

QARAKHANID ECONOMIC HISTORY – 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. Trade 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.

Readings

Biran, Michal. "The Qarakhanids' Eastern Exchange: Preliminary Notes on the Silk Roads in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries", in Bemman, Jan and Schmauder, Michael (eds.). *Complexity of Interaction Along the Eurasian Steppe Zone in the First Millennium CE*. Bonn, 2015.

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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 10th-12th centuries?