Universiteit Leiden
The Netherlands

From Täŋri to Chinggis: The Reframing of Uyghur Kingship and Titulatures in the Kingdom of Qocho under Mongol Rule (ca. 840–1250)

Ducher, Lisa

Citation
Ducher, L. (2026). *From Täŋri to Chinggis: The Reframing of Uyghur Kingship and Titulatures in the Kingdom of Qocho under Mongol Rule (ca. 840–1250)*.

Version:	Not Applicable (or Unknown)
License:	License to inclusion and publication of a Bachelor or Master Thesis, 2023
Downloaded from:	https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4291539

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

From Täŋri to Chinggis: The Reframing of Uyghur Kingship and Titulatures in the Kingdom of Qocho under Mongol Rule (ca. 840–1250)

Lisa Ducher

S4453115

MA Middle Eastern Studies, Leiden University

MA thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Elena Paskaleva

January 2026

Word count (excl. Appendices): 20 687

Figure 1. Uyghur noblemen, Bešbalık, Cave 9 (9th century), wall painting, Ethnological Museum, Berlin. From *Drei uigurische Fürsten*, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst. https://recherche.smb.museum/detail/463684/drei-uigurische-fürsten

Table of contents

Introduction 7

1.1 Linguistic Background 8

1.2 Historical context 9

1.3 Literature Review 10

1.4 Terminology 13

1.5 Research Gap 14

1.6 Methodology 16

Chapter 2: *Iduq qut* in Pre-Mongol Uyghur Kingship: a Sacral Title Rooted in Religion 18

2.1 Origin of the Title *iduq qut* 18

2.2 Manichaeism and Uyghur Kingship (8th–10th century) 21

2.3 Buddhist Adaptations of Uyghur Kingship (9th–13th century) 28

2.4 Concluding remarks 33

Chapter 3: *Täŋri* in Uyghur and Mongol Kingships: Convergences and Conflicts .. 34

3.1 *Täŋri*'s Significance for the Uyghurs' Legitimacy 34

3.2 *Täŋri*'s Significance for the Mongols' Legitimacy 37

3.3 Areas of Conflict and Implications Stemming from Täŋri as a Source of Legitimization 42

3.4 Concluding remarks 46

Chapter 4: *Iduq qut* under the Mongol Rule: from Sacred Authority to Political Status 47

4.1 The Reframing of Religious Elements in Uyghur Rulership 47

4.2 Integration of Uyghurs into the Mongol System 52

4.3 Continuity and Adaptation of Pre-Mongol Features after 1209 55

4.4 Concluding remarks 59

Conclusion 60

References 62

Appendices 68

Appendix 1. Abbreviations 68

Appendix 2. Chronology of Uyghur iduq quts 69

Appendix 3. Categorization of Uyghur rulers' titulatures 72

Appendix 4. Glossary 75

Note on Transliteration and Referencing

Transliteration systems

For transliterated passages in Old Uyghur, I rely on the transliteration used by Marton Vèr in the Berliner Turfantexte series, based on *Uigurisches Wörterbuch* (Röhrborn, 1977). In the *Berliner Transkription*, front vowels are marked by ä, ö, ü, and specific consonants by ŋ, č, š. Accordingly, the principal terms discussed in this thesis appear as *täŋri, qut*, *khan*, *bilgä*, and *iduq qut*. For Mandarin Chinese, Hanyu pinyin is used. Arabic and Persian transliterations follow the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (IJMES) standards. Finally, the romanization of Russian uses the ALA-LC (American Library Association – American Congress) system.

Referencing style

The present study follows the *American Psychological Association* (APA) 7th edition requirements for formatting citations.

Orthographic distinctions

The term *täŋri* is written as such when referring to the epithet in titulatures, and written Täŋri when discussing the deity.

Appendices

The reader will find in the appendices the abbreviations used for Old Uyghur fragments, the chronology of Uyghur rulers, a chart with the evolution of Uyghur rulers' titulature, and a glossary.

List of figures

Figure 1. Uyghur noblemen

Figure 2. Qocho/Xizhou Uyghur, Khotan, and Qara-Khanid

Figure 3. The Kingdom of Qocho at the dawn of the Mongol invasion

Figure 4. East Uyghur Qaghanate (744-840)

Figure 5. Illustration of the trilingual inscription of Qarabalgasun

Figure 6. Portrait of a Uyghur king

Figure 7. Fragment Ch/U 6843 recto and verso

Figure 8. Coin attributed to Ögödei's reign (r.1227–1241)

Figure 9. Seal of Güyük Khan (r.1246–1248)

Figure 10. Map of the Yuan Empire under Khubilai Khan (r.1260–94)

Introduction

In 1209, as a reply to the voluntary submission of the *iduq qut* Barchuq Art Tegin (ca. 1206–ca 1230), ruler of the Uyghur Kingdom of Qocho (843–ca 1250), Chinggis Khan (d. 1227) declared in *The Secret History of The Mongols*:

> I will give him a daughter. Let him be a fifth son. Let the Ïduqut come hither, bringing gold, silver, *subut*-pearls, *tana*-pearls, *nasis*-brocades, and silks.[1]
>
> (Atwood, 2022, p.120)

This statement reflects the complexity of Uyghur vassalage under the Mongols. Despite being proclaimed equal to Chinggis' sons, the Uyghur ruler was first regarded as a vassal, as stated in the above declaration, expected to bring luxury goods. This apparent honor implies both symbolic sovereignty and structural incorporation of the kingdom into the Mongol imperial system. The khan expected Uyghur active participation in the Mongol state-building initiative as a counterbalance to marital alliances and lineage bonds. Still, the Uyghur ruler was able to maintain his title, *iduq qut,* translated as "blessed by divine favor from Heaven" by Dai Matsui (Matsui, 2023, p. 3). The preservation of the local royal title underscores the significance of the Uyghur kingdom for the rising Mongol Empire (1206–1368). This privileged status granted by Chinggis Khan in 1209 establishes a collaborative relationship between the two entities, mainly enabled by the deliberate submission of the Uyghurs and their flourishing trade network (Allsen, 1983, p. 248).

The political entity that emerged from the rise of Chinggis Khan from 1206 to the fall of the Yuan dynasty in China in 1368 is what this study will term the Mongol Empire. In the present study, the term 'Uyghur' is not used to refer specifically to the ethnicity, but rather to designate the kingdom and qaghanate itself, constituted of several ethnicities, set up by the Uyghur ruling class of Turkic origin.

To understand the significance of the decision made by Chinggis Khan, it is essential to establish the historical and linguistic background of the Uyghur ruler's titulature "*Arslan Bilge Tengri* (name ruler) *Iduq qut*", abbreviated to *iduq qut* (Arat, 1986).

[1] The choice has been made to use Atwood's translation of *The Secret History of The Mongols* for its readability and contextual insights.

1.1 Linguistic Background

Qut is intrinsically polysemic, which makes it hard to define. The word *qut* refers to various titles and objects, but the present study focuses solely on its use in titles associated with rulers. Hans-Joachim Klimkeit translates it as "fortune" or "charisma." According to Klimkeit, the origin of the *qut* dates back to the adoption of "the religion of the Light," Manichaeism, by the Uyghur ruler in the late 8th century (Klimkeit, 1982). From the beginning, the *qut* is intertwined with religion. This dialogue between the political and religious spheres is personified by the ruler's magical powers derived from his *qut*, such as his ability to foretell events. The *qut* and its incarnation, the ruler, protect and guarantee prosperity to the kingdom (Golden, 2010, p. 44).

Associated with *iduq,* translated as 'holy' or 'sacred'*,* it conveys the notion that the ruler is a sacred entity invested with a divine mandate. It is intertwined with Täŋri, the Sky deity who provides the *qut* (blessing, fortune) to the chosen ruler (de la Vaissière, 2024, p. 356). This 'Heavenly mandate' and the reference to Täŋri, also claimed by the Mongols, raises the question of the potential reframing of Uyghur ruler legitimacy sources after their submission to Chinggis Khan in 1209.

The title *iduq qut* is a loanword originating from the Basmils (742-744), a tribe of non-Turkic origin from Mongolia, who were overthrown by the Uyghurs in the middle of the 8th century (Lee, 2023, p.20; Golden, 2010, p. 27). Not only the title itself, but also the Uyghur conception of kingship is inherited from pre-Mongol Turkic traditions. Regarding the occurrence of the title throughout the kingdom's history, there is scarce evidence between the 9th and 12th centuries (Kasai, 2020, p. 67). However, for the following period, Yang Fu-hsüeh writes that "until the later period of the Qoco Uyghur Kingdom, approximately from Asan Temur Iduq-qut (second half of the 12th century) and Barchuart Tegin Iduq-qut, almost all the kings had the title Iduq-qut" (Fu-hsüeh, 1995, p.376). This statement informs on the persistence of the title after 1209 until the last iduq qut Čing Timür (1352-1360), despite the dislocation of Uyghur power due to external pressures under the Yuan (1271–1368) and the Chagataids (c. 1220–1334) (Golden, 2017, p. 11).

1.2 Historical context

The first phase of Uyghur history as a political entity begins in 744 with the establishment of the East Uyghur Qaghanate (744–840) in Mongolia along the Orhon River, which collapsed in 840 after a Kyrgyz attack. Following this defeat, the Uyghurs migrated southwestward toward the Tarim Basin and Turfan oases.

There, they founded a Western sedentary kingdom, known to historians as the Uyghur Kingdom of Qocho (also known as Gaochang 高昌 in Chinese sources). They abandoned the imperial title of *qaghan* during their transition from a nomadic qaghanate to a sedentary kingdom, in favor of *täŋri*-based titles and *iduq qut* in accordance with their new political status. The Kingdom of Qocho was centered around two capitals: Bešbalık and Qocho, located between the Turfan and Tarim Basins. (See Figure 2.)

Situated among oases at the heart of the Silk Roads, the Uyghur kingdom rapidly grew into an indispensable trade partner for its neighbors. Due to its cosmopolitanism and geographic location, it benefited from diverse religious influences and successively adopted Manichaeism and Buddhism (Soucek, 2000, p. 77). Uyghurs also developed strategic relations with the Tang dynasty (618–907) in the East and supported the Chinese dynasty commercially and politically.

In 1133, the Qara Khitai (or Western Liao Dynasty) (1124–1218) absorbed the local kingdom, and Uyghurs became vassals. During their rule, the Kingdom of Qocho remained relatively autonomous, only financially contributing to the Qara Khitai Khanate through taxes. The growing financial constraints, alongside the rapid rise of Chinggis Khan, pushed the Uyghurs to violently abandon the Qara Khitai and pledge allegiance to the Mongols in 1209.[2]

Later, under the reign of Möngke Khan (r. 1251–1259), due to purges of several officials, including the iduq qut, the local Kingdom of Qocho lost a consequent degree of autonomy. This episode reinforced Uyghur surveillance by the Yuan dynasty (Boyle, 1958, pp. 48–49; Thackston, 1998, pp. 75–76). Yuan influence on the Uyghur kingdom grew bigger under Khubilai Khan (1276–1294). Qocho, standing at the heart of a conflict between the Yuan and Chaghatai *ulus,* was progressively dissolved, especially under Qaidu's (1236–1301) campaigns,

[2] Uyghur submission is reported by Juvaynī as following the rebellion of the Iduq qut against the Qara Khitai envoy sent to collect taxes and killed by the Uyghurs (Boyle, 1958, p.44).

and was wholly integrated into the Yuan administrative system by the late 1270s (Biran, 1997, pp. 19–20; p. 42).

From the late 13th century onwards, the kingdom was progressively integrated into the Chaghatai Khanate, after the Yuan dynasty lost authority over the region of Qocho. This shift paved the way for the subsequent Islamization of Uyghurs.

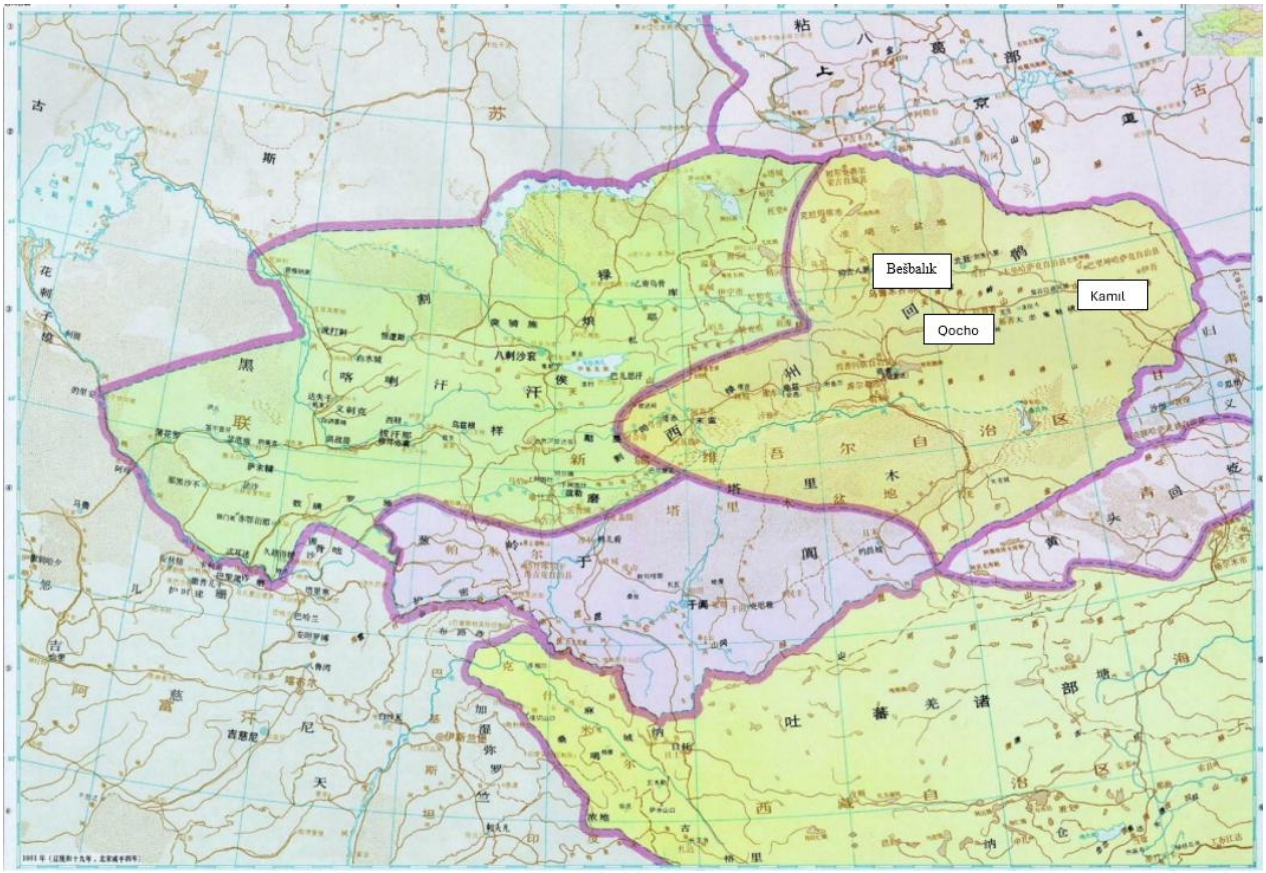


Figure 2. Qocho/Xizhou Uyghur (高昌/西州回鶻), Khotan (于闐), and Qara-Khanid (黑汗/喀喇汗) (beginning of the 11th Century). Adapted from Tan (1982), pp. 38–39.

