

# QARAKHANID HISTORY

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## GOVERNMENT

### Overview

“Qarakhanid” is a name devised by 19<sup>th</sup> century European scholars and used for both the Turkic dynasty that ruled Transoxiana from the late 10<sup>th</sup> to the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, and the dynasty’s Turkic subjects. Muslim sources, however, use several different names for this dynasty; Arabic sources frequently use the name *al-Khāqāniya* (الخاقانية, “that of the Khaqans”) or *al-Khāniya* (الخانبة, “that of the Khans”), while Persian sources generally call them *Āl-i Afrāsiyāb* (آل افراسياب, “the family/house of Afrasiyab”), a reference to a line of legendary pre-Islamic kings who ruled in Transoxiana.

The origins of the Qarakhanids are still not completely understood as the surviving sources related to Qarakhanid history are not contemporary with the dynasty and, while quite informative concerning relations between the Qarakhanids and their neighbors, provide little information on internal events of the Qarakhanid state. Numismatics has been of some use in establishing the genealogy and chronology of Qarakhanid rulers, but like the written sources, Qarakhanid coinage presents its own challenges to researchers. Nevertheless, it appears that the Qarakhanid dynasty has its origins in the ruling clan of the Qarluq confederation who claimed descent from the Ashina, the ruling clan of the earlier Gök Türk state. Emerging at some time in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the Qarakhanids imposed their rule over a confederation of tribes in the regions of the western Tarim Basin around Kashgar, the western Tien Shan, and Semireche (also, Zhetysu, Jetysu, or Jeti-su). At this point the Qarakhanids shared a number of characteristics with previous states in this region and with the eastern neighbors, the Uighur, namely language, religion and lifestyle. This was not the case with the Qarakhanids’ neighbors to the southwest, the Samanids. Established in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century in the regions of Khorasan and Transoxiana, the Samanids were Persian in speech and origin, Muslims and rulers of a settled urban and agricultural population.

In 893 the Samanids took the city of Talas (Taraz), driving the Qarakhanids west into the region of Kashgar. A few decades later a Qarakhanid prince in this region, Satuk Bughra Khan, converted to Islam. Exactly when, how and why Satuk Bughra Khan decided to become a Muslim is unclear; some sources credit a *faqīh* from Baghdad, others the efforts of dervishes for his conversion. Whatever the reason, Satuk Bughra Khan’s conversion was clearly voluntary and would eventually lead to the conversion of the Qarakhanids en masse. Shortly after his conversion Satuk Bughra Khan killed his father and took Kashgar. Following Satuk Bughra Khan’s death in 955 the Qarakhanids began to enlarge the territory under their control through expansion in the direction of the Samanids.

Qarakhanid expansion in the last decade of the 10<sup>th</sup> century was focused on Transoxiana and culminated with the conquest of the Samanid capital, Bukhara, in 992. Following the downfall of the Samanids and the establishment of Qarakhanid rule in Muslim Transoxiana, the Qarakhanids then expanded their holdings in the Tarim Basin by pushing east and conquering the Kingdom of Khotan in 1006.

Despite these successes, infighting remained a constant feature of the Qarakhanid state. This internal strife eventually resulted in a formal division of the Qarakhanid territories, a process that was complete by 1042-

43. The result was an Eastern and Western Khanate with their capitals at Samarkand and Balasaghun (later Kashgar) respectively. The borders of the two khanates met in the Semireche and Fergana regions, but were not clearly designated and were frequently fought over.

The two Qarakhanid khanates were relatively stable politically and economically prosperous until the late 11<sup>th</sup> century when the Seljuqs became the dominant power in Transoxiana. Samarkand, capital of the Western Khanate, fell to the Seljuqs in 1089 and the khanate became a Seljuq vassal. The Eastern Khanate voluntarily submitted to the Seljuqs shortly afterwards. While the Eastern Khanate's status as a Seljuq vassal would be relatively short-lived, the Western Khanate would remain a Seljuq vassal until 1141 with the Seljuqs placing whomever they wished on the throne of the khanate.

After suffering a major defeat at the hands of the Qara Khitai in 1141, the Seljuqs were no longer the dominant power in Transoxiana and the Qarakhanid khanates became vassals of the Qara Khitai. Acting as administrators of the Muslim populations in the Qara Khitai territories around Samarkand and Kashgar, the Qarakhanids gained a reputation for tolerance and justice. Both the Eastern and Western Khanates came to an end in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century in the tumultuous events that also brought about the downfall of the Qara Khitai state. The Eastern Khanate ended with the death of the last Qarakhanid ruler in Kashgar in 1211, and in the following year, 1212, the last Qarakhanid ruler of the Western Khanate was executed in Samarkand by the Khwarazmshahs.

### Government Structure

The Qarakhanid state had a bipartite division of authority, east and west, similar to that of the Gök Türk Empire. The eastern, supreme Qarakhanid khan was titled the *Arslan Qara Khaqan* (*arslan*, "lion") while the western co-ruler bore the title *Bughra Qara Khaqan* (*bughra*, "male camel"). Animal names are found in many of the Turkic titles of Qarakhanid nobility; in addition to *arslan* and *bughra*, other titles include *böri* ("wolf"), *toghrul* ("bird of prey") and *toghan* ("falcon"). Each khan had two sub-rulers, the *Arslan Ilig*, and *Arslan Tegin* in the east, and the *Bughra Ilig* and *Bughra Tegin* in the west. After the Qarakhanids converted to Islam, in addition to the Turkic titles, the khans began to use the Arabic titles *sultan* (سلطان) and *sultan al-salatin* (سلطان السلاطين, "sultan of sultans").

