

Conclusion

Negü ter eşit emdi sartlar başı,
Ajun tezginigli hitay arkışı.

Hear what the chief of the merchants says,
One who roamed the world with the China caravan.

YŪSUF KHĀṢṢ ḤĀJIB BALĀSĀGHŪNĪ¹



References to the Turks and the Sogdians disappeared from the Chinese sources starting in the Northern Song period. The last envoys from Tujue arrived in China during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period. The question of whether these envoys were dispatched by the Qarakhanids or other Turkic groups remains open for discussion. The first documented evidence of the Qarakhanid mission in Song China was 1009, which allows us to connect this event with the Qarakhanid conquest of the Khotan kingdom. From this period the Qarakhanid Khaganate was known in Chinese sources as the “Khotan state” (*Yutian guo*) and frequently sent envoys to the Northern Song until the Jurchen capture of Kaifeng in 1127.

From 1009 to 1124, Chinese official sources depicted more than forty Qarakhanid delegations. Based on the number of missions sent to China we can divide the Qarakhanid-Song relations into two periods: 1) the period of formation from 1009 to 1063 and 2) the period of intensive trade from 1063 to 1124. It should be noted that the actual number of missions could be much higher than recorded in official histories due to the selective approach applied during the compilation by the following dynasty. The Qarakhanids were viewed as descendants of the Uyghurs in Song China, therefore, their missions sent to the imperial court before the Islamic period and the Khotan conquest could have been regarded as Uyghur missions. The presence of Qarakhanid commodities in Ganzhou (Zhangye), Dunhuang, Turfan, and Liao China can be observed

1 *Qutadghu bilig*, trans Dankoff, 226; for the Turkic text, see *Qutadghu bilig*, ed. and trans. Arat, vol. 1, 571.

starting in the 960s. It allows us to speak to the Qarakhanid diplomacy and trade in the East from the tenth to the twelfth centuries that particularly flourished in the eleventh century.

The main purpose of the Qarakhanid diplomacy in China was trade and generous rewards obtained from the Chinese emperors. Qarakhanid official envoys were recorded as *banci/banca* in Song sources. This term referred to foreign envoys that besides diplomatic obligations also had economic functions and offered military service to protect borders in Song China. The Qarakhanids had their trade stations in the Xihe Circuit and exchanged horses for Sichuan tea.

The most frequent contacts can be observed starting from the Emperor Shenzong period. They can be explained by economic reforms introduced by the statesman Wang Anshi in 1068–1077. For instance, the regulation prohibiting the use of copper coins for foreign trade was abolished under his new policies, which also included an increase in currency circulation and the breaking up of private monopolies. The foundation of the Tea and Horse Agency in 1074 that aimed to increase the number of horses used for defense offered additional benefits, such as a tea tax exemption for Qarakhanid merchants, and attracted more trade caravans to China.

The Qarakhanids traded with the Ganzhou Uyghurs and the Xizhou Uyghurs as well as with the Tibetan Tsongkha kingdom. Their relations with the Xizhou Uyghurs opened the road to the Liao Empire. The first envoy from the Islamic world to arrive in Liao China did so in 924 and was recorded under the name Dashi, the term applied to the Qarakhanids in Liao sources. There are only three delegations from Dashi in the Liao official histories. However, archaeological data shows intensive trade and cultural contacts between the Liao and the Qarakhanids. Cultural relics depicting the image of Central Asian envoys and artists unearthed from the Liao tombs demonstrate frequent contacts and exchanges by the eleventh century. Later these relations were also strengthened by marriage alliances. This explains why the Khitans migrated in large numbers during this period to the Qarakhanid territories. This region later became a new home for the Khitan ruling elite, who had to abandon their lands after the Jurchen invasion and collapse of the Liao Empire. The first Qarakhanid delegations to Song China most likely arrived via the Liao realm. However, the Qarakhanid-Liao relations were not always peaceful, probably due to the Khitan tendency to control trade roads to Song China. It also refers to the relations with the Tanguts. Therefore, the Qarakhanids sought to find alternative networks to gain access to the markets of the Northern Song. They managed to bypass the Khitan and the Tangut territories on their roads to Song China with the help of the Tibetan Tsongkha kingdom. The Qarakhanids actively traded

with Tsongkha and supplied goods from the Islamic world. It can be observed from the list of gifts presented by Tsongkha to the Song emperors that included rarities from the Qarakhanid realm and the Islamic world. Tsongkha rulers in turn provided guides and translators for Qarakhanid delegations who accompanied them to China.