1.3 Literature Review

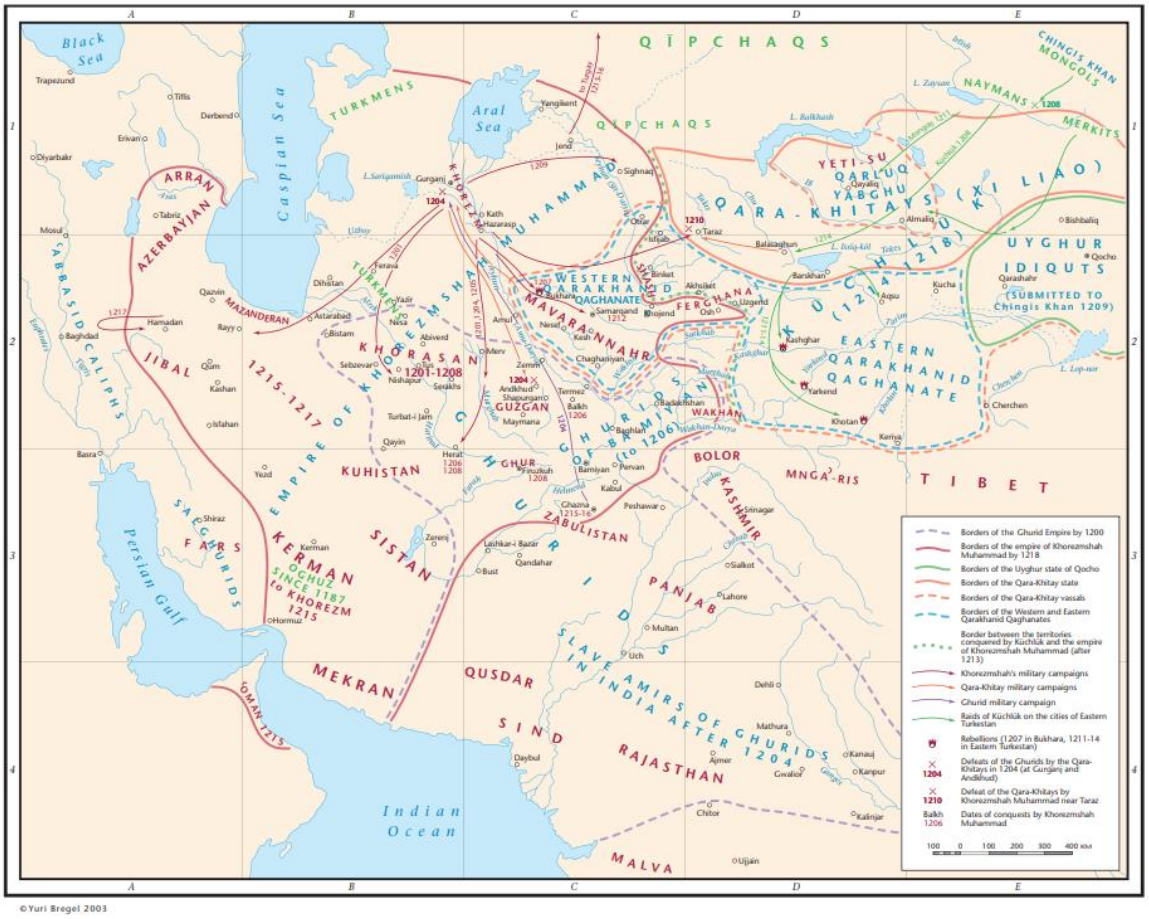
The perspective of Mongol imperial history has long shaped Uyghur studies. Especially Thomas Allsen (1940–2019) and Michael C. Brose (b.1956) made a crucial contribution to the field from that vantage point. The former, in *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (2001), unveils the interconnectedness of the Mongol Empire and its ability to filter and absorb valuable traits from sedentary populations to fuel its own expansion. The latter, in *Subject and Masters:*

Uyghurs in the Mongol Empire (2007), examines the complexity of vassalage and underscores the Uyghurs' extensive contributions to the Mongol Empire. Despite their importance, these studies remain focused on the Mongol state-building and the role of local populations in this enterprise. Recently, scholars such as Dai Matsui, Takao Moriyasu, and Marton Vér have shifted the focus from a Mongol-centered perspective towards a localist approach.

Rather than relying on Arabic, Chinese, or Persian chronicles, their studies are mainly based on Old Uyghur civil and religious documents from the Turfan collection, the result of four expeditions conducted in Central Asia between 1902 and 1914.[3] My thesis builds on this paradigm by focusing on the implications of the Mongol takeover for local populations in the Tarim Basin region, namely Uyghurs.

These Uyghur-centered studies mainly focus on two areas: philological analysis of titles and religious studies, particularly Manichaeism and Buddhism. The first category involves tracing the linguistic filiation of Uyghur titles and their proximity to other languages, particularly Chinese. The unique geographical location of the Kingdom of Qocho in the Tarim Basin placed the Uyghurs at the crossroads between many traditions, especially Turkic, Sogdian, and Chinese. (See Figures 2 and 3.) The cultural and religious eclecticism shaped by this geography is reflected in the official and religious titles. Annemarie von Gabain in *Das Leben Im Uigurischen Konigreich Von Qoco 850-1250* notes the cohabitation of Chinese and Old Turkic elements in Uyghur titulatures. Apart from these influences, she also notes linguistic proximity to Sogdian and Persian, revealing the rich synthesis practiced by the Uyghurs (Gabain, 1973, pp. 67–69). Other scholars, such as Reşid Rahmeti Arat and Andrey Kubatin, follow the same approach, mapping a linguistic network among Turkic dynasties that share similar titles. These studies provide a solid foundation and accurate classification for analyzing titles. In the absence of any direct historical chronicles of the Uyghur kingdom, these philological and religious studies offer precious insights into the kingdom’s political life.

[3] These excavation campaigns took place under the leadership of Albert Grünwedel and Albert von Le Coq in the Turfan area, Hami, Kucha, and Karashahr. A large quantity of fragmented manuscripts in 15 different languages were found, especially Uyghur manuscripts. All the collected fragments are now studied and regularly published in the *Berliner Turfantexte* series.



©Yuri Bregel 2003

17. THE EARLY 13TH CENTURY: THE GHURIDS, KHOREZMSHAHS, QARA-KHITAYS, AND KÜCHLÜK

Figure 3. The Kingdom of Qocho at the dawn of the Mongol invasion. After Bregel, (2003), p. 35.

On rituals of legitimization and kingship, Peter Golden has published many fruitful studies. For instance, in his chapter "The Türk Imperial Tradition in the Pre-Chinggisid Era", he sheds light on three similar components present in other Inner Asian cultures: sacral claims, ethnogenesis myth, and magical power (Golden, 2006, p. 78). This triptych constitutes a valuable framework for understanding the foundations of Uyghur kingship, which inherited and reinterpreted some Turkic traditions. Following this approach, Yukiyo Kasai delves into the sacred nature of Uyghur kingship in "Uyghur Legitimation and the Role of Buddhism", where she details the importance of religion in the legitimacy process and the transformation of associated rituals and titles under Mongol rule. In her article, she compiles Uyghur rulers' titles from the 8th to the 11th centuries and concludes that, even though there is continuity in titulature and strategies of legitimation, the evolution of rituals reveals a pragmatic instrumentalization of religious elements. Especially the Buddhist components used by Uyghurs were carefully

chosen under the Yuan dynasty to leave the official symbols of legitimacy to the Great Khan (Kasai, 2020, p. 88). Jens Wilkens builds on this research in a chapter entitled "Sacred Space in Uyghur Buddhism," emphasizing the centrality of temples and sacred spaces in legitimizing royal power. This approach provides complementary findings focused on the manifestations of power that enable the contextualization of Uyghur titulatures within a complex ideological paradigm.

1.4 Terminology

Before delving into the matter further, it is important to discuss the use of 'Western terminology' in Mongol studies. I am aware that discussing ancient politics in modern terms and using Western terminology as a conceptual framework is far from perfect. The present section aims to frame as clearly as possible the way these terms are employed throughout the thesis.

'Legitimacy' is often one of the most abused interpretative frameworks when studying empires and kingdoms. It is, of course, relevant to the present study, but establishing some distinctions is needed. There is a difference between internal and external legitimacy. Internal legitimacy is an individual's belief in his right to rule, whereas external legitimacy is recognition by another institution or group. Legitimacy, internal or external, is assessed based on the synchronicity between the ruler and a moral/religious standard. Applied to the present study, this means that the legitimacy of the Kingdom of Qocho transitioned from mainly internal (based on its own moral and religious synthesis) to mainly external after it adopted Mongol moral standards.

Max Weber is the most cited scholar when defining legitimacy. He categorized the bases for legitimate rule in society into three categories. The first source of legitimacy is described as "rational-legal," referring to a system of well-established laws and rules proclaimed by the sovereign. The second one is "charismatic" derived from the personal charisma of the leader, manifested through the *qut* in the case of Uyghurs. Finally, there is the "traditional" type of legitimacy, which is accepted as the logical historical continuum, the preservation of a preexisting order, in our case, the continuation of the Türk Qaghanates.

In the Uyghur case, religious legitimacy often conferred political legitimacy, or the right to rule. However, under the Mongols, because the source of legitimacy was reshaped, the

ideological overlapping was a double-edged sword: it is partly thanks to their religious compatibility with the Mongols that Uyghurs gained an important status, but it is also because of this that they capitulated on specific sources of legitimacy (e.g., Täŋri).

The term 'ideology' is used in the thesis not to refer to doctrinal texts, but rather to name the coherent set of concepts and symbols used in Mongol and Uyghur political legitimization. Therefore, ideology is applied to myths, religious elements, and ritual practices.

Another important notion is 'vassal' or 'vassalage' applied to Mongol/Uyghur relations. Though its use remains highly questionable and should be sporadic, I allow myself to use these expressions to frame Uyghur subordination and legitimacy as dependent on the Mongols, as conceptual debates go, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this study.

In this thesis, I often describe Uyghur kingship as 'sacred'. It refers to a model in which political legitimacy is anchored in the ruler's sacralization. Two forms of sacred kingship, "divinisation" and "righteousness," merge and alternate in Uyghur ideology. The first category considers the ruler semi-divine ('born in Heaven') and attributes his possession of supernatural attributes to his ensuring the realm's prosperity. This is especially the case before Buddhist penetration in the Kingdom of Qocho, though it persists in 'tengrist' terminology (*iduq qut*) even under Mongol rule. The other category, "righteousness," applies when the ruler is aligned with and legitimized by moral truth derived, in the present case, from Manichaeism, Buddhism, and later Mongol ideology. In this case, the sacred is not directly linked to the ruler but is rooted in universal principles such as the *dharma* or Heaven's mandate (Strathern, 2019, pp. 155–218).

1.5 Research Gap

As detailed above, to the best of my knowledge, only a few researchers have merged philological and historical approaches, and even fewer have focused on the evolution of Turkic titles under Mongol rule. The scope of many studies focuses either on the Türk Qaghanate (552-744) or post-1250 developments. One reason for this gap could be the scarcity of sources for the transition period from the Qara Khitai to the Mongol rule (1124–1209), and the lack of dates in the majority of documents, which inherently leads to speculative studies. My research does not claim to solve these issues entirely. However, the present thesis aims to address this gap by situating the events around 1209 in a broader ideological and historical context preceding the

Uyghur submission to the Mongols in order to show the long-term evolution of the Uyghur ruler title.

More specifically, my study focuses on the title *iduq qut* and the disputed politico-religious notion *täŋri*. I articulate my research around the following question: how does the evolution of Uyghur rulers' titulature reflect the adaptation of religious and political claims within the Mongol imperial system? Focusing on titles such as *iduq qut* is particularly relevant, for it illustrates the partial continuity with the Turkic Qaghanate, and underlines the Uyghur's original contribution to the Turkic conception of kingship. From a broader perspective, the objective is to collect insights on the impact of the Mongol conquest on vassal models of kingship and sacred legitimacy.

Though the persistence of the title *iduq qut* indicates the Mongols' consideration and the Uyghurs' privileged status, the symbolism of this title changed after 1209. Present research argues that the theocratic essence of Uyghur kingship, intertwined with religion and sacralization of the ruler, underwent a period of decline. The ruler's title *iduq qut* progressively lost its sacred importance as a symbol of the ruler's filiation with the divine Täŋri. It became an honorary distinction referring to a mere political ruler. Indeed, the evolution of the title under Mongol rule shows that mentions of the term *täŋri* decline from the 13th century onwards. (See Appendix 3) Once regarded as the bearer of divine legitimacy and magical power, the iduq qut was a vassal of the Mongols and could no longer claim the sacred status granted by Heaven. The divine origin of the ruler's *qut* recalls the Great Khan's heavenly legitimacy, and the reference to Täŋri could be seen as a sign of defiance towards Mongol power.

This argument is based on three intertwined claims: Prior to 1209, Uyghur titulatures adjust native elements such as *iduq qut* or *täŋri* to align with the state religion (Chapter 2). From 1209 onward, *iduq qut* is favored and the cosmological claim visibly restrained through the decline of *täŋri*-based titles (Chapter 3). Though Buddhism and the title *iduq qut* are retained, the 'purification' of titulatures reflects the Uyghur kingdom's integration into the Mongol imperial ideology (Chapter 4).

To support these claims, the thesis first explores the roots of Uyghur titulature structure, which is inherited from pre-Mongol Turkic traditions. Then, delves into the essential role of the divine element *täŋri* in Uyghur titles and Mongol rulership, adopting a comparative approach.

Ultimately, this results in an analysis of the 'desacralization'[4] of Uyghur rulers' titles and the status of *iduq qut* under Mongol domination.

1.6 Methodology

The research is conducted by a thorough analysis of a selected corpus of Old Uyghur documents, mainly from the Turfan collection. The documents have been partly selected from the recently published, translated, and annotated editions by Matsui (2023), Moriyasu (2019), and Vèr (2019). The script and stamp categorization set out by Dai Matsui (2023) and Moriyasu (2019) helps determine whether the document belongs to the pre-Mongol or Mongol period. Styles of script are classified chronologically by the authors.

The "square" script was used from the 9th to the 12th century in religious and literary manuscripts. After the 12th century, the cursive script became the standard for civil and administrative documents. This is why cursive script documents are usually attributed to the Mongol period. However, since square script was continuously used after the Mongol takeover, they suggest taking stamps and opening/closing formulas into account when categorizing the documents. Variations such as "semi-square" and "semi-cursive" were identified, the former being a less formal style than the "square", and the latter being used for documents written in a more official style than the "cursive" ones.

I combine philological and historical research to assess the significance of title components and understand their adaptation across different political and religious contexts. Due to the lack of native documents and the complexity of the matter, the research draws on external paradigms to gather clues about the kingdom's internal dynamics. The fragmented nature of Uyghur sources and the difficulty of dating them require the use of Chinese and Persian sources. My contextual corpus is constituted of sources such as the *Yuan Shi* 元史 (ca. 1370), *Jāmiʿ al-Tawārīkh* written by Rashīd al-Dīn (1247–1318), and *Ta'rikh-i-Jahan-Gusha* by Alā al-Dīn 'Aṭā Malik Juvaynī (1252/1253–1360). I make use of both originals and translations when needed. Navigating with local and external sources enables me to trace patterns of title

[4] By 'desacralization', the thesis means filtering out specific sacral elements such as references to *täŋri* and reference to the divine powers and birth of the ruler.

occurrence or disappearance. It also provides additional information on the domination/submission relationship between the Mongols and Uyghurs.

