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Mobility patterns along the Eastern Silk Roads (tenth to fourteenth centuries): a global-microhistorical perspective

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Abstract

This study investigates the importance of interregional mobility along the Eastern Silk Roads during the Mongol period, highlighting the interconnectedness of postal and pilgrim networks in eastern Central Asia, with a particular focus on mid-fourteenth-century changes in the multifaceted dynamics of overland mobility under Mongol rule. By referencing an extensive corpus of Old Uyghur and Middle Mongolian administrative texts, as well as pilgrim inscriptions, the research provides a nuanced understanding of the relationship between the Mongol administration and the postal system within it, and how they were connected with pilgrim activities. The article uncovers valuable insights into how mobility patterns changed over time. Furthermore, a comprehensive analysis of the geographical aspects of these networks reveals enduring links between the Eastern Tianshan Region and the Gansu Corridor, whilst also underlining the expansion of pilgrim networks during the Mongol period. The research also explores the societal implications of these mobility networks, highlighting the importance of religious affiliation and social status in overland mobility. This comprehensive analysis illuminates the Eastern Silk Roads and presents a unique perspective on the interplay of political, religious, and socio-economic factors that shaped the history of the region during Mongol rule.

Keywords: administration; Chaghadaid *ulus*; Dunhuang; Mongol empire; Uyghurs; overland mobility; pilgrim networks; postal system; Silk Roads; Turfan

Introduction

The Eastern Silk Roads have always been a key region of Central Eurasian mobility and, as the Mongols united most of the region under their rule in the thirteenth century, economic, diplomatic, and cultural connections between the different parts of the united empire (*Yeke Mongγol Ulus*) reached a level that was previously unseen in human history. This extended interconnectedness naturally influenced mobility patterns, too. For the first time, we have direct evidence that travellers from Europe reached the territories of Eastern Eurasia, and people from Asia visited Europe. Diplomatic interactions between the Mongol *uluses* on the one hand and between the Mongol Empire and its neighbours on the other, resulted in envoys' and ambassadors' regularly making interregional journeys, facilitated by the famous imperial postal relay system (Mong.: *jam* Turk.: *yam*). The Silk Roads experienced a final heyday, as gradual changes in the conditions of interregional mobility and trade made long-distance exchange lucrative.

Ironically, when compared with the other parts of the Mongol empire, our knowledge about the geographical centre of the united empire—the central stages of this unprecedented overland mobility—is rather limited. The Chaghadaid *ulus*—that is, the Central Asian part of the imperium—is traditionally the least-studied realm of the Mongol empire due to the relatively limited number of relevant sources and this situation is even more pronounced where the turbulent period of the mid-fourteenth century is concerned.¹ Due, however, to developments during the last few decades in the philological study of some local source groups—that is, the preserved Old Uyghur and Middle Mongol written artefacts—it is now possible to partially revise our understanding of interregional mobility around this broad area.

This study focuses on the Eastern Silk Roads—more precisely, the mobility between the Eastern Tianshan (天山) region and the Gansu (甘肅) or Hexi Corridor (河西走廊), which comprised a border zone between China proper and Central Asia, and, during the Mongol period, between the Yuan Dynasty (大元) and the Chaghadaid *ulus*.² Due to the limited quantity of local narrative sources concerning the history of this region during the Mongol period and in preceding centuries, standard modern histories of Central Asia and the Silk Roads are usually based on external literary sources. These include narrative texts that were either jotted down far away in the centres of neighbouring sedentary civilisations, mainly in China or the Islamicate world, or authored by foreign travellers who had only passed by there and thus had short temporary insights. This peculiarity of the historiography of this region is not surprising when one considers the nature of the rich multilingual internal source material, which was produced locally. These written artefacts are usually unique original sources, the majority of which are religious texts. Even those that have historical relevance are mostly documents that have no narrative nature. They are usually preserved only fragmentarily and without context. These peculiarities of the local source material make it challenging to construct a coherent historical narrative based on them. Nevertheless, the philological study of these documentary materials in recent decades has demonstrated their value as complementing, corroborating, or occasionally contradicting the narratives that are constructed on external literary texts. This article demonstrates that, in addition to being supplementary sources of information, coherent historical narratives can be constructed by using these locally produced documents. In doing so, the present article utilises the fruitful discussions, mainly among specialists of the early modern period, on how methodologies and approaches of the two influential historical traditions—global history and microhistory—could be combined in a meaningful way.³ This is evident in the selection of topics and sources, as well as in the methodologies employed. Mobility is a pivotal theme in global history. However, the majority of the following analysis focuses on two neighbouring regions of the Eastern Silk Roads: the Eastern Tianshan region and the Gansu Corridor. This geographical restriction is typical for microhistory. Nevertheless, the analysis and the resulting conclusions sometimes extend beyond the geographical boundaries described above,

¹ M. Biran, *Qaidu and the Rise of the Independent Mongol State in Central Asia* (Cornwall, 1997), pp. 3–6; M. Biran, 'Diplomacy and chancellery practices in the Chagataid khanate: some preliminary remarks', *Oriente Moderno, Nuova Serie* LXXXVIII (2008), pp. 369–393, especially pp. 369–373.

² In the present article, the Eastern Tianshan region refers to the broader territory that is populated by Uyghurs along the northern route of the Silk Roads, i.e. the independent state of the West Uyghurs (ninth to twelfth centuries) that later retained substantial autonomy under Khara Khitai (or Western Liao 西遼) and Mongol rule until the second half of the thirteenth century. The Turfan region refers to the central part of this territory, centred on the settlements of Turfan and Kočo (Chin. Gaochang 高昌).

³ See especially the contributions to the recent special issues that are dedicated to the global microhistory of the journals *Annales* (2018, No. 73/1), *Past and Present* (2019, Supplement 14), and the *Journal of Early Modern History* (2023, No. 27).

encompassing additional regions of Central and Eastern Asia. The period in question, spanning five centuries from the tenth to the fourteenth, can be described as *long durée*. It is, however, important to note that most of these sources refer to the Mongol period—specifically the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The majority of the two main source groups, namely the documents and pilgrim inscriptions in Old Uyghur and Middle Mongolian languages, were produced locally. The selection of these two source groups is significant, as their combined analysis provides insights into both officially or state-supported mobility patterns, namely postal networks, and more private mobility patterns of pilgrim networks. The methodology used to process the source material combines in-depth philological analysis of individual texts, familiar from microhistory, with a statistical approach that is typical of global history.

Historical background

After the collapse of their steppe empire (East Uyghur Khaganate 742–840 CE) in the Mongol steppe region, most of the Uyghurs migrated to the Gansu Corridor and to the Eastern Tianshan Region, where they established a new polity—so-called West Uyghur Kingdom (mid-ninth to twelfth centuries). Here, the Uyghurs gradually gave up their nomadic lifestyle and settled in the oasis cities of the region. They merged with the local Indo-Iranian (mostly Tocharian and Sogdian) and Chinese population, achieving a unique cultural development, and subsequently became protagonists in the cultural and economic exchanges along the Eastern Silk Roads. Besides their early and voluntary submission to Chinggis Khan in 1209, the Uyghurs were the first settled people with a high cultural and administrative level to become part of the Mongol empire, making them perfect agents for the transmission of knowledge about the governance of settled subjects that was crucial for the Mongols. Because of these circumstances, the Uyghurs enjoyed a highly privileged status among Mongol subjects. This situation changed with the intra-Mongol conflicts that began after the death of Möngke khan (1259). The Uyghur territories were involved in these conflicts and they gradually lost their autonomy through the second half of the thirteenth century, when their polity was integrated into the Chaghadaid *ulus*. Nevertheless, for shorter periods, the Yuan Dynasty was able to extend its authority over some of their territories.⁴

As a significant portion of the subsequent discourse will concern the consequences of the mid-fourteenth-century crisis, it seems prudent to provide a more comprehensive account of the events of this period. The effects of changing climate and pandemics on history may perhaps need less explanation than at any point during the last century since the spread of Spanish Influenza. Climate change and a series of plague epidemics were also two main environmental factors that shaped the history of Central Asia in the mid-fourteenth century.⁵ According to the traditional narrative, due to these trends, Central Asia has generally been viewed as a particularly unsettled and politically unstable region during this period. In the Chaghadaid khanate, after Kebek's rule (r. 1319/1320–1327), khans changed every few years and the division between the western and eastern parts of the realm became increasingly severe. In 1346, in the western half of

⁴ M. Biran, 'Mongol Central Asia: the Chaghadaids and the Ögögeids, 1260–1370', in *The Cambridge History of the Mongol Empire. Volume 1. History*, (eds.) M. Biran and H. Kim (Cambridge, 2023), pp. 319–358.

⁵ Recent years have produced an ever-growing literature on both topics. Some of the most valuable recent contributions are P. Slavin, 'Death by the lake: mortality crisis in early fourteenth-century Central Asia', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* L/1 (2019), pp. 59–90; M. H. Green, 'The four Black Deaths', *The American Historical Review* CXXV (2020), pp. 1601–1631; P. Slavin, 'From the Tian Shan to Crimea: dynamics of plague spread during the early stages of the Black Death, 1338–46', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* LXVI (2023), pp. 513–627; cf. also J. Preiser-Kapeller, *Der Lange Sommer und die Kleine Eiszeit* (Wien, 2021).

the state, Qazaghan (d. 1358), an emir of the Qara'unas, gained power, while, in the eastern parts, the emirs enthroned Tuyluq Temür (r. 1347–1363), who claimed to be the grandson of Du'a (r. 1282–1307). This political separation brought an end to the Chaghadaid khanate and saw the birth of the *Ulus Chaghadaid* in the western territories (i.e. Transoxiana) and Moghulistan (modern Kyrgyzstan, the southern part of Kazakhstan, and most of Xinjiang) in the eastern parts.⁶

In the above-mentioned eastern end of Chaghadaid khanate and the westernmost end of the Yuan empire, the neighbouring territories, namely the Eastern Tianshan region and the Gansu Corridor, had considerable Uyghur populations who were, in the Mongol period, mainly Buddhist with a Christian minority. These regions and their Buddhist Uyghur population had been closely connected for a long time, at least since the turn of the first millennium.⁷ Nonetheless, after the death of Möngke (1259), both territories were drawn into intra-Mongol wars, often on different sides. From the early 1280s, a split developed in the Chaghadaid lineage, too: the so-called 'Eastern Chaghadaids' resided in Gansu under Yuan patronage, while the Central Asian Chaghadaids established control over West and East Turkestan from the early fourteenth century until the disruption of their realm, as mentioned above. Although full-scale wars between the two sides were rare, this political opposition fostered further separation between the two regions.⁸

In both regions, these political events were paired with gradual changes in the religious life of the population. On the one hand, the spread of Islam from the western lands of Central Asia to the east was a major process in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The Chaghadaid khan Tarmaširin (r. 1331–1334) actively promoted Islam in Transoxiana, but full-scale Islamisation probably reached the Uyghur territories rather later. The Moghul ruler Tuyluq Temür converted to Islam in 1354, after the division of the Chaghadaid realm. His youngest son Xiḍr Kwhāja (r. 1389–1399) forcibly Islamised the people of Beš Balıq (Chin. Beiting 北庭) and Turfan.⁹ Interreligious

⁶ B. M. Biran, 'Mongols in Central Asia from Chinggis Khan's invasion to the rise of Temür: the Ögödeid and Chaghadaid realms', in *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia: The Chinggisid Age*, (eds.) N. Di Cosmo, A. J. Frank, and P. B. Golden (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 58–60; H. Kim, 'The early history of the Moghul nomads: the legacy of the Chaghatai khanate', in *The Mongol Empire and Its Legacy*, (eds.) R. Amitai-Preiss and D. O. Morgan (Leiden, 2000), pp. 290–318.

⁷ T. Moriyasu, 'The West-Uighur Kingdom and Tun-huang around the 10th–11th centuries', *Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Berichte und Abhandlungen* VIII (2000), p. 340; T. Moriyasu, 'The Sha-chou Uighurs and the West Uighur Kingdom', *Acta Asiatica* LXXVIII (2000), pp. 28–48; J. Wilkens, 'Buddhism in the West Uyghur Kingdom and beyond', in *Transfer of Buddhism Across Central Asian Networks (7th to 13th Centuries)*, (ed.) C. Meinert (Leiden and Boston, 2016), pp. 219–225.

⁸ K. Katō, 'Kebek and Yasawr: the establishment of the Chaghatai-khanate', *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* XLIX (1991), pp. 97–118; Y. Liu, 'War and peace between the Yuan Dynasty and the Chaghadaid khanate (1312–1323)', in *Mongols, Turks and Others. Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World*, (eds.) R. Amitai and M. Biran (Leiden and Boston, 2005), pp. 339–358; D. Matsui, 'A Mongolian decree from the Chaghataid khanate discovered at Dunhuang', in *Aspects of Research*, (ed.) Zieme, pp. 165–166; Wilkens, 'Buddhism', pp. 226–227.

⁹ On the spread of Islam in Eastern Turkestan, see A. Haneda, 'Introduction: the problems of Turkicization and Islamization of East Turkestan', *Acta Asiatica. Bulletin of the Institute of Eastern Culture* XXXIV (1978), pp. 1–21. According to Haneda, the 'total Islamization of East Turkestan, Uighuristan included ... took place from the early 14th century to the first half of the 16th century' (p. 21). Yet, according to the local Uyghur sources, Buddhism played a decisive role among the Uyghurs for most of the fourteenth century. See also H. Kim, 'The cult of saints in Eastern Turkestan: the case of Alp Ata in Turfan', in *Proceedings of the 35th Permanent International Altaistic Conference. September 12–17, 1992 Taipei, China*, (ed.) Ch. Ch'en (Taipei, 1993), pp. 199–226; H. Kim, 'Muslim saints in the 14th to the 16th centuries of Eastern Turkestan', *International Journal of Central Asian Studies* I (1996), pp. 285–322; cf. P. Zieme, 'Notes on the religions in the Mongol empire', in *Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Routes*, (eds.) A. Aksoy, Ch. Burnett, and R. Yoeli-Tlalim (Farnham, 2011), pp. 177–187, at pp. 183–184.

encounters are also attested in the Old Uyghur and Middle Mongolian written sources.¹⁰ In the religious life of these regions during the Mongol period, besides the spread of Islam, the ever-growing influence of Tibetan Tantric Buddhism played a decisive role, presumably due to the interest in Tantric practices that was shown by the Mongol ruling elite. Not only the Yuan rulers, but also some of the Chaghadaid khans, such as Eljigidei (r. 1327–1330) or Čangši (r. 1335–1338), were adherents of Tibetan Buddhism. According to some sources, even the above-mentioned Tuyluq Temür asked for Buddhist teachers from Tibet after his conversion. Both the Old Uyghur religious manuscripts and the epigraphic material from the Mongol period mirror this process and, as we will see later on in this article, the secular documents refer to this trend, too.¹¹

Under these circumstances, one would expect that, on the one hand, local administration in the Eastern Tianshan region and the Gansu Corridor would face serious difficulties in the mid-fourteenth century and, of course, that the mobility of the populace would have been very limited. On the other hand, it might be expected that the traditional religious contacts and networks might have weakened or even disintegrated. These trends should be especially visible in comparison with the period of the *Yeke Mongyol Ulus*, as the united Mongol empire had brought a florescence of overland connections between different regions of the Mongol empire in Central Asia. Gansu and East Turkestan—and the Turfan region in particular—played an outstanding role in these connections. Besides the highly important Silk Road routes, some of the main roads of the imperial Mongol postal system also led through this area.¹²

Description of the source material¹³

The Old Uyghurs developed a rich body of literature with various genres, although most of the extant works are religious texts that are translated from other

¹⁰ On the encounters between Muslims and Buddhists in Central Asia in general, see J. Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road* (Philadelphia and Oxford, 2010). For a brief summary of the various attitudes towards Islam as they are reflected in the Old Uyghur texts, see Zieme, 'Notes on the religions in the Mongol empire', pp. 180–184. A comprehensive study of the Old Uyghur data concerning the traces of Muslim people and communities in these texts is still missing.

¹¹ Matsui, 'Mongolian decree', pp. 167–171; Wilkens, 'Buddhism', pp. 227–230, 232–235; M. Biran, 'Culture and cross-cultural contacts in the Chaghadaid realm (1220–1370): some preliminary notes', *Chronica* VII–VIII (2007–2008), pp. 36–39.

¹² H. Shim, 'The postal roads of the Great Khans in Central Asia under the Mongol-Yuan empire', *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* XLIV (2014), pp. 405–469; H. Shim, 'The *jam* system: the Mongol institution for communication and transportation', in *The Mongol World*, (eds.) T. May and M. Hope (London and New York, 2022), pp. 382–393. Shim, however, had a much broader geographic focus, covering the whole of Central Asia, and based his research mainly on analysis of the various narrative sources rather than the local documents. Thus, his studies complement the discussion below very well.