The Qarakhanids imported silk, silver, tea, and probably porcelain from China. These goods were offered as diplomatic gifts and trade commodities to their neighbors in the Islamic world and stimulated the Qarakhanids' economic activity between China and the Islamic world. Trade with China became one of the main sources of economic development of the Qarakhanids and caused the growth of their prestige in international relations.

The Qarakhanid trade in China was not specialized; they brought everything that was valued in China. This feature made them similar to Sogdian traders, who also transported to China different kinds of commodities obtained from their realm and beyond. Qarakhanid merchants exported horses, camels, donkeys, sheep and other nomadic commodities such as furs and hides that were produced in their realm. When Khotan was incorporated into the Qarakhanid Khaganate, they continued the jade trade with China that had been in existence since ancient times. These commodities were largely supplemented by precious goods obtained from their neighbors and allies. Chinese sources state that the Qarakhanids were the main amber supplier in China. This study shows that the Qarakhanids transported Baltic amber and other products from Northern and Eastern Europe, including walrus tusks, castoreum, and fur that arrived in their realm from Volga Bulgharia via Khwarazm. They also played an active role in the continental frankincense trade and became the only supplier of this precious incense from South Arabia in the East along the overland roads. Frankincense was shipped by the Arabs to the Mediterranean region, India, and Southeast Asia, as well as to China by maritime routes. It reached Central Asia along the Silk Roads from the Mediterranean region as well as through trade networks with India and then brought by the Qarakhanids to China. They certainly were aware of the high demand for frankincense in China and therefore searched for ways to obtain it. And as we can see, they were successful. The large-scale Qarakhanid frankincense trade in China was later blocked following the imperial edict on the embargo on their frankincense. Other Qarakhanid commodities were Central Asian fabrics and minerals, Indian precious stones and ivory, and Iranian glass and lions. Their economic activities were summed up by the Qarakhanid poet and statesman Yūsuf Khāṣṣ Ḥājib. In the following verses, he obviously referred to the sable trade with Volga Bulgharia, the silk trade with China, and the pearl trade with Iran and India:

If there were no merchants roaming the world,
 When could you ever wear a black sable lining?
 If the China [Khitay] caravan ceased to raise dust on the roads,
 How could these countless kinds of silks arrive?
 If the merchants did not travel the world around,
 Who could ever see a string of pearls?²

In its widest geographical extension, it can be concluded that Qarakhanid trade embraced a vast region, from Eastern Europe to the most remote parts of East Asia. They continued to use trade networks with Europe developed by the Samanids and restored Sogdian roads to China, creating alternative directions when necessary due to political conditions. The Song imperial policy supporting Buddhists and developing contacts between Chinese and Indian monks gave additional benefits to the Qarakhanids located between China and India. Unearthing a large number of glass and metal items produced in the Islamic world from the Liao realm proves written data on the role of the Qarakhanids in international relations from the tenth to the twelfth centuries.

The Qarakhanids served as middlemen in trade, diplomacy and culture between the Sino-Tibetan and Turko-Islamic worlds. They helped to increase and improve diplomatic relations between these two worlds. They accompanied Saljuq delegations from Rum on their way to Song China as well as encouraged the Liao Emperor and the Uyghur Idikut to send their envoys to the Ghaznavids. The study shows that the Qarakhanid Khagans occupied a unique position in diplomatic relations with China. Chinese sources describe a case when a foreign delegation from the Islamic world was allowed to enter China and access the Chinese market thanks to an official letter provided by the Qarakhanid Khagan. Additionally, Indian monks traveled to China via the Qarakhanid realm and Manicheans moved between Transoxiana and Turfan.