The eastern and western halves of the Qarakhanid state were further divided into a system of appanages, or *iqta* (إقطاع), which gave members of the ruling clan the right to revenues generated from a land grant. These appanages did not have stable borders due to infighting, but were often associated with the urban centers of Kashgar in Xinjiang, Balasagun in Semireche, Samarkand in Transoxiana, and Uzgend in Fergana. A change in the appanage an individual held resulted in not only a change of title, but also a change in status and seniority within the ruling clan.

Below this, the Qarakhanids ruled over a mix of settled, agricultural territories, tribes and tribal unions that all recognized Qarakhanid suzerainty.

### Policy

It is only in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century, following the Qarakhanids conversion to Islam in the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century, that the Qarakhanids began to pursue a clear policy of conquest to replace the Iranian Samanids as the Muslim rulers of Transoxiana. The first campaign was led by Hasan bin Sulayman Bughra Khan and between 990 and 992 he conquered Isfijab, Fergana and Bukhara, marking these victories by minting coins in his name. Between 996 and 999, Nasr bin Ali took Chach and Samarkand, and retook Bukhara for the Qarakhanids. The Samanids were completely eliminated by 1005, leaving the Qarakhanids masters of Transoxiana for the time.

However, the Samanids were not the Qarakhanids' only concern in the late 10<sup>th</sup> – early 11<sup>th</sup> century. To the east and north-east of their state the Qarakhanids were embroiled in a series of confrontations with other non-Muslim Turkic tribes. At one point these Turkic peoples almost reached the Qarakhanid capital at Balasaghun, until the Qarakhanid ruler Ahmad bin Ali appealed for help. Numerous *ghazi* ("fighter for the faith") volunteers, some from other Muslim states answered his call, first driving out the invading forces and then defeating them.

The Qarakhanids were also involved with Ghaznavid state to their south and south-west. Qarakhanid relations with the Ghaznavids were more complex than those with the non-Muslim Turkic peoples to the north, and varied depending on the relative strength of the two sides, or the degree of internal strife within the Qarakhanid dynasty. In 1025, concerns over the growing strength of the western khan, Ali Tegin, led Mahmud of Ghazna to form an alliance with the eastern khan, Yusuf Qadir Khan, against Ali Tegin. Although Ali Tegin was only temporarily forced out of Bukhara and Samarkand, Mahmud's victory had left the two halves of the Qarakhanid state relatively equal in strength and unable to seriously threaten the Ghaznavids.

In 1040 the Qarakhanids became aware a new, rising power in Central Asia, the Seljuqs, when they defeated the Ghaznavids at Dandanqan and became the masters of Khorasan. In the following years, while the Seljuqs were involved with consolidating their hold on these new territories, the Qarakhanid state was formally divided into two independent khanates around 1042-43. For approximately the next four decades the energies of the two states were mostly directed either at territorial expansion at the other khanate's expense or internal affairs.

When the Seljuq sultan Malikshah took the cities of Bukhara and Samarkand in 1089 the western Qarakhanid Khanate became a Seljuq vassal; the eastern khanate would voluntarily submit shortly afterwards. From this point on, first as vassals of the Seljuqs and then, after 1141, as vassals of the Qara Khitai, Qarakhanid policy until the early 13<sup>th</sup> century was directed at the continuation of the state.

### Readings

Asimov, M. S. and Bosworth, C. E. (eds.). *History of civilizations of Central Asia*. Vol. 4, Part One. Paris, 1998.

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### Discussion Questions

1. What is the primary historical significance of the Qarakhanid state?
2. Why is the history of both the Oghuz and Qarakhanid states difficult to reconstruct?

### MILITARY

Information regarding the Qarakhanid army is extremely limited, and what information exists is generally indirect – explanations of military terms in the *Divan al-Lughat at-Turk*, military related comments in the *Kutadgu Bilig* (both Qarakhanid works), or accounts of Qarakhanid battles in outside historical sources. However, when combined with the Qarakhanid's general tendency to follow Turkic traditions known from other Turkic groups in many aspects of their society (such as government and economy), this information can be used to form a general picture of the Qarakhanid military.

The picture that emerges is of an army which relied heavily on the typical nomadic cavalry force employing mounted archery, but combined this with some infantry forces.

The soldiers who made up the Qarakhanid armies came from two main sources. The first was the *oglan* or *ghulām*, slave-soldiers (mostly Turkic) that were to become a prominent feature of medieval Islamic armies. How these slaves were acquired, either directly as prisoners taken in raids and wars with non-Muslim Turkic groups, or purchased from slave traders is not clear, but the existing sources imply that most of these slaves were purchased as boys. Afterwards, the boys were given an arduous education in both military skills as well as palace customs and protocol.

The second source was the various Turkic tribes that had been incorporated into the Qarakhanid forces. While several tribes are mentioned by name in the surviving sources, the most important appears to be the *Chighiller* (*Çiğiller*). These tribes had continued to follow their traditional nomadic lifestyle, and were therefore an important element in the Qarakhanid cavalries.

When the Qarakhanid rulers eventually settled and began to rule their lands from a permanent palace, a personal guard was established to ensure the ruler's safety as well as the security of the palace. This force was divided into two groups: the *turgak* which was responsible for security during the day, and the *yatgak* that worked at night. Both were under the overall command of an officer known as the *kapujubashi*.

