appearance of a religious class. While the tradition Turkic shamans were important figures in early Turkic societies, they did not form a distinctive social class in the same sense that the much more highly organized Manichaeans, Buddhists, and, to a much lesser extent, Nestorian Christians did. All three religions had a division between ordinary believers and a formal clergy – the Manichaean “elect”, Buddhist monks, and Christian monks and priests. These groups not only constituted a distinct social class, but were also conduits for a variety of outside influences.

Non-Turkic Peoples The Uighur states included two significant minorities, the Sogdians and the Chinese. Of the two the Sogdians were the more influential in many aspects of Uighur government and society. The Sogdians, an Iranian people, were the most important merchants in the region between China and the borders of Persia, with trade networks across Sinkiang, northern China and Mongolia. Sogdians were the intermediaries in the Uighurs' silk-horse trade with the T'ang and played an important role in the transition of the Uighur Empire from a tribal-based state to a more urban, settled one by providing administrative experience and cultural models. In order to protect and promote their trade, Sogdians acted as advisors and officials to the Uighur, roles that they had played in Gök Türk Empire. When Bögü *kaghan* converted to Manichaeism, widespread among the Sogdians, around 762 Sogdian influence became even more pervasive in the Uighur Empire. One of the most dramatic examples of Sogdian influence in this period is the abandonment of the Old Turkic runic script in favor of a modified version of the Sogdian alphabet for writing the Uighur language.

The second most important minority in Uighur territory was the Chinese. In addition to royal marriages between Uighur *kaghans* and Chinese princesses, there were also groups of Chinese who were permanent residents of the Uighur states. Nonetheless, Chinese influence among the Uighur was negligible in comparison to the Sogdians. Although the demand for Chinese luxury goods among the Uighur was high and the Uighur were sometime military allies of the T'ang, almost all political and cultural borrowing was from the Sogdians.

Slaves Slavery continued to exist among the Uighur, as evidenced by civil documents originating from the Kingdom of Qocho. However, how widespread slavery was and what duties slaves performed in Uighur society is not clear from these sources. However, because the Uighur states were more settled, it is plausible that slaves could have been used as agricultural laborers.

Urban vs. Pastoral Although it is possible to see some traces of the social division between pastoralists and urban ruling elites in the Gök Türk Empire, this division became increasingly sharp in the Uighur Empire and the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho. While the ordinary pastoralists remained closer to traditional beliefs,

pastimes, diet and lifestyle, the urban elites who ruled the pastoralists and settled population adopted foreign religions and were more open to foreign cultural influences; spent time in activities centered on the home rather than riding and hunting; ate agricultural products and duck instead of the nomads' horsemeat and *kumys*; and lived in permanent structures rather than felt yurts. As these two groups grew apart, there was the danger that the ruler's influence would grow weaker beyond the capital and allow tribal leaders to take political advantage of the nomads' discontent. This division between the urban ruling elite and the majority nomadic population may have first become significant among the Uighur, but it would reappear in many later Eurasian states established by nomadic pastoralist peoples.

Summary Gök Türk society, in general, reflected the Turkic culture from which it emerged with only limited borrowings from the more settled civilizations it encountered. Although the Uighur Empire was in many ways (language, organization, culture etc.) a "Third Gök Türk Empire", it more fully developed trends that had begun to emerge among the Gök Türk, such as urbanization and long-distance trade and made far-reaching borrowings from neighboring cultures, particularly in the field of religion. It also witnessed emergence of a deep division between the settled and nomadic populations in Uighur society.

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Discussion Questions

1. What were the differences between the social structure of the Gök Türk and the Uighur, and why did these differences develop?
2. What was the status and role of the Sogdians in both the Gök Türk Empire and the Uighur Empire?

GENDER RELATIONS

Women in Uighur Society

The information about women in the Uighur Empire and the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho is more readily available from both written sources and art work.

In addition to their traditional roles as wives and mothers (roles that often went unrecorded in the historical sources), there are two distinctive groups of women known from the time of the Uighur Empire. The first is the *katun*, or principal wife of the *kaghan*, who was very often of Chinese origin. In fact, of the thirteen *kaghans* who ruled the Uighur Empire, seven had Chinese *katuns*, and three of these women the daughters of the Tang emperor. These *katuns* were often involved in court politics both during and after their husbands' deaths; the Chinese *katun* of the last Uighur *kaghan* upon her return the Tang capital of Ch'ang-an in 843 apologized for failing in her duty to "pacify" the Uighurs.