Knowledge exchange was facilitated by Qarakhanid envoys and merchants who brought firsthand information from the two worlds. Official envoys met personally with the Liao and Song emperors and were interviewed about their own and neighboring territories. The research demonstrated that imperial scholars and cartographers depicted geographical information in their works obtained from the Qarakhanid envoys. The prominent scholars who were active during this time in Central Asia and served at the courts of the ruling elites also had primary access to official and non-official records of these people who worked and lived year-round in China. Ethnographic and

² *Qutadghu bilig*, trans. Dankoff, 58; for the Turkic text, see *Qutadghu bilig*, ed. and trans. Arat, vol. 1, 445.

geographical knowledge about Tibet and China was supplemented by new data and information replacing outdated materials collected during the Tang period that continued to be used in Central Asia even after the fall of the Tang Empire. Chinese knowledge about remote territories and cultures was also updated thanks to the economic and diplomatic activity of the Qarakhanids that enabled their allies in the Turko-Islamic world to send official missions to China. For instance, the Song court scholars updated their knowledge about Asia Minor, describing a new political power that was rising in the region after receiving the official delegations sent from their rulers, apparently the Saljuq Sultans of Rum. The term “Bosi” for Persia was mentioned in the description of Northern India in Song sources and referred to the Persianized Ghaznavid dynasty. Iran was under the Saljuq Empire, which changed its representation in Chinese sources. The Saljuq Empire and its territory appeared under an entirely new name, Cengtān, probably derived from the title Sultan. The Chinese officials relying on information provided by the envoys of these polities recorded details about their territories, government, economy, peoples, their language, religion, and culture. It means that the Chinese did not know anything about them and sought to collect data about new polities and cultures. In contrast, the description of the Qarakhanids in Song official histories contains data mainly related to official delegations and commodities. It means that the Qarakhanids and their culture were familiar to Song China. Therefore, Chinese officials did not need to record this data in the official documentation.

Chinese texts stated that not only men but also women were present in official delegations sent by the Qarakhanid Khagans to Song China. The presence of women in trade and pilgrimage caravans was not infrequent in the Qarakhanid world during this time. Taking into account that official envoys spent several years in China, it can be assumed that their families accompanied them. At the same time texts recorded that these women participated in official ceremonies at the Song imperial court, which opens the window into further discussions about their roles.

Participation of the Qarakhanids in trade networks beyond the Silk Roads linking different worlds placed them at the center of international economic relations in the tenth to the twelfth centuries. The traditional approach, applied to Qarakhanid studies in academia and based mainly on Muslim sources, does not provide many materials on the “eastern” side of the Qarakhanids. Having just two extant works compiled by the Qarakhanid scholars and data in historical writings of their neighbors in Turko-Islamic world obviously does not allow us to speak extensively about this issue. The Chinese histories consulted in this work not only introduced the Qarakhanid trade and policy in the East along the Silk Roads but also revealed their participation in trade along the

Amber Road, the Frankincense Road, the Tea and Horse Road. Chinese texts also allowed us to observe the Qarakhanid relations with the Uyghurs and the Tibetans, especially with the Xizhou Uyghurs and the Ganzhou Uyghurs and the Tibetan Tsongkha kingdom, which were multi-ethnic confederations and home for many Turkic groups. It may explain why the Qarakhanids remained culturally Turkic in comparison to the Persianized Saljuqs or the Ghaznavids.

It is possible to conclude now that nothing allows us to speak with authority about “the overland Silk Road crisis” during the Qarakhanids in the tenth–twelfth centuries. The revival of the continental Silk Roads after the Tang period often attributed to the Mongols can be now started from the Qarakhanid period. The great commerce maintained by the Qarakhanids between China, Central Asia, Iran, and India and beyond from the tenth to the twelfth centuries is a historical reality verified by historical texts and archaeological data. However, the history of the Qarakhanid trade is far from complete. The lacunae in the documentation of the Qarakhanid trade in the East after the fall of the Liao dynasty and the Jurchen capture of the Northern Song capital leave many questions. It can be assumed that during the Qara Khitai rule in Central Asia Qarakhanid merchants could reach Turfan, which was also under the Qara Khitai, as well as the territories of the Tanguts, who were Qara Khitai allies. But the lack of sources does not allow us to clarify the scale of Qarakhanid activity in Jin and Southern Song China. At the same time, the discovery of Jin coins in the territory of historical Balasaghun and the findings of Chinese porcelain produced in Southern Song and Jin China in Qarakhanid Samarqand indicate that this issue remains to be studied.