Chapter 2: *Iduq qut* in Pre-Mongol Uyghur Kingship: a Sacral Title Rooted in Religion

During the pre-Mongol era, Uyghur titles were directly affiliated with state religions, Manichaeism, and then Buddhism, and borrowed elements from them. The title of the ruler was the result of a religious layering going back to Turkic traditions. Each of its components served as a legitimizing rationale, anchoring the ruler in a larger tradition. More precisely, this chapter posits that the reference to Täŋri and Turkic elements constituted an element of continuity despite changing religious context until the Mongol conquest. The following sections explore each major layer that is shown in the title and conception of rulership.

2.1 Origin of the Title *iduq qut*

The adoption of the title *iduq qut* by Uyghur rulers occurred after they settled in the Tarim Basin in the middle of the 9th century. Until their migration, the Uyghur East Qaghanate was ruled by a qaghan. This shift of title accompanied the Uyghur transition from a nomadic qaghanate to a sedentary kingdom. In this new geographical, political, and religious context, the ruler needed a singular title to affirm his authority. What were the implications and claims made by the ruler behind the title *iduq qut*? How did it affect the notion of legitimacy previously embodied in the title *qaghan*? Starting by discussing the title *qaghan* is essential to understanding the difference in rank from *iduq qut* and the context in which it appeared.

At the time of the formation of the East Uyghur Qaghanate in the mid-8th century, its rulers, who had recently overthrown Türk rule, considered themselves the 'political successors' of the Türks. Nevertheless, although they shared religious and cultural similarities, Uyghurs regarded the Türks, to whom they were formally submitted, as their enemies due to political rivalry (Lee, 2023, p.35). This narrative did not prevent the first Uyghur rulers from claiming that they were linked to the founder of the first Türk Qaghanate (ca.552–744): Bumin Qaghan (ca.490–553/54). Rulers' titles in the Türk Qaghanate combined epithets and the political title *qaghan* ("universal ruler") at the end (Asimov, M. and Bosworth, C. E., 1998, p.197). Early Uyghur qaghans reproduced the same title pattern, signifying to all that they inherited imperial legitimacy. For instance, the first Uyghur ruler was called Qutlugh Bilgä Kül Qaghan (r. 744–747), and his son

was El-Etmiş Bilgä Qaghan (r. 747–59). The same structure is used with *iduq qut* too, which is always positioned after the epithets and the name of the ruler.

Rybatzki distinguishes two parts in Uyghur qaghans' titles. The first part of the titulature is constituted of what he calls "intitulation" (e.g., "*täŋri de bolmīš"* ("being made by Heaven"), or *"qut bolmīš"*). This part of the title shows that the ruler received his power from an external source. He does not inherently hold it, but is invested with a mission, thanks to his attributes (e.g., strength, courage, wisdom), for the benefit of his kingdom. The second part of the titulature is identified by Rybatzki as a "significant name-title consisting of definite attributes and *bilge qaghan*"(Rybatzki, 2000, p.247).

Andrey Kubatin qualifies these "attributes" as "epithets" that allow us to distinguish between ranks and rulers (Kubatin, 2016, p. 135). An epithet can emphasize the ruler's qualities and be used even before his enthronement to differentiate him (Kubatin, 2016, p. 137). For instance, the first two Uyghur rulers' titles contained the epithet *bilgä*, meaning 'wise', and given to the "Counselor" of the Türk Qaghans, or as an attribute to the qaghan (Clauson, 1972, p.340; Golden, 2010, p.81). The epithet can also explicitly inform on the rank. For example, *qutlugh* (literally 'possessing *qut,'* i.e., fortune, charisma) refers to the ruler's or high-esteemed official's divine source of legitimacy. More peculiar epithets like "*el-etmish*", translated by Kubatin as "the one who created the state", directly underline the ruler's political legitimacy and achievements (Kubatin, 2016, p.144). Rybatzki considers the second part to be the most important, as it is consistently mentioned in the documents, unlike the first part, and enables the differentiation of rulers, as demonstrated by Kubatin. This distinction between "intitulation" and "epithets" shows that Uyghur ruler's legitimacy is dual. It is composed of a transcendental source, and the intrinsic virtues of the sovereign. These attributes participate in the cosmic balance between the mandate of Heaven and royal wisdom.

The etymology and meaning of *qaghan*, commonly translated as 'emperor' or 'supreme ruler,' has been highly debated by scholars. My goal here is to summarize their conclusions to understand the implications of the Uyghur rulers' adoption of this title. It is admitted among scholars that one of the oldest attestations of this title is present in Chinese sources (可汗, *kè hán*) referring to the ruler of the first Türkic Qaghanate (552–603). However, scholars such as Pulleyblank or Doerfer suggested that the title could have been borrowed from Xianbei (3rd century BC–3rd century AD), a nomadic and semi-nomadic people living in the North-East of

China. Despite the absence of consensus regarding its origins, the use of *qaghan* dates back to ancient times, underscoring its importance in rulers' legitimizing processes.

Qaghan is better understood in relation to *khan.* The former seems to be attributed to a superior ruler, whereas the latter is for a 'lesser ruler' in medieval Central Asia. Its adoption by Uyghur rulers shows their aim to continue the ambitions of the Türk Qaghanate.

The shift from *qaghan* to *iduq qut* followed the Uyghur defeat against the Kirghiz coming from the South Siberian Yenisei region around 840, and their resettlement in the Tarim Basin. Their demise led to the fall of their qaghanate and undermined the continuity of the Türk qaghanate. Uyghurs, now a local kingdom, needed to adapt their political identity to their new environment and subjects. *Qaghan* emphasized the idea of superiority; it is a 'pan-nomadic' title, whereas *iduq qut* solely focused on the sacral nature of the ruler rather than universal ambitions. It demonstrated that the ruler still had Täŋri's favor even after the displacement of the power center.

Gerard Clauson in *An etymological dictionary of pre-thirteenth-century Turkish* distinguishes two entries for the term *iduq.* In the main entry, the author interprets the word as the deverbal passive noun from the verb *ı:d* meaning "to send, to deliver". He notes that *iduq* is "used only in the sense of 'sent, i.e., dedicated to God', hence sacred in a more general sense" (Clauson, 1972, p.41). The second entry*, "idi,"* means "master, owner, lord, god." More recently, Dai Matsui translated *iduq qut* as "blessed by divine favor from Heaven" based on Clauson's interpretation of *iduq qut* as "the sacred favor of heaven" (Matsui, 2023, p. 3). Linguistic discussions on this topic are abundant and go beyond the scope of this thesis. What is relevant to the present study is the idea of 'sacred' or 'blessed' that persists across all interpretations. Used separately, both words *iduq* and *qut* can refer to inanimate or non-human objects. Used together, they emphasize the charisma or mission given by god to its bearer. The idea of a sacred mission given to the ruler dates back to Turkic traditions, though it is not clearly affiliated with any religion. It is on the spectrum of 'shamanistic' Turkic-Mongol beliefs. [5]

Iduq qut is only one part of the pre-Mongol Uyghur ruler's titulature "*Arslan Bilge Tengri* (name ruler) *Iduq qut*" (Arat, 1986). *Arslan*, meaning 'lion,' is an epithet used in many Turkic titles symbolizing strength and bravery (Clauson, 1972, p. 238). The structure of the titulature "*Arslan Bilge Tengri* (name ruler) *Iduq qut*" and its variations combine divine-related and ruler-

[5] The word 'shamanistic' itself is problematic, but the debate surrounding its use goes beyond the scope of the present study. For more details, see Wilkens, J. (2024).

related epithets. While some title components, such as *qut* and *täŋri*, directly refer to the divine who rules through the blessed sovereign, others express the ruler's qualities, such as *bilgä* and *arslan*. The king, as a human being, personifies the Sky and the Earth. The name of the ruler is symbolically at the center of this microcosm and embodies celestial and terrestrial elements.

Before the Mongol period, Uyghur titles could also be shortened (e.g., *bilgä qaghan, iduq qut*) in secular and administrative contexts. The sacral elements of the titulature were omitted, resulting in a simplified form that preserved the ruler's political identity. The shortened form was privileged but not invented under Mongol rule, and it contributed to the secularization of Uyghur titles (see Chapter 4). In pre-Mongol times, the elaborate form of the Uyghur ruler's title primarily served as a legitimizing element in official internal (ruler-to-subjects) and external (ruler-to-other-regional-powers) communications. However, after 1209, titles were reshaped in the context of a relation vassal/ruler reflecting the subordinate status of Uyghurs.

Several elements from the pre-Manichean title seen previously, such as *qut* and *täŋri*, survived Uyghur religious conversion to Manichaeism in the 8th century. Others derived from Manichean tradition were stacked on top of the pre-existing components to better claim Uyghur legitimacy.

2.2 Manichaeism and Uyghur Kingship (8th–10th century)

Manichaeism, a religion blending elements from Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Christianity, was adopted in 762/763 by the ruler Bögü Khan and stayed the kingdom's state religion until the middle of the 10th century (Lee, 2023, p.39).[6] First, as the state religion of the East Uyghur Qaghanate, Manichaeism continued to be strongly supported by the West Uyghurs of the Kingdom of Qocho (second half 9th –13th) after they settled in the Tarim Basin region. Uyghur conversion helped address issues of dynastic credibility and navigate the transition from East to West. It is likely that, because the Qocho rulers lacked genealogical legitimacy, auxiliaries such as religion played a greater role in their rule.[7] Manichaeism ensured a bond between East

[6] The date of Uyghur conversion to Manichaeism is subject to debate among scholars. For more details see Moriyasu, T., 2015, p. 319. I will stick to the date formulated by Chavannes and Pelliot based on their study of the Chinese section of the trilingual stele of Qarabalgasun as it is the one commonly used (Chavannes & Pelliot, 1913, pp. 186–190).

[7] Even though the history of West Uyghurs is lacunar, their rulers probably did not belong to East Uyghurs clan, the Yaglakar clan. For more details see Kasai, Y., 2020.

and West Uyghurs after their migration into separate areas and enabled them to overcome genealogical disputes between the two kingdoms (Kasai, 2020, p. 72).

Nevertheless, the implantation of Manichaeism fluctuated and was not linear. For instance, under the reign of Tun Baga Tarxan (Dunmohe Dagan 頓莫賀達干, r. 779–789), Manicheans were persecuted. Despite these tensions, Manichaeism visibly interacted with preexisting Turkic traditions without replacing them. Both traditions appear side by side in rulers' titles. While it remains challenging to evaluate the sphere of influence of the religious conversion on Uyghur kingdom subjects, Manichean elements can clearly be identified in Uyghur rulers' titles. This reveals that the newly adopted religion at least affected the ruler's cosmological position and, by extension, the rituals and ceremonies surrounding him.

The trilingual inscription of Qarabalgasun, written in Old Turkic, Sogdian, and Chinese under the eighth Uyghur qaghan (r. 808–821 CE) in Mongolia, constitutes one of the oldest testimonies of Uyghur adoption of Manichaeism and clear evidence of Uyghur title reformulation. (See Figure 4.) Concerning the conversion itself, the stele describes the burning of so-called "images of the demon" (Chin. *moxing* 魔形) and the adoption of a vegetarian diet imposed by royal decree (Wilkens, 2024, p. 93), revealing the conversion's direct social impact.

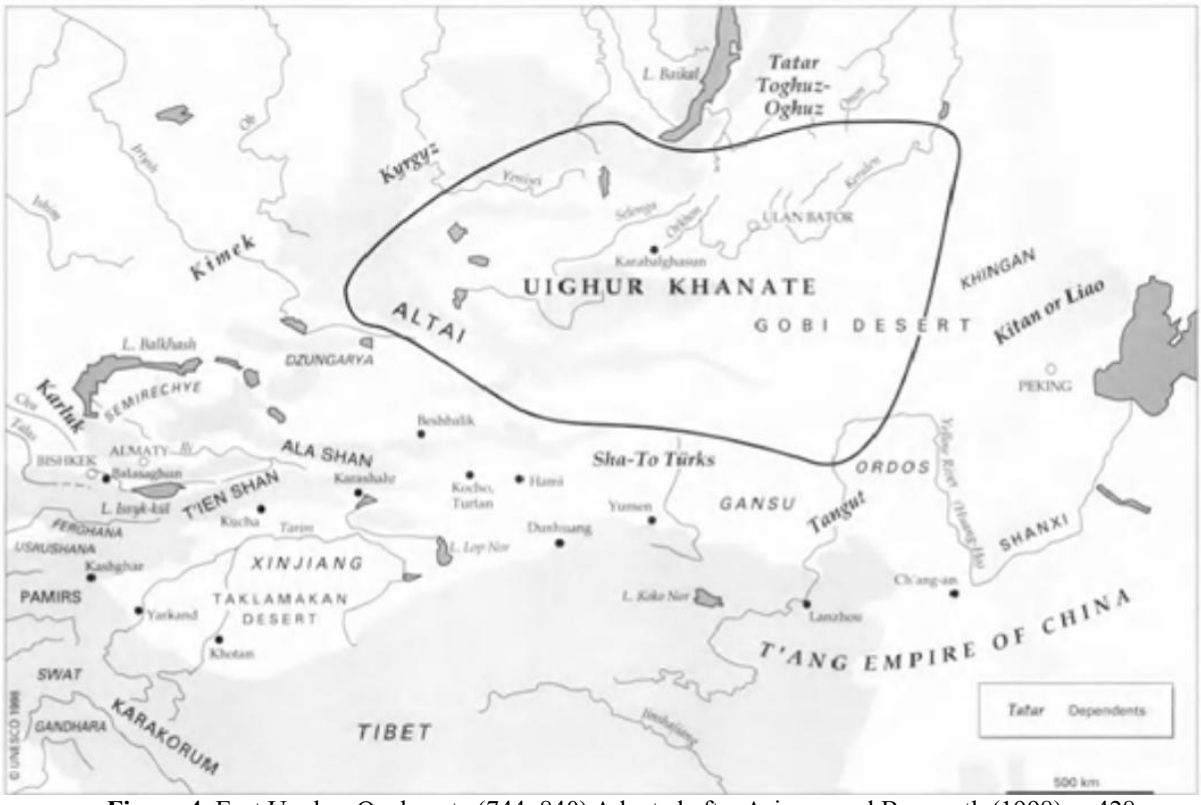


Figure 4. East Uyghur Qaghanate (744–840) Adapted after Asimov and Bosworth (1998), p.428.

The granite stele was found near the palace remains in the capital of the East Uyghur Kingdom, Qarabalgasun. (See Figure 5.) The Chinese version is the best preserved among the three and bears the expression *jūn dēng lǐ luō mì méi mì shī* 君登里囉汨没蜜施, "he who found blessings from the Sun God," referring to the ruler (Moriyasu, 2015, p. 328). According to Kodo Tazaka, the addition of jun 君, meaning 'sun,' to the conventional Uyghur titulature beginning with "*Tängridä Qut Bulmïš"* "he who found blessings from Heaven," is due to the adoption of Manichaeism (Tazaka, 1940, pp. 223–232). However, Moriyasu disagrees with this interpretation, arguing that this formula reveals a posthumous rewriting of the ruler's legend.

If we stick to Tazaka's interpretation, the stele juxtaposes the two primary sources of legitimacy: the Sun, preceding the Manichean period, but that should be connected in this context to the Manichean cosmology, and Heaven, already used under the Türks. In addition, the mention of *qut* persists and continues to work within the new religious context. Once again, the titulature exemplifies the coexistence of beliefs within the Uyghur kingdom. The decision to preserve previous elements ensured a smoother transition towards the new religion, as it did not annihilate the preexisting order. The continuity of pre-Manichean features also anchors the ruler in a broader history and revives the ambition to carry on the Türk tradition.