One surprising role that some Uighur women filled was that of being a warrior. At least one historical source mentions female mounted archers as part of the *kaghan's* army and among the soldiers the *kaghan* provided to the Tang.

Finally, religion provided some Uighur women with the opportunity to exert some influence within their society. Both the Manichaeans and Buddhists accepted women as nuns, and the supervision of nuns administration of convents was in the hands of women. In addition, the murals from the Buddhist shrines at Bezeklik depict a number of aristocratic Uighur women who were important donors for the construction of these cave shrines. This would indicate that these women had considerable wealth that they were able to use as they saw fit.

Summary

Despite the limited sources that provide information on the status and roles of women among the Gök Türk and the Uighur, it appears that women had more options among the Uighur than the earlier Gök Türk. This would seem to be the result of both the greater complexity of the more urban Uighur's society, and the roles that were available for women in Manichaean and Buddhist religious institutions.

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Discussion Questions

1. Why were there apparently more opportunities for women in Uighur society than in Gök Türk society?
2. How did religion affect the status of women in Uighur society?

INNOVATIONS

Overview In comparison to other world empires and states the First and Second Gök Türk Empires, the Uighur Empire and the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho were all relatively short-lived. Despite this, each of these states had an influence on world history and culture that far exceeded their short existence.

The Uighur Empire was doubtlessly an important state in the events in Inner Asia during its nearly century-long existence. However, the conversion of the Uighur elite to Manichaeism in the mid-8th century would have influence on the region long after the downfall of the empire. By adopting Manichaeism, the Uighur Empire provided this persecuted faith with official support, thus allowing it to spread and gain new adherents. Without Uighur patronage, it is possible that Manichaeism would not have died out in the 14th century, but much earlier. In addition, the Manichaean texts and artwork produced in the Uighur Empire and later discovered in Turpan and Dunhuang have provided much of the first-hand information on Manichaean beliefs and practices.

The Uighur Kingdom of Qocho, despite its more limited territory, was also historically significant in a number of areas. As the Uighur in Qocho became predominantly Buddhist, the translation of Buddhist texts from a number of languages into Uighur began. These translations are not only valuable as early examples of Turkic literature, but they can also be used to determine the content, development and spread of specific Buddhist texts. In addition, they are indicators of the state of and trends in Inner Asian Buddhism in this period.

The vast majority of these works were written using the Old Uyghur alphabet, developed in the 9th century from the Aramaic-based Sogdian alphabet. This script would continue to be used until the 19th century, but more importantly it served as the basis for the Mongolian alphabet, and ultimately the Manchu alphabet as well. Both of these scripts are still in use today.

Uighur art, as attested from surviving frescoes and manuscript illustrations was a unique style that, like much of the medieval art of Inner Asia, blended native elements with artistic influences from China, Iran and India.

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Discussion Questions

1. In what areas did the influence of the Uighur outlive both the Uighur Empire and the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho?

TRADE

Almost all aspects of the Uighurs' trade and commerce, particularly with China, were inherited from those of the Gök Türk states before them, with the exception of the direct, far western trade of the First Gök Türk Empire. This included the trade in horses, as well as hides, yaks and camels for Chinese silk. As with the Gök Türk, silk was used by the Uighur as a prestige gift to retain the loyalty and support of tribal leaders within their state, as well as a profitable commodity in trade with outsiders. In addition to the animals and animal products of the steppe, the Uighur also conducted a profitable trade with China in Siberian furs obtained by trade or tribute from northern tribes. Trade with China shifted dramatically in the Uighur's favor after they allied themselves with the Tang to help end the An-shu-lan Rebellion in the mid-8th century, providing vast amounts of booty from sacked Chinese cities during the rebellion, and extremely favorable trade agreements after it was over.

In addition to direct trade, the Uighur controlled highly profitable trade routes through the Kansu corridor which provided them the opportunity to impose heavy tolls on caravans travelling between China and Central Asia.

Finally, as in the time of the Gök Türk states much of the Uighur's trade and trade policy was in the hands of the Sogdians. While the Sogdians' knowledge and experience in matters related to trade generally benefitted the Uighur, there were risks. The Sogdians were ultimately out to protect and to further their own commercial interests, and what was in the Sogdians' interest did not always coincide with that of the Uighur.

Summary

For all the Turkic states under consideration trade was a vital part of the economies and political arrangements. Chinese luxury goods in general, and silk in particular, were a major element in maintaining internal loyalties among the tribes within these states, as well as generating wealth from trade with peoples outside their borders. In all of these states, the Sogdians were extremely active in trade directly, and in influencing trade policy in general.