While the exact way in which the royal bureaucracy administered the army is unknown, Qarakhanid sources mention that soldiers were recorded in a *defter* (record book) called the *ay bitiği* or simply *ay*, possibly for pay purposes, and that their names could also be removed from the *defter*. Since similar *defters* were a feature of the military *divans* of later Turkic states, this may indicate that the Qarakhanids had a *divan* in charge of military affairs.

When the Qarakhanid army went on campaign it utilized a forward unit known as a *yezek* whose primary duty was to scout for ambushes and enemy forces along the path that the main body of the army would take. At night, the duty of intercepting enemy scouts and vanguard forces fell to a unit known as the *tutgak*. The ruler's security on in the field was the responsibility of the *mevkib*, a unit composed of palace guards and other palace units.

When the Qarakhanid army prepared to engage the enemy, officials known as *chawush* (*çavuş*) were responsible for forming the men into their ranks. Battle was typically opened by long-distance mounted archery, followed by infantry archery. The infantry only closed with the enemy when it appeared that they were sufficiently weakened and could be defeated.

Qarakhanid cavalry were armed with bows and arrows, and lances. Infantry forces carried swords, axes, maces and daggers. For personal protection the soldiers wore helmets and body armor and carried shields.

While most Qarakhanid military forces were under the command of the Qarakhanid Khan, not all were. Members of the ruling dynasty who were responsible for the administration of specific territories had military forces at their command, as did provincial governors and some other government officials.

While the surviving sources make no mention of the siege equipment in the Qarakhanid army, it would appear that the Qarakhanids had neither siege equipment nor engineers capable of making any. In 982 the Qarakhanids established a siege of the city of Khotan in the Tarim Basin. The city only fell to the Qarakhanids 24 years later in 1006, clearly indicating that the Qarakhanids had not been able to breach the city's walls. If the Qarakhanids had siege equipment it is unlikely that Khotan would have been able to hold out for so long.

## Readings

Davidovich, E.A. "The Kharakhanids", in Asimov, M. S. and Bosworth, C. E. (eds.). *History of civilizations of Central Asia*. Vol. 4, Part One. Paris, 1998.

Golden, Peter B.. "The Karakhanids and early Islam", in Sinor, Denis (ed.). *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*. Cambridge, 2008.

## Discussion Questions

1. What are the difficulties in determining the organization of the Qarakhanid army?
2. What sources and methods can historians use to reconstruct the Qarakhanid army?

## SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Qarakhanid society was broadly divided into a ruling nobility, settled artisans and peasants, nomads and slaves. Beginning with the ruling class, like many nomadic and Turkic dynasties, the Qarakhanids came to power as the dominant clan of a tribal confederation whose members recognized Qarakhanid leadership. In addition, as was common among Turkic groups, the dominant clan regarded the territories they ruled as a family possession. The result was that while there was a recognized supreme leader, other members of the ruling clan had varying degrees of authority and territory under their control.

Under the Qarakhanids, this division of power and territory took the form of a bipartite division of authority, east and west, similar to that of the Gök Türk Empire. The eastern, supreme Qarakhanid khan was titled the *Arslan Qara Khaqan* (*arslan*, “lion”) while the western co-ruler bore the title *Bughra Qara Khaqan* (*bughra*, “male camel”). Animal names, most likely totemic animals originally, are found in many of the Turkic titles of Qarakhanid nobility. In addition to *arslan* and *bughra*, other titles include *böri* (“wolf”), *toghrol* (“bird of prey”) and *toghan* (“falcon”). Each khan had two sub-rulers, the *Arslan Ilig* (or *Ilik*), and *Arslan Tegin* (or *Tigin*) in the east, and the *Bughra Ilig* and *Bughra Tegin* in the west. After the Qarakhanids converted to Islam, in addition to the Turkic titles, the khans began to use the Arabic titles *sultan* (سلطان) and *sultan al-salatin* (سلطان السلاطين, “sultan of sultans”).

The Qarakhanid rulers maintained many of their nomadic practices, among them living in tents much of the time. However, recent archaeological work has shown that the Qarakhanid rulers did have some urban residences, as in Samarkand for example, and that they actively established towns that may have played a role in the trade between nomads and settled populations.

Nomadic Turkic groups made up the bulk of the Qarakhanid tribal confederation. They constituted the main force of the Qarakhanid armies, although regular forces were beginning to be established, and they produced products such as leather, meat, and wool that were exchanged for the manufactured and agricultural products of the settled population. There were also cases of nomadic groups settling and becoming agriculturalists.

Below the ruling clan were the settled urban craftsmen, and traders and rural peasants. Many were of Iranian, or Tocharian origin, but under Turkic rule they were gradually becoming Turkic in speech and culture. The craftsmen of the towns and cities were primarily potters and glassmakers, while the traders, especially Silk Road traders, were often Sogdians. Rural peasants fell into two broad categories – free peasants and sharecroppers. Free peasants worked their own lands and were independent, while sharecroppers lived and worked the lands of wealthy owners and paid for it with a share of their crops.

At the bottom of Qarakhanid society were slaves. While slaves do not seem to have formed a large class on their own in Qarakhanid lands, there was a very active slave trade. Large numbers of Turkic slaves, primarily from pagan Turkic groups were taken and sent west to be sold and serve as soldiers in the *mamluk* or *ghulam* armies of the Abbasids and others.