Another document, M 919 (verso, ll. 12–20), dated from the 8th–9th century, more directly exemplifies the ruler's sacralization as it draws a direct parallel between the ruler and the Sun god by attributing them the same throne. It describes the enthronement of the new Uyghur ruler as follows:

> *Kaltı yana kün tängri ornınta yaruk ay tängri yašıyu bälgürä yarlıgkarča eligimiz iduk kut ol o[k] orunta bälgürä yarlıgkatı。。 altun örgin üzä oluru yarlıg boltı。。 el ötükän kutı ilki bügü eliglär kangları eliglär kutı bo [ı]duk örgin kutı tängri eligimiz ı[du]k kut üzä ornanmakı bolzun*
>
> Just as the Moon God of Light graciously appears once more shining in the place/seat (ornınta) of the Sun God, our (new) King, the Iduk Kut has graciously appeared in that very same place/seat (ol o[k] orunta) (of the throne). After he sat upon the gold (royal) throne (altun örgin), there was the (following) speech/proclamation (yarlıg): "May it be that the divine blessing of the national Ötükän, the divine blessing of the Kings and their fathers, the first sage Kings, and the divine blessing of this sacred throne (bo [ı]duk örgin), rest upon our divine King - the Iduk Kut".
>
> (Clark, 2013, pp.198–200)

This passage clearly shows the divinization of the secular ruler who sits on "the gold (royal) throne (*altun örgin*)" where the Sun god appeared. This document probably echoes rituals that physically expressed the connection between the secular sovereign and the divine.

These documents make clear that Manichean symbolism merged with Turkic traditions. This is evident in the ruler's titulature, especially in the references to the Sun (*kün*) and the Moon (*ay*) in rulers' intitulations. (See Appendix 3) Manichaeism aligned with the Uyghur conception of kingship on several points, especially the cosmological role of the ruler. Mani, the prophet and founder of Manichaeism, conceived the so-called "World of Light" as a court with the ruler, the King of Light, at its center (Klimkeit, 1982, p. 17). This idea echoes Uyghurs' conception of the universe as a tent with the ruler in the middle, beneath the Sun, Moon, and Sky deities (Esin, 2001, pp. 40–41). This similarity suggests significant potential for religious layering and cosmological reframing. According to Klimkeit, as a consequence, the conversion to Manichaeism complexifies the source of the Uyghur ruler's fortune (*qut*), no longer exclusively granted by the Sky, Heaven (Täŋri), but also by the Sun and Moon (Klimkeit, 1982, p. 23).

As Hayrettin İhsan Erkoç explains: "During the Manichean period, the God of Sun (Kün Täŋri) and the God of Moon (Ay Täŋri) appear as divine helpers of Uyghur qaghans and sources of their legitimacy, but the religious practices of the Uyghurs indicate that cults about these celestial objects were also observed by them prior to their conversion" (Erkoç, 2025, p.59). Mentions of the Sun and Moon were found in titles prior to Manichean adoption as part of the nomadic royal ideology. Golden underlines that these elements could be part of shared "common cultural traditions of Inner Asia" (Golden, 1992, p.65). Prior to Manichaeism, these references were part of a 'shamanistic' vision of the world, closer to steppe religions. In Turkic traditions, the duality of Sun/Moon creates harmony in the universe. The Sun was affiliated with masculine energy, and the Moon with feminine energy. The couple *Kün-ay* guided and watched over the ruler and his wife, and represented sovereignty for the Türks (Esin, 2001, p. 148). The symbolism in Manichaeism is different. The Sun and Moon are the two palaces of Light: in the former reside the "Third Messenger", the "Mother of Life" and the "Living Spirit"; and in the latter, "Jesus the Splendour", the "Virgin of Light" and the "First Man" (Rybatzki, 2000, p. 245). Because of this cosmological proximity, Uyghur conversion to Manichaeism was made easier. Indeed, the legitimizing elements and their powers did not change; only their interpretation and communication did.

Later, under the West Uyghur Kingdom of Qocho, several texts attest to how Manichaeism reshaped Uyghur iduq qut's titulature. The fragment T.M 417 (Le Coq), which, according to Arat, is the oldest record of the actual title *iduq qut* in Old Uyghur documents, also mentions

Manichean elements (Arat, 1986, p. 24). Its date of production remains unknown, but Matsui and Moriyasu attribute this fragment to the West Uyghur period. The text praises the iduq qut Avlavç and its divine aptitudes, which brought harmony to the kingdom. This document seems to have been written for the enthronement of the new ruler. It reads that "the decree to ascend the golden throne was issued": *altun örgin öze oluru yarlıg boltı* (Arat, 1986, pp.26–27, l.15–16).

This recalls document M 919 from the East Uyghur period, which shows the attempt to tie Western iduq quts to the fallen Eastern Qaghanate. Similarly with the previous period, the text mentions the title of the ruler, here *iduq qut,* alongside *kün täŋri,* the Sun god, and *ay täŋri,* the Moon god, saying that it is thanks to them that the ruler ascended (Arat, 1986, pp.26–27, l.12–13). Contrary to the East Uyghur period, in this fragment, the emphasis is clearly on Täŋri. It becomes the central cosmological element, affiliated with the Sky god itself, but also with the divine nature of the ruler, as embodied in the expression "*ıduḳ-ḳut teñgrikenimiz*" that could be translated as "our Excellence *Iduq qut*" (Arat, 1986, p.27).

U3917, a secular Manichean letter from the West Uyghur period, also bears an analogy between the ruler "*tängrim quti*" and the Sun god "*kün tängri".* The text provides information about the perception of the ruler among his subjects:

> *Tängrim qutïɣ kün tängri–čä saqïnu täginür män*
> *On uyɣur ilintä ölgüm bar ärsär tirilgäy*
> *Tip saqïnur män öčgüm bar ärsär tamït (g) ɣay*
> *Tip saqïnur män tängrim tängrim qutï–nga*
>
> My Lord! I venture to imagine His Highness (to be) like the Sun-god. Even if I am destined to die in the united kingdom of On Uygɣur, I think I will be revived (by him). Even if I am destined to expire, I think I will be set alight (thanks to him), My Lord!
>
> (Moriyasu, 2019, p. 172).

This passage presents the ruler as the protector and possessor of the power of life, death, and revival over his subjects. In blessings and eulogies, the sender often presents himself as a 'slave' submitted to the ruler's will and actions. The documents reproduce the same scheme and often bear the same kind of opening formulae. This is especially the case in letters to Uyghur kings or princes, sometimes referred to as 'Letters of Salutation' (*äsängü bitig*). The sender first asks about the well-being (*äsängü*) of the high-rank addressee as in COUL no.24 (U 6180):

> *///// tigin tängrim tözün*
> *Ïduq ät'özi köngüli ädgü*
> *+mü yini yinik mü nätäg yarlïqar*

Ärki ädgün äsänin yarlïqa-
Mïšïn išidip sävinü

Oh Highness Prince (*tigin tängrim*) /////, is your mind (<lit. his mind of [the noble and sacred] flesh-spirit) good? Is your (lit. his) body light (unburdened)? [How] is Your Lordship? We ////// rejoice at being informed that you were (lit. he was) in good health (hend.).

(Moriyasu, 2023, pp. 44–45)

These letters often enquired about the well-being of the ruler, for which the sender prayed. This rhetorical procedure emphasizes the sacrality of the iduq qut, who, because of his divine charisma *qut,* is of both human and divine nature. However, these powers are not exclusively his but are borrowed in the context of his ruling mission, thereby making the ruler accountable to his people and gods for his mistakes and decisions.

Because this analogy between the ruler and the Sky as a divine element could be found across multiple cultures in the region, it kept the Uyghur conception of kingship flexible and more likely to evolve and endure religious and political shifts. Indeed, even if multiple factors changed, the fact that Uyghur kingship's conception borrowed from a broad and flexible cosmological repertoire enabled them to retain elements from multiple traditions. Manichaeism, due to its syncretic nature, synthetizing elements from diverse religions, also provided a certain flexibility. This probably allowed the Uyghurs to better navigate the transition towards Buddhism and the later submission to the Mongol conception of rulership.

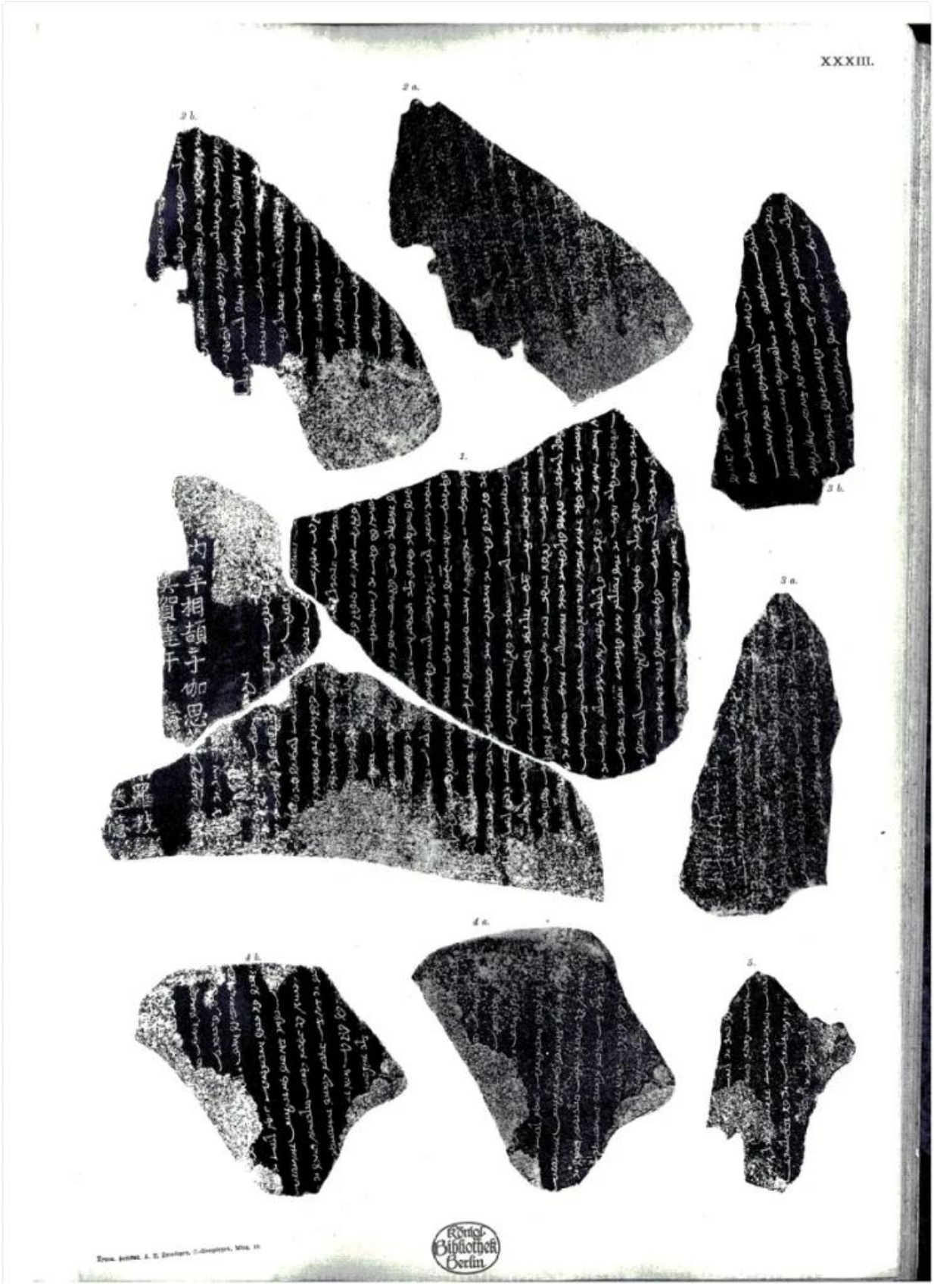


Figure 5. Illustration of the trilingual inscription of Qarabalgasun. Adapted from Radloff (1892).

2.3 Buddhist Adaptations of Uyghur Kingship (9th–13th century)

Before its adoption by the Uyghurs of Qocho in the 10th century, Buddhism was already practiced by several peoples, including the Indians, the Iranians, the Tokharians (Indo-European speakers), and the Chinese. Several factors can explain the Buddhist conversion in the kingdom on a state level. Firstly, the fall of the Tang dynasty in 907 left the kingdom with no powerful protection. Uyghurs benefited from Tang's protection as a reward for their military support of the dynasty, especially against the Tibetan Empire (7th–9th century), and during the An Lushan Rebellion (755). This context can explain their attempt to adopt a widespread religion such as Buddhism. Secondly, Buddhism was the religion of the majority of the Uyghurs' new subjects and served to strengthen ties with these communities and already established institutions (e.g., monasteries). Thirdly, Buddhism offered the Uyghurs economic advantages. Their kingdom was strategically located near pilgrimage sites and trade routes, thus benefiting from the passage of monks, pilgrims, and merchants. During the Buddhist period, the Kingdom of Qocho also reinforced its economy by becoming a crucial translation and production center for Buddhist texts.

However, even after their conversion, Uyghur rulers tried to maintain a balance between different religious communities, especially Manicheans and Buddhists, as both were important for the kingdom's stability. This could partially explain why there is no visible change in their official titles. For Kasai, "it was not a life-or-death matter for the Buddhist community whether the Uyghur rulers officially demonstrate their power in Buddhist contexts or not" (Kasai, 2020, p.84). The multi-religious environment of the Uyghur kingdom is especially reflected in the "Manichean pothi book" featuring a traditional Buddhist form and Buddhist terminology alongside Manichean texts and illustrations (Raschmann, 2024, p.76).

The absence of a clear change in Uyghur titulature after Buddhist conversion raises a broader question: should the adoption of Buddhism be regarded primarily as a strategy of legitimization? Sem Vermeersch addresses this issue in "Who Is Legitimating Whom? On Justifying Buddhism's Place in the Body Politic" (2020). The author questions whether Buddhism automatically legitimized the ruler and argues for a more nuanced interpretation that includes textual and practical manifestations. The article stresses the necessity of examining religious legitimization not only in the terminology employed but also in its traces, like rituals and practices, before concluding. In the case of Uyghur rulers, due to the lack of documents

directly associating the ruler with Buddhist cosmology in the early times of their conversion, it remains difficult to assert that this conversion was fully calculated by the iduq qut. A distinction should be made between state and grassroots Buddhism. The latter was already practiced prior to the Uyghur settlement among local populations. At a state level, patronage was surely an important instrument of kingship in medieval Central Asia. Supporting Buddhist monasteries and translations enabled Uyghurs to integrate sedentary Buddhist communities into their realm and to develop the region economically. However, 'native' components of legitimacy remained, while Buddhist elements did not clearly appear in titles. Buddhism, as Manichaeism did before, complements 'native' religious elements and ensures internal coherence within the realm. This suggests that the adoption of Buddhism was selective, pragmatic, visible in actions, but not necessarily expressed through kingship. Additionally, rulers' agency should not be exaggerated, as no document clearly declaring Uyghur state conversion survives. The adoption of Buddhism being probably the result of external influences and internal pressures.