¹³ For the transliteration and transcription of Uyghur texts, I follow K. Röhrborn, *Uigurisches Wörterbuch. Sprachmaterial der vorislamischen türkischen Texte aus Zentralasien. Neubearbeitung. I. Verben. Band 1: ab- - äzüglä-* (Stuttgart, 2010), pp. XXXI–XXXV. With regard to the Middle Mongolian texts, the system of transliteration and transcription follows that of D. Cerensodnom and M. Taube, *Die Mongolica der Berliner Turfansammlung* (Berlin, 1993), pp. 29–30. For those words that appear in both sets of source material, such as Kočo, I follow the transcription of the Uyghur texts. Manuscripts are cited according to their shelf-marks at the holding institutions. If necessary, their signatures in specific publications might be added, divided by a stroke from the shelf-mark. The Mongolian documents of the Berlin Collection are cited according to their numbers in *ibid*, pp. 168–183. The pilgrim inscriptions are cited according to their numbers in D. Matsui, 'Tonkō sekkutsu Uigurugo, Mongorugo daiki meibun shūsei' [Uyghur and Mongol inscriptions of the Dunhuang Caves], in *Tonkō sekkutsu tagengo shiryō shūsei* [Multilingual Source Materials of the Dunhuang Caves], (eds.) D. Matsui and Sh. Arakawa (Tokyo, 2017), pp. 1–161 (Nos. 1–283). Where necessary, their signatures are cited, too. These signatures are constituted of a reference to the cave in which the inscription was situated and its language, e.g. inscription

languages.¹⁴ It is regrettable that, despite the existence of a number of Old Uyghur works that could be considered historiographic in nature, only a small number of fragments survive. As a consequence, these texts cannot be used to inform our current discussion.¹⁵ Due to these circumstances, the history of the Uyghur territories in the Mongol period is usually written based on literary sources from the neighbouring cultures and Western sources, with local written sources usually used only as supplementary material. However, concerning the mid-fourteenth century, our narrative source base is also quite limited. Nevertheless, a scrutiny of the available Old Uyghur and Middle Mongolian sources can assist us to gain a better understanding of the region even in unsettled times such as the mid-fourteenth century. Moreover, these sources can give us insights into some otherwise unseen aspects of everyday life. The present article examines two kinds of textual sources: Old Uyghur and Middle Mongolian administrative texts and pilgrim inscriptions. Over recent decades, research has achieved immense progress in the study of both source groups and thus enabled the examination of new aspects of this material. These aspects include the temporal distribution and geographical dimension of the texts—factors with clear significance in the study of mobility in eastern Central Asia.

Old Uyghur and Middle Mongolian documents

The Old Uyghur orders and the Middle Mongolian decrees were issued by the state administration in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.¹⁶ They mirror the working of the state administration in various fields. Our material contains especially rich information concerning chancellery activities, taxation, and the postal system, underlining the importance of these institutions within the Mongol state(s).¹⁷ They are written on paper, typically with the cursive style of the Uyghur (or Uyghur–Mongol)

No. 8 has the signature M044 Uig 01, which means it was the first Old Uyghur inscription found in cave number 44 at Mogao.

¹⁴ On the distribution of the religious material, see S.-Ch. Raschmann, ‘What do we know about the use of manuscripts among the Old Uighurs in the Turfan region?’, *Eurasian Studies* XII (2014), pp. 523–525.

¹⁵ On the Old Uyghur historiographical fragments, see T. Moriyasu, ‘Uiguru kara mita Anshi no ran’ [The rebellion of An Lu-shan and Shi si-ming from the Uighurs’ viewpoint—with special reference to an Uighur Document Mainz 345], *Studies on the Inner Asian Languages* XVII (2002), pp. 117–170, esp. pp. 147–157; P. Zieme and Zh. Tieshan, ‘A memorandum about the king of the *On Uyghur* and his realm’, *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hung* LXIV (2011), pp. 129–159 (hereafter: *AOH*); P. Zieme and Zh. Tieshan, ‘A further fragment of Old Uigur annals’, *AOH* LXVI (2013), pp. 397–410.

¹⁶ Discussion of the material in the present article focuses only on those aspects of the sources that are essential for the purposes of the study. For a comprehensive discussion, see D. Matsui, *Old Uigur Administrative Orders from Turfan* (Turnhout, 2023). For the Middle Mongolian documents, see M. Weiers, ‘Mongolische Reisbegleitschreiben aus Čayatai’, *Zentralasiatische Studien* I (1967), pp. 12–15; Cerensodnom and Taube, *Mongolica*, pp. 178–182; Biran, ‘Diplomacy’, pp. 370, 386–389. For a detailed and comparative analysis of those parts of both materials that can be connected to the postal system, see M. Vér, *Old Uyghur Documents Concerning the Postal System of the Mongol Empire* (Brepols, 2019), pp. 22–44.

¹⁷ On chancellery practices in the Chaghadaid khanate, see Biran, ‘Diplomacy’, pp. 386–389; M. Vér, ‘Chancellery and diplomatic practices in Central Asia during the Mongol period as shown in Old Uyghur and Middle Mongolian documents’, *Eurasian Studies* XVII (2019), pp. 182–201. On taxation in the Uyghur territories under Mongol rule, see D. Matsui, ‘Taxation systems as seen in the Uigur and Mongol documents from Turfan: an overview’, *Transactions of the International Conference of Eastern Studies* L (2005), pp. 72–80. The postal system was one of the most important institutions of the empire. However, despite the importance of the *jam* system that was pointed out long ago, a comprehensive monographic elaboration of the entire postal system of the Mongol empire is still missing, but see A. J. Silverstein, *Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 141–164; T. T. Allsen, ‘Imperial posts, west, east and north: a review article’, *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* XVII (2010), pp. 237–276; M. Vér, ‘The origins of the postal system of the Mongol empire’, *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* XXII (2016), pp. 227–239; Shim, ‘*Jam* system’.

script.¹⁸ Apart from those documents that were produced for internal usage (e.g. official registers), they were sealed with one or more stamps.¹⁹ The preserved Old Uyghur official documents are far more numerous than those in Middle Mongolian.²⁰ Due to this, their formal peculiarities, and their contents, they can be connected to at least two different levels of the administration. Most of the Uyghur documents were issued at a local or regional administrative level and dealt with more ordinary issues in connection with the everyday functioning of the state and local communities. Meanwhile, the Mongolian documents were issued at the highest bureaucratic level and seemingly dealt with issues that were more important.²¹ A special subgroup of the Old Uyghur administrative documents is especially important for the purpose of this article—namely, that which includes texts that are connected to the imperial Mongol postal system. Besides the 45 recently edited Old Uyghur official documents, five Middle Mongolian

¹⁸ Takao Moriyasu has distinguished four types of Uyghur script: square or book script, semi-square, semi-cursive, and cursive. Moriyasu used this system to help in the relative dating of the Old Uyghur textual sources. From these different types of the script, the cursive style is the least decipherable and thus these documents are often hardly legible. T. Moriyasu, 'From silk, cotton and copper coin to silver. Transition of the currency used by the Uyghurs during the period from the 8th to the 14th centuries', in *Turfan Revisited: The First Century of Research into the Arts and Cultures of the Silk Road*, (eds.) D. Durkin-Meisterernst et al. (Berlin, 2004), pp. 228–229.

¹⁹ Such official registers and accounts can be identified, for example, in the material that concerns the postal system; Vér, *Old Uyghur Documents*, pp. 35–37, 145–154; M. Vér, 'Insights from the inside: an Old Uyghur register and the administration of the Mongol empire', in *Altaic and Chagatay Lectures: Studies in Honour of Éva Kincses-Nagy*, (ed.) I. Zimonyi (Szeged, 2021), pp. 435–448, especially pp. 444–446. On the stamping methods of the Uyghur documents, see D. Matsui, 'Dating of the Old Uigur administrative orders from Turfan', in *VIII. Milletlerarası Türkoloji Kongresi (30 Eylül-04 Ekim 2013—İstanbul) bildiri kitabı Vol. IV*, (eds.) M. Özkan and E. Doğan (İstanbul, 2014), pp. 614–616; Matsui, *Administrative Orders*, pp. 13–14; and, on formal aspects of and stamping methods in Middle Mongolian documents, see Biran, 'Diplomacy', pp. 386–389.

²⁰ Unfortunately, we lack any direct evidence that would help us to estimate exactly what percentage of the documents issued in the Chaghadaid khanate are preserved today. At any rate, the content of the known documents (which are mostly connected to everyday issues) suggests that only a small portion of the documents issued are extant. Since the material is preserved in various collections across the world and some of these collections are not yet fully catalogued and published, it is impossible to determine the exact numbers of these documents. However, an approximate amount can be assumed. The Turfan Collection in Berlin is one of the biggest collections of Old Uyghur texts worldwide. The two catalogues by S-Ch. Raschmann contain 101 fragments categorised as official documents. The catalogue of the so-called Arat Estate, containing photos of the fragments of the Berlin Turfan Collection that were destroyed or lost during the Second World War, describes another 55 official documents. The collection of Mongolian manuscripts in the Berlin State Library contains 18 Mongolian official documents altogether. According to the catalogue of the Old Uyghur manuscripts of the Serindia Collection from St. Petersburg, out of the 586 Old Uyghur texts published so far, 141 have been categorised as secular or civil documents. Of these, ten are official decrees and three are official letters. The difference between the numbers of preserved Uyghur and Mongolian texts suggests that significantly more official documents were originally issued in the Old Uyghur language. S-Ch. Raschmann (ed.), *Altürkische Handschriften. Teil 13: Dokumente Teil 1* (Stuttgart, 2007) (hereafter Raschmann, *Altürkische 13*); S-Ch. Raschmann (ed.), *Altürkische Handschriften. Teil 14: Dokumente Teil 2* (Stuttgart, 2009) (hereafter, Raschmann, *Altürkische 14*); S-Ch. Raschmann and O. F. Sertkaya (eds.), *Altürkische Handschriften. Teil 20. Altürkische Texte aus der Berliner Turfansammlung im Nachlass Reşid Rahmeti Arat* (Stuttgart, 2016) (hereafter, Raschmann, *Altürkische 20*); P. Zieme et al. (eds.), *Catalogue of the Old Uyghur Manuscripts and Blockprints in the Serindia Collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, RAS* (Tokyo, 2021), vol. I.

²¹ Vér, *Old Uyghur Documents*, pp. 43–44; Vér, 'Insights from the inside', pp. 444–446. Moreover, in the case of the documents concerning the postal system, three different levels of administration are observable. The local administrative activities of single postal stations (official accounts and registers) constituted one stratum, above that was a local or regional level (from which come most of the Uyghur administrative orders), and above these is a highest interregional level (that of the Mongolian decrees). It is worth mentioning that the formation of this three-level administration overlapped with the Chaghadaid takeover in Central Asia in the early fourteenth century.

decrees (MongHT72–75, B163:42) are also related to the postal system.²² These various documents (orders, decrees, accounts, lists, etc.) reflect the operation of this enormous system of communication and transportation in the region, often containing information about travellers, their duties, places of departure, and destinations.²³

Pilgrim inscriptions

The other type of textual sources for the present article are the Old Uyghur pilgrim inscriptions. After their movement to the Eastern Tianshan region in the mid-ninth century, most of the Uyghurs—including their ruling elite—left Manichaeism and their traditional beliefs, and adopted Buddhism, by the beginning of the eleventh century at the latest.²⁴ The Uyghurs of the Gansu Corridor, called also Shazhou (沙州) Uyghurs, had close connections with the West Uyghur Kingdom (i.e. the Uyghurs of the Eastern Tianshan region) from the turn of the first millennium at the latest.²⁵ From the earliest times, various linguistic and cultural influences (Tocharian, Sogdian, etc.) affected the Turfan Uyghurs' Buddhist culture, among which the Chinese and especially the Buddhist culture of Dunhuang were considerable.²⁶

Despite the fact that some of the Old Uyghur pilgrim inscriptions that were found by the first expeditions to East Turkestan had been edited and published, they first received substantial scholarly attention in the 1990s, and their study only began to flourish in recent years.²⁷ There are multiple reasons for this lasting ignorance. First, these texts are usually preserved without context, so these records, often short, are hard to interpret on their own.²⁸ Second, they are written in the barely readable cursive style of the Uyghur

²² For an edition of the Old Uyghur official documents, see Vér, *Old Uyghur Documents*, pp. 59–155.

²³ For a research history of the philological and historical study of the administrative texts, see Matsui, 'Old Uigur administrative orders', pp. 6–8; for an overview with a special focus on the documents concerning the postal system, see Vér, *Old Uyghur Documents*, pp. 15–22; see also T. Moriyasu, *Corpus of the Old Uighur Letters from the Eastern Silk Road* (Turnhout, 2019).

²⁴ T. Moriyasu, 'Chronology of West Uighur Buddhism: re-examination of the dating of the wall paintings in Grünwedel's Cave No. 8 (new: No. 18)', in *Aspects of Research into Central Asian Buddhism: In Memoriam Kōgi Kudara*, (ed.) P. Zieme (Turnhout, 2008), pp. 191–193; Wilkens, 'Buddhism', pp. 204–205.

²⁵ Besides the above-mentioned works by Moriyasu, a brief but thorough summary of the history of the Uyghurs in this period with further literature appears in Wilkens, 'Buddhism', pp. 219–220.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 204–225; S.-Ch. Raschmann, 'Pilgrims in Old Uyghur inscriptions: a glimpse behind their records', in *Buddhism in Central Asia I. Patronage, Legitimation, Sacred Space, and Pilgrimage*, (eds.) C. Meinert and H. H. Sørensen (Leiden and Boston, 2020), p. 205.

²⁷ Porció published the first in-depth study, which contained an overview of the research history up to 2014: T. Porció, 'Some peculiarities of the Uyghur Buddhist pilgrim inscriptions', in *Searching for the Dharma, Finding Salvation—Buddhist Pilgrimage in Time and Space. Proceedings of the Workshop 'Buddhist Pilgrimage in History and Present Times' at the Lumbini International Research Institute (LIRI), Lumbini 11–13 January 2010*, (eds.) C. Cueppers and M. Deeg (Lumbini, 2014), pp. 157–178. The most recent summary with an overview of the research history is D. Matsui, 'Old Uyghur graffiti inscriptions from Central Asia', in *Graffiti Scratched, Scrawled, Sprayed: Towards a Cross-Cultural Understanding*, (eds.) O. Škrabal et al. (Berlin, 2023), pp. 173–214, esp. pp. 175–182.

²⁸ Sometimes, the inscriptions contain only a few words or a name, such as No. 264: *mān śakyapal* 'I Śakyapal' (Matsui, 'Tonkō sekkutsu Uigurugo', p. 130). Most of the inscriptions contain a few lines, but longer texts are rare. The longest pilgrim inscription is a verse from the Yulin Caves (No. 249, Y34 Uig 01). This poem contains 15 stanzas, each with four lines (Matsui, 'Tonkō sekkutsu Uigurugo', pp. 122–125). A complete inscription, which are quite rare, would contain the following elements: 1) dating, 2) names (and titles) of the pilgrims, 3) motivation, 4) transferring merits, 5) wishes and aims, 6) closing formulae. Porció cited the inscription No. 219 (Y25 Uig 12) as an excellent example. Here, I revised the reading of certain words according to Matsui (2017), who could check the text in situ: '1–2 On the 28th day of the 4th month of the fortunate Horse Year, 2–3 We Ōlčay Tömär [Tämür] and Drm-a Širi came from Shazhou to this sacred mountain temple in order to worship. 4–5 After having worshipped, [in the moment of] returning [I,] have humbly wrote some lines. May it be a memory to be seen in future! 6 As the fruit of our merits [gained by] this worship 7 may our bad karma of the visible [i.e.

script.²⁹ Third, they contain, at first sight, much less information than other types of Old Uyghur sources.

Despite these peculiarities, research over recent decades has shown that they are precious sources, containing rich information on many otherwise hidden aspects of the history of the region. The 2017 publication of the most comprehensive edition of pilgrim inscriptions from the Dunhuang Caves so far brought a fundamental change in this field of research.³⁰ This volume offers the results of fieldwork that was carried out between 2010 and 2017. This book contains pilgrim inscriptions from six different cave complexes in the vicinity of Dunhuang, written in all of the languages that were in use among the Buddhists of the surrounding regions from the Xi Xia (西夏) and Mongol periods (*circa* eleventh to fourteenth centuries), namely Chinese, Tibetan, Tangut, Mongolian, and Uyghur. Besides these, the edition also contains inscriptions in Brāhmī script and a study of donor portraits. The first chapter of this book presents editions of 283 Uyghur and Mongolian inscriptions. Most of these texts are Uyghur inscriptions and only 19 graffiti contain Mongolian text.³¹ If we compare this number to the 33 inscriptions that were available to Porció in 2014, the importance of this work is obvious. However, 283 inscriptions are from *circa* 150 caves, but there are about 800 caves altogether in the vicinity of Dunhuang.³² Most recently, study of the Old Uyghur inscriptions from the Toyok Caves in the Turfan region has witnessed an unprecedented development. Thanks to the publication of several sources and case studies, dozens of further inscriptions are now available to researchers. Moreover, in some cases, the content of these inscriptions could be connected to those of the Old Uyghur documents.³³ To sum up, it can be concluded that the

the present] as well as of the invisible [i.e. past and future] existences, *g*–*9* be cleaned, and, together with all sentient beings, may us attain the Buddhahood quickly! *Sādhu, sādhu* may it be!', Proció, 'Some peculiarities', pp. 171–172; cf. also: Matsui, 'Tonkō sekkutsu Uigurugo', pp. 110–111.

²⁹ The following citation illustrates the difficulty in working with these sources and the importance of these efforts: 'Deciphering the Uigur and Mongolian wall inscriptions written by a rapid cursive hand with so light ink is much more difficult than deciphering them on paper... What is anxious is that the wall inscription in the Yulin and Mogao Caves are fading into fainter and, consequently the deciphering of them is getting more difficult day by day'; D. Matsui, 'Revising the Uigur inscriptions of the Yulin Caves', *Studies on the Inner Asian Languages XXIII* (2008), p. 29.