### Readings

Barthold, W. *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*. Oxford, 1928.

Davidovich, E.A. “The Kharakhanids”, in Asimov, M. S. and Bosworth, C. E. (eds.). *History of civilizations of Central Asia*. Vol. 4, Part One. Paris, 1998.

Golden, Peter. “The Karakhanids and early Islam”, in Sinor, Denis (ed.). *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*. Cambridge, 2008.

### Discussion Questions

1. How is the mix of Turkic and Islamic elements that made up Qarakhanid society reflected in their social structure?

2. Why are the relations between settled and nomadic populations often described as a symbiotic relationship?

## GENDER RELATIONS

Due to the lack of textual evidence, it can only be surmised that, as in other pastoral nomadic societies, Qarakhanid women initially enjoyed relatively free lives. However, after the Qarakhanids became Muslims, there would have been gradually increasing pressure for Qarakhanid women to adopt lifestyles more in keeping with the norms of surrounding Islamic societies. This would have meant a life that was primarily restricted to the home and family, and little involvement with events outside.

However, there is some evidence that upper-class Qarakhanid women may have been more visible and enjoyed higher social status than women from lower social classes. There is a Chinese source from the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century which describes the foreign envoys who came to the Northern Song imperial palace in Kaifeng to present gifts to the emperor as part of the New Year celebrations. Among the envoys were the Qarakhanid representatives, who came with their wives. The Qarakhanids were apparently the only envoys whose wives accompanied them to this official function since the presence of women in any of the other envoys is not mentioned. Whether the women in the Qarakhanid envoy were simply accompanying their husbands, or whether they conducting independent diplomatic or commercial business in the Song capital is unknown, but their presence in the diplomatic party is a clear indication of their elevated status.

The other evidence for the status of elite Qarakhanid women comes from two mausoleums located in Taraz, Kazakhstan attributed to the Qarakhanids that were constructed next to each other and mark the burial sites of two noble women. The first, the Babaji Khatun Mausoleum was constructed sometime between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, while the other, the Aisha Bibi Mausoleum, is dated to the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries. Both structures show a high degree of craftsmanship and artistic sophistication, indicating that these women must have held highly respected positions in their society.

## Readings

Barthold, W. *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*. Oxford, 1928.

Davidovich, E.A. "The Kharakhanids", in Asimov, M. S. and Bosworth, C. E. (eds.). *History of civilizations of Central Asia*. Vol. 4, Part One. Paris, 1998.

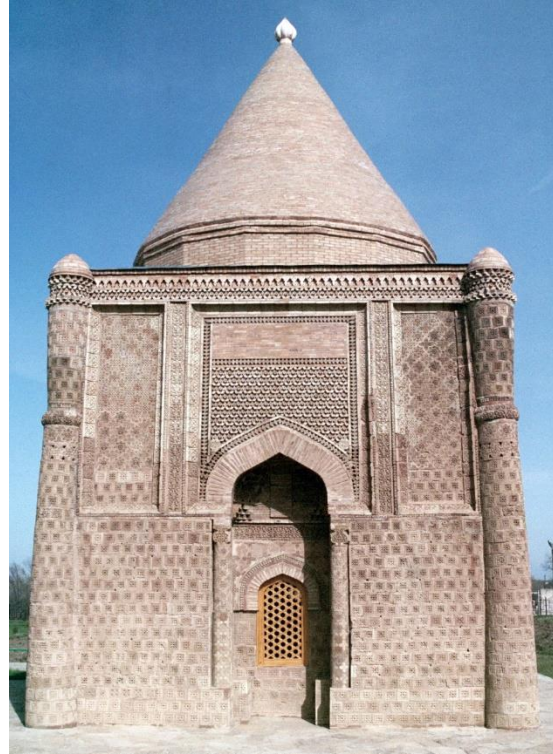
Golden, Peter. "The Karakhanids and early Islam", in Sinor, Denis (ed.). *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*. Cambridge, 2008.

## Discussion Questions

1. Why is determining the status and roles of women in medieval societies often difficult for historians?
2. Why different types of indirect evidence can historians use to make deductions about the lives of women in medieval societies?



*Babaji Khatun Mausoleum*



*Aisha Bibi Mausoleum*

## INNOVATIONS

As peoples who had only recently converted to Islam and were in the process of assimilating not only a new religion, but also the cultural legacy of the Islamic world at a time when the New Persian language was beginning to supplant Arabic as the language of administration and literature in the eastern regions, the Qarakhanids, Oghuz and Seljuqs were perhaps not yet in the best position to make their contributions to this culture. Nevertheless, the Qarakhanids and the Seljuqs of Rum did make their own unique contributions to Islamic civilization and culture.

The most notable innovation of the Qarakhanids was their attempt to create a Muslim literature in the Qarakhanid Turkic language that could take its place next to the existing corpus of Arabic literature and the rapidly growing number of works composed in Persian. This effort to create a Turkic Muslim literature may have been motivated not only by the desire to make the language of the recently converted Qarakhanids as prestigious as Arabic and Persian, but also to compete with the large number of mostly Buddhist and Manichaeen works that had been written in the closely related Uighur Turkic language. What ever the reason, the two surviving works written in Qarakhanid, Mahmud al-Kashgari's *Diwan Lughat al-Turk* (ديوان لغات الترك, *Compendium of the Turkic Dialects*), composed around 1077, and the *Qutadgu Bilig* (قوتادغو بيليگ, *The Glory of Royal Wisdom*) by Yusuf Khass Hajib of Balasaghun, written in 1069, attest to the quality of literature that could have been created had this effort continued. Almost four centuries would pass before the composition of literary works in a Turkic language would reappear under the Ottomans and the Timurids.