Preserving pre-Buddhist manifestations of power also enabled the rulers to strengthen the continuity with the fallen East Uyghur Qaghanate and Uyghur origins. The ruler retained preexisting cosmological concepts while allowing Buddhism to penetrate the ideological repertoire. Consequently, Uyghur rulers' conversion to Buddhism did not alter titulatures but instead led to hybridization, visible, for instance, in rituals and artistic representations. This process is noticeable in the Old Uyghur translation of Buddhist texts. Buddhist terminology is often adapted and translated into Uyghur terms. For instance, *täŋri* was used as a synonym for 'god'. Other native terms semantically evolved or adapted to fit in the new religious context. In the case of *qut,* Wilkens explains that "in some Buddhist texts, the native idea of *kut* as related to the lifespan of a certain person is preserved" (Wilkens, 2024, p.100)—Uyghurs based their translation of exogenous texts on native terminology, facilitating their cultural absorption.

Uyghur Buddhism is made of what Wilkens describes as a "complex religio-cultural mélange" in which native religion and Buddhist practices coexisted (Wilkens, 2024, p. 106). Considering the historical context surrounding Uyghur conversion, Buddhism in the Kingdom of Qocho can be interpreted less as a doctrinal claim than a strategy of resilience for a newly settled realm. One should, however, remain careful, as Kasai points out that many Buddhist documents from the West Uyghur Kingdom are written in cursive script. A script that, according to his classification, belongs to the Mongol period. It is thus difficult to tell whether hybrid forms predated the Mongol period or developed under the Yuan.

Some hypotheses exist concerning the adoption of Buddhist titles by Uyghurs, though no clear evidence proves them. Based on his research on Dunhuang rulers (Guiyijun (851–1036?), 歸義軍) who called themselves 'cakravartin' (derived from Sanskrit *chakra* meaning 'wheel' and *vartin* 'one who turns') or 'bodhisattva king' ("sage kings"), Takatoshi Akagi argues that Uyghurs rulers might have adopted this rank as well in search for external legitimacy after Tang dynasty's fall (Akagi, 2010). By identifying himself as the *cakravartin*, the ruler based his legitimacy on his spreading of the *dharma.*[8] However, Kasai remains reasonably cautious on this point because of the lack of direct sources outside Dunhuang, which is situated much further East outside the Kingdom of Qocho (Kasai, 2020, p. 79). The title *cakravartin* is also associated with the idea of universality, a claim that could have put the Uyghur kingdom of Qocho, a regional power, in a symbolic conflict with other Buddhist powers in the region. Furthermore, this title is exclusively tied to Buddhism, leaving little room for other religions and for the conception of kingship that Uyghur rulers seemed to seek to retain. Rather than claiming a specific Buddhist title, Uyghur rulers integrated Buddhist cosmology and practices into their religious and ideological repertoire. Juxtaposing and adapting traditions could have helped preserve internal harmony in the kingdom.

A tangible example of the integration of Buddhism into dailylife practices is the patronage of Uyghur rulers. In the colophons of Uyghur Buddhist texts, the ruler is presented as a protector or patron of monasteries. The colophon template and merit-based formula in Old Uyghur Buddhist texts are derived from Chinese Buddhist documents. The proximity between the two traditions, combined with the Uyghurs' adoption of Chinese Buddhist doctrine, indicated a process of textual sinicization that presumably affected the internal framing of Uyghur kingship in Qocho.

Rulers' donations and sponsorship could also be visually represented. A fascinating portrait of a donor from the Buddhist temple west of Bešbalık (Beiting) depicts a Uyghur king. (See Figure 6.) This painting is one of the rare examples of an identified portrait of Uyghur iduq qut, with his full title mentioned. The cartouche on the left reads :

> *Kün ay t(ä)ŋrilärtä kut bulmıš kut ornanmıš alpın ärdämin el tutmıš üčünč arslan bilgä t(ä)ŋri elig tugmıš xan t(ä)ŋridäm ıduk körki bo ärür.*[9]

[8] The *dharma* in Buddhism refers to the doctrine, the universal truth taught by the Buddha.
[9] Hiroshi Umamera reads the inscription slightly differently as follows: "*Kün ay tngri-lär-tä (qut) (b)ulm[ï] š [buya]n ornanmïš alpïn [ä](r)dämin il (t)utmïš üčü(n)č ạrslan bilgä xa(n)?- nïng? tuɣmïš-qa [t](ngr)idäm ïduq körki bu ärür"*(Umamera, 1996, p. 365).

> This is the heavenly holy portrait of Tugmıš Khan Arslan Bilgä Täŋri Elig III, who received the charisma from the Sun- and Moon-God, on whom the charisma settled down, who holds the realm with bravery and virtue.
>
> (Zieme, 2014, p.18).

According to Kasai and Zieme, Arslan Bilgä Täŋri Elig III ruled around 980. Interestingly, only the portrait itself and its location clearly show the Buddhist context. The epithets used in the title, such as *arslan* or *bilgä,* precede Uyghur conversion to Buddhism. The inscription also mentions that the ruler received his charisma from the Sun and Moon, "*Kün ay t(ä)ŋrilärtä kut bulmıš"*, similar to the Manichean context. This reinforces the idea of a religious layering process. Both Manichaism and Buddhism were structured around similar principles, such as manuscript culture, religious patronage, and the teachings of a charismatic ruler. Besides, Buddhism and Manichaeism were compatible cosmologically. Both religions saw the ruler as a protector receiving blessings for their actions. The ruler's attachment to Buddhism is instead shown through the portrait itself, which praises the donation and physically positions him within Buddhist cosmology. The painting, located in the temple, probably on the way to the Buddha in the main room, belongs to the sacred space where the ruler stands close to the divine.

As seen in the previous example, despite changes in religious context, the titles of rulers in the West Uyghur Kingdom from the 9th to the 11th century often bear the same three epithets: *arslan, bilgä, täŋri* (see Kasai, 2020, Table 3.2 on p. 67). (See Appendix 3) Manichaeism and later Buddhism adapted to preexisting religious vocabulary. This idea connects to Wilkens's argument that 'native Uyghur terms' were used to translate Manichean and Buddhist texts but were semantically adapted (Wilkens, 2024, p. 99).

Figure 6. Portrait of a Uyghur king. After *Běitíng Gāochāng Huíhú Fósì Bìhuà* (1990), Plate 41.

Just as *täŋri* referred to Manichean deities during the Manichean period, the pre-existing legitimizing repertoire was adapted to Buddhist cosmology. Thus, signs of the new Buddhist repertoire were potentially more visible in rituals and in written culture sponsored by the ruler than in titulatures, where the pre-Buddhist terminology persisted. Similar to the act of conversion itself, religious traits were instrumentalized and selectively integrated into royal culture. Under Mongol rule, this would lead the Uyghurs to abandon certain Buddhist practices in official ceremonies to show their obedience to another Buddhist dynasty, namely the Yuan.

2.4 Concluding remarks

A consistent pattern emerges from the evolution of Uyghur rulers' titles between the 8th and the 11th century. A filtering process accompanied each religious conversion, first Manichaeism, then Buddhism, leading to a flexible, multilayered conception of kingship. In his article "Uyghur Legitimation and the Role of Buddhism," Yukiyo Kasai explains that official titles "reflect the rulers' intentions concerning how they want to formally represent themselves." (Kasai, 2020, p.62). In the Uyghur case, there is a steady intention to privilege Turkic elements while adopting and exploiting external religious elements. This allowed rulers to maintain their authority over a cosmopolitan population, without omitting their roots.

Chapter 3: *Täŋri* in Uyghur and Mongol Kingships: Convergences and Conflicts

This part explores the similarities between Uyghur and Mongol cosmologies and legitimacy sources, and the potential conflicts that arose under Mongol rule. Even though Uyghurs were Buddhists until the 14th century, Turkic elements such as *täŋri* remained central for their political authority. Täŋri provided political legitimization of the Uyghur dynasty, but was also claimed as the exclusive support of the Chinggisid clan. This, consequently, was at the heart of ideological disputes between the two powers.

The corpus of Old Uyghur documents that I have studied, primarily from Matsui (2023) and Moriyasu (2019), shows that during the 10th and 11th centuries, also known as the West Uyghur period, the term *täŋri* appears regularly in documents when referring to the ruler (e.g., COUL no.10, COUL no.21, COUL no.24, COUL no.37, U 3917, U 5990). It is also largely present in titles preceding the political title *elig*[10], or in the title *täŋrikän.* (See Appendix 3) However, in Old Uyghur documents written in cursive script, dated by Dai Matsui to the Mongol period, the Uyghur ruler's title does not mention *täŋri*.[11] I am well aware that my corpus is far from exhaustive, and that it remains challenging to date scattered documents and to trace a pattern. However, the contrast between square-script and cursive-script documents, and the structural evolution of titulatures, raises questions. To explain the potential ideological overlapping around Täŋri, if not decline, of the epithet *täŋri* in Uyghur rulers' titles, let us examine its significance in the Mongol and Uyghur legitimacy strategies.

3.1 *Täŋri*'s Significance for the Uyghurs' Legitimacy

In Uyghur terminology, *täŋri* refers to both the blue sky (*kök Täŋri*) as a natural element, and as the supreme deity without apparent distinction. As Erkoç explains: "Uyghur qaghans believed that they were born in the sky, achieved their imperial titles from Täŋri, and received help from him in their administrative organizations and battles against enemies; these might indicate that, like the Türks, the Uyghurs saw Täŋri as a god that favored them" (Erkoç, 2025,

[10] Literally "having a realm", as *el* means 'state' and *-ig* is the possessive suffix (Clauson, 1972, pp 140-141).
[11] The chart in Appendix 4 confirms this pattern of disappearance. *Täŋri* reappears only for the last two rulers.

p.59). This ideological framework is shared with their predecessors, the Turkic Qaghanates, as exemplified by the Orkhon inscription in honor of Bilgä Qaghan (r. 717–734), stating that:

> Heaven, which, so that the name and fame of the Turkish people should not perish, had raised my father the kagan and my mother the katun, Heaven, which kingdom-this same Heaven, so that the name and fame of the Turkish people should not perish, has now appointed me as kagan.
>
> East Side of the inscription (Ross, 1930, p.867)

To put it differently, Täŋri was the Uyghurs' privileged source of authority and rank. It was a legitimizing agent whose favor shows in the ruler's *qut* (i.e., charisma, good fortune). In that sense*, qut* as the manifestation of Heaven's will was similar to the Chinese Mandate of Heaven (*tianming* 天命) used by the Yuan. It was given, but could also be lost if the ruler failed to fulfill his duties.

In Uyghur cosmology, the ruler appeared as the mediator between the divine and the kingdom. He was symbolically born in the Sky, in Heaven "*täŋridä bolmıš*" and ruled on Earth. Consequently, his titulature until the 13th century encompasses terrestrial (often epithets such as "*arslan*" as discussed in Chapter 2) and celestial elements, all articulated around Täŋri, the supreme and creative deity. The role of Heaven in a ruler's legitimacy is evidenced in the Šine-Usu Inscription in Orkhon script[12] from Mongolia, written during the reign of the second Steppe Uyghur ruler Täŋridä bolmıš el etmiš bilgä qaghan (r. 747–759) (Moriyasu, 2009, p.9, line N1):

> *Qulum küngüm bodunuγ tängri yer ayu berti*
> The heaven god and the earth god were designed to tell (me) that the (Turk) people were my (i.e., the Khan's) slaves.
>
> (Moriyasu, 2009. pp 12 & 25, lines E1–E2)

The text mentions both the "heaven god" (*"tängri"*) and the "earth god" ("*yer"*) as sources of power, presenting the ruler as the privileged intermediary. Heaven shares its sacral nature with the ruler, and Earth secures his political sovereignty. The above examples also highlight that power transmission does not exclusively occur through the bloodline but is also transmitted through the passing down of Heaven's mandate.

If Heaven's mandate is the ruler's privilege, *täŋri* as an epithet can also be used for religious figures. This is the case in the Manichean letter COUL no.36 "*täŋri avtadan qutïnga"* translated by Moriyasu as "excellency (…) the divine Bishop" (Moriyasu, 2019, p.59). So, what distinguishes the ruler from a high-ranking official? *Täŋri* itself is polysemic and semantically

[12] Orkhon script refers to the Old Turkic alphabet adopted by the Göktürks, and later replaced by Old Uyghur.

flexible. According to Luvsandorj Bold, it has three meanings: “god-blessed”, “proclaimed name”, and “spiritual, heavenly”. This means that *täŋri* is used respectively in religious, political, and honorific contexts. When referring to the ruler’s rank, *täŋri* becomes *täŋrikän.* In this formulation, the suffix *-kän* (-khan), referring to a king, is juxtaposed to *täŋri*. The suffix *-kän* is a determinant affecting the nature of *täŋri.* In this context, *täŋri* is not the “upper universe” but has been adapted to become a “qualifying attribute” (Bold, 2022, p.23). This title itself reunites the sacral and human natures of the ruler by superposing a divine *täŋri*, and a political rank *khan.* The latter ensures a clear hierarchy, especially useful for distinguishing the addressee’s rank in administrative documents.

Täŋrikän was already used during the Turkic Qaghanates and is attested in several steles, such as the Ongiin Inscription, dated to the 8th century, and the Hangita Hat inscription, both from Mongolia (Osawa, 2011, p. 185). However, it is primarily used in these inscriptions to praise the ruler’s achievements. In Old Uyghur documents attributed to the Kingdom of Qocho, *täŋrikän* is used in letters and administrative documents as an honorific title, a mark of respect. As an example, the document COUL no.37 (U 6843) (see Figure 7. verso), written in semi-cursive script and classified by Moriyasu as “Type B: specific specified form of letter to superior,” mentions “*täŋrikänimiz qutïnga”* that can be translated as “our heavenly ruler”. This letter is a correspondence between an Uyghur *il ögäsi* (i.e., a “conseller of the realm”) to the ruler (Moriyasu, 2019, pp.59–60). It has been partly written between the lines of a Chinese Buddhist text (see Figure 7. recto). Due to these elements, this letter was likely intended for internal communication within the Uyghur hierarchy, revealing that *täŋrikän* could also be used as a mere title of greeting when writing to the ruler. Another document, the letter COUL no.10 (U 5994), written in semi-square, reinforces this idea. It opens with “*tängrikän*” as a mark of the addressee's high rank, then discusses logistical matters related to livestock management (Moriyasu, 2019, pp. 32–33).

Besides its use in administrative contexts, interestingly enough, the rulers’ chronology shows that *täŋri*-based titles are extensively used by rulers of the West Uyghur period between the 9th and 11th centuries as their official titulature. In contrast, *qaghan* is preferred before 840. (See Appendix 3) This suggests a deliberate shift in political titulature following the fall of the East Uyghur Qaghanate. Adopting *täŋri*-based titles emphasizes sacral legitimacy rooted in Turkic traditions, and coincides with Uyghur political reconstruction after the fall of their Qaghanate. From the 9th century onward, *täŋri* evolved as a political epithet and an honorific distinction in documents. Its three manifestations in Uyghur kingship: the Sky deity, the divine

mandate given to the ruler (*täŋridä bolmiš*), and the *qut* as a sign of Heaven's favor, remained despite the changing religious context in the kingdom. However, its omnipresence in titles seems to decrease after the Mongols seized power.