³⁰ Matsui and Arakawa (eds.), *Tonkō sekkutsu tagengo shiryō shūsei*.

³¹ In the introduction, 18 inscriptions are marked as Mongolian (Matsui, 'Tonkō sekkutsu Uigurugo', p. 3). From these, 11 had already been published (Nos. 12, 15, 32, 33, 56, 60, 62, 169, 174, 228, 230) but the other seven are first publications (Nos. 83, 112, 128, 177, 243, 255, 282). In the book, a further inscription is described as Mongolian. Inscription No. 104 is written with 'Phags-pa characters and contains only the dating, i.e. *ji č'ij*, the Mongolian transcription of the *Zhizheng* 至正 regnal era (1341–1370). It is also worth mentioning that some of the inscriptions are bilingual, such as No. 128: [Uyg.] *män šakypal uday-ka barur-ta kenki-lär-kä ödig kaldum* | [Mong.] *qutuy-tu boltuyai keme* 'I šakypal, as I was going to Mt. Wutai (Uyg. *uday*), I made a memory to the posteriors. | Let there be happiness! Saying' The editor interprets an inscription (No. 269, Y39 Uig 05) from the Yulin Caves written in Chinese and reading 大慈奴 as a transcription of the Uyghur personal name Taysidu. Moreover, as the Chinese writing is described as a bit immature, it is surmised that it was written by a Uyghur (*ibid*, p. 132). In the first line of another inscription (No. 275, Y41 Uig 06), the first words are Sanskrit but in Uyghur script: *om vasdi sidam* (*ibid*, p. 134).

³² *Ibid*, p. 8.

³³ A. Yakup and L. Xiao, 'A philological investigation of the Old Uyghur pilgrim inscriptions recently discovered in the cave NK 10 in the Tuyuq Grottoes of Turfan', *AOH LXXII* (2019), pp. 399–417; P. Zieme, 'Notes on the interpretation of the Toyok Inscription of the West Uyghur Kingdom', *Studies on the Inner Asian Languages XXXV* (2020), pp. 1–24; T. Imin, '吐峪溝石窟佛教遺址新發現回鶻文題記釋讀' [A reading of newly discovered wall inscription in Uighur from the Buddhist site at the Tuyuq Grottoes], *敦煌研究 Dunhuang yanjiu* (2020/5), pp. 115–127; M. Fu and L. Xia, 'Comprehensive study on Old Uighur and Chinese wall inscriptions in room B of newly excavated cave 26 in Tuyuq Grottoes, Turfan', *AOH LXXIV* (2021), pp. 181–206; G. Li and H. Zhang, 'Uyghur wall inscriptions newly discovered in the cave 26 of the Tuyuq Grottoes of Turfan (II)', *Studies on the Inner Asian Languages XXXVI* (2021), pp. 23–59; D. Matsui, 'Two remarks on the Toyok caves and *abita qur*

publication of Old Uyghur inscriptions is far from complete, but the present state of research on this source material enables us to study various aspects of mobility in eastern Central Asia in the pre-Mongol and Mongol periods.

Dating of the sources

To be able to follow up on the changes that have occurred in overland mobility through time, we have to take into account the dating of our source material. The Old Uyghur material covers the period between the tenth and the late fourteenth centuries, while the Middle Mongolian texts originate from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries—that is, the Mongol period. However, more precise dating is required for a historical analysis, as dates are often missing from both source types (documents and pilgrim inscriptions), so the periodisation of these texts is far from self-evident. Moreover, the most widespread chronological systems of the Uyghur (and Mongol) literary tradition are not sufficient to provide an absolute age determination.³⁴ This means that, even when a date is presented, in most cases, it is expressed according to the twelve-year animal-cycle calendar and an absolute dating of the documents is impossible on this basis.³⁵

Dating of the Old Uyghur and Middle Mongolian documents

Previously, more or less accurate dating was only possible if a personal name known otherwise (e.g. the name of a ruler or the like) was attested in the text. Most of the Mongolian royal decrees (Mong.: *jarliγ*) fall into this group, as their first element is the authorisation—that is, the attestation of the ruler in whose name the document was issued (e.g. $_{15}$ *yisüntemür-ün j(a)rliγ-iyar* ‘By the order of Yisün Temür’ [MongHT74]). From the rulers’ time of reign and the dating according to the 12-year animal circle (e.g. $_{10}$ *moyai j[i]l* $_{11}$ *qaburun ačūs sar-a-in arban sin-e- $_{12}$ te* ‘in the Snake year, on the tenth new day of the last month of spring’ [MongHT72]), which is the last part of the Mongolian decrees, scholars could in many cases calculate the more or less accurate dating for a certain document.³⁶

Dating of the Uyghur texts is more complicated. Based on their formal and content analysis, the vast majority were issued at the lower and middle administrative levels.³⁷ They contain usually no authorisation—that is, the name of the ruler in whose name the decree was issued or the name of the issuer is missing.³⁸ Consequently, relative

“Abita Cave”, *Письменные памятники Востока XVIII/3* (2021), pp. 37–50; D. Matsui, ‘Bir Eski Uygur duvar metnine gire Koço Uygur Krallığında Budist manastırların Himayesi’, in *Prof. Dr. Ceval Kaya Armağanı*, (eds.) O. F. Sertkaya et al. (Ankara, 2022), pp. 335–345; P. Zieme, ‘Avalokiteśvara mit altuigurischen Inschriften aus der Bāzāklık-Grotte 46’, in *Connecting the Art, Literature, and Religion of South and Central Asia: Studies in Honour of Monika Zin*, (eds.) I. Konczak-Nagel, S. Hiyama, and A. Klein (New Delhi, 2022), pp. 431–436.

³⁴ On the various chronological systems applied by the Turkic people, see L. Bazin, *Les systèmes chronologiques dans le monde turc ancien* (Budapest and Paris, 1991).

³⁵ For example, the dating in the first line of the provision order U 5315 (PO07) reads as follows: *küskü yıl bešinč ay üč yajıka* ‘Rat year, fifth month, on the third new day’ (Vér, *Old Uyghur Documents*, p. 73). The same dating format is also the most-often attested in the pilgrim inscriptions, such as in No. 61: *ıbars yıl aram ay yajıka...* ‘Tiger year, first month, on the tenth new day’ (Matsui, ‘Tonkō sekkutsu Uigurugo’, pp. 44–45).

³⁶ On the dating of Mongolian decrees, see H. Franke, ‘Zur Datierung der mongolischen Schreiben aus Turfan’, *Oriens XV* (1962), pp. 399–410; V. Rybatzki, ‘Einige Hilfsmittel zur Identifikation und Datierung mittelmongolischer ziviler Dokumente’, in *Historical and Linguistic Interaction between Inner-Asia and Europe*, (ed.) Á. Berta (Szeged, 1997), pp. 269–293.

³⁷ Vér, *Old Uyghur Documents*, pp. 43–44.

³⁸ There are some exceptions. From the documents concerning the postal system, a provision order (U 5790 + *U 9261) starts as: *melik tämür ogul-nurj* ‘(By the order) of Prince Melik Tämür’. He has been identified with a

dating—a rough determination of age according to the texts' formal and content-related peculiarities—is crucial for the study of this material. Four kinds of criteria have been distinguished to establish such relative dating, namely grammatical markers, script, terminology, and personal names.³⁹ By using these criteria, the material can be divided into two parts: an earlier layer, dating to the West Uyghur period (tenth to twelfth centuries); and a later layer, dating to the Mongol period (thirteenth to fourteenth centuries).⁴⁰ Four kinds of scripts are distinguishable: square, semi-square, semi-cursive, and cursive styles. According to the relative dating, all documents in cursive script can be dated to the Mongol period, while the texts with semi-square writing are from the West Uyghur period.⁴¹ The dating of a special subgroup of the Old Uyghur documents, namely the administrative orders, has recently undergone substantial development.⁴² Analysis of the various stamping methods that were applied to the official documents led to the establishment of a more accurate, and even in some cases absolute, dating technique. Based on this, seven different groups are distinguishable: (A) the West Uyghur period, (B) the Early Mongol (Pre-Yuan) period (i.e. before 1279), (C) the Early Mongol–Yuan period (from the first decades of the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368)), (D) the Yuan period (until the late 1320s CE), (E) the Kārsin–Yalın texts (early fourteenth century), (F) the Chaghadai khanate period (after the late 1320s), (G) the 'Kutlug-seals' orders (mid-fourteenth century), and (H and Misc) undated fragments.⁴³ Thanks to these recent achievements in the study of the Old Uyghur documents, we are now able to grasp the temporal dimensions of this source material, too.

Mongol prince, the youngest son of Ariq Böke, who was the younger brother of the fourth emperor Möngke (r. 1251–1259) and the fifth emperor Qubilai (1260–1294), with whom he engaged in civil war for the throne between 1260 and 1264. With the identification of the prince, the dating of the document (*it yil onunç ay altı yajıka*, i.e. 'Dog year, tenth month, on the sixth new day') could be narrowed down to two possibilities: 1286 or 1298. Four documents of the St. Petersburg collection (SI 6544/a–d) were similarly dated. The third document (6544/c) contains the name of Ariq Böke and all the four documents were issued in the Sheep year (*koyın yıl*). The year during which Ariq Böke could have issued such a document in the Turfan region was 1259. A further document (U 5331/a) concerning the postal system contains the name of its issuer (*taçudın sözüüm* 'This is my, Taçudın's word [i.e. order]'), but he has not yet been identified. For the dating of the former documents, see Matsui, 'Dating', pp. 617–618, 620–621; Matsui, *Administrative Orders*, pp. 15–16. A decree of tax exemption was issued in the name of Duwa (r. 1282–1307; *tuw-a yarlık-ın-tın*) in the Tiger year (*bars yıl*) and thus can be dated to either 1292 or 1302. This document is also special because it is the first decree from the Turfan region that bears almost every formal peculiarity of the later Mongolian decrees, while being written in the Uyghur language; D. Matsui, 'An Uigur decree of tax exemption in the name of Duwa-Khan', *Şinşlex Uxaanii Akademiin Medee IV* (2007), pp. 60–68; see also Vér, *Old Uyghur Documents*, pp. 43–44; Vér, 'Chancellery and diplomatic', pp. 186–189.

³⁹ The most recent summary about the dating of Old Uyghur documents is Matsui, *Administrative Orders*, pp. 13–22.

⁴⁰ While the West Uyghur period is dated to between the mid-ninth and twelfth centuries, the earliest Old Uyghur texts in Uyghur script were probably written in around the tenth century, hence the dating of tenth to twelfth centuries: Moriyasu, 'From silk', p. 228.

⁴¹ Most of the terms that can be markers of a later date are Mongolian and Chinese loanwords and personal names; T. Moriyasu, 'Notes on Uighur documents', *Memoirs of the Research Department of Toyo Bunko* LIII (1996), pp. 79–81, 91–92; Moriyasu, 'From silk', pp. 228–229, 235, fn. 12.

⁴² On the classification of Old Uyghur documents, see Vér, *Old Uyghur Documents*, pp. 47–53; Matsui, *Administrative Orders*, pp. 4–6.

⁴³ The 15 documents belonging to the last group (H) are written in cursive script and can thus be dated to the Mongol period, but more accurate dating—usually due to their very fragmentary state of preservation—is impossible; Matsui, 'Dating', pp. 615–620, 623; Matsui, *Administrative Orders*, p. 22. Additionally, Matsui, in his recent monograph, has edited six short requisition orders that can also be dated to the Mongol period (Misc1–6, pp. 189–196 and fn. 157).

Dating of the pilgrim inscriptions

In the case of the pilgrim inscriptions, we can establish an approximate dating of the texts by means of the various scripts that were employed in the texts and the differing styles of the Uyghur script, but the contents also sometimes allow even more accurate dating. Until recent times, researchers could not prove that Old Uyghur pilgrim inscriptions could be dated to earlier than the Mongol period.⁴⁴ However, a considerable number of inscriptions have been recently dated to the West Uyghur period, namely between the tenth and twelfth centuries. If an inscription is written in or features 'Phags-pa script, it indicates dating to between the late thirteenth and mid-fourteenth centuries.⁴⁵ In most cases, more precise dating is impossible, as the inscriptions usually also employ only the 12-year animal-cycle dating. Fortunately, in some cases, other chronological systems are also used. The Uyghurs borrowed the so-called 'Second System'—a sexagenary cycle from China, which is a combination of the 12-year animal cycle and the five elements, resulting in a 60-year cycle and providing opportunities for more precise dating.⁴⁶ Alongside this dating form, the Uyghurs and Mongols borrowed another form of dating from China: some transcriptions of Yuan era names are attested, such as *Zhizheng* 至正 (1341–1370), occurring as *či čij* on the Old Uyghur and *ji jij* on the Mongolian inscriptions. When this system is used alongside the 12-year animal cycle, the exact year can be defined. Furthermore, there are some inscriptions that could not be dated according to their content or format but, due to their connection to other dated inscriptions, they also can be dated with varying degrees of precision.⁴⁷ After the above survey of the available source material, we now turn our attention to the analysis of the temporal distribution of the sources, as well as the geographic and social aspects of mobility.

Temporal distribution of the sources

In the study of the temporal distribution of Old Uyghur and Middle Mongolian documents, our interest is concentrated on two related questions: first, the general operation of administration in the eastern part of the Chaghadaid *ulus* in the mid-fourteenth century compared with earlier periods of Mongol rule; and second, specific changes in the operation of that subsystem of the administration that was responsible for the support of overland communication and mobility, namely the postal system. Meanwhile, the study of the temporal distribution of the inscriptions from the Gansu Corridor will contribute to our knowledge of changes in pilgrim activity.

Temporal distribution of the Old Uyghur and Middle Mongolian documents

In order to fulfil our aims, in the case of the Old Uyghur and Middle Mongolian material, we will study the temporal distribution of a broader selection of texts (i.e. the

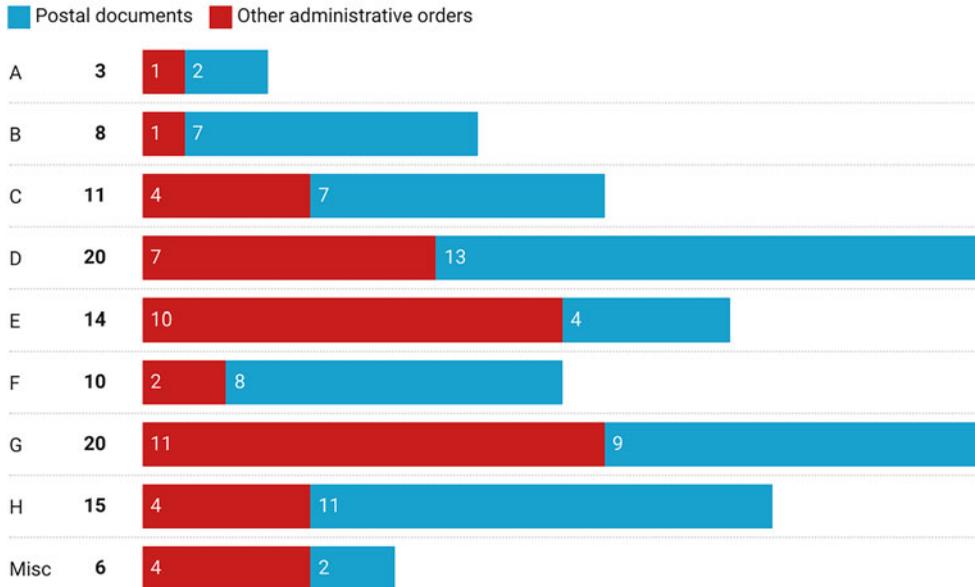
⁴⁴ Porció, 'Some peculiarities', pp. 174–175.

⁴⁵ 'Phags-pa script was developed by Drogön Chögyal Phagpa lama (1235–1280) during the 1260s at the behest of Qubilai khan. Phagpa lama submitted the script to the throne in 1269 and it was in usage until the 1360s.

⁴⁶ Bazin, *Les systèmes chronologiques*, pp. 239–240. For example, the fragmentary date of inscription No. 167 (Y12 Uig 10): ; *ki šipkan-lıq oot kut[lug ';* '(The year) with the Stem *ji* and the blessed (element) of Fire' could be narrowed down to three possible dates: 1289, 1319, or 1349, depending which Chinese character is transcribed with the word *ki* in the beginning of the line; cf. Matsui, 'Tonkō sekkutsu Uigurugo', pp. 88–89.

⁴⁷ A good example is the text No. 23 (*M100 Uig 01). This inscription was written by a certain Ayıš Kaya, such as Nos. 97 (Y02 Uig 08) and 111 (Y03 Uig 13), and the latter two were dated to the 'sheep year' (*koyñ yıl*). All of them could be dated to 1331. Two further inscriptions from Yulin cave 13 (Nos. 179 and 182) were written by Ayıš Kaya, but the former bears no date and the latter is dated to the 'mouse year' (*küskü yıl*). If the author of the former three and the latter two inscriptions is the same, then the closest mouse year and thus the most plausible dating of the latter two texts would be 1336; Matsui, 'Tonkō sekkutsu Uigurugo', pp. 26–27.