## Readings

Davidovich, E.A. "The Karakhanids", in Asimov, M. S. and Bosworth, C. E. (eds.). *History of civilizations of Central Asia*. Vol. 4, Part One. Paris, 1998.

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## Discussion Questions

1. Why were the Ottomans and Timurids able to make Ottoman and Chaghatay Turkish literary languages that were into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while the Qarakhanid attempt to create a Turkic literature in their Turkic language was short-lived?

## TRADE

Like many aspects of Qarakhanid history, information about the economy and trade of the Qarakhanid state(s) is limited and comes mostly from contemporary accounts written by outsiders and archaeological excavations. Nonetheless, both indicate that the Qarakhanid state was relatively prosperous, with active trade and general economic growth. One indication of this prosperity is the large number of Qarakhanid coins that have been found at numerous sites. In addition to being evidence of economic activity within the Qarakhanid state(s), these coins have been vital in establishing the chronology of Qarakhanid rulers.

Qarakhanid prosperity was primarily the result of the Qarakhanid state(s) being located on some of the most important trade routes in Central Eurasia. Qarakhanid territory included the Tarim Basin and extended westward to Samarkand – the region that the main Silk Roads linking China and the Islamic states to the west passed through. From the west the Qarakhanids imported for sale to China items such as ivory, amber, frankincense, some porcelain, coral and glassware. From Qarakhanid territories horses, camels, Bukharan fabrics, Khotanese jade, Central Asian wines and glassware were sent on to China. Similarly, Chinese goods such as silk, satin, fine porcelain, and mirrors, as well as Khotanese jade, and slaves passed through Qarakhanid lands on their way west. One of the few surviving testaments to the importance of these trade routes to the Qarakhanids is the Rabati Malik (also Raboti Malik or Ribat-i Malik, رباط ملك) caravanserai in Uzbekistan on the route between Bukhara and Samarkand.

However, these east-west trade routes were not the only ones to pass through Qarakhanid territories. Trades routes extending to the north and south also brought commodities to the Qarakhanids. From the south goods such as precious stones, pearls, and perfumes came from India, and musk from Tibet made its way north into the Qarakhanid state(s). Northern trade routes supplied furs, dairy products, carpets, wool, felt, and *khutū* (variously identified as walrus, narwhal or mammoth ivory, but likely to be musk ox horn) used to make knife handles and sword hilts.

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## Discussion Questions

1. What is the contribution of numismatics to the historical study of poorly documented states, periods and regions?

2. What was the place and role of the Qarakhanids in central Eurasian trade in the 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries?



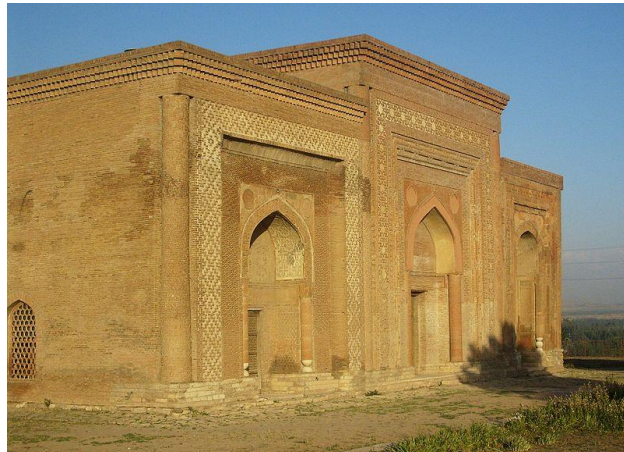
## ART

### Architecture

Although the number of surviving Qarakhanid buildings is limited, enough examples (mostly mosques and mausoleums) have survived to allow scholars to determine certain distinctive features of Qarakhanid architecture. As the first Turkic Muslim state, the Qarakhanids had no existing Turkic Islamic architecture on which to model their structures. Consequently, they used the architecture of their neighbors and political rivals, the Samanids, as the starting point for their own architecture, and Samanid influence is particularly notable in the decoration of Qarakhanid mausoleums.



*Samanid Mausoleum, 10<sup>th</sup> century, Bukhara Kyrgyzstan*



*Qarakhanid Mausoleum, 12<sup>th</sup> century, Uzgen, Kyrgyzstan*

Of the various surviving Qarakhanid structures, minarets are the most common, the most distinctively Qarakhanid, and display almost all of the characteristic features of Qarakhanid architecture. The typical Qarakhanid minaret is constructed of brick, has a tapered shaft, and a large “lantern” at the top, as seen in the Vabkent Minaret (*right*) from the late 12<sup>th</sup> century. The brickwork generally employs different decorative techniques, usually arranged in bands on the shaft of the minaret. However, these techniques were not restricted to minarets, and can be found on other Qarakhanid structures.

The first of these decorative techniques is “outset fret brick decor”. In this technique, the decorative elements are square or rectangular units that are two or three times the height of the bricks’ length and project out from the surface of the structure. These patterns were frequently arranged in clearly marked panels. Examples of this technique can be seen above the entrance to the Maghak-i Attari mosque in Bukhara and on the Uzgen Minaret in Uzgen, Kyrgyzstan.