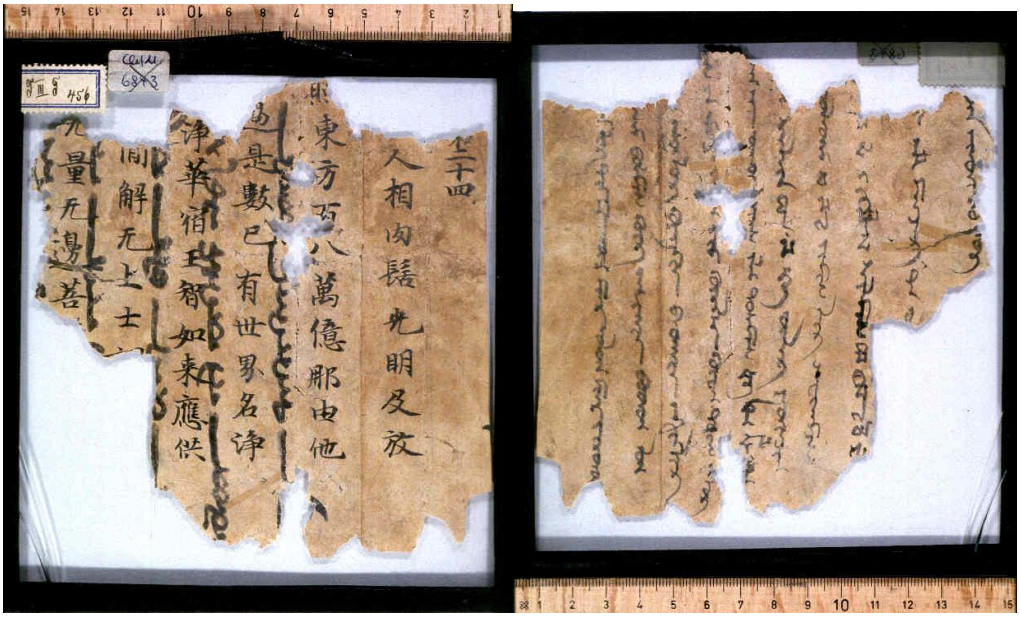


Figure 7. Fragment Ch/U 6843 recto and verso. From the Digitales Turfan-Archiv. https://turfan.bbaw.de/dta/

3.2 *Täŋri*'s Significance for the Mongols' Legitimacy

As Michal Biran writes, for the Mongols, "nothing happened without Tengri" (Biran, 2024, p.231). Its omnipresence in documents is unmissable. Peng Daya, an official under the Southern Song in China (1127–1279), wrote in his account of Ögödei's court in 1240:

> In their everyday speech, they always say, 'Relying on the strength of immortal Heaven and the fortunate protection of the emperor.' In all affairs that they desire to undertake, they say, 'Heaven wants it like that.' Regarding anything that people have already done, they say, 'Heaven is aware.' There is no affair that is not attributed to Heaven; from the lord of the Tatars to his common people, it is thus.
>
> (Atwood, 2021, p.109).

This passage implies that Mongol rulers perceived morality as external, dictated by the divine. Täŋri's role in the Mongols' kingship recalls the Uyghurs' conception of Heaven as omnipotent and creator of the world order. For both Mongols and Uyghurs, every decision or conquest was submitted to Heaven's judgement. The Mongol khan, just as the Uygur iduq qut

was only the messenger of Täŋri's will. It is because Täŋri has been favorable to the Mongols that they were able to build their empire.

The imperial expansion through conquests was seen as part of Täŋri's universalist mission. Uyghur and Mongol instrumentalization of Täŋri diverge on this aspect. In the times of the Mongol Empire, the edicts reminded of Täŋri's authority with the opening formula: *möngke täŋri-yin küčün-dür* "by the power of eternal heaven." Paragraph 275 of the *Secret History of the Mongols* reads "*Möngke tngri-yin kücun-dur, yeke su jali-yin ibe'en-dur*", or "By the Power of Eternal Heaven; by the Protection of the Majestic Imperial Fortune" as a support and justification of Batu's campaign against the Qipchaq (1236–1241) (Atwood, 2022, p.43). Besides good fortune and charisma (*qut*), the Mongol ruler received from Täŋri the legitimacy to universally rule (*möngke täŋri*), which made his mandate exclusive (Allsen, 2023, p. 444). Challenging the ruler would be interpreted as a direct offense to Täŋri. For their part, Uyghur rulers did not explicitly claim universal rule, but rather the control of a defined political entity and the continuity with Turkic Qaghanates.

Mongol textual references to Täŋri also differentiate the khans from the Uyghur iduq quts. As seen previously, *täŋri* can be used in both Uyghur official titles and blessings or tributes to high-ranking officials. In Mongol ideology, Täŋri is not used directly in titulatures but is mentioned in legitimizing formulae. It appears in administrative documents and on certain coins, such as one attributed to the reign of Ögödei that bears the inscription "*Tengri kuchundur*" or "by the strength of Heaven" (trans. Nyamaa Badarch). (See Figure 8.) As stated above, the reference to Täŋri is not directly affiliated to the ruler as a person, but instead juxtaposed as a second figure of authority.

Figure 8. Coin attributed to Ögödei's reign (1227–1241). From https://ccoins.ru/monety-chingishana-i-chingizidov-velikaya-mongolskaya-imperiya/

Güyük Khan's seal (1206–1248) is the most relevant example of this juxtaposition, and reads as follows (See Figure 9.):

> *Möngke-Tengri-yin Küchün-tür Yeke Monggol Ulus-un Dalai-yin qan-u jarliy il bulqa irgen-tür kürbesü busiretügüi ayutuyai*
>
> By the Power of Eternal Heaven, the jarliɣ of the Universal Qan of the Great Mongol Patrimony. If this reaches a pacified or a rebellious people, it must respect [it] [and] it must Fear.
>
> (Buell & Kolbas, 2016, p.44).

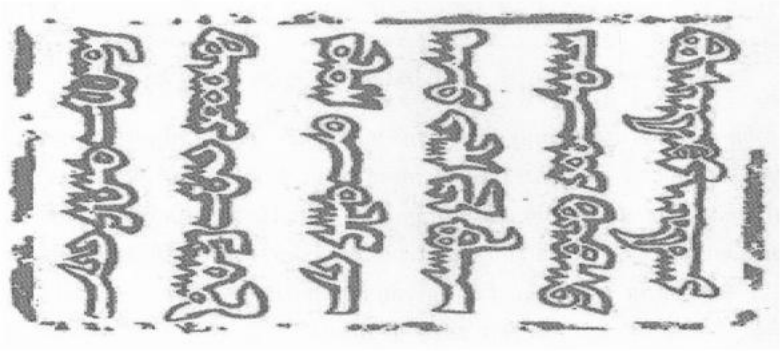


Figure 9. Seal of Güyük Khan (r.1246–1248). After Buell and Kolbas (2016), p. 44.

The seal mentions three sources of authority: the "Power of the Eternal Heaven", "the jarliɣ of the Universal Qan", and "the Grand Mongol Patrimony". This triad constituted the main pillars of Mongol imperial ideology, all of which were connected to Täŋri.

The first element of Mongol legitimacy refers to Heaven's supreme power entrusted to the sovereign for the duration of his reign. This conception of divine favor mirrors Uyghur's kingship. The power of Heaven is evident in the ruler's *qut* and actions. As Jonathan Brack argues in a recent article, Mongol religion is "immanent". Contrary to a "transcendent" religion, such as Islam or Buddhism, in which the divine is considered to be above the world, in the "immanentist" Mongol conception, the spiritual realm merges with the natural world (Brack, 2022, pp. 817–818). Heaven, the divine, is understood as being present in the material world. Consequently, as in the case of the Uyghurs, which can also be considered as "immanentist" to some extent[13], the Mongol ruler is sacralized through the tangible manifestations of his *qut*

[13] Uyghurs seem to operate a synthesis between "immanent" and "transcendent" religions. Because their rule is rooted in Turkic traditions, they preserve a similar deification of the ruler which does not contradict their allegiance to Manichaeism or Buddhism.

(blessing, charisma given by Heaven) (Biran, 2024, p.233). In both Uyghur and Mongol conceptions, the power of Heaven merges with the power of the sovereign; Heaven is not ontologically separated from the ruler, the way Buddha is. As discussed previously, Täŋri is an ubiquitous deity that can be found everywhere, but that is not directly personified by the khan; only its powers are.

The second element on the seal suggests that the khan had the power of Justice and Punishment. An attribute that is once again borrowed from Täŋri. The khan's *yarliq* are mere interpretations of Heaven's law, which have been turned into general legal principles unified under the name *yasa. Yasa* or Chinggis' law, besides *yarliq*, is also composed of *törü*, seen by the Mongols as the legal manifestation of Heaven. Its content remains mysterious, but scholars usually assume that it was a collection of principles of good government. Hence, changes, even if undertaken by the khan himself, were forbidden for it would result in Täŋri's anger (Pochekaev, 2016, pp.183–184). *Törü* predates the Mongol period and was already mentioned in Old Turkic and Old Uyghur texts under the Turkic and Uyghur qaghanates, but its ideological role evolved under the Mongols. In the prior Mongol period, *törü* was not emphasized as a foundation of kingship but rather as a sole political tool. However, under the Mongols, *törü* became prominent and was seen as the rightful world order directly established by *möngke täŋri*. Roman Yu. Pochekaev describes the ancient Turkic law as having been "' privatised' by Chinggis Khan and his descendants" (Pochekaev, 2016). This was made possible by integrating *törü* into the khan's law, symbolically merging the latter's authority with Heaven's. This 'privatization' of law also touches upon the third aspect of Mongol ideology: lineage. This was the criterion which restricts access to divine favor and the power of justice.

'Mongol patrimony', i.e., the Chinggisid lineage's property, was the third fundamental aspect of Mongol kingship. The Empire functioned as a patrimonial confederation partly based on kinship relations. Hence, the legitimacy of the ruler derived from their lineage and ancestors. The Chinggisids are directly affiliated with Heaven, only they possess its favor. Unlike the Uyghurs, belonging to the same bloodline was the prerequisite for being invested with Täŋri's mandate. Heaven's mandate was the prerogative of one clan to which the others needed to submit in order to fulfill Täŋri's will. The chosen ruler was also the only one to claim the "supreme rulership" (Biran, 2024, p.234). Both lineage and Heaven's mandate are intertwined in Mongol ideology and instrumentalized in legitimacy discourses. For instance, Möngke Khan (1209–1259) grounded his legitimacy in these two elements. First, he spread the idea that he

restored the 'true' Chinggisid (Toluid) lineage on the throne.[14] This was mainly achieved by revalorizing Tolui's loyalty and dedication to the Empire (Allsen, 1987, pp. 37–38). Then, in his quest for legitimacy, Möngke drew extensively on pre-Mongol traditions passed down by the Uyghurs. He amplified the reference to Heaven's mandate. With his own name *möngke*, meaning 'universal,' and his important military campaigns, he reminded his enemies that he won Heaven's favor. This raises questions concerning the place of Uyghurs in the Chinggisid lineage. If Barchuq Art Tegin was presumably declared the "fifth son" of Chinggis Khan at the time of his submission, this bond probably eroded with time and increasing Mongol control over Uyghur territory.

Territory and places were also sources of legitimacy, especially when taking into consideration Mongol expansionism. In Mongol cosmology, Heaven was often associated with Earth in ways similar to those in Uyghur cosmology. As Atwood explains it, "what these references to Heaven and Earth reflect is a conviction that Heaven's favour is fundamentally mediated by holy land" (Atwood, 2023, p.44). As stated earlier, because Mongol and Uyghur religions are "immanent", lands are also seen as manifestations of the divine, thus providing legitimacy. Therefore, settling in specific areas could visibly demonstrate the transfer of mandate. Allsen explains that specific territories such as the Orkhon valley, the Ötüken yış, a mountain region central for Uyghurs and later Mongols, constituted a sacred territory (Allsen, 2023, p.452). This territory is directly linked to the legitimacy of the one who possesses it, for it is believed that he will receive the *qut* accumulated over the ages. The same concept led the Mongols to locate their capital, Qaraqorum, at a strategic point where Turkic dynasties had ruled. This strategic location enabled Mongol rulers to position themselves in the continuity of these and symbolically receive the power accumulated in the land. Consequently, when the Mongols took over these territories, the Uyghurs likely saw in the new conqueror the manifestation of Täŋri's choice. This could partially explain the disappearance of the compound *täŋri* in Uyghur titulatures, which would represent a cosmological paradox.

As often done by the Mongols, *täŋri* as a legitimacy source was adapted from preexisting traditions, continued but adapted by Chinggis and his descendants to fit their imperial project. However, while Uyghurs mainly derived their legitimacy from a strong cosmological narrative

[14] Tolui (1191/1192–1232) was the youngest son of Chinggis Khan and father of Möngke. However, he did not directly succeed his father Chinggis. Instead, Ögödei did, giving a clear advantage to Ögödei's descendants.

in which the ruler was born in Heaven, the Mongols supplemented this vision with genealogical (the prominence of the lineage) and juridical (*yasa*) components.

3.3 Areas of Conflict and Implications Stemming from Täŋri as a Source of Legitimization

Mongol ideology is intrinsically centralized and exclusive. It monopolizes Heaven's mandate, which cannot be shared with another ruler simultaneously. Therefore, three main areas of conflict between Uyghurs and Mongols can be inferred: competing claims for divine favor, genealogical incompatibility, and cosmological proximity, as exemplified by ethnogenesis myths. This tryptic mirrors the components identified by Peter Golden as common to several Inner Asian cultures (Golden, 2006, p. 78).

Mongol requests for exclusive Heaven's favor and universalist ambitions probably led Uyghur rulers to narrow their sacral claims, as sharing the same source of legitimacy would have defied the Mongol khans. The Mongol attitude towards religion is a complex and well-debated topic. Scholars such as Atwood argue for Mongol religious pragmatism, whereas others, such as Anne F. Broadbridge or Nicola Di Cosmo, emphasize religious rigidity and ideological exclusivity. The same attitude, of course, does not apply linearly to all periods of the Empire. At the dawn of Chinggis Khan's rule, the Empire was still very much rooted in steppe religious culture, hence attached to principles such as *täŋri*. Over time, as Allsen demonstrates in *Culture and Conquest*, the Mongols adopted a selective appropriation of exogenous religious traits. Their tolerance stops where their authority starts to be challenged. Therefore, because Täŋri represented the roots of Mongol legitimacy in the first years of the Empire, its exclusivity could have been more fiercely claimed.

The largest area of conflict arising from the simultaneous use of *täŋri* as a legitimizing element concerns political identity. In the case of Uyghur kingship, the most important factor in the legitimacy of the ruler was not the purity of his genes, but rather his direct relation to Täŋri. As an example in the history of the Uyghur kingdom, dynastic succession was toppled multiple times by high-ranking officials. However, as previously seen, Mongol ideology emphasizes the primacy of lineage. In Uyghur conception, *täŋri* is a religious force that, due to its semantic and symbolic flexibility, has been adopted by other religions such as Manichaeism and Buddhism. Nevertheless, because Täŋri is highly political for Mongol khans, it cannot be

retained by Uyghur rulers. It is deeply affiliated with the Chinggisid family, gatekeepers of the mandate.

However, the ideological proximity of Mongols and Uyghurs also helped their absorption into the Empire. Allsen underlines for instance the continuity of the idea of good fortune between Uyghur religions and Chinggis' conception of rulership, stating that it made the Uyghurs more likely to accept and adapt to this new ruler (Allsen, 2023, p.454). The rise of Chinggis Khan could have been regarded as Täŋri's choice to entrust the new ruler with its mandate. In the *Secret History of the Mongols,* paragraph 238 mentions the message sent by Barchuq Art Tegin to Chinggis Khan, making his submission explicit:

> As when clouds clear and mother sun appears, as when ice thaws and river water is drawn (…) I shall become a fifth son and devote my strength to him (Chinggis Khan).
>
> (Atwood, 2022, §238)

The metaphor with natural elements reinforces the idea that Chinggis' rule is a logical phenomenon and that Heaven's will is unquestionable. Täŋri is a deity who rewards but also punishes the wrongdoers. Hence, the threat of divine backlash could have facilitated Uyghur submission. Chinggis is also directly associated with nature in the passage and, by extension, with Heaven.