Temporal proportion of Old Uyghur administrative and postal documents



A) the West Uyghur period (10th-12th cc.), (B) the Early Mongol (Pre-Yuan) period, (C) the Early Mongol – Yuan period, (D) the Yuan period, (E) the Kārsin-Yalın-texts (early 14th century), (F) the Chaghadaï Khanate period (after the late 1320s) and (G) the “Kutlug-seals” (mid-14th century)

Figure 1. Temporal proportion of dated Old Uyghur administrative and postal documents.

administrative or official documents in general) and, within it, a narrower group of sources (i.e. those administrative documents that are connected to the postal system, hereafter ‘postal documents’) (Figure 1). So far, more or less accurate dating has been provided for 107 administrative documents, which constitute our broader pool.⁴⁸

When we look at the list of these dated manuscripts, the first and probably most outstanding fact is that only three documents can be dated to the pre-Mongol era—that is, the West Uyghur period, which is slightly less than 3 per cent. It means that more than 97 per cent of all datable Old Uyghur administrative documents date back to the Mongol period—that is, to the last two centuries of the six-century-long Old Uyghur strata. Out of these 104 documents from the Mongol period, 21 could not be dated more accurately (groups H and Misc). For a further distribution of the remaining 83 documents, an obvious choice would be a comparison between the united empire era (until 1259) and the later periods. Unfortunately, the division of the source material is not that obvious because it is possible that the formal differences between groups B (early Mongol and pre-Yuan) and C (early Mongol, Yuan) arise from the different levels of their issue and not the temporal gap between them.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, altogether, the two groups contain 19 documents (eight plus 11), while the later four groups up to the mid-fourteenth century (groups D to G) contain 64. This is a significant difference that contradicts the distribution that one would expect in view of the historical background of the region.

⁴⁸ Matsui, *Administrative Orders*, pp. 13–22, 57.

⁴⁹ Matsui, ‘Dating’, p. 620.

Moreover, of the 83 Old Uyghur administrative documents that have been dated more accurately, so far, ten can be linked to the Chaghadaid khanate period (i.e. after the late 1320s, group F) and 20 belong to the so-called ‘Kutlug-seals’ orders (group G), namely the mid-fourteenth century.⁵⁰ Consequently, more than one-third of the administrative documents dated so far belong to these later periods or, in other words, to the broader mid-fourteenth century. Unfortunately, more accurate dating of the group F documents has not yet been possible, but the case of the ‘Kutlug-seals’ orders is more promising. These documents were dated at between 1350 and 1362. More precisely, 11 of these 20 documents were dated at between 1355 and 1362, and a further 3 to 1350 with quite high certainty.⁵¹ These data suggest that local and regional administrations were fairly active in the Eastern Tianshan region until the early 1360s. However, as Matsui has recently argued, many of the Old Uyghur administrative requisition orders may have been tax-conversion certificates—that is, compulsory requisitions, which (in an ideal case) were offset against any ordinary taxes.⁵² How to interpret this phenomenon is a difficult question. On the one hand, it shows the flexibility of the administrative system but, on the other, it seems that this flexibility was necessary due to the constantly changing circumstances.

In order to gain a better understanding of how the administration could support physical mobility, we have to look at the postal documents, first at the local and regional levels—that is, the Old Uyghur documents. As mentioned above, most of these documents constitute a subgroup within the administrative documents. The overlap of the two groups is significant: of the 45 official texts that were edited in my recent volume on Old Uyghur documents related to the imperial postal system, there are only three official documents that are not included within the administrative documents category.⁵³ Moreover, the recently released edition of the Old Uyghur administrative orders contains 21 additional documents that could be related to the postal system.⁵⁴ This means that 63

⁵⁰ The name of this latter group comes from a seal that is common on these manuscripts, bearing the inscription *kutlug bolşun* ‘May it be fortunate’; Matsui, *Administrative Orders*, p. 20.

⁵¹ It was possible to provide an accurate date for document U 5300, which has the dating $_{1t}(a)kagu\ yil\ žün\ tok(u)zunc\ [ay]...$ ‘₁The Fowl year, the leap ninth [month]’. As Bazin pointed out, the Uyghur calendar faithfully followed the official Chinese calendars from the Song Dynasty (960–1127), through the Southern Song (1127–1279), Yuan (1280–1368) dynasties, and finally after 1368 the Ming (1368–1644), too (‘Les systèmes chronologiques’, p. 246). The only Fowl year that had a leap ninth month in the mid-fourteenth century was 1357; thus, this must have been the year in which U 5300 was issued. Another nine documents of this group could be dated on this basis, but of course with lower certainty. Based on this, a further 11 documents could be dated, although their dating could be 12 years earlier or later: 1355–1356 (*U 9260); 1357 (K 7719); 1357–1358 (U 5325); 1358 (U 5288, U5309, U 5291, Ot Ry 8127); 1358–1359 (I.Ü. Küt. Damirbaş 535); 1360–1361 (U 5303); 1361 (U 5316); 1362 (U 5967). D. Matsui, ‘Uigurubun Kutoruguin monjo’ [Uigur administrative orders bearing ‘Qutluy-seals’], *Nairiku Ajia gengo no kenkyū* [Studies on the Inner Asian Languages] XIII (1998), pp. 1–62, especially pp. 7–11; Matsui, *Administrative Orders*, pp. 21–22. Three further documents (U 5284, U 5285, and U 5292) were dated to 1350 by using a similar method based on the dating of U 5285: $_{1ud\ y[i]l\ [ž]ün\ čahš(a)put\ ay...}$ ‘₁Ox year, [] leap 12th month’; *ibid.*; D. Matsui, ‘Mongoru jidai Uigurisutan no zeiki seido to chōzei shisutemu’ [Taxation and tax-collecting systems in Uiguristan under Mongol rule], in *Hikokutōshiryō no sōgōteikibunseki ni yoru Mongoruteikoku, Genchō no seiji, keizai shisutemu no kisotekikenkyū* [Research on Political and Economic Systems under Mongol Rule], (ed.) K. Matsuda (Osaka, 2002), pp. 107–108.

⁵² Matsui, *Administrative Orders*, pp. 25–30.

⁵³ Vér, *Old Uyghur Documents*, pp. 59–155; Matsui, *Administrative Orders*, pp. 9–11. Yet, all of these documents are special cases. Two of them belong to the official miscellanea, i.e. documents that have to be considered as official documents due to their format (stamping, imperative form in the last line, etc.) or content but do not belong to any other subgroups of official documents. The documents belong to this subgroup: U 5331/a (OMis01), U 5947 recto (OMis02). The third is an official or semi-official register (OReg01) preserved on two manuscripts (Ch/U 8175 verso + Ch/U 6512 verso) and housed today in the Turfan Collection in Berlin. On this official register, see Vér, ‘Insights from the inside’.

⁵⁴ These documents are as follows (in brackets, their signature in Matsui, *Administrative Orders*, are given): *U 9252 II (B5), SI 4239 (D7), MIK III 6238 (D14), Ch/U 7213v + *Ch/U 9003v (E3), *U 9240 (F1), *U 9238 (F3), *U 9247

out of the 107 (58.87 per cent) administrative documents are somehow connected to the postal system—a fact that shows the importance of the *jam* system in the region.⁵⁵

Of the three administrative documents that date back to the West Uyghur period, two are provision orders for the postal system, making up around 66 per cent. In group B, out of the eight administrative orders, about 87.5 per cent, or seven of them, can be traced back to the postal system. Group C contains seven postal documents and four others, amounting to approximately 63 per cent. As for the Yuan period, the number of documents witnessed a significant increase, yielding a total of 20, among which 13, or roughly 65 per cent, are postal documents. In the early fourteenth-century group E, only four documents out of 14 (approximately 28.5 per cent) were postal in nature. However, in group F, during the Chaghadaid khanate period, eight out of ten documents (80 per cent) are related to the postal system. Group G, which dates back to the mid-fourteenth century, is much richer in terms of the number of documents (20), which is similar to group D, but with a higher proportion of postal documents at 45 per cent, or nine out of 20. Over 36 per cent (30 out of 83) of all datable administrative documents from the Mongol period originate from the period between the late 1320s and the early 1360s. Among these 30 documents, approximately 56 per cent (17) are related to the postal system. If we consider groups B to G, the proportion of postal documents increases to almost 58 per cent (48 out of 83). If we include the 15 documents from group H and the six brief requisition orders (Misc) originating from the Mongol period but with no precise dating, the proportion of postal documents rises to over 58 per cent (61 out of 104).

The Middle Mongolian documents from Turfan and its adjacent regions concerning the postal system are less numerous, but they were issued at the highest administrative level (Figure 2). All the Mongol decrees from the region that are datable and published so far stem from the fourteenth century.

Of nine such documents, four have certain connections to the postal system and a further two might also be connected.⁵⁶ The earliest accurately dated Mongolian document

(F4), SI 5360 (F8), SI 5308 (F9), U 5967 (G12), U 5514 + *U 9246 (G17), U 5292 (G20), *U 9254 I (H2), *U 9254 II (H3), Ch/U 7300v (H4), *U 9239 (H5), U 5691 (H7), U 5913 (H9), Ot Ry 1111 (H10), SI 4237 (H14), U 5861 (Misc5).

⁵⁵ For an analysis of the relevant Chinese sources leading to a similar conclusion, see I. Landa, 'The strategic communication between the Yuan imperial capitals and the northern macro-regions: the fragile stability of the empire', in *Core, Periphery, Frontier—Spatial Patterns of Power*, (eds.) J. Bemmann et al. (Bonn, 2021), pp. 224–245.

⁵⁶ The standard edition of these texts is Cerensodnom and Taube, *Mongolica*, pp. 168–183; in the St. Petersburg collection, one Mongol text under the signature G 120 recto (1339) was edited by Gy. Kara, 'Medieval Mongol documents from Khara-Khoto and East Turkestan in the St. Petersburg branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies', *Manuscripta Orientalia. International Journal for Oriental Manuscript Research* IX/2 (2003), pp. 28–30 and later revised in D. Matsui, 'Uigur peasants and Buddhist monasteries during the Mongol period: re-examination of the Uigur document U 5330 (USp 77)', in *Cultures of the Silk Road and Modern Science*, (ed.) T. Irisawa (Osaka, 2010), vol. I, pp. 61–62; a document of the Dunhuang Academy with the signature B163:42 dated to 1350–1374 (Matsui, 'Mongolian decree', pp. 159–178). The documents MongHT 72, 73, 74 and B163:42 have definite connections to the postal system. Apart from these, two further documents can be connected: MongHT 75 and a document unearthed lately near Khara-Khoto (F209:W68), published in J. Yoshida and J. Chimedodouji, *Harahoto shutsudo mongoru monjo no kenkyū* [Study on the Mongolian Documents Found at Qaraqota] (Tokyo, 2008), pp. 77–80 (No. 017). A peculiarity of this latter document is that it contains reference to the use of camels in the postal system. Transcription and an English translation with commentary of MongHT72–75 and F209:W68 are available in M. Vér, 'The Postal System of the Mongol Empire in Northeastern Turkestan' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Szeged, 2016), pp. 260–274. Another Mongolian document in the British Library (Or. 12452(E)1 Toy. IV. iii. 02a) also has connections to the postal system. This document contains the expression *dilitü temegen* ('middle(-distance) camel'), which refers to special animal terminology that is used in documents concerning the postal system. This terminology differentiated animals into a three-grade classification (short, middle, and long), according to the distances that they were capable of achieving; D. Matsui, 'Bezeklik Uigur administrative orders revisited', in *Tujue yuwenxue yanjiu: Geng Shimin jiaoshu 80 huadan jinian wenji* [Studies in Turkic Philology: Festschrift in Honour of the 80th Birthday of Professor Geng Shimin], (eds.) Zh. Dingjing and A. Yakup (Beijing,

Dating and provenance of Middle Mongolian documents

| Signature | Provenance | Date |
|-----------|-------------|-----------------------------|
| MongHT68 | | 1369 |
| MongHT69 | | |
| MongHT70 | | 1352 |
| MongHT71 | Kočo | 1348 or 1360 |
| MongHT72 | Kočo | 1353 |
| MongHT73 | Kočo | 1331 |
| MongHT74 | Kočo | 1338 |
| MongHT75 | Kočo | |
| MongHT76 | Kočo | 1326 |
| G 120 | Khara-Khoto | 1339 |
| B163:42 | Dunhuang | second half of 14th century |
| G 117 | Khara-Khoto | |

Figure 2. Dating and provenance of Middle Mongolian documents.

was issued in 1326 (MongHT 76) and the latest in 1369 (MongHT 68). The earliest Mongolian document connected to the postal system is dated to 1331 (MongHT 73) and the latest to the second part of the fourteenth century but before 1374 (B163:42).⁵⁷ Thus, on the basis of the bare numbers, it can be stated that the administration in the eastern part of the Chaghadaid *ulus* was not just active at all levels in the mid-fourteenth century, but was also quite productive, and a good deal of our extant documents can be connected to the postal system. This means that the postal system was functional and active, and played an important role within state administration. Its importance and functionality might, however, have reduced over time if we consider the ratio of documents concerning the postal system within the administrative texts.

Temporal distribution of the pilgrim inscriptions

Our other group of sources—the Uyghur and Mongolian pilgrim inscriptions in Gansu—show a slightly different picture (Figure 3). As mentioned earlier, contrary to earlier opinions, a considerable number of Old Uyghur pilgrim inscriptions have recently been identified as being likely to belong to the West Uyghur period—that is, the tenth to twelfth centuries.⁵⁸ From the other inscriptions that are dated to the

2009), pp. 340–341; see also M. Vér, ‘Animal terminology in the Uyghur documents concerning the postal system of the Mongol empire’, *Turkic Languages* XXIII (2019), pp. 192–210.

⁵⁷ Matsui, ‘Mongolian decree’, p. 164.

⁵⁸ Differentiation of the various script styles is extremely hard, especially in the case of shorter inscriptions. Apart from the 35 documents listed in the introduction of his chapter (p. 6, fn. 11), the following inscriptions belong to the earlier layer: Nos. 7, 36, 249, 265, 267, 268, and 270 (Dai Matsui, personal communication, 9 April 2020). He surmises that 12 of the earlier Old Uyghur inscriptions, as well as 29 of the Brāhmī inscriptions,

Temporal distribution of the pilgrim inscriptions

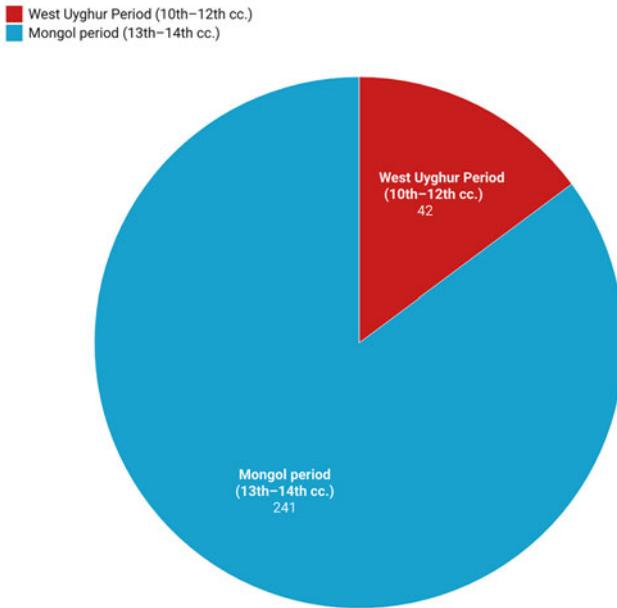


Figure 3. Temporal distribution of the pilgrim inscriptions.

Mongol period, 23 are written with or contain the ‘Phags-pa script, which allows an approximate dating of these texts to between 1269 and the 1360s.⁵⁹ There are 15 inscriptions with more accurate dating—that is, the precise year, or at least one to three possible years of dating are identifiable. All of these inscriptions are dated to the fourteenth century. From the 15 inscriptions 12 were written in the *Zhizheng* 至正 era (1341–1370) or later.⁶⁰ Three inscriptions certainly stem from the earlier decades of the fourteenth century.⁶¹

Although it is impossible to accurately date most of the pilgrim inscriptions, the reconstruction of their temporal distribution, as described above, allows some important inferences to be drawn. Although the vast majority of the inscriptions are still being dated to the Mongol period, identification of an earlier strata of inscriptions confirms the existence of pilgrim activities among Uyghur-speaking people in the pre-Mongol period. Unfortunately, more precise dating of these earlier texts is not yet possible; it can only be stated that pilgrims who were writing in the Uyghur language were already visiting the Buddhist caves around Dunhuang during the West Uyghur period—that is, between the tenth and twelfth centuries. Only in the case of 15 of the 241 later texts is it possible

were written by a certain Adityazen from Beš Balık, i.e. by a single person; Matsui, ‘Old Uyghur graffiti’, pp. 182–184.

⁵⁹ In five cases (Nos. 123, 124, 127, 188, and 245), the editor could not define definitively in which language the ‘Phags-pa text was written.

⁶⁰ The following inscriptions belong to this group: No. 15 (1350 or 1362), No. 95 (1363), No. 104 (Zhizheng era), No. 131 (1343, 1355 or 1367), No. 147 (Zhizheng era), No. 159 (1345, 1357 but the most probable is 1369), No. 174 (1344, 1356 or 1368), No. 176 (1366, 1370 or 1378), No. 203 (1369, presumably written by the same person as No. 95), No. 218 (1352). In addition, Nos. 131, 147, 163, and 263 might have been written by the same person, thus the latter two belong presumably to this group also. Here, I did not take into account No. 219. Hamilton and Niu dated this text to 1390 (Inscription Q) but Matsui argued convincingly that their arguments are insufficient for a definite dating; Matsui, ‘Tonkō sekkutsu Uigurugo’, pp. 72, 111.