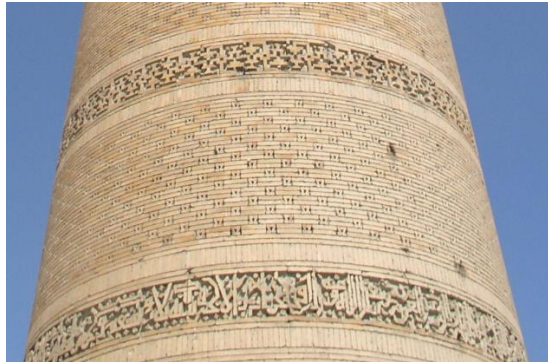


*Maghak-i Attari Mosque, 10<sup>th</sup> century*

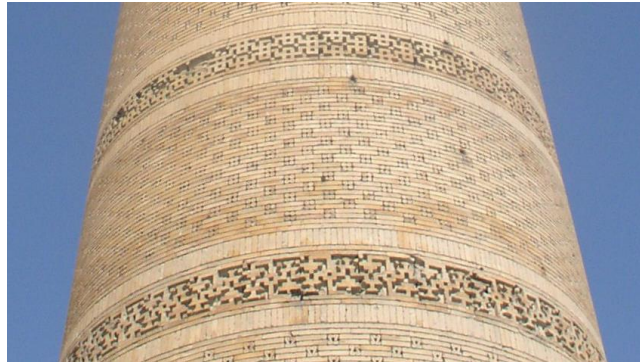


*Uzgen Minaret, Band 1, 11<sup>th</sup> century*

The second decorative brickwork technique that is frequently employed in Qarakhanid architecture is “brick plugs”. Brick plugs are terracotta plugs of various shapes used to fill spaces between double-stacked bricks. A variation of this technique used on minarets was to employ brick plugs of different shapes in different bands on the shaft of the minaret. This use of brick plugs can be seen in the Vabkent Minaret.



*Brick plugs, Band 1, Vabkent Minaret*



*Brick plugs, Band 2, Vabkent Minaret*

In addition to the previously mentioned characteristics of Qarakhanid architecture, there are two additional characteristics that are worth mention. First, the Qarakhanids employed a very distinctive, regional epigraphy in their building inscriptions, coins, ceramics, gravestones and manuscripts of the Qur’an. Although the Qarakhanid epigraphy was clearly influenced by the styles used by Ghaznavid and Ghurid artists, Qarakhanid artists developed unique letter forms that are found in different media across Qarakhanid territories in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The second characteristic is the increasing use of Persian in Qarakhanid building inscriptions and coinage, in place of Arabic. The earliest surviving examples of the use of Persian on any Islamic building are found on the Shah Fazl tomb at Safid Buland, constructed between 1055-1060 for the Qarakhanid ruler Muhammad ibn Nasr. The Qarakhanids’ use of Persian in these official roles is in contrast to practice of their predecessors, the Samanids. Despite being of Iranian origin and patrons of Persian literature, the Samanids made almost no use of Persian in any official, public capacity. However, the Qarakhanid practice of expanding the use of Persian would be copied by later dynasties and spread across much of Central Asia and beyond.



One unique example of Qarakhanid architecture is the Ribat-i Malik caravanserai, dating from the late 11<sup>th</sup> century, in Uzbekistan. Although only the main entrance portal has survived to any degree, its intricate brickwork décor is a testament to the high level Qarakhanid architecture achieved in the use of bricks to create decorative effects.

*Entrance portal of the Ribat-i Malik*

The influence of Qarakhanid architecture continued even after the fall of the Qarakhanid states, and can be seen in the architecture of later Muslim dynasties in Central Asia. In particular, the architecture of the Timurids in the late 14<sup>th</sup> and early 15<sup>th</sup> centuries utilizes many elements of Qarakhanid architecture, although on a considerably larger scale and with a much greater use of glazed tiles.

## Minor Arts

Very little Qarakhanid art has survived other than the decorative elements of structures that are primarily religious in nature. However, in 2000 a French-Uzbek archaeological mission excavating a Qarakhanid royal pavilion uncovered the remains of wall paintings which once decorated this elite residence. Despite the fragmentary condition of most of the wall paintings, depictions of human figures, animals and foliate decorative elements were recovered. The most complete human figure was a dynamic, three-quarter-life size painting of an arrow bearer. The paintings display a high degree of technical skill and artistry in their composition and use of color.

In addition to these, fragments of inscriptions in both Persian and Arabic were also discovered. Although the complete inscriptions could not be reconstructed, enough was preserved to show that Persian was used for poetic inscriptions while Arabic was used for Qur'anic verses and patronage information.

## Readings

McClary, Richard P. *Medieval Monuments of Central Asia: Qarakhanid Architecture of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Centuries*. Edinburgh, 2020.

## Discussion Questions

1. What innovations did the Qarakhanids bring to Islamic architecture in Central Asia?
2. What was the influence of Qarakhanid architecture on later cultures?

## LITERATURE

The Qarakhanids and their neighbor and rival, the Ghaznavids, were the first Turkic Muslim states and exemplify two different approaches to how the Turkic peoples adapted to the traditions and culture of the eastern Muslim world. In general, the Ghaznavids embraced the Arabo-Persian Islamic culture and modes of administration of their time, and preserved little of their Turkic heritage. The language of administration and culture was predominantly Persian, Arabic the language of religion and religious studies, and Turkic remained the spoken language.