Uyghur surrender to the Mongols established a new form of political relationship that Uyghurs had not known before 1209. Indeed, prior to 1209, under the Qara Khitai, the submission was mainly limited to the economic sphere and did not affect Uyghur religion or practices.[15] They were in Qara Khitai's sphere of influence, but under the Mongols, they became direct agents of the Empire[16]. Uyghur integration into the Empire is confirmed by Chinggis' decision to consider the iduq qut as "a fifth son". By this act, he takes him under his protection and law.

The political ritual of submission expressed Uyghur symbolic withdrawal from direct access to Heaven's mandate and the adoption of the Mongol order. The *SH* mentions the tribute that Chinggis required from the Uyghurs: "gold, silver, *subut*-pearls, *tana*-pearls, *nasis*-brocades, and silks" (Atwood, 2023, §238). The allegiance is also confirmed and favored by a marriage alliance recorded by Juvaynī:

[15] See Biran, M. (1997).
[16] Many Uyghurs became translators and benefited from important administrative roles, especially under the Yuan. For more details, see Brose, M. (2007).

> In recognition of these praiseworthy services Chingiz-Khan distinguished him with extraordinary attentions and favours; and betrothed one of his own daughters to him.
>
> (Boyle, 1958, p.47)

This passage refers to Barchuq Art Tegin's participation in military campaigns, especially against the Tanguts around 1225. Economically and militarily submitted to the Mongols, Uyghurs recognized that the khan was Heaven's chosen supreme ruler. This eliminated the possibility for a similar claim by iduq quts. The rulers', now vassals, sacred kingship in the Uyghur kingdom became a sacred 'aristocracy' favored by the khan but ranked lower in the Chinggisid lineage hierarchy. Embracing the status of vassal was also a strategy of survival for the Uyghur kingdom, not to mention that it presented significant advantages compared to their situation under the Qara Khitai.

Another area of conflict surrounds the proximity of the Mongol and Uyghur ethnogenesis myths. Heaven was at the heart of dynastic power and was present in the mythicized origins of rulers. In consequence, the Mongol and Uyghur ethnogenesis myths, by their proximity, suggest a potential ideological overlap after 1209. To quote Igor de Rachewiltz, "heaven is a maker of destiny" and "a giver of strength and protection". For the author, Mongol beliefs surrounding Täŋri are the same as those in Turkic traditions (de Rachewiltz, 2007, p. 123). It is the principle by which one lives and dies. The intervention of Täŋri as a demiurge is evident in the myths of Mongol and Uyghur ethnogenesis. The *SH* opens on this statement: *Činggis qahan-nu huja'ur de'eretenggeri-eče ǰaya'atu töreksen börte-čino aju'u,* translated by Atwood as "the Origin of Chinggis Khan: there was Grey Wolf born with a destiny from Heaven above." (Atwood, 2023, §1). The wolf as an ancestor is already attested in Turkic cultures preceding the Mongols. By referring to this mythical animal, the Mongols built on preexisting imperial legends popular in Eurasia and positioned themselves within a cosmological continuum.

Chinggis' unique fate under Täŋri's guidance is reminded several times in the gesta. His birth itself is seen as Heaven's choice.

> Deyi Secen said, 'This boy of yours is a boy with flame in his eyes and fire in his face. Quda Yisukei, last night I dreamed a dream. A white falcon flew towards me, clutching the sun and the moon, and alighted on my hand. I told this dream of mine to someone, saying, "The sun and the moon were visible before, but now this falcon clutching them brought them over and alighted on my hand. What good is this whiteness descending showing me?"
>
> (Atwood, 2022, §63)

In Deyi Secen's auspicious dream, the white falcon symbolizes the descending will of Heaven. There is also the intervention of the Sun and Moon representing the future imperial couple Temüjin and his wife Börte.

Likewise, Uyghur tradition ties Bokug Qagan's birth, a mythical Uyghur qaghan, to the manifestation of Täŋri's intervention. [17]As reported by Juvaynī, he was born of Heaven.

> In that age two of the rivers of Qara-Qoram, one called the Tughla and the other the Selenge, flowed together in a place called Qamlanchu ; and close together between these two rivers there stood two trees ; the one they call *qusuq* which is a tree shaped like a pine, whose leaves in winter resemble those of a cypress and whose fruit is like a pignon both in shape and taste ; the other they call *toz.* Between the two trees there arose a great mound, and a light descended on it from the sky; and day by day the mound grew greater. On seeing this strange sight, the Uighur tribes were filled with astonishment ; and respectfully and humbly they approached the mound : they heard sweet and pleasant sounds like singing. And every night a light shone to a distance of thirty paces around that mound, until just as with pregnant women at the time of their delivery, a door opened and inside there were five separate tent-like cells in each of which sat a man-child.
>
> (Boyle, 1958, pp. 55–56)

This passage mentions "Qara-Qoram," i.e., Qara Qorum, the future capital of Chinggis Khan. This reinforces the geographical and symbolic relation between Mongol and Uyghur ethnogenesis. In both stories, the Light symbolizes divine intervention. The same cosmological vocabulary is employed, indicating the proximity of the beliefs described by de Rachewiltz. These similarities between Mongols and Uyghurs' conceptions of legitimacy and rulership create a sense of mythical redundancy, endangering Mongol supremacy. In other words, because the mythification of rulers' sacralization was the same for Uyghurs and Mongols, it implies that one of them would undermine the credibility of the other. The redundancy is not necessarily the issue; the nature of the Uyghur/Mongol relationship is. Because Uyghurs submitted to the Mongols, they also had to abdicate their ideological monopoly of Täŋri's favor.

Besides external factors, the decline of *täŋri*-based titles could also be the result of internal changes within the Kingdom of Qocho. Especially due to the religious layering already at work before Uyghur submission to Chinggis Khan, by 1209, Täŋri might have had a reduced spiritual impact on the Uyghurs. It remains challenging to measure the degree of spiritual attachment to Täŋri in the Uyghur kingdom at the beginning of the 13th century. However, their early adoption

[17] This ruler has been identified as Bögü Kaghan (r. 759–79)(Chin. Mouyu 牟羽) by several scholars, but this hypothesis has been invalidated by Kasai. For more details, see Kasai, Y. (2004).

of Buddhism as a state religion provided them with additional sources of legitimacy, as discussed in Chapter 4.

3.4 Concluding remarks

When submitting to the Mongols, Uyghur rulers symbolically transferred their Heaven mandate to the khan without renouncing their own sacred kingship. This political submission forced Uyghur rulers to strategically abandon the idea of a privileged relationship between the iduq qut and Täŋri, while remaining under its mandate through their allegiance to the Mongols. Under these circumstances, the ruler was able to maintain his sacrality without challenging Mongol hegemony.

Chapter 4: *Iduq qut* under the Mongol Rule: from Sacred Authority to Political Status

This section demonstrates the persistence of the title *iduq qut* in Uyghur rulers' titulature under the Mongols. It shifts from a sacral to an honorific distinction under Mongol rule. It is argued that, due to the conceptual and ideological conflicts discussed above, the title *iduq qut* remained a mark of privileged status granted to the Uyghurs in exchange for their dedication during the early Mongol period. However, from the 1250s onwards, despite a certain continuity in titles, Uyghurs were more seriously integrated into the imperial administrative system.

The Uyghurs were the first sedentary allies of the Mongols. Their early submission likely played a role, along with economic factors, in securing a privileged status. However, after the reign of Möngke Khan, this status evolved into a more drastic subordination, which ultimately resulted in the kingdom's dissolution in the Yuan administrative system. This subsection attempts to develop how Mongol intervention transformed Uyghur kingship and what it meant for the kingdom's autonomy.

4.1 The Reframing of Religious Elements in Uyghur Rulership

There is evidence of the use of the title *iduq qut* in its shortened form, i.e., without any additional honorifics, before the Mongol period, as explained by Arat (1986). However, it gained importance under Mongol rule, becoming the title of choice for foreign chroniclers to use when referring to Uyghur rulers. This form filtered out ostentatious religious attributes present in what Rybatzki calls "intitulation," such as *täŋridä bolmīš* ("being made by Heaven"), and only retains epithets (e.g, *alp, barchuq*) and the political title *iduq qut* (Rybatzki, 2000, p. 247). This simplified title prevented Uyghurs from challenging Mongol authority and, at the same time, affirmed their superiority.

The reframing of religious elements in Uyghur rulership can be explained by the fact that Mongol state culture, was composed according to Allsen of (1) "the indigenous traditions and institutions of conquered peoples, (2) foreign traditions imported by the Chinggisids and, finally, (3) the Mongols' own social and cultural norms" (Allsen, 2001, p. 203). They operated a

‘centralization’ of sacral claim, hence demoting the conquered people. Uyghur kingship after 1209 needed to be adapted and attuned with Mongol ideology.

This was especially evident under Khubilai Khan, who, from 1264 onwards, strengthened his claim to Buddhism by identifying himself as a *cakravartin* (Kasai, 2020, p. 86).[18] Kasai states that during this period, Uyghur rulers explicitly showed their affiliation with Buddhism, especially as “donors involved in the production of the Buddhist texts” (Kasai, 2020, p. 87). However, he notes that these Buddhist texts were primarily published for local or private contexts, whereas official productions for celebrations were reserved for the Mongol Khan.

The desacralization of Uyghur rulers does not necessarily imply that they had no importance under the Yuan. On the contrary, Uyghur rulers were key agents of the Empire, providing it with military force, translators, and intermediaries (Brose, 2007). However, the distinction between official instrumentalization of Buddhism and local religious practices became clearer under Yuan rule. Devotion and patronage continued within the Uyghur kingdom, but imperial charisma had diminished and was now embodied in Yuan ideology. The desacralization of the Uyghur ruler does not mean that all sacral elements disappeared, but rather that terminology and Buddhist rituals were carefully selected to avoid ideological competition with the Mongols.

The Uyghur document Em01 (as classified by Nobuo Yamada) on the liberation of a slave named Pintung exemplifies the privileged status of Uyghur iduq qut under the Yuan dynasty.[19] The document opens with a hierarchical list of the blessed leaders as follows: the Mongol emperor, the Emperor’s brothers and sons, the king of Qocho, and the Buddhist leaders (from the 14th to the 16th line: *bu bitig-täki söz-tin öṅgi bolsar-bizuluγ suu-qa bir altun yastuq aq̈a iṅi tägiḍ-lär birär kümüš yastuq ïduq-qut- qa bir ystuqšaẓïn ayγučï-qa bir at qïṣẏ̈ud öḍünüp*) (Ge, 2022, p.103). The text shows that the King of Qocho, once regarded by Chinggis as a “fifth son,” is moved outside the emperor's family under the Yuan. He is a subject, though privileged, and does not belong to the Chinggisid lineage. The tense relations between the kingdom and the Yuan can also explain the reconsideration of the Uyghur ruler's status. In the 1250s, under Möngke, several Uyghur officials were caught up in purges targeting administrators to eliminate supporters of the rival Ögödeid branch. Iduq quts consequently faced a more drastic assimilation into the Yuan administrative system, culminating in the appointment of a Mongol *darugachi* (i.e., governor) representing the Great Khan’s authority in the kingdom.

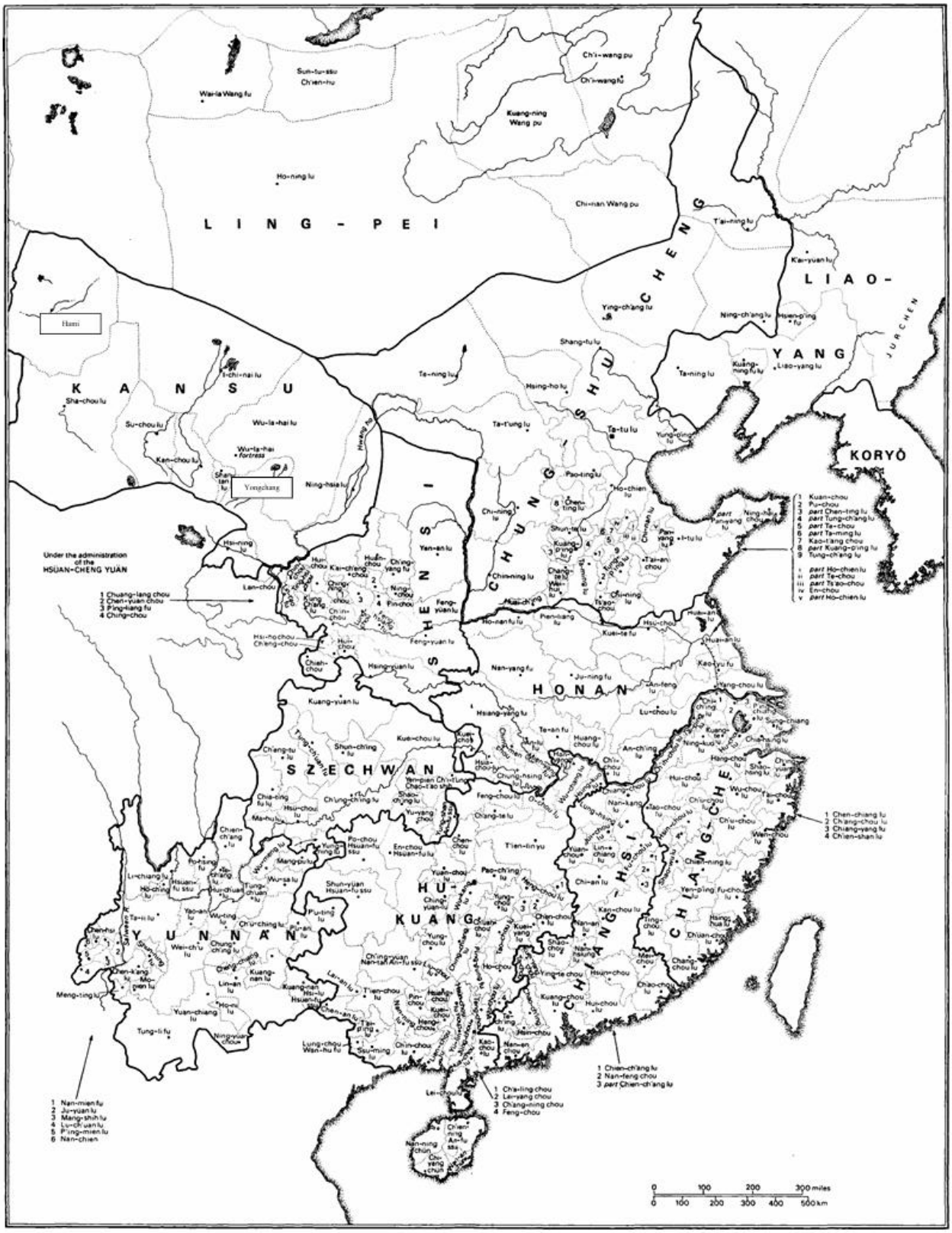
[18] He especially adopted the Tibetan Buddhist doctrine (Sakya School), which became the imperial religion.
[19] According to Liu Ge, the document could have been produced around 1280.