⁶¹ These are the following: No. 23 (1331), No. 32 (1323), No. 167 (1319).

to achieve more accurate dating to within the Mongol period. Nevertheless, the fact that all of these texts are dated to the fourteenth century is remarkable. Moreover, 12 of these 15 texts can be dated to the mid-fourteenth century. This suggests not only that pilgrim activities continued despite the crisis, but that traffic might have increased. From the 23 inscriptions with ‘Phags-pa script, two can be dated more precisely (Nos. 104, 131), both to the mid-fourteenth-century group (1341 or later). Due to the historical background, it is conceivable that the other 21 inscriptions with ‘Phags-pa script also stem from the fourteenth century. To sum up, it can be stated that these pilgrim activities were continuous in the fourteenth century and the overwhelming majority (80 per cent) of the datable inscriptions stem from the mid-fourteenth century. In other words, our source material shows no clear sign of a shrinkage in pilgrim activities during the mid-fourteenth-century crisis. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of mobility, besides the temporal distribution of our sources, we have to look at the geographical aspects of the information that they provide.

Geographic mobility

To grasp the spatial dimensions of mobility, we can lean upon two types of information from our sources: their provenance and the toponyms attested in the texts. As in the case of the temporal distribution, we try both to reconstruct the geographic aspects of the entire administration and to focus especially on the postal system.

Postal relay network and the administration

Our knowledge about the provenance of the Uyghur and Mongolian documents is rather limited (Figure 4). If the manuscripts have a find-signature (*Fundortsignatur*), then these usually give only limited information, often informing us only of the expedition that acquired the object, such as the roman numerals after a capital T in the case of the Berlin manuscripts (T I–IV) that refer to the four Turfan Expeditions. Sometimes, they provide information about the place of excavation as well, usually determining only the toponym and not the exact finding place. In our material, the most common such sign is D among the Berlin manuscripts, which refers to Dakianusšahri (Idikutšahri)—that is, Kočo.⁶² More precise information is available only in exceptional cases, such as MIK III 6972a, which is a provision order that has been preserved at the Museum of Asian Art in Berlin. This manuscript has the find-signature T I α, which refers to the ruins of the so-called Temple α in Kočo.⁶³

Of the 107 Old Uyghur administrative orders, we know the provenance of 50 manuscripts. Among the 63 official texts that concern the postal system, the place of excavation is known in 37 cases—that is, for more than 46 per cent of the administrative and almost 58 per cent of the postal documents. Most of these documents stem from Kočo and its immediate vicinity—that is, from within a circle with a radius of 40 kilometres. The

⁶² Kočo was one of the most important political, religious, cultural, and commercial centres of the West Uyghur Kingdom and it was an important city and administrative centre under Mongol rule, too. Kočo (Chin. Gaochang 高昌) is known also as Idiküt-shāri near modern Kara-khōja; P. Pelliot, ‘Kao-tch’ang, Qočo, Houo-tcheou et Qarâ-khodja’, *Journal Asiatique* XIX/1 (1912), pp. 579–603.

⁶³ This site of the find might contribute to our understanding of the role played by religious communities in the upkeep and administration of the postal relay system, as discussed below in the ‘Mobility and society’ section. For a detailed description of the various document signatures in the Berlin Collection with further literature, see Raschmann, *Alltürkische* 13, pp. 17–18; Raschmann, *Alltürkische* 14, pp. 9–11; Raschmann, *Alltürkische* 20, pp. 22–24.

Provenance of Old Uyghur documents

| Administrative documents (107) | Number | Postal documents (63) | Number |
|--------------------------------|--------|-----------------------|--------|
| Toyok | 1 | Toyok | 1 |
| Murtuk | 1 | Murtuk | 0 |
| Čikten | 2 | Čikten | 2 |
| Bulayık | 3 | Bulayık | 2 |
| Yarkhoto | 3 | Yarkhoto | 1 |
| Sänjim | 5 | Sänjim | 5 |
| Bezekliik | 5 | Bezekliik | 5 |
| Turfan | 9 | Turfan | 5 |
| Kočo (42) | 21 | Kočo (43,24%) | 16 |
| Σ | 50 | Σ | 37 |

Figure 4. Provenance of Old Uyghur administrative and postal documents.

importance of Kočo as an administrative centre for the region and as a central node of the local postal network is shown by the fact that 21 of the 50 administrative and 16 of the 37 postal documents with known provenance were found here—that is, around 42 and 43 per cent of the total. Only two documents in the St. Petersburg collection (SI 4820a–b) were found in Čikten (near to the modern Čiktım, Chin. Qiketaizhen 七克台镇) *circa* 83 kilometres to the east along the main road to Kamil (modern Komul, Chin. Hami 哈密). Of the 12 Mongolian documents, we know the provenance for eight. A majority of the Mongolian documents were found in the same vicinity as the Uyghur pieces—more precisely, in Kočo, *circa* 30 kilometres to the south-east of Turfan. Additionally, one document (B163:42) stems from Dunhuang and one (G 120) from Khara-Khoto (Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, PRC) but, due to their content, both are connected to the Kočo region.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Chinese scholars discovered document B163:42 in Cave 163, in the Northern Section of the Mogao Caves, during excavations between 1988 and 1995. The manuscript is preserved today at the Dunhuang Academy. The decree is a travel permit for a high-ranking Tibetan Buddhist priest whose pilgrimage led through the Kočo region; Matsui, 'Mongolian decree', pp. 159–164. György Kara edited document G 120 from Khara-Khoto. Since the document bears no stamp, he surmised that it is probably a draft or copy of a decree of Yisün Temür (1337–1339/1340) issued in 1339. This assumption seems to be corroborated by the fact that the verso side of the manuscript was used for other purposes—a practice unseen, according to my knowledge, among other Mongolian decrees from this period. The Mongolian text on the recto side is addressed to the *iduqud* (< Uyg. *idi kut* 'the sacred favour of heaven', the ruler of the Uyghurs) of Kočo and tries to settle a dispute over a vineyard; Kara, 'Medieval Mongol documents', pp. 26–30; Matsui, 'Uigur peasants', pp. 61–62.

Toponyms in Old Uyghur documents

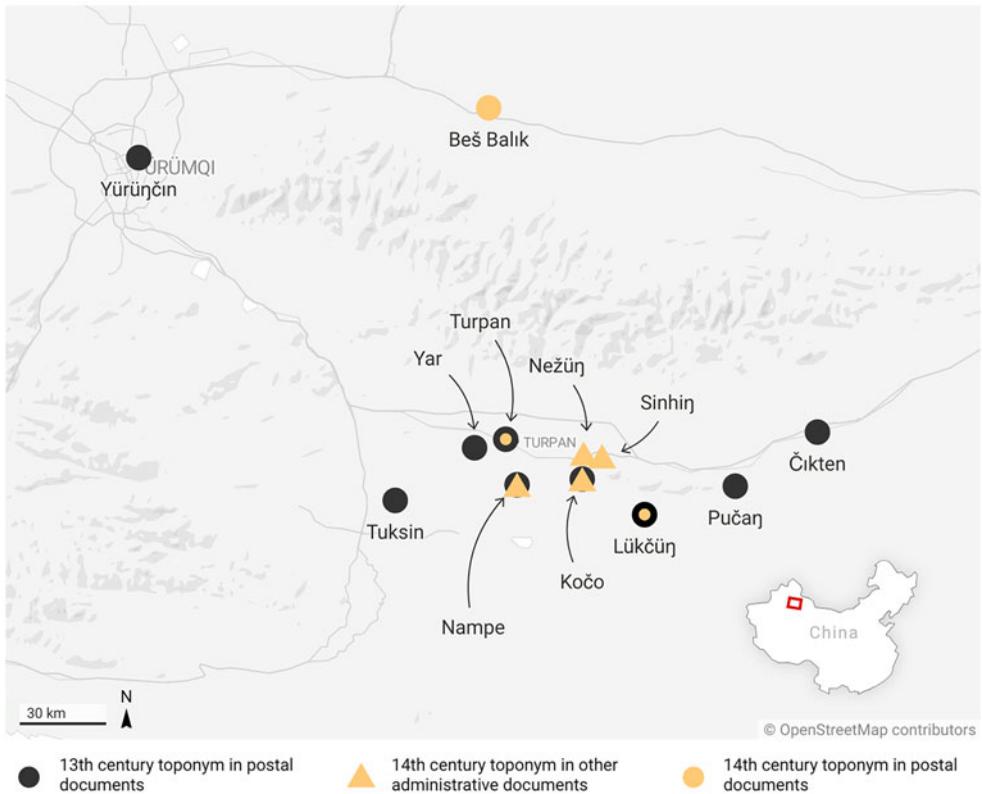


Figure 5. Toponyms in the Old Uyghur documents.

Most of the toponyms in the Old Uyghur administrative documents have been identified (Figure 5).⁶⁵ An obvious difference between the documents dated to the first three chronological groups of the Mongol period (B, C, and D) and the last three groups (E, F, and G, which date with certainty to the fourteenth century) of the Mongol period is that, although fewer documents belong to the earlier layers (39 compared with 44), they contain considerably more toponyms.

The earlier three document groups from the Mongol period contain nine different identifiable toponyms and all of them can be connected to the postal system, while the latter three groups contain only six different toponyms and only three of these can be attested in documents concerning the postal system.

In the earlier period, Kočo stands at the geographical centre of the network that is constituted by eight of these nine places. Four places (Nampe, Turpan, and Yar to the west and Lükčün to the east) fall within a 40-kilometre circle around Kočo. Three further places (Pučarj and Čikten to the east and Tuksin to the west) lie within a radius of slightly over 80 kilometres and an additional settlement, Yürüñçin, lies more than 180 air

⁶⁵ Most of the toponyms discussed here are handled in D. Matsui, 'Old Uigur toponyms of the Turfan oases', in *Kutadgu Nom Bitig: Festschrift für Jens Peter Laut zum 60. Geburtstag*, (eds.) E. Ragagnin and J. Wilkens (Wiesbaden, 2015), pp. 275–303.

kilometres to the north-west from Kočo.⁶⁶ This network shows a clear east–west direction with a conjunction to the north-west to the northern side of the Tianshan mountain range. These data complement Shim’s discussion of the postal roads in the Uyghur territories very well. On his map of the postal road in the Uyghur territories, the route comes from the direction of Šaču (Chin. Shazhou 沙州) through Kamil (Hami) to Beš Balık and then heads west in the direction of Čam Balık (Changbaliq).⁶⁷ What is remarkable is the complete omission from the map of Kočo, Turfan, and the other toponyms of the Old Uyghur documents in the vicinity of these two centres. In a footnote, Shim mentions a certain Yelü Xiliang (耶律希亮), who arrived in Shangdu (上都) via the Kuča–Kočo–Kamil route in 1263.⁶⁸ This traveller surely went through the heartland of the Uyghur territories and probably passed by several places that were attested in the Old Uyghur documents, but they do not feature in this itinerary. Seemingly, the narrative sources mention only the major stations and hubs along the postal routes, while the Old Uyghur documents also mention smaller localities from the Turfan region. This peculiarity of the Old Uyghur documents allows a more sophisticated map of the regional postal network to be drawn.⁶⁹

From the fourteenth century, only three attested toponyms of the Old Uyghur documents can be connected to the postal system: Lükčüñ (Chin. Lukeqin 魯克沁; U 5285, PO05), Turpan (U 5790 + *U 9261, PO09), and Beš Balık (*U 9247), the latter having once been the (summer) capital of the Uyghur rulers, lying *circa* 135 kilometres to the north of Kočo on the northern slopes of the Tianshan. Besides this attestation of Lükčüñ from around 1350, the city is mentioned in three different administrative orders from the early fourteenth century (*U 9234, *U 9233, and Ch/U 6910) that are not connected to the postal system. Considering that it is mentioned in only one document from earlier layers (U 5314, Kāz06 from group D), it seems likely that the importance of Lükčüñ as a local administrative centre emerged in the fourteenth century.

The toponyms of the Mongol decrees show a different picture (Figure 6). From our point of view, there is a very important difference in the structure of the Mongol orders compared with the Old Uyghur decrees: in their closing protocol, they always record their place of issue.⁷⁰ Although only two of these places have been identified with any certainty, their locations are similar in one respect: they fall hundreds of kilometres to the west or north-west of the Turfan region.⁷¹ Bulad lies *circa* 630 kilometres to the

⁶⁶ Yürüñçin was the Old Uyghur name for contemporary Ürümqi (Xinjiang, PRC); D. Matsui, ‘Ürümçi ve eski uyurca Yürüñçin üzerine’, in *Yalım Kaya Bitigi: Osman Fikri Sertkaya Armağanı*, (eds.) H. Şirin and B. Gül (Ankara, 2013), pp. 427–432.

⁶⁷ Shim, ‘Postal roads’, p. 436, Map 5: ‘The Postal Road along Uighuristan’. Čam Balık was located approximately 30 kilometres north-west of modern Ürümqi (Xinjiang); Y. Bai and D. Matsui, ‘フフホト白塔のウイグル語題記銘文’ ‘Fufuhoto shiro-tō no Uiguru-go dai-ki meibun’ [Old Uighur inscriptions of the White Pagoda, Hohhot], *Studies on the Inner Asian Languages XXXI* (2016), p. 46.

⁶⁸ Shim, ‘Postal roads’, p. 434, fn. 97.

⁶⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 433–438. Shih-shan Susan Huang and her colleagues created a digital map of the postal system of the Yuan Dynasty based on Chinese sources and the results of Shim, showing the same route in the Eastern Tianshan region: <https://www.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id=eb0c810a6f304144a8045bfca5d95df7> (accessed 5 June 2024).

⁷⁰ Cerensodnom and Taube, ‘Mongolica’, pp. 165–167; Vér, *Old Uyghur Documents*, pp. 40–43.

⁷¹ The following places of issue in Mongolian decrees have so far remained unidentified: Basar (MongHT68 and attested also in G 117), Olqun (MongHT69), Jürüg (MongHT70), Qongli (MongHT75), Čibinliy (MongHT76). In MongHT71, a certain Berg Čimgen is attested as the place of issue and the editors of the text were not able to identify this. Hosung Shim is not aware of the attestation of this toponym in this document, but he discusses in detail the possible location of the toponym Chimegen/Chi-mai-gan (赤麥干) attested by Qāshānī and in the *Yuanshi*. He concludes that the attestations in the Chinese and Persian sources could be either transcriptions of the Classical Mongolian word *čimege(n)* (‘sound, noise’) or a colloquial pre-classical Mongolian *čimge(n)*, meaning

Geographical aspects of the Middle Mongolian decrees

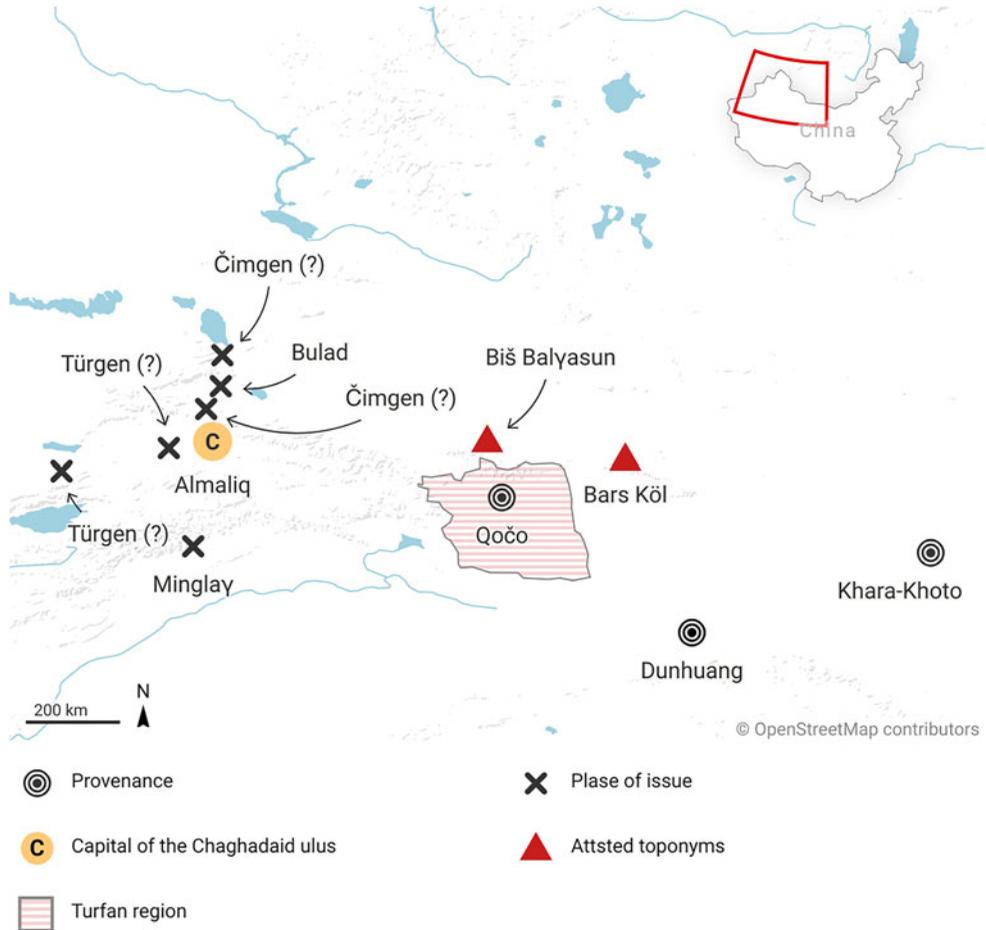


Figure 6. Geographical aspects of the Mongol decrees.

northwest of Kočo; the closest possible location of Türgen is around 740 kilometres away and the farthest is about 970 kilometres to the north-west.⁷² All of these places are much closer to the Chaghadaid capital Almalıq (Modern Yining/Kulja in Xinjiang, near to the

'marrow'. Accordingly, he reconstructs two possible locations of the place: one near to Ala Kul Lake (in present-day Kyrgyzstan) and another slightly north of the Iron Gate (Shim, 'Postal roads', pp. 445–447, especially fn. 143). Both locations fit the pattern of places of issue lying several hundred kilometres west of the Turfan region. The latter location may be even more likely, as it lies in the direct vicinity of Bulad, where MonHT73 was issued. The same pattern applies to a certain Ming-bulak, marked on Sir Aurel Stein's map of East Turkestan, which might be identified with Minglay, the place of issue in document MongHT72. This place is mentioned in two verses in Kašgarī's *Dīwan luġāt at-turk*, which describes two Karakhanid raids on the Uyghurs. One of the texts mentions the crossing of the Ila River, which the editors identified as the Ili River in present-day north-western China and south-eastern Kazakhstan. This location seems also to be consistent with the other places where the Mongolian decrees were issued; R. Dankoff and J. Kelly (eds. and trans.), *Mahmud al-Kāšgarī: Compendium of the Turkic Dialects (Dīwan Luġāt at-Turk)* (Duxbury, MA, 1982), vol. 1, p. 327; vol. 2, pp. 271–272.