The reopening of the northern silk roads during the First Gök Empire had a profound impact not only on trade between China, Central Asia and the Mediterranean, but also helped to stimulate the development of other trade routes to Khwarezm and other regions.

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Discussion Questions

1. How and why did foreign trade create internal divisions in Gök Türk and Uighur society?
2. What was the role of the Sogdians in foreign trade in the Gök Türk and Uighur states? What were the risks to these states from Sogdian involvement in foreign trade?

RELIGION

Overview The Gök Türk and Uighur states were characterized by religious diversity and played an important role in the history and development of religions in central Eurasia. In addition, the discovery of numerous religious texts in Old Turkic and artwork with religious subject matter has contributed greatly to modern scholars' understanding of the history, development, beliefs and practices of Central Asian religions in general and Buddhism and Manichaeism in particular.

Religion among the Uighur

In the early years of the Uighur Empire it is likely that, as in many other matters, the people continued to follow the traditional religion that had predominated among the Gök Türk. However, when the Uighur agreed in 756 to help the Tang dynasty in the An Lu Shan rebellion (755-763), they inadvertently set in motion a series of events that would result in major religious changes. Following the second capture of the city of Lo-yang in 762, the Uighur ruler Bögü Kaghan spent several months in the city, and became acquainted with the beliefs of its large Sogdian Manichaean community. Bögü Kaghan returned to his capital Ordu Balik with four members of this community, and shortly afterwards the question of whether the Uighur state should accept Manichaeism was the subject of an intense debate. Over the strong opposition of some officials, the kaghan decided in favor of adopting Manichaeism, making the Uighur Empire the only major state to do so. The extent to which Manichaeism was accepted by the Uighur is unclear, but it does appear that at the very least the Uighur elite converted to Manichaeism.

The true reasons for Bögü Kaghan's conversion to Manichaeism are unknown, however, there are a number of possible explanations. One is that Bögü Kaghan was genuinely convinced of the truth of Manichaean teachings, and impressed by its rituals, art, and disciplined lifestyle. Alternatively, his decision may have been influenced by more practical considerations. Accepting Manichaeism may have been a way to distance itself from Tang China, or any other major power. In addition, the conversion to Manichaeism brought the Uighur closer to the wealthy, individual Sogdians and their culture. Whatever the reasons, following Bögü Kaghan's decision the Uighur lands became an important center for Manichaeans throughout Central Asia.

Internally, the decision to adopt Manichaeism as the Uighur's official religion was not universally popular. Despite the kaghan's conversion and support, Manichaeans were sometimes attacked and killed in Uighur territory, and the increasing Sogdian influence and interference in Uighur affairs that followed the conversion were sources of discontent among some Uighur nobles. However, in the coming years Manichaeism became more firmly established at least among the urban Uighur elites. The Arabic account of Tamim ibn Bahr's journey to the Uighur around 821 he mentioned the presence of both Zoroastrians and Manichaeans in the empire, but noted that the Manichaeans were the majority in "the king's city".

Following the destruction of the Uighur Empire in 840, the surviving Uighur scattered and eventually established a new state in Qocho around 866. Initially, many of these Uighur were still Manichaean, but other religions soon began to make inroads among the Uighur. Some of the Uighur converted to Nestorian Christianity, as demonstrated by the discovery of frescoes with Christian themes and fragments of Nestorian Christian writings in Uighur Turkish at several sites in Turfan.

However, Buddhism would soon become the predominant religion of the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho. The Uighur in Qocho would sponsor the building of temples and cave shrines that were richly decorated with frescos depicting religious scenes as well as the donors. In addition, numerous Buddhist works were translated from Chinese or the Kuchean language into Uighur. The majority of these from the Mahayana school of Buddhism, but some are works from the Hinayana school. Later, in the Mongol period some Buddhist works would be translated from Tibetan into Uighur.

The religions practiced in Qocho show some unique features that indicate a degree of cultural borrowing. In some Uighur Buddhist texts, the Hindu deities Indra and Brahma are referred to by the Zoroastrian/Manichaean names Hormuzd and Azrua. Similarly, a Manichaean religious calendar written in Sogdian contains both Chinese and Uighur elements.

Summary

The religious beliefs of Gök Türk and the Uighur show a fascinating mix of traditional, indigenous beliefs and adaptations of foreign religious traditions. The Uighur adoption of Manichaeism was not only a unique event in world history, but also led to the preservation of most of the Manichaean art and writings that we have today. Later, when Buddhism became the predominant religion, the Uighur left a rich legacy of sophisticated art and religious literature in their own language.