The evolution of the legend of Bokug Qaghan can also serve as a relevant example of the reframing of Uyghur kingship vocabulary. As seen in Chapter 3, the core of the story directly recalls Turkic cosmology through divinized natural elements (e.g., the three, the light). However, Yukiyo Kasai shows in an article on the legend that, if its core never changed, the vocabulary and analogies used in the story evolved with the religious context (Kasai, 2004). In the early days of the Uyghur kingdom, the legend combined Turkic and Manichean elements. For Instance, the Light described in the story can refer to both Täŋri and Mani. Later, Buddhist layers were added. In the colophon U 971, commented on by Kasai, Bokug is compared to Maitreya (see glossary), and the Uyghur ruler is likened to a Bodhisattva who descended from Heaven (Kasai, 2004, pp. 3–4). As Kasai points out, later compilations of Bokug Qaghan's legend do not exhibit similar Buddhist features. The version reported by Juvaynī (see Chapter 3, part 3.3) emphasizes Manichean and Turkic components and does not include Buddhist elements. Similarly, Chapter 122 in the Yuan Shi describes a divine light which descended upon a tree "有神光降于樹" (*yǒu shén guāng jiàng yú shù*), and the tree resembled a pregnant woman "樹乃生癭，若懷妊狀" (*Shù nǎishēng yǐng, ruò huái rèn zhuàng*). The passage also mentions the title 亦都護 (*Yì dū hù*) for *iduq qut*. It is likely that the Mongol religious doctrine, especially after Khubilai's conversion in 1264, obliged Uyghurs to return to the pre-Buddhist repertoire.

The evolution of Bokug Qaghan's legend under Mongol rule shows how the conception of Uyghur kingship fluctuated and adapted in response to Mongol claims. While Täŋri constituted the most problematic element under Chinggis Khan, under the Yuan, it is the adoption of Buddhism as a state religion that reshaped Uyghur sources of legitimacy.

However, later, under a different context, one text clearly ties Uyghur rulers to Buddhism again. The bilingual stele *Yidouhu gaochangwang shixunbei* 亦都護高昌王世勳碑 [The Genealogical Memorial Inscription of the Iduq quts, Kings of Qocho], written in 1334 in Chinese and Old Uyghur, mentions the title *iduq qut* several times, each time with different Buddhist attributes. The inscription commemorates the service of eight generations of Uyghur kings of Qocho to the Yuan. The Uyghur ruler is, for example, associated with a Boddhisatva: "我们 *kangaqu* 菩萨 (*púsà* i.e., Boddhisatva) 神圣的 亦都护王 (*yì dū hù wáng* i.e*., iduq qut*)" (Geng, 1980, p.519). Interestingly, the Buddhist title does not overshadow *iduq qut.* Both coexist, the former as a religious attribute, the latter as a political rank. What were the reasons for such a tribute to Uyghur rulers? This stele appears to be an attempt to contextualize Uyghur

declining agency and authority within a Buddhist framework. The Mongols faced instability when the stele was written, and the Uyghur kingdom was fragmented due to the conflict between Qaidu and Khubilai Khan. The Uyghur court was in exile in Yongchang (永昌) (see Figure 10.), far from Qocho, where Qaidu had chosen a new ruler. Because of these difficulties, Uyghur rulers would have had to diversify their source of legitimacy.



MAP 32. The Yüan empire

Published online by Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Histories Online © Cambridge University Press, 2008

Figure 10. Map of the Yuan Empire under Khubilai Khan (r.1260–94). Adapted from Franke and Twitchett (1994), pp. 438–439.

Despite the loss of direct religious elements in Uyghur rulers' titles, the iduq qut and their people remained blessed by Heaven's protection through the Mongol khan. Because he submitted to Täŋri's decision to give the mandate to Chinggis Khan and his descendants, the Uyghurs continued to benefit from Heaven's favor and blessing. A continuity visible in the title *iduq qut* itself, "blessed by divine favor from Heaven" (Matsui, 2023, p. 3).

Other Mongol vassals, like the Kings of Koryo from the eponymous kingdom (located on the actual Korean peninsula; see Figure 10.) faced a similar fate to the Uyghurs. After their subjugation by the Yuan in the mid-13th century, they first secured a long-lasting marriage alliance with the Mongols and then benefited from privileged political status. In 1287, the Great Khan "conferred Koryo˘ kings the office of the Chief Councilor and the kingship of Koryo" (King, 2021, p.9). Alongside their administrative roles, Koryo's rulers could officially retain their sovereign status under certain conditions. They became political assets fully integrated into the Mongol system; therefore, their ruling title was mainly functional, similarly to the Uyghur case. Koryo's kings, now vassals and seen as 'imperial sons-in-law,' adopted administrative prerogatives and were forced to stay away from Yuan titles (Robinson, 2023, p.692). This example shows us another case of cosmological authority loss among Mongol vassals.

The elaborate titles of Uyghur rulers included many religious components prior to the Mongol invasion, but underwent a process of secularization, or to be more exact desacralization, under their rule. References to ancient traditions remained, but their cosmological meaning seemed to lose its power in favor of administrative nobility. Mongol political agency over the kingdom enabled them to reshape the nature of its sovereignty, as evidenced by the simplification of the Uyghur ruler's titles.

4.2 Integration of Uyghurs into the Mongol System

Uyghur integration into the Mongol system can be categorized as follows: (1) administrative integration, i.e., taxation, supervision of the kingdom by a Mongol governor, (2) political, as in control over dynastic succession, and (3) ideological, i.e., reframing of titles, participation in court rituals. The word 'integration' is deliberately preferred to 'assimilation', which implies the dissolution of Uyghur identity and the adoption of Mongol traits. In contrast, the former

refers only to Uyghur political adjustments as vassals. The 'assimilation' and dissolution of the Uyghur kingdom did not occur before the 14th century under the Chagataids.

As mentioned earlier, in the 1250s, a *darugha* was appointed by the Great Khan to supervise the Kingdom of Qocho. This constitutes a shift, as Yuan civil officials administratively outranked the ruler who symbolically remained on the throne. Some marks of respect towards the iduq qut remained visible in documents. The document, classified as Official Register 1 (OReg01 / U8175), written in cursive script, dates from the Mongol period by Moriyasu (the text also mentions the term "*daruga*" (line 21), confirming that the document probably belongs to the Mongol period), mentioning "*iduq qut Kudik-a"* emphasizes this title by the presence of an "honorific lift" (Moriyasu, 2020, p.147). This expression, used by Moriyasu, describes the action of the scribe who lifted down two lines following the title in the text. The same indent following *iduq qut* is also found in the document U5323. This constitutes a mark of respect for members of the Uyghur ruling family or the Chinggisid lineage (Clark, 1975, p. 435). The fact that this feature persisted under Mongol rule in Uyghur communications shows that Uyghur rulers still held a superior status in society and were respected. Marton Vèr points out that this register could have been written during the exile of Uyghurs iduq quts in the 1270s, or later in the first half of the 14th century under Chagataid suzerainty (Vèr, 2021, p. 440). Therefore, it would show that marks of respect persisted even longer after Uyghur assimilation to the Chagataids.

Political integration is exemplified in Persian chronicles, which attest that Uyghur Iduq qut's succession was confirmed by the Mongol khans. Both Juvaynī and Rashīd al-Dīn record that the succession of Barchuq Art Tegin was decided by Töregene Khatun (r. 1242–1246), the widow and regent of Ögödei Khan (1186–1241). Juvaynī writes:

> After a short space, the idi-qut Kesmes likewise passed away; and at the command of Queen Toregene, his brother Salindi took his place and was called idi-qut. He was firmly established on the throne and held in high esteem, *and the giver of success is God*.
>
> (Boyle, 1958, p.48)

Rashīd al-Dīn simirarly recounts that "his brother Salindi took his place by order of Toéragana Khatun, became Idiqut, and was powerful and respected" (Thackston, 1998, p.76). Having control over Uyghur succession is, of course, essential in order to reaffirm the newly established hierarchy and secure loyalty. Interestingly, both clarified that the iduq qut was "held in high esteem". This emphasizes the wise and fair choice made by the khatun, and also as a sign that the ruler was recognised and respected by the Mongols. The expressions "held in high

esteem" or "powerful and respected" should also be read as manifestations of imperial and divine favor, the privileged sources of legitimacy for Uyghurs as vassals. Therefore, it reinforces the idea that imperial and divine will were aligned. In this context, the title *iduq qut* remains a mark of honor now fully embedded within the Mongol hierarchy and 'feudal' system.

Progressively from the second half of the 1270s, the Uyghurs were more fully integrated first into the Yuan ulus, then into the Chaghatai realm. The ruler Qočyar ïduq Qut (1266–about 1280) first moved his court from Bešbalık (Beiting) to Qocho (Gaochang), then to Kamıl (Hami). (See Figure 2.) This migration to the East can be explained by the Uyghurs' delicate position in the Chaghatai-Yuan conflict, which lasted approximately from the 1270s to 1323. By settling in Kamıl, a Yuan-controlled land, Qočyar Iduq Qut put his kingdom under direct Mongol protection and supervision. Uyghur exile from their land worsened when Khubilai decided to move Qočyar's successor Ne'üril Tegin (r. 1280–1318) to Yongchang (永昌) further East. However, Allsen clarifies that Qocho was probably recaptured by Ne'üril for only a short period at the beginning of the 14th century (Allsen, 1983, pp. 254–255; pp. 259–260).

In the meantime, the Yuan dynasty established several institutions in the Uyghur homeland, mainly around its two capitals. In Qocho, " a civilian Provincial Surveillance Office (an-ch'a-ssu 按察司) was set up in 1278, but was replaced in 1283 by a Pacification Office (hsüan-wei-ssu 宣慰司) which combined the duties of military and civilian control" (Kaplonski and Sneath, 2010, pp.368–369). In the other capital, Bešbalık, they instituted a Protectorate (dū hù fǔ 都護府) in 1281. In addition to this administrative and military integration, the kingdom also entered the Yuan monetary system in the early 1280s. All these measures were part of Khubilai's strategy to secure the Western frontier and prevent Qaidu from accessing eastern trade routes. These actions resulted in the Uyghurs' complete loss of political independence.

Ultimately, in the 14th century, the Uyghur kingdom leaned towards the Chagataid sphere of influence and was absorbed by the Central Asian ulus. A Mongol document, G120, from the 1270s or the first half of the 14th century, preserved in the St. Petersburg Collection, mentions an iduq qut, presumably appointed by the Chagataids (Kara, 2003, pp. 28–30). According to Clark, the document was issued in the name of the Chaghatai emperor Yisün Temür (r. 1338–1339) and can be dated to 1339 (Clark, 1975, p. 137). This coincides with the end of the Yuan-Chaghatai conflicts in the region. In 1316, Yuan Rezong (1285–1320) restored the Uyghur iduq qut to the throne at Qara Qojo, interpreted by Liu Yingsheng as a sign of Yuan's last victory in the region (Yingsheng, 2005, pp. 348–349). G120 then shows that the title *iduq qut* – also

attested in document Em01- was preserved despite the Chaghatai conquest of the Uyghur kingdom.

4.3 Continuity and Adaptation of Pre-Mongol Features after 1209

As demonstrated previously, the submission to the Mongols required reframing official titles in vassal terms to fit the hierarchy. However, as discussed above, Uyghurs were particularly well-positioned compared to other Mongol vassals, such as the Qarluqs, another Turkic 'tribe'.

In 1211, both Qarluq ruler Alp Arslan ('Lion King') and Uyghur iduq qut Barchuq Art Tegin appeared before Chinggis Khan on the Kerulen river in the East of actual Mongolia. Their submission follows a similar pattern. Having killed the governor sent by the Qara Khitai to which Qarluqs were subordinated, Alp Arslan proclaimed his allegiance to Chinggis Khan. However, contrary to the Uyghur ruler, who was allowed to retain his title *iduq qut*, the Qarluq king was assigned the title *tajik* instead of *khan*. Rashīd al-Dīn describes the scene in these terms:

> During Genghis Khan's time the ruler of the Qarluq was named Arslan Khan. When Genghis Khan sent Qubila Noyan of the Barulas tribe to that area, Arslan Khan submitted and went before Qubila. Genghis Khan gave him a girl from his own *urugh*[20] and commanded that he be called Arslan Sartaqtai (meaning Tajik!), saying, "How can he be called Arslan Khan?"
>
> (Thackston, 1998, p.78)

Even if the two new vassals received a wife chosen by the khan, the Uyghurs were placed higher than the Qarluqs in the hierarchy. Probably because, as Ruth Dunnel reminds it, "the cosmopolitan Uighurs contributed invaluable expertise and experience to an expanding Mongol imperial administration" (Dunnel, 2024, p.34). Their value as vassals gave them a significant advantage in the eyes of the Mongols. However, why did *khan* constitute such a defying title for Chinggis compared to *iduq qut*? The title *khan* has a Turkic origin, directly linking the ruler back to the Heaven mandate. A symbol restricted to the Mongol elite after they took over. On the other hand, *iduq qut,* even if rooted in the same cosmology, does not necessarily challenge Mongol authority. Rashīd al-Dīn describes the use of this title as being a particularity of the Kingdom of Qocho: "Recently the idiomatic usage of the Uyghur has been

[20] Refers to the lineage, the clan.

to call their ruler Idiqut, which means possessor of good fortune" (Thackson, 1998, p.76). This quote also highlights the Uyghur ruler's agency in maintaining his title. *Iduq qut*, as a title, is sacred but not universal; its recognition was limited to the Uyghur Kingdom of Qocho, whereas *khan* was perceived as a manifestation of the ruler's independence from Mongol suzerainty. The ideological conflict surrounding the title *khan* could also explain the disappearance of the component *täŋrikän* from the Uyghur rulers' titulature.

Therefore, Chinggis Khan, by this act demoting Alp Arslan, clearly drew a hierarchical distinction between himself and the Qarluqs as mere vassals. The Qarluq ruler became a *tajik*, meaning he was placed outside the nomadic Turco-Mongol sphere and categorized as a Muslim sedentary client. This example shows that a willing submission, althought preventing death, did not guarantee a privileged status within the Mongol hierarchy. The Uyghur case is peculiar because they provided the Mongols with a valuable amount of crucial resources (economic, cultural, and political) for the establishment and consolidation of their realm.

Despite religious constraints and political integration, Uyghur rulers' titles retained pre-Mongol elements until the last king, Čingtemūr Iduq Qut (Civ. 1352; 1348 or 1360**).** Political ranks remained, for example, signaled by *iduq qut* or *tegin.* (See Appendix 3) The former continued referring to the ruling branch of Qocho as integrated into the Chaghatai ulus in the first half of the 14th century. In contrast, the latter was used for Uyghur rulers in Yongchang from 1280 until the Chaghatai takeover. It was used by exiled iduq quts from Ne'üril Tegin (1280–1318) to Taypinu Tegin (1332–?) (see the timeline in the appendices). This change was probably the result of their displacement and distant 'rule' over the Qocho realm. The Yuan Khan probably took this decision, but it interestingly demonstrates a continuity with Turkic traditions. *Tegin* was initially used as a title for a relative of the *khan* or *qaghan*, especially a prince in Old Uyghur documents from the pre-Mongol period. For instance, in a letter written by a Uyghur *il ögäsi* (U 5990), the title "*tigrim täŋrim qüti"*" is used to refer to a prince (Moriyasu, 2019, pp.50–51). The title of *tegin* could also be given to vassal local rulers to emphasize their subordination. It primarily puts forward the political rank of the ruler rather than his sacrality, which