⁷² For the identification of these toponyms, see Kara, 'Medieval Mongol documents', pp. 29–30 (Bulad); Franke, 'Zur Datierung', pp. 405–406 (Türgen).

China–Kazakhstan border) than to the Turfan region; none of these was actually issued at the capital, however.⁷³

At the same time, many of the identifiable toponyms that were handled in these decrees were within the Turfan region, such as Kočo, Singging, Qongsir, Soim, and Limčin, or the Yogačari Monastery.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, more distant places such as Beš Balık and Bars Köl are also attested.⁷⁵ The fact that these documents were issued hundreds of kilometres from the place where they were excavated and from the region that their instructions concerned seems to affirm the hypothesis that they belong to a higher, inter-regional administrative level.⁷⁶ With respect to spatial mobility, the Mongolian decrees affirm that the Chaghadaid administration could support the movement of envoys and state officials at the highest levels. Moreover, decree B163:42 is a travel permit that was issued by Kedmen-Bayatur, the governor of the Turfan region under the Chaghadaid khanate in the latter half of the fourteenth century, for a high-ranking Tibetan Buddhist priest who was serving the Yuan court. According to the document, the priest made a pilgrimage in the Bars Köl, Beš-Balık, and Kočo region. This itinerary tallies exactly with the route that is depicted on the map in Shim's article. In other words, the Central Asian Chaghadaid governor ordered their postal system to support the pilgrimage of a high priest who was connected to the Yuan court and, most probably, after his pilgrimage, he brought this permission to Dunhuang, where it was found.

The pilgrim networks

Turning our attention from the geographical aspects of the administrative and postal documents to those of the Uyghur pilgrim inscriptions, first, we must consider the significant development in the number of available sources that led to more attestation of toponyms in the published materials. In 2008, the following toponyms could be identified: Šaču (Chin. Shazhou 沙州), Kaču (Chin. Guazhou 瓜州), Sügčü (Chin. Suzhou 肃州), Yungčang Vuu (Chin. Yongchangfu 永昌府), and Tangut *čölgä* ('The Circuit of Tangut') in the Gansu region, and Kamil (Hami) and Napčik (Lapčuk) from the Eastern Tianshan region.⁷⁷

Research on Old Uyghur inscriptions over the last 16 years has contributed a great deal to the understanding of Buddhist pilgrimage in the Gansu and Eastern Tianshan region under Mongol rule and broadened the reconstructed pilgrim network considerably, even

⁷³ Despite these decrees having been issued in the fourteenth century, this peculiarity tallies with Michal Biran's observation concerning the united empire period, i.e. the sources about Almaliq stress that Chaghadaid did not live in the city itself, but in its vicinity. It seems that his successors followed this tradition; M. Biran, 'Rulers and city life in Mongol Central Asia (1220–1370)', in *Turko-Mongol Rulers, Cities and City Life*, (ed.) D. Durand-Guédy (Leiden and Boston, 2013), pp. 260–261.

⁷⁴ On the localisation of Singging (MongHT68), Limčin and Qongsir (MongHT70), see Matsui, 'Old Uigur toponyms', pp. 278–283. On the Buddhist Yogačari Monastery (G 120) in Kočo, see Kara, 'Medieval Mongol documents', p. 29. Recently, Soim (MongHT70) was identified with Uyghur form *išum* (or *yašum* ~ *yäšüm* ~ *äšüm*), which corresponds to the modern village of Subashi (蘇巴什) *circa* seven kilometres to the north of the Toyok Caves; Matsui, 'Two remarks on the Toyoq caves', pp. 44–45.

⁷⁵ Beš Balık is attested once as Biš Balyasun (MongHT68) and once as Biš Baliy (B163:42). The latter document mentions Bars Köl also, i.e. contemporary Barkul Lake, located *circa* 110 kilometres to the north-west of Kamil (Hami). The same decree attests Qara Qočo, which refers to a larger geographical area around Kočo that included the aforementioned other territories. Bars Köl might be attested also in the fragmentarily preserved last line of a Mongolian document in the Berlin Collection (MongHT85+86) as a place of issue. The relevant passage can be transcribed as: *16...[bar]s köle büküü-tür bičibei '16...we wrote (this while) we were in [Bar]s Köl'*; cf. Matsui, 'Mongolian decree', pp. 164–165. If this assumption proves to be true, then this would be the decree that was issued closest to the Turfan region, i.e. it would differ significantly from the pattern described above of the place of issue of the Mongolian documents.

⁷⁶ Vér, *Old Uyghur Documents*, pp. 43–44.

⁷⁷ Matsui, 'Revising the Uigur inscriptions'.

Regional and long-distance pilgrim networks

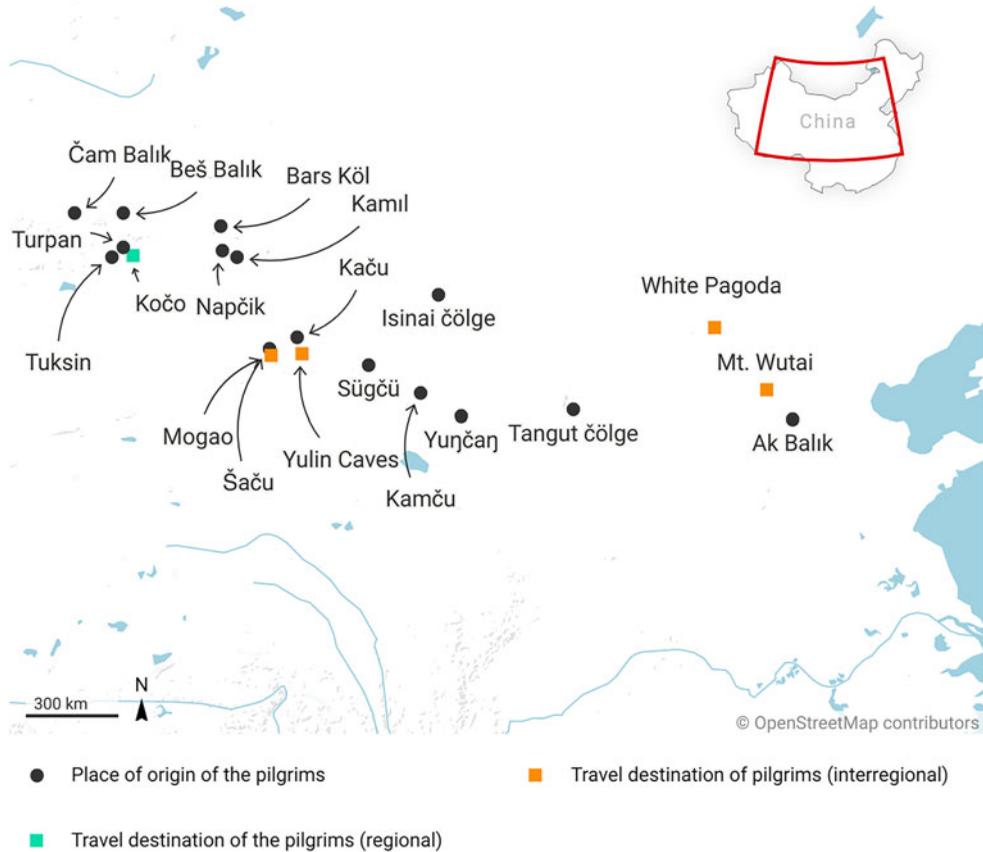


Figure 7. Regional and long-distance pilgrimage networks.

extending it beyond these two regions (Figure 7). Of the 283 edited Old Uyghur and Mongolian pilgrim inscriptions from the vicinity of Dunhuang, some 52 contain toponyms.

The first type of pilgrim mobility can be described as regional pilgrimage—that is, pilgrims came from neighbouring settlements and visited the cave temples around Dunhuang. In Gansu, the network did not change considerably, but some trends are more visible due to the significantly higher number of inscriptions that have been edited. It is not surprising that Kaču is one of the most frequently attested places of origin for the pilgrims, as, among the attested toponyms, it is the closest, lying *circa* 55 kilometres to the north of the Yulin Caves. Of its 14 attestations, 12 were found in the Yulin Caves.⁷⁸ From these two cases, we can explicitly exclude Kaču as an author's place of origin.⁷⁹ A Mongolian (No. 230, Y28 Mong 04) and a Uyghur inscription (No. 256, Y35 Uig 03) of

⁷⁸ Inscription No. 8 (M055 Uig 01) is from the Mogao Caves and there is one from Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves (D02 Uig 01).

⁷⁹ In both cases, the text explicitly says that the authors came to Kaču: *šaču-nıy kaču-nıy aranyadan-ta yūkün(gäli) kälip* '(we) came to the mountain hermitage of Šaču and Kaču to venerate' (No. 176, Y12 Uig 19); *2-3kaču-nıy tağ süm-kä yūküngäli kälip* '2-3(I) came to venerate to the mountain temple of Kaču' (No. 198, Y16 Uig 06). Due to the proximity of Šaču and Kaču to the Mogao and Yulin complexes, it seems conceivable that temples

the Yulin Caves are too fragmentary to determine the role played by Kaču (Mong. Γaju) in the author's pilgrimage. Surprisingly, the second-nearest settlement, Šaču, lying *circa* 30 kilometres to the north-west of the Mogao Caves, appears far less frequently in the inscriptions. Only four inscriptions from the Yulin cave complex mention Šaču as a place of origin. In a further inscription, which is written in Mongolian, a pilgrim from Yuŋčarj mentions Šaču as a farther destination in his pilgrimage.⁸⁰ This clearly shows that the pilgrims visited several sacred places on their pilgrimages.

Another type of pilgrim mobility was the long-distance pilgrimage, which often covered several hundred kilometres. These pilgrims did not necessarily come from other regions; the Gansu Corridor extends about 1,000 kilometres between Lanzhou (蘭州) and the Yumen Pass (or Jade Gate) on the boarder of modern Gansu and Xinjiang. It is notable that the other settlement most often attested (14) is Sügčü, which lies slightly more than 220 kilometres to the east of the Yulin Caves, so the pilgrims who arrived from here clearly belonged to this second group. Four of its attestations were found in the Mogao Caves and the rest in the Yulin Caves. It seems that attestations of Sügčü in the 12 Uyghur as well as the two Mongolian inscriptions refer to it as the place of origin of the authors and their companions. With its seven attestations, Kamil in the Eastern Tianshan region is the third-most-often attested toponym among the inscriptions. Although Kamil lies *circa* 350 kilometres to the north-west of the Dunhuang cave complex, its frequent attestation is not surprising if we take into account that it was a local administrative centre and the junction of several main roads that connected Gansu and the Eastern Tianshan region. The main road between Kočo and Dunhuang went through Kamil and passed by the northern side of the Kumtag desert.⁸¹ Kamču (Chin. Ganzhou 甘州), which was located about 400 kilometres south-east from the Yulin Caves, has three attestations.⁸² Yungčang Vuu is located approximately 650 kilometres to the south-east of the Yulin Caves, where it is attested in the above-mentioned Mongolian inscription (No. 169, Y12 Mong 12) as the place where the author's pilgrimage started.

The third and last type of pilgrim mobility can be categorised as interregional pilgrimage, when pilgrims visited the Dunhuang cave complex from neighbouring or more distant regions, their journeys covering several hundred kilometres. The so-called Tangut district (*tangut čölge*), farther to the east, is mentioned in two Uyghur inscriptions in the Mogao Caves.⁸³ From the Eastern Tianshan region, Kočo has three attestations:

and mountain hermitages of the former two cities mentioned in the inscriptions refer to the cave temples of the latter two.

⁸⁰ *2-3yung čang vuu-ača iregsed bi dorji en-e süm-e tür mörgüjü šaču-yin süm-e-tür odbai* '2-3I Dorji, have come here to this temple from Yungčang and worshipped, (then) proceeded to the temple of Šaču' (No. 169, Y12 Mong12). Here again, the temple of Šaču is likely to refer to the Mogao Caves.

⁸¹ In contrast to this, there was a direct connection leading from Lükčüj directly to Dunhuang along the southern edge of the desert, and called *Dahai dao* 大海道, mentioned in a Chinese work of the Tang period (618–907). Since it was a more difficult and more dangerous way, it seems plausible that most of the pilgrims would have chosen the main road through Kamil. On these two roads, see D. Matsui, 'Nishi uiguru jidai no uigur-ubun kyōshutsu meirei monjo wo megutte' [Three Uigur administrative orders for delivery of the 10th–12th centuries], *Studies in the Humanities (Volume of Cultural Sciences)* XXIV (2010), pp. 26–28; for the *Dahai dao* 大海道, see also P. Pelliot, *Le routes de la région de Turfan sous les Tang suivi de l'histoire et la géographie anciennes de l'Asie Centrale dans Innermost Asia*, (ed.): J.-P. Drège (Paris, 2002), pp. 10–25.

⁸² No. 176 (Y12 Uig 19) and No. 227 (Y28 Uig 01) are Uyghur inscriptions, while No. 243 (Y33 Uig 10) is a Uyghur–Mongolian bilingual text. The name Kamču is also attested in No. 161 (Y12 Uig 04), but it could be a personal name rather than a toponym: Hamilton and Niu, 'Inscriptions ouïgoures', p. 146; Matsui, 'Revising the Uigur inscriptions', p. 21.

⁸³ This place was in the vicinity of contemporary Yinchuan 銀川 (Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, PRC) lying *circa* 1,000 kilometres to the East of Dunhuang: Matsui, 'Tonkō sekkutsu Uigurugo', pp. 21–22. The two inscriptions are No. 13 (M061 Uig 02) and No. 14 (M061 Uig 03).

Napčik and Beš Balik are mentioned twice and Turfan once.⁸⁴ Besides the place names that are already known from pilgrim inscriptions, the attestation of Čam Balik, *circa* 30 kilometres to the north-west of contemporary Ürümqi, in a Mogao cave inscription (No. 37, M148 Uig 02) is new.⁸⁵ Isinai *čölge* is mentioned in a very fragmentary Mongolian inscription (No. 255, Y35 Uig 02) without context. It can be located to the vicinity of Khara-Khoto in Inner Mongolia, *circa* 570 kilometres to the north-east of Dunhuang.⁸⁶ Toponyms in the newly published material broaden this pilgrim network further.

Old Uyghur Buddhist sights and sacred places were present not only near Dunhuang, but also in the Turfan region. The study of these materials is also of primary interest in the reconstruction of interregional mobility between the Gansu Corridor and the Turfan region.⁸⁷ Based on the most recently published inscriptions from the Toyok Caves complex that lies *circa* 14 kilometres to the east of Kočo, this sight was an important regional centre of Buddhist pilgrimage and place of retreat. The monastery of the Toyok Caves had especially close ties with the Buddhist community in Lükčünj. Nevertheless, a Chinese pilgrim inscription (I 8) in Room B of Cave 26 were left by a pilgrim who visited the cave in 1328 from Yuan territories, namely from or via Chengdu (成都)—it is likely that the cave was still the destination of interregional pilgrimage in the fourteenth century.⁸⁸

The material that is preserved in the Central Asian collections worldwide offers further possibilities for conducting research on inscriptions from the Turfan region.⁸⁹ Recently, Raschmann reported that around 130 wall inscriptions from the material of the four German Turfan expeditions (1902–1914) had been rediscovered in the Museum of Asian Art in Berlin and that most of this material remains unpublished.⁹⁰ In a case study, she illustrated how a better understanding of these holy places can be gained through comparative analysis of the multilingual text material and the archaeological findings. Based on the results of her study, the Ruin Q in Kočo was considered a holy place and served as a

⁸⁴ Of the three Uyghur inscriptions mentioning Kočo, two are located in the Mogao Caves (No. 13, M061 Uig 02; No. 31, M138 Uig 01) and one in the Yulin Caves (No. 248, Y33 Uig 15). Napčik is mentioned in two inscriptions at the Yulin cave number 12 (No. 158, Y12 Uig 01, and No. 161, Y12 Uig 04). Beš Balik is attested once in the Mogao Caves (No. 31, M138 Uig 01) and once in the Yulin Caves (No. 231, Y31 Uig 01), while Turpan is also mentioned in a Yulin cave (No. 162, Y12 Uig 05).