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Discussion Questions

1. What were the possible reasons for the Uighur Empire to convert to Manichaeism? What were the effects on their state and society? Historically, why was their conversion to Manichaeism important?
2. What is the significance of the efforts to translate numerous Buddhist works into Uighur?

ART

In contrast to the Gök Türk, there is virtually no Uighur sculpture to discuss, but numerous examples of Uighur pictorial art in the form of murals and manuscript illustrations. This may be due to the fact that the Uighur became adherents of two major religions that both had a rich tradition of religious painting – Manichaeism and Buddhism.

The majority of the surviving Uighur paintings are frescoes in cave shrines depicting scenes of the Buddha and the donors who contributed to the construction and decoration of the caves. The most famous of these is the Bezeklik Thousand Buddha Caves near Qocho. Constructed between the 5th and 14th centuries, the 77 individual caves contain numerous depictions of the Buddha executed in styles ranging from relatively naïve to highly complex. Stylistically, the paintings are eclectic, displaying strong Iranian and Chinese influence as well as some Indian influence to a much lesser degree.

Depictions of the donors are particularly valuable for the information they provide on the appearance, dress and, sometimes, the ethnic origin of the donors. Uighur nobles, both men and women, are depicted among the donors in some scenes, while in other paintings Sogdians are shown among the donors. In addition to information about people, the murals occasionally provide some details on Uighur architecture.



(L) *An Uighur prince, Bezeklik Caves 8th-9th c.* – (R) *Uighur Princess, Bezeklik Caves, 9th-12th c.* (Wikicommons)

The other major source of Uighur art is manuscript illustrations. Numerous illustrated Uighur texts, primarily Buddhist and Manichaean, were discovered at Turfan and Dunhuang. They reveal a sophisticated tradition of manuscript illustration, and, like the cave murals, provide information on religious practices as well as the dress and appearance of religious leaders. The Manichaean texts are particularly valuable in this regard due to the limited surviving sources of information about Manichaeism.

LITERATURE

While there are a few examples of the use of the Old Turkic script which from the time of the Uighur Empire, such as the Tariat (or Terkhin) inscriptions on a stela erected during the reign of Bayanchur khan (r. 747-759), the vast majority of surviving Uighur writings date from the time of the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho and are written in the Old Uighur script, developed from the Sogdian alphabet (which itself was ultimately derived from the Aramaic script). This Old Uighur alphabet only appeared after the Uighur migrated into the Turfan region in the mid-9th century.

Although numerous secular documents that reveal much about daily life in the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho have been discovered, the surviving literary works are overwhelmingly religious in nature – some are Nestorian Christian works, others are Manichaean texts, but the vast majority are Buddhist in nature, reflecting the religious affiliations of the kingdom's people. As the Uighur converted to Buddhism in increasing numbers, numerous Buddhist scriptures and Buddhist-related texts were translated into Uighur. The majority of these translations were made from Chinese texts, but other works originally written in Sogdian, Tocharian and even Tibetan were also translated, graphically demonstrating the variety of cultural influences present in the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho.

The translated Buddhist texts provide a vivid picture of the trends and developments in Buddhism in both the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho, and Central Asia in general. The majority of the surviving Uighur Buddhist texts are from the Mahayana tradition, and there are Uighur translations of the Chinese versions of almost all of the most important Mahayana texts of the period such as *The Lotus Sutra*, *The Garland Sutra*, and *The Golden Light Sutra*. In addition to these works from the Mahayana school, a few Uighur translations of Theravada works have been found as well as a number of tantric works translated from Tibetan and Chinese during the Mongol period. One significant translation from Chinese into Uighur was not a religious text per se, but the biography of Xuanzang, a Chinese Buddhist monk who traveled to India (629-645) to obtain Sanskrit Buddhist texts. The translation of this comprehensive biography not only provides a wealth of information about Buddhism in this period, but also information on the geography and politics of the regions Xuanzang traveled through, as well as information on the Chinese and Turkic languages of the time. The quality of the Uighur translation by Singu Šāli (also Singqu Sali or Šingqo Šāli Tutung) indicates a high level of knowledge of not only his native Uighur, but a mastery of both Chinese and Sanskrit.

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Discussion Questions

1. What is the importance of the Manichaean manuscripts preserved in Old Uighur?
2. How do the Buddhist texts translated into Old Uighur help in understanding the history and development of Buddhism in Central Asia? From which languages were these works translated?



Fragment of a 10th century Manichaean text (Wikicommons)

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Discussion Questions

1. Why did the Uighurs produce more art than the Gök Türks?
2. What were the stylistic influences on Uighur art?
3. What is the historical value of Uighur art?