In both government and culture, the Qarakhanids took a different approach. From the titles of their rulers to the distribution of cities and lands among the ruling dynasty, many aspects of Qarakhanid ruler were a continuation of pre-Islamic steppe traditions. Their approach to culture was similar. Persian and Arabic were used in the same roles as among the Ghaznavids, but Qarakhanids also attempted to create the first Turkic literature based on Arabic and Persian models. Two Qarakhanid literary works of this type have survived to the present day: Mahmud al-Kashghari's *Diwan Lughat al-Turk* (ديوان لغات الترك, *Compendium of the Turkic Dialects*), composed around 1077, and the *Qutadgu Bilig* (قوتادغو بيليگ, *The Glory of Royal Wisdom*) by Yusuf Khas Hajib of Balasagun, written in 1069.

The first, the *Diwan Lughat al-Turk*, was lexicon that attempted to explain the history and culture of the Turks to a Muslim audience beyond the Qarakhanid nobility. Therefore, it was written in Arabic, and the vocabulary entries cover everything from various aspects of daily life such as occupations, clothing and furnishings, to the tribal organization of the Turks, their history and their culture. Some entries even contain Turkish stories and poems as part of their explanations and definitions. As a Turk and philologist who was well versed in the Islamic culture and learning of his time, Kashgari was attempting to do for the Turks what the early Arab Muslim philologists had done for the Arabs, namely to compile and to explain history, language and culture of the Turks.

In contrast, the *Qutadgu Bilig*, a work whose subject matter and language clearly indicate that it was intended for a limited Qarakhanid audience. The work takes the form of a "mirror for princes", a treatise advising a ruler how best to administer his state in the form of a dialogue between the sovereign and his advisors. In addition, it is written in Qarakhanid Turkish, with one of the three extant manuscripts even using the Uighur script, rather than the Arabic alphabet as in the other two.

The writing of the *Diwan Lughat al-Turk* and the *Qutadgu Bilig* have been interpreted by some scholars as an effort by the Qarakhanids to create an Islamic Turkic literature that could take its place next to works of Arabic and Persian literature. If so, despite the quality of these two works, the Qarakhanids were ultimately unsuccessful. It would not be until the time of the Ottomans and the Timurids, writing in Ottoman Turkish and Chaghatay Turkish respectively, that Turkish would finally take its place as the third major literary language in the Islamic world after Arabic and Persian.

As successors to the Samanids, the Qarakhanids were also patrons of Persian literature and learning. Contemporary sources state that a number of poets and writers were present in Qarakhanid royal court. Two well-known Persian poets in particular are known to have spent time at the Qarakhanid court in Samarqand: 'Am'aq Bokhara'i (عمیق بخارانی), and Suzani Samarqandi (سوزنی سمرقندی). 'Am'aq began his career as a poet in Bokhara, which had developed its own unique school, and went to the Qarakhanid court in 1067. 'Am'aq became known for his knowledge of philosophy, sciences, and literature as well as his talent as a poet, and eventually was made the poet laureate of the Western Qarakhanid ruler Shams al-Mulk Nasr (r. 1067-1080). Suzani was also highly regarded as a poet, but is most remembered for his stinging satirical poetry lampooning well-known figures of his time as well as some of his colleagues. In addition to these professional poets, the last two Western Qarakhanid rulers, Ibrahim Arslan Khan (r.1178-1203) and Osman Ulugh Sultan (r.1202-1212) both composed poetry in Persian.

### Readings

Davidovich, E.A. "The Kharakhanids", in Asimov, M. S. and Bosworth, C. E. (eds.). *History of civilizations of Central Asia*. Vol. 4, Part One. Paris, 1998.

Golden, Peter. "The Karakhanids and early Islam", in Sinor, Denis (ed.). *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*. Cambridge, 2008.

### Discussion Questions

1. Why did the Ottomans and Timurids succeed in making Ottoman and Chaghatay Turkish literary languages used for centuries, while the Qarakhanid attempt to create a Turkic literature was short-lived?
2. Why did the Qarakhanids patronize poets and writers who composed their works in Persian?

### RELIGION

#### Tengrism

Whatever religion they ultimately accepted, almost all of the Turkic peoples of Central Asia initially followed Tengrism. Tengrism is the name given to the worship of *Kök* (also *Gök*) *Tengri* (ᠲᠡᠩᠭᠢ / "blue heaven"), or simply *Tengri* (ᠲᠡᠩᠭᠢ), the chief deity in the traditional religion of many of the steppe peoples of Eurasia, among them the Xiongnu, the Turkic peoples, Mongols, and early Magyars. While Tengri is the sky god and creator, Umay (ᠤᠮᠠᠢ) or Eje, is the earth-mother and goddess of fertility. Below these two deities there are a number of minor deities. In addition to its polytheism, Tengrism was characterized by animism, totemism, veneration of ancestors, and shamanism.

The earliest reference to Tengri is found in Chinese sources from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE that discuss the Xiongnu. More information is found in the later Orkhon inscriptions of the Gök Türk Empire, where it is clear that the Gök Türk rulers believed that they had a mandate from Tengri to rule. In a 9<sup>th</sup> century, the *Irk Bitig*, a book on divination written in Old Turkic, Tengri is described as *Türük tängri*, "god of the Turks". A linking of Tengri (written *tngri* in classical Mongolian) and a ruler, similar to that in the Orkhon inscriptions, can be found in the *Secret History of the Mongols*, written in 1240. In it, Genghis Khan's unification of the Mongols and right to rule them is frequently attributed to Tengri.