⁸⁵ Bai and Matsui, 'Old Uyghur inscriptions of the White Pagoda', p. 46.

⁸⁶ Matsui, 'Tonkō sekkutsu Uigurugo', p. 127.

⁸⁷ For example, the wall paintings and the attached inscriptions of a Bezeklik cave temple were used to re-examine the connections between the Buddhists of Dunhuang and the Turfan region in the West Uyghur period (Moriyasu, 'Chronology of West Uyghur Buddhism', pp. 191–227). Similarly, the mural inscriptions from Bezeklik offered the basis on which to clarify that the toponyms *Nežünj~Nešünj~Lešünj* in the Old Uyghur texts refer to Bezeklik or Sängim Ağız; D. Matsui, 'Ning-rong 寧戎 and Bezeklik in Old Uyghur texts', *Studies on the Inner Asian Languages XXVI* (2011), pp. 141–175; for a summary of the results in English, see Matsui, 'Old Uyghur toponyms', pp. 283–288.

⁸⁸ Fu and Xia, 'Comprehensive study', pp. 200–201; Matsui, 'Two remarks on the Toyok caves', pp. 44–45.

⁸⁹ For an eminent example of such research, see P. Zieme, 'A Brāhmaṇa painting from Bāzāklik in the Hermitage of St. Petersburg and its inscriptions', in *Unknown Treasures of the Altaic World in Libraries, Archives and Museums: 53rd Annual Meeting of the Permanent International Altaic Conference, Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, R[ussian] A[cademy of] S[ciences] St. Petersburg, July 25–30, 2010*, (eds.) T. Pang et al. (Berlin, 2013), pp. 181–195.

⁹⁰ Dieter Maue published ten Old Uyghur inscriptions in Brāhmī script from Kumtura and Kızıl in his two catalogues; D. Maue, *Altürkische Handgschriften. Teil 1. Dokumente in brāhmī und tibetischer Schrift* (Stuttgart, 1996), pp. 201–205 (Nos. 72–77); D. Maue, *Altürkische Handschriften. Teil 19. Dokumente in brāhmī und tibetischer Schrift. Teil 2* (Stuttgart, 2015), pp. 457–465 (Nos. 210–213). In the latter volume, No. 212 (MIK IIII 1047) contains a dating that identifies as the 39th year of the 60-year cycle and gives 1242/1243 as a possible date but, as he notes, the addition or subtraction of 60 years is also possible; *ibid.*, p. 462. For a summary of the published material of source languages other than Old Uyghur, see Raschmann, 'Pilgrims in Old Uyghur inscriptions', p. 214, fn. 43.

destination for Buddhist pilgrimage from the seventh or eighth century to the fourteenth century. Unlike the Dunhuang material and the White Pagoda inscriptions in Hohhot, these texts do not usually provide information about pilgrims' places of origin, suggesting that these pilgrimage sites in the Turfan region were primarily of local or regional interest. Meanwhile, the fact that the dating of the visit is usually the first thing that is included in these inscriptions also makes it probable that the texts stem from people who were from outside the cave complexes and not local monks. Nevertheless, one text (no. III 393) attests a pilgrim's place of origin but, unfortunately, this toponym (Koglı) has not yet been located. This Koglı is most probably identical to the Qongli of MongHT75. Raschmann's observation that the specification of places of origin in the pilgrim inscriptions refers to interregional pilgrimages fits very well with the above observation of the present article—that is, that the places of issue of the Mongolian decrees fall several hundred kilometres away from the Turfan region. If the two toponyms are identical, then we can surmise, based on the identified places of issue of the Mongolian decrees, that Koglı's location was somewhere in the vicinity of the Chaghadaid capital, Almaliq.⁹¹

The Old Uyghur pilgrim network can be followed up even beyond Gansu and the Eastern Tianshan region. As is well known, Mt. Wutai (Chin. Wutaishan 五台山) had a preeminent importance among the sacred places of Chinese Buddhism and was an important destination for many pilgrims. The Chinese poem *Wutaishan zan* 五台山贊 ('Praise of Mt. Wutai'), which was found in the Dunhuang fragments, was only translated into the Uyghur language and the earliest possible date of its translation is the tenth century.⁹² This fact alone would suggest quite early Uyghur interest in the rather distant Mt. Wutai. Furthermore, the early date of the translation of this poem is also indicative of the dissemination of Buddhism among the Uyghur-speaking population at the time. Moreover, transcriptions of the Chinese text with Old Uyghur letters are preserved, too.⁹³ These references show that, besides the Buddhist centre of Dunhuang, Mt. Wutai was also very important among the Uyghurs and could have been a possible pilgrim destination. Two of the pilgrim inscriptions in Yulin cave No. 03 confirm this assumption. Both were written in the cursive style of the Uyghur script but, whereas the first is a bilingual Uyghur–Mongolian text (No. 128, Y03 Uig 30), the latter is exclusively written in the Uyghur language (No. 130, Y03 Uig 32). The two texts have different authors (Šakyapal and Tāvāči Tutuñ), who wrote these texts on their way to Mt. Wutai (*udai-ka barur-ta* 'going to Mt. Wutai').⁹⁴ Two of the Dunhuang inscriptions refer to Akbalık ('White city') as the pilgrims' place of origin.⁹⁵ This city, attested in Mongolian sources as Čayan Balyasun, can be identified with modern Zhending 真定, which is situated *circa* 130 kilometres to the south-east of Mt. Wutai in China's Hebei province.⁹⁶

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 215–229; for the various readings of the word in earlier editions and for further attestation of this place name, see *ibid.*, pp. 222–223.

⁹² P. Zieme, 'Gudai Huihu fojiao zhi zhong de Wutai shan yu Wenshu shili' 古代回鹘佛教之中的五台山与文殊师利 [Mt. Wutai and Mañjuśrī in Uyghur Buddhism], in *Yishan er wuding: Duo xueke, kua fangyu, chao wenhua shiye zhong de Wutai xinyang yanjiu* 一山而五顶：多学科、跨方域、超文化视野中的五台信仰研究 [One Mountain of Five Peaks: Studies of the Wutai Cult in Multidisciplinary, Crossborder and Transcultural Approaches], (eds.) M. Jiang 妙江, Ch. Jinhua 陳金華, and K. Guang 寬廣 (Hangzhou, 2017), p. 119; cited in Raschmann, 'Pilgrims in Old Uyghur inscriptions', pp. 206–207.

⁹³ P. Zieme, 'Three old Turkic Wutaishanzan fragments', *Studies on the Inner Asian Languages XVII* (2002), pp. 223–229.

⁹⁴ So far, the most detailed analysis of the relationship between Mt. Wutai and the Uyghurs was published by Y. Kasai, 'The Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, Mt. Wutai, and Uyghur pilgrims', *BuddhistRoad Paper 5.4* (2020), <https://omp.ub.rub.de/index.php/BuddhistRoad/catalog/book/131> (accessed 5 June 2024).

⁹⁵ No. 160 (Y12 Uig 03) and No. 208 (Y19 Uig 03).

⁹⁶ Matsui, 'Tonkō sekkutsu Uigurugo', p. 84.

The edition of the Uyghur pilgrim inscriptions in the White Pagoda (Chin. Baita 白塔) from the vicinity of modern Hohhot in Inner Mongolia definitely broadened the geographical limits of the Uyghur Buddhist pilgrimage network.⁹⁷ In the 20 inscriptions, pilgrims are attested as coming from Kamil (Texts E and J), Tuksin (Texts K and L), and Čam Balık (Text T). Based on this information, it seems conceivable that the White Pagoda had its own interregional pilgrim network. However, one cannot exclude the possibility that pilgrims from the Eastern Tianshan region visited this site after veneration in Dunhuang or on their way to Mt. Wutai.

Unfortunately, as we saw in the previous section, a far lower proportion of the inscriptions are datable with accuracy within the Mongol period. Moreover, the number of those datable inscriptions that also contain toponyms is even lower. Nevertheless, some inferences can be drawn concerning temporal changes in the Buddhist pilgrim network of the literate Uyghurs. The attestation of Beš Balık (No. 231), Kamil (No. 251), and Kaču (No. 256) in inscriptions from the West Uyghur period show early connections between the Eastern Tianshan region and Gansu.⁹⁸ It seems certain that Buddhist holy places already existed in the Eastern Tianshan region in this earlier period, as the example of ruin Q from Kočo shows.⁹⁹ We have substantial detailed information on these connections from the Mongol period and we know that many more settlements were involved. Moreover, the Buddhist pilgrimage network of Uyghur–Mongol literati expanded extensively beyond Gansu and the Eastern Tianshan region in the Mongol period, most notably to the east. New toponyms appear on our map in this period in the Eastern Tianshan region (Čam Balık, Turfan, Kočo, Napčik), in Gansu (Sügčü, Kamču, Yungčang), in Inner Mongolia (Isinai *čölge*), and in contemporary Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region (Tangut *čölge*). The farthest place of pilgrim origin attested in the inscriptions is Akbalık (Zhending 眞定, in Hebei province), which is not far from the famous Mt. Wutai. Direct proof of new pilgrim destinations that are far beyond Gansu and the Eastern Tianshan region, namely Mt. Wutai in contemporary Shanxi Province and the White Pagoda near modern Hohhot in Inner Mongolia, is another very important development of the Mongol period pilgrim network. The former is attested in two inscriptions at Yulin cave 03 as the pilgrims' final destination, while 20 Old Uyghur pilgrim inscriptions from the latter have been published recently. Based on the inscriptions, the existence of connections between the White Pagoda and the whole Eastern Tianshan region (Kamil, Tuksin, and Čam Balık) seems clear. Simultaneously, one of the latest Mongolian decrees (B163:42), which is dated to the second part of the fourteenth century but before 1374, which served the pilgrimage of a high-ranking priest in the Eastern Tianshan region but was found in Dunhuang, seems to confirm that interregional pious journeys were still possible after the mid-fourteenth century. The Tibetan name of the lama, Dorži-Kirešis Bal Sangbo, suggests that there were connections not just between the Eastern Tianshan region and the Gansu Corridor, but also with Tibet, and perhaps China proper, too.¹⁰⁰ The question of whether a high-ranking

⁹⁷ Bai and Matsui, 'Old Uighur inscriptions of the White Pagoda', pp. 29–77.

⁹⁸ The author of No. 231 was a certain Adityazen from Beš Balık (*beš balık-lıq adityazen*), who, as discussed above, had also written up to 11 other inscriptions.

⁹⁹ The archaeological surveys and findings, including several wall inscriptions in different languages, provide clear evidence of this. For example, the Tocharian B inscriptions from ruin Q in Kočo demonstrate this; see M. Peyrot, 'Tocharian B inscriptions from Ruin Q in Kocho, Turfan region', in *The Ruins of Kocho. Traces of Wooden Architecture on the Ancient Silk Road*, (eds.) L. Russel-Smith and I. Konczak-Nagel (Düsseldorf and Berlin, 2016), pp. 127–134. A similar situation can be observed in the case of the Toyok Caves, which have recently been subjected to a comprehensive re-examination and publication by Chinese archaeologists.

¹⁰⁰ A further fine example for the close connections between Tibet, Gansu, and the Uyghurs of Turfan is a Uyghur translation of the Tibetan *Book of the Dead*. This work was found in Dunhuang and was, according to its colophon, translated by a monk from Kamil and copied by another monk from Lükčüj (*üč lükčüj* in the

priest who connects his official duty with his pious activities can be considered a pilgrim leads us on to our last topic: the social aspects of mobility.

Mobility and society

A comprehensive analysis of the information on society in any of our major source groups would go well beyond the frame of the present article and deserves separate studies, if not a monograph. We thus restrict our discussion to those social aspects of the sources that have an immediate connection to physical mobility: namely, religious groups, social status, and the interconnectedness of various systems of the administration or society.

While the present study concentrates mostly on mobility in connection with the Buddhist community, these societies were multi-religious and multi-ethnic. Besides Buddhism, Islam and the Apostolic Church of the East (i.e. Christianity) were certainly present. References to all three religions and their representatives are attested in both of our source groups. Three main aspects of the relationship between the postal system and these religious communities can be defined: taxation, confiscation and, finally, use of the postal system by those religious groups.¹⁰¹ The Old Uyghur and Middle Mongolian documents provide information that concerns all three aspects.

A provision order from the West Uyghur period (U 5329, PO08) shows clearly that the Church of the East was involved in the maintenance of the postal network in the West Uyghur state: *₂msydr -lar-nıy bir yol at[in] ₃taykay -takı yolçı-ka berzün* ‘₂₋₃The Nestorian presbyters (*msydr*), ₃shall give one of their road horses (*yol atın*) to the travel guide (bound) for Taykay.’ Taykay in the Uyghur text could mean either the main road from Turfan to Dunhuang through Kamil or the *Dahai dao* 大海道 leading from Lükčün directly to Dunhuang along the southern edge of the Kumtag desert.¹⁰² Should either of these possible answers be true, it seems that the Apostolic Church of the East had to support travel between the Eastern Tianshan region and Gansu. From the Mongol period, we have five provision orders, which were unearthed in the Bezeklik caves, in which a certain Bökän šāli, who was presumably a Buddhist monk, had to provide hay and straw for travellers on the postal system.¹⁰³ Two provision orders that stem from Čikten, a settlement on the main road between Turfan and Dunhuang, confirms that both the Buddhist and Christian communities had to bear expenses that concerned the upkeep of the postal system.¹⁰⁴ Such information about Muslim communities is not available in the Old Uyghur and Middle Mongolian documents.

For the other two aspects—confiscation and the use of the postal system by representatives of the religious communities—the best example in our material is the above-cited Mongolian decree (B163:42). This was issued to support the travel of Buddhist priests with the postal system and the following passage is indirect proof that clergy had to endure

original text) at the request of prince Asuday, who was a member of the family of the Prince of Xining (西寧, in present-day Qinghai province) near Dunhuang; P. Zieme and G. Kara, *Ein uigurisches Totenbuch. Nāropas Lehre in uigurischer Übersetzung von vier tibetischen Traktaten nach der Sammelhandschrift aus Dunhuang* *British Museum Or. 8212* (109) (Budapest, 1978), pp. 162–163. For a detailed discussion: Matsui, ‘Mongolian decree’, pp. 167–171. For an overview of interactions of Tibetan and Uyghur Buddhism, see Wilkens, ‘Buddhism’, pp. 227–230.

¹⁰¹ M. Vér, ‘Religious communities and the postal system of the Mongol empire’, in *Role of Religions in the Turkic Culture. Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on the Role of Religions in the Turkic Culture held on September 9–11, 2015 in Budapest*, (eds.) É. Csáki, M. Ivanics, and Zs. Olach (Budapest, 2017), pp. 291–306.

¹⁰² For an edition of the whole text with commentary, see Vér, *Old Uyghur Documents*, pp. 74–76; Matsui, *Administrative Orders*, pp. 65–66. On the role of Buddhist and Christian communities in the upkeep of the relay network in the pre-Mongol period, see M. Fu, ‘Buddhist and Christian relay posts on the Silk Road (9th–12th centuries)’, *Central Asiatic Journal* LXIII/1–2 (2020), pp. 243–244.

¹⁰³ Vér, *Old Uyghur Documents*, pp. 84–90 (PO13–PO17).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 92–98 (PO19–PO20, SI4820/a–b).

confiscations: ‘...no one shall hold [them] back [or] shall take their loads, carts, camels and ₁₀horses, saying “[they are] the relay animals or provisions”.’¹⁰⁵ Muslim and Christian names are also attested in documents that concern the postal system but, as has been pointed out, people who bore Muslim names could also have been Buddhists.¹⁰⁶

Although names and titles are often false friends to the researcher (as, among other reasons, the former can easily be transformed into the latter), if we want to gain a better understanding of the social status of travellers, we must examine these aspects of our sources. With regard to the social status of those who travelled via the postal system, it is not surprising that they were usually high-ranking officials and military officers. The title most often attested is *elči*.¹⁰⁷ Among the civil officers, *daruga(či)s* are mentioned, too.¹⁰⁸ Various military officers are also mentioned: leaders (*noyin*) of *tümäns*, attendants of envoys (*nöker*), and officers from the vanguard.¹⁰⁹

In the pilgrim inscriptions that came from Dunhuang, people with Muslim and Christian names are attested, too.¹¹⁰ Moreover, a whole inscription (No. 197) that is written in Syriac script is connected to the Apostolic Church of the East. Furthermore, the names that are mentioned in it (Nathaniel, Yohanan) and the closing formula (*yad bolzun amin* ‘until all eternity, Amen’) underline the Christian context of the inscription.¹¹¹ Based on this, it seems conceivable that Muslims and Christians also visited the Buddhist holy places.¹¹²

¹⁰⁵ Matsui, ‘Mongolian decree’, p. 160.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 168; Matsui, ‘Revising the Uigur inscriptions’, p. 26.

¹⁰⁷ The word *elči* has two meanings: according to Erdal, the original Old Turkic meaning was ‘Staatsmann’, later picking up a secondary meaning as ‘Botschafter, Kurier’ during the Mongol period: M. Erdal, ‘Die türkisch-mongolischen Titel *elġan* und *elġi*’, in *Altaica Berolinensia: The Concept of Sovereignty in the Altaic World*, (ed.) B. Kellner-Heinkele (Wiesbaden, 1993), pp. 94–99; cf. G. Doerfer, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente in Neupesischen* (Wiesbaden, 1965), Band II, pp. 203–207 (No. 656).

¹⁰⁸ The Mongolian *daruġa(či)* means ‘governor, chief, superior, chairman, commander; director, manager, elder’. For an extensive account of the extremely rich literature concerning this title, see Doerfer, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente in Neupesischen* (Wiesbaden, 1963), Band I, pp. 319–323 (No. 193); I. de Rachewiltz, *The Secret History of the Mongols* (Leiden and Boston, 2006), pp. 961–962 (§263); I. Vásáry, ‘The Tatar factor in the formation of Muscovy’s political culture’, in *Nomads as Agents of Cultural Change: The Mongols and Their Eurasian Predecessors*, (eds.) R. Amitai and M. Biran (Honolulu, 2015), pp. 255–256.

¹⁰⁹ The *noyin* in the Uyghur text must be a borrowing of Mongolian *noyan~noyin* (‘lord, prince, chief, superior, commandant’); cf. Doerfer, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente in Neupesischen*, Band I, pp. 526–528 (No. 389); F. Lessing (ed.), *Mongolian-English Dictionary* (Bloomington, 1973), p. 589. The expression *tümän noyin* most likely means ‘leader of a unit of ten thousand, commander of a myriad’. Uyğ. *nöker* < Mong. *nökör* originally meant ‘friend, comrade, companion, husband’; cf. *ibid.*, p. 593. In the Mongol empire, *nököd* (plural form of *nökör*) denoted the companions and personal dependants of a ruler or nobleman. They played a key role in the transformation of Mongol society from the time of Chinggis Khan. The word appears frequently in de Rachewiltz, *Secret History*. For a detailed description of the word and its history with further literature, cf. Doerfer, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente in Neupesischen*, Band I, pp. 521–526 (No. 388); de Rachewiltz, *Secret History*, pp. 256–257; A. Róna-Tas and Á. Berta, *West Old Turkic. Turkic Loanwords in Hungarian I-II* (Wiesbaden, 2011), pp. 623–624 (under the entry: *nyögér*). For the attestations of the various titles in the Uyghur documents concerning the postal system, see Vér, *Old Uyghur Documents*, pp. 201–224.

¹¹⁰ The name Ahmat (< Ar. Aġmad) appears in No. 61, while Ikbāl Saġ (< Pers. Iqbāl Sang) is quite often attested (Nos. 105, 164, 235, 237, 247). Ishak (< Syr. ’Išġāq) *tarhan* is mentioned in No. 89 and Yohanan (< Sogd. ywġnn < Syr. Ywġnn) appears in No. 197. In the inscriptions of the White Pagoda, the personal names Sulayman (< Ar. Sulaymān, Text A) and Pilipoz (< Syr. Pilippōs, Text Q) are attested and the title *kümkä* that seems to be connected to the Apostolic Church of the East also; Bai and Matsui, ‘Old Uyghur inscriptions of the White Pagoda’, pp. 31, 33–36, 42–44.

¹¹¹ Cf. Matsui, ‘Tonkō sekkutsu Uigurugo’, pp. 100–101; Raschmann, ‘Pilgrims in Old Uyghur inscriptions’, p. 209.

¹¹² Matsui, ‘Tonkō sekkutsu Uigurugo’, pp. 7–8; for further examples, see Matsui, ‘Old Uyghur graffiti’, pp. 182–193.

When looking at the social statuses that are reflected in the Old Uyghur and Mongolian pilgrim inscriptions, it is not surprising that various Buddhist titles such as *bahši* or *ačari* are very often attested. One could consider the frequent appearance of high-ranking officials and other illustrious people in pilgrim inscriptions rather surprising, but the trend for titles to become part of personal names over time must also be kept in mind. For example, in the edition of the Dunhuang inscriptions, all the attestations of *tegin* (OU ‘prince’) are handled as elements of personal names.¹¹³ In inscriptions from the West Uyghur period, the word *saġun* (< Chin. *jiang jun* 將軍) comes forth in various forms. The original meaning of this word is ‘army commander, general’ but, in later periods, it, too, was often used as a personal-name element. In inscription No. 89, besides a certain Kutlug Toġa *saġun*, two *tarhans*, Ishak and Alp Sıġkur, are also attested, the former being a Christian name.¹¹⁴ Due to the rather early dates of those texts in which they are attested, their usage can be interpreted via the original meaning.¹¹⁵ The Uyghur inscription No. 80 was written in a cursive style, but the title, *el arslan han*, clearly refers to the West Uyghur period.¹¹⁶ From the Mongol period, *tümän bägi*, *darugači*, *suġgon*, and *han* are attested in the Uyghur inscriptions.¹¹⁷ In two Mongolian inscriptions (Nos. 15, 62), the word *köbegün* (‘son’) appears but, in this context, the term seems to refer to Mongol princes of the royal family.¹¹⁸ These data seem to underpin the conclusion that, contrary to the common picture of pilgrims, a significant part of the Uyghur and Mongolian inscriptions belong to high-ranking officials and members of the elite. As we have seen in the Mongolian decree that was unearthed in Dunhuang (B163:42), it was possible for a high-ranking priest to enjoy the support of the postal system during his travel, and thus the private sphere (pilgrimage) and official sphere (usage of the postal system) could have been mixed. In summary, it can be concluded that our sources show that, in practice, the different spheres (official and private) and systems (administrative and religious networks) were interconnected and interdependent.¹¹⁹ This interconnectedness urges us to apply a comprehensive

¹¹³ Matsui, ‘Old Uyghur graffiti’, p. 151.

¹¹⁴ This ancient title is attested in the Orkhon inscriptions and it goes back to Chin. *da guan* 達官; cf. Doerfer, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente in Neupersischen*, Band II, pp. 460–474 (No. 879).

¹¹⁵ The word appears twice in its original form (Nos. 69 and 89), once as *saġun üge* (No. 265), the latter meaning ‘adviser’, and once as *bägsaġun* (No. 69); Matsui, ‘Tonkō sekkutsu Uigurugo’, p. 149.

¹¹⁶ Originally, the style of writing was regarded as semi-square and dated to the West Uyghur period but, later, Matsui changed its labelling to cursive and dated it to the Mongol period. According to him, the text was added in the Mongol period to an earlier picture from the West Uyghur period, which lost its original epigraph and was depicting the ruler of the West Uyghurs; cf. D. Matsui, ‘Notes on the Old Uigur wall inscriptions in the Dunhuang Caves (II)’, *Studies in Humanities (Volume of Cultural Science)* XXXII (2014), pp. 28–30; Matsui, ‘Tonkō sekkutsu Uigurugo’, p. 54.

¹¹⁷ The title *tümän bägi* (No. 14) is the Turkic equivalent of the Mongolian *tümen noyin*, i.e. a leader of a unit of 10,000. Raschmann also reported an attestation of a *tümän bägi* in an inscription from ruin Q of Kočo: Raschmann, ‘Pilgrims in Old Uyghur inscriptions’, p. 227. For a discussion of this title and of *darugači* (Nos. 145, 161, 167, 215, 281), see footnotes 108 and 109. The title *suġgon* (No. 176) goes back to Chin. *zong guan* 總管 ‘governor’; cf. Matsui, ‘Tonkō sekkutsu Uigurugo’, p. 93.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Matsui, ‘Tonkō sekkutsu Uigurugo’, p. 23; see also Matsui, ‘Old Uyghur graffiti’, pp. 200–203.

¹¹⁹ Of course, the commercial network of the Uyghurs was also involved in this interconnectedness. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, the caravan trade network of the Uyghurs already connected the Eastern Tianshan region to the lands of the Song and Liao Dynasties, to Mongolia, and to the Tangut territories in the Gansu Corridor to the east, had connections to the trade routes along the southern edge of the Taklamakan, and extended to Kuča, the Talas valley, and Khotan in the west; T. Moriyasu, ‘Epistolary formulae of the Old Uighur letters from the Eastern Silk Road (Part 2)’, *Memoirs of the Graduate School of Letters Osaka University* LII (2012), pp. 44–48. The Old Uyghur letters show that the caravan trade, this other crucial system of interregional mobility, contributed regularly to the communication between the different regions by transmitting letters and gifts; see e.g. Moriyasu, *Corpus of the Old Uighur Letters*, Nos. 03, 06, 08, 17, 25, 30, 54, 56, 65, 93, 112, 117, 135. A commercial letter (Or. 8212 / 120) dispatched to Dunhuang (Šaču) to the sender’s younger brother

approach if we want to better understand premodern mobility patterns. In this sense, I would give a rather permissive answer to the question that was raised by Raschmann—that is, whether we can regard those Buddhist laymen of our sources who, besides their other duties, visited holy places and left inscriptions as pilgrims. A personal identity is constituted of several cultural *personae* and connected to different social groups at the same time. I would recommend trusting the authors of our sources and, if they felt like pilgrims, then we should believe them.¹²⁰

Conclusion

The results of this study contribute to our understanding of mobility along the Eastern Silk Roads in three key areas: temporal, spatial, and social. From a temporal perspective, the long-lasting existence of a postal network in the Turfan region is proven. It is also evident that local and interregional pilgrim networks persisted in the Turfan region, as well as in the Gansu Corridor around Dunhuang, between the tenth and fourteenth centuries. In contrast to previous assumptions, recently, 42 pilgrim inscriptions that are believed to have originated from the West Uyghur period have been identified in Buddhist cave temples around Dunhuang. However, one pilgrim could leave many inscriptions behind. The attested toponyms on pilgrim inscriptions from the West Uyghur period demonstrate the existence of early connections between the Eastern Tianshan region and Gansu, which were maintained until the end of the period under discussion—that is, the late fourteenth century.

The majority of the information that our sources provide is related to the Mongol period—specifically, the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Two particularly noteworthy findings are the high proportion of postal documents among the administrative sources and the resilience of the postal system even during the challenges of the mid-fourteenth century. Ninety-seven per cent of the Old Uyghur administrative documents stem from the Mongol period. This difference in numbers is too big to be explained only by the temporal difference. It might be due to the destruction of the archives of official documents from the earlier period, but also to the fact that the administrative apparatus became significantly larger and more sophisticated under Mongol rule. If we take the material from the Mongol period into account, then we see that the majority of datable Old Uyghur official documents were issued after the dissolution of the united empire—that is, after the mid-thirteenth century. Again, this can be explained by the destruction of earlier materials during intra-Mongol clashes, but later development of the local administration and archives is also conceivable. The administrative documents from the Mongol period show a continuous functionality of administration in the Uyghur language at local and regional bureaucratic levels. Almost 60 per cent of the administrative documents are related to the postal system. In the early Mongol period, the proportion of postal documents within the administrative texts was very high, which may indicate the Mongols' urgent need for an effective communication system in the early phase of their rule. Later, as the total number of administrative documents increased, the proportion of postal documents decreased but, by the middle of the fourteenth century, more than half of the administrative documents were still postal documents. According to the Old Uyghur administrative documents, the state apparatus was functional throughout the Mongol

informed the recipient that the sender intended to travel with a caravan to Sügçü; *ibid*, pp. 121–122, No. 94. From the Mongol period, a very damaged text (*U 9361) might refer to *ortoq* merchants' privileged access to the imperial postal system: M. Vér, 'In vino veritas: wine and its context in the Uyghur society—an insight to the economic life of the Silk Roads', *AOH* LXXIV/1 (2021), p. 124.

¹²⁰ Cf. Raschmann, 'Pilgrims in Old Uyghur inscriptions' pp. 224–225.

period. Meanwhile, the proportion of those documents that belonged to the postal system is clearly lower—that is, it seems that the administration was less able or willing to support physical mobility on local and regional levels. Due to the idiosyncrasies of dating practices in our sources, it is often not possible to connect their information to specific political events. However, when this is possible, their data can enhance our comprehension of the immediate historical processes.

Due to the very limited number of pilgrim inscriptions for which accurate dating is possible and which contain toponyms, temporal changes across this huge and seemingly complex network are hard to follow up. On the one hand, the fact that most such inscriptions from Dunhuang stem from the mid-fourteenth century suggests that pilgrimages were continuous in this period as well. On the other hand, because all three inscriptions (Nos. 159, 163, 176) contain toponyms from the immediate vicinity of Dunhuang, they may indicate a diminution of the network.

From a spatial perspective, the results can be connected to three distinct spheres of mobility: the local, the interregional, and the global. The local postal and pilgrim networks in the Turfan region are clearly discernible, as are the pilgrim networks around Dunhuang in the Gansu Corridor. The importance of Kočo as an administrative centre of the region and as a central node in the local postal network is shown by the fact that *circa* 42 per cent of the administrative and *circa* 43 per cent of the postal documents with known provenance were found here. Most of the attested place names that concern the postal system are in the immediate vicinity of Kočo. They show a clear east–west route with a conjunction to the northern slopes of the Tianshan. If we compare this network that is drawn by the Uyghur toponyms with that of the narrative sources, the former shows a more sophisticated network but on a significantly smaller territory.¹²¹ If we carry on the analogy of Harris in which the narrative sources show the arteries and veins of the imperial body, then the Old Uyghur documents show the capillary vessels.¹²²

The numerous newly published pilgrim inscriptions did not change our picture of the pilgrim network in Gansu considerably but, due to the significantly higher number of edited inscriptions, the trends are more visible.¹²³ The reconstructed pilgrim network in Gansu is consistent with the postal roads that are described in the Chinese narrative sources. This may be attributed to the geographical circumstances, but it could also be a consequence of the partial overlap of the individuals who were engaged in travel in both networks. The frequent attestation of Kamil is also explicable, as it was a major administrative centre and a junction between the Gansu Corridor (and thus China proper) and adjacent territories farther west. Holy places in the Turfan region, such as the Toyok Caves complex or Ruin Q in Kočo, can be identified, too. Nonetheless, we still have only limited clues to the interregional pilgrimage that was being directed to these places, suggesting that they were rather destinations for local pilgrimage.

With regard to the interregional mobility, it can be stated that both the postal and the pilgrim networks were in use between the Turfan region and the Gansu Corridor during the tenth and fourteenth centuries, and the Mongolian documents are of particular interest in this respect. All the Mongolian documents were found in Kočo, except two that were unearthed in Dunhuang and Khara-Khoto, but even these two are tightly connected to the Kočo region by their contents, although they were created hundreds of kilometres to the west and north-west of the Uyghur lands, in the vicinity of the Chaghadaid capital, Almaliq. This peculiarity seems to support the author's earlier assumption that the

¹²¹ Cf. Shim, 'Postal roads'.

¹²² L. J. Harris, 'The "arteries and veins" of the imperial body: the nature of the relay and post station systems in the Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644', *Journal of Early Modern History* XIX (2015), pp. 287–310.

¹²³ Cf. Matsui, 'Revising the Uigur inscriptions', pp. 27–29.

Mongolian documents were issued at the highest (interregional) levels of the administration, and the Old Uyghur documents at the local and regional levels.¹²⁴ Moreover, these decrees suggest a functional administrative connection between the power centre of the Chaghadaid *ulus* and its eastern edge. One of the Mongolian decrees (B163:42) is especially interesting, as it connects the Eastern Tianshan region with the Gansu Corridor (and perhaps Tibet), while also connecting the pilgrim activities and the postal system.

The extension of the pilgrim networks during the Mongol period led to the global connectedness of the pilgrims. The pilgrim network in the Mongol period can be followed up even beyond the Eastern Tianshan region and the Gansu Corridor. The territories that once belonged to the Tangut district (*tangut čölge*), the White Pagoda near contemporary Hohhot and Mt. Wutai, as well as the neighbouring Akbalik area clearly became a part of this network.

Although the postal documents do not contain direct information beyond the areas adjacent to the regions under study, some of the results of the analysis can be interpreted in a global context. Of particular note is the high share of postal documents among administrative documents. The documents examined here are also unique in that a large number of original manuscripts that were produced within the postal network have not survived from other parts of the empire. Consequently, these findings may be particularly important in understanding the history of Mongol Eurasia as a whole. On the one hand, the high share of postal documents among the administrative documents shows the importance of the relay system within the administration. On the other, it makes clear just how enormous burdens the establishment and maintenance of this system were. It is uncertain whether the share of the postal system from the administration was equally high in the other territories of the empire. Since the regions under discussion constituted a central part of the empire and thus could be considered as key junction points, it must have been a strategic interest of the state to organise the most effective communication network here. Nevertheless, even somewhat lower investments in other parts of the empire would have placed a significant burden on the Mongolian budget. We know that the Great Khans repeatedly attempted to restrict access to the postal network by unauthorised individuals, which further supports this conclusion. Overall, it appears that the substantial investments that were made by the Mongols into their postal networks enabled them to establish and rule the largest continuous land empire in pre-modern history. Nevertheless, these expenditures may have precluded the Mongols from effectively financing other aspects of the state.

Finally, the most significant finding with regard to the social aspects of mobility also invites interpretation on a global scale. Both the Uyghur and Mongol documents, as well as the pilgrim inscriptions, provide examples of the strong interconnectedness of postal networks and infrastructure with pilgrim networks and infrastructure. Furthermore, interlocking with contemporary trade networks also seems plausible. Among those travellers of the postal system and of the pilgrim network who are (to varying degrees) identifiable, high-ranking officials and other members of the elite are over-represented. This indicates that the private and official spheres of interregional mobility cannot be strictly separated. Consequently, the various social and administrative structures that are connected to mobility and communication, such as the religious and postal networks discussed here, or the trade networks should be studied from a holistic perspective and not separately.

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¹²⁴ Vér, *Old Uyghur Documents*, pp. 43–44; Vér, 'Insights from the inside', pp. 444–446.

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Conflicts of interest. None.

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