Tengrism was the state religion of the Gök Türk Empire, both the Eastern and Western Gök Türk states, the various Bulgar states, and the Mongols until the 14<sup>th</sup> century when some began to convert to Islam. Although Tengrism is still followed by some Turkic and Mongol groups, it declined among the Turkic peoples



when various groups began to adopt foreign faiths such as Manichaeism, Buddhism, Judaism (in the case of at least some of the Khazars), Nestorian Christianity, and Islam. However, elements of Tengrism have often survived among the Turkic peoples, particularly in the popular practices of these religions.

### Qarakhanid Religion

Prior to their conversion to Islam, the Qarakhanids, like the Qarluqs before them, appear to have followed a mix of native beliefs (Tengrism, shamanism) and Buddhism, both long familiar to many of the Turkic peoples of Central Asia. However, when the Qarakhanids became Muslims they began a process that would change the religion, culture, and history of Central Asia.

Exactly how, when and why the Qarakhanids converted to Islam is unclear. One plausible account links this event to the Qarakhanids' early rival to the west, the Iranian, Muslim Samanids. As a result of dynastic infighting, the brother of the Samanid ruler fled to Kashgar in Qarakhanid territory. There, he asked the local ruler from the Bughra branch of the Qarakhanid ruling dynasty, Oghulchaq, for asylum. Pleased to have such an illustrious Samanid "guest", the Qarakhanids appointed him as governor of Artush (also written Artuj, Artuch or Artish), an important commercial center near Kashgar. One of the new governor's early acts was to have a mosque built in Artush.

At some point after this mosque was built, Oghulchaq's nephew Satuq was sent to inspect caravan goods in Artush. During his inspection the muezzin in the mosque recited the call to prayer, and Satuq was deeply impressed by the sight of the Muslim merchants stopping their commercial activities in order to pray. Satuq is said to have begun studying the Quran after this, and at some point in the 930s he publicly became a Muslim.

After his conversion, some sources claim that Satuq attempted to persuade his uncle to become a Muslim, but the uncle resisted, leading to a clash between the two. When Satuq was eventually able to depose his uncle and take Kashgar, he took the title Satuq Bughra Khan and proclaimed Sunni Islam as the official religion of the Western Qarakhanids.

Satuq's motives for converting are unknown, but there are a number of possible reasons. First, it could have been a sincere conversion and Satuq was genuinely convinced of the truth of Islamic teachings. However, in light of Satuq's actions after his conversion, it appears that, no matter how sincere Satuq's personal beliefs were, there were also very practical benefits for both the Qarakhanids and for Satuq, that came with the new faith.

As a Muslim, Satuq would gain greater trust and respect from the apparently influential Samanid refugee, increasing the likelihood that he would help Satuq against the Samanid state. In addition, Satuq would have enhanced influence among the numerous Qarakhanid ghulams in the Samanid armies who had converted to Islam before him. Islam was also a means to unite the Qarakhanids and give them a distinct identity, both assets in the program of conquest and expansion that Satuq intended to carry out.

Whatever his motives, it is clear that Satuq Bughra Khan actively promoted Islam among his own people and among Turks who came under Qarakhanid rule. Five years after Satuq's death in 955, one source claims that "200,000 tents of the Turks" became Muslim. While this number is probably exaggerated, it nonetheless indicates that Islam was spreading quickly among the Turkic peoples of Central Asia.

The Qarakhanids rapidly assumed the characteristics of Muslim rulers, and became known for their individual piety, respect for religious scholars, establishment of *waqfs* (وقف, pious foundations), and construction of mosques and *madrasas* (مدرسة, theological schools). In addition, as Sunni Muslims and adherents of the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence, the Qarakhanids were accepted as legitimate rulers by the inhabitants of the former Samanid territories they took control of after the fall of the Samanids.

Although the Qarakhanids were clearly devout Muslims, and the sources indicate that they strongly urged non-Muslim Turks in the lands that they controlled to convert to Islam, the Qarakhanids displayed a very tolerant attitude to the non-Muslims in their lands. For example, the Nestorian church had a metropolitan in Samarkand throughout the entire period of Qarakhanid rule there, and was able to create an entirely new

metropolitanate in Kashgar in 1137. Similarly, Buddhists in the Qarakhanid domains appear to have suffered no restrictions or persecutions.

The Qarakhanid conversion to Islam had a major impact on the history and culture of both the regions of Transoxiana and Khorasan in particular, and the wider Islamic world in general. The Qarakhanids and their rivals the Ghaznavids were the starting point for the development of Turco-Persian Islamic culture that combined Turkic rule (and language to some degree) with Persian as the language of letters (and often administration), in predominantly Muslim lands where Arabic remained the language of religion and religious studies. Outside of those regions where Arabic was the primary language of daily speech, Turco-Persian Islamic culture would predominate and would be the Islamic culture taken into the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia.

### **Readings**

Davidovich, E.A. "The Kharakhanids", in Asimov, M. S. and Bosworth, C. E. (eds.). *History of civilizations of Central Asia*. Vol. 4, Part One. Paris, 1998.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Why did the Qarakhanids decide to become Muslims?
2. What changes did the Qarakhanid conversion to Islam bring to their culture, economy and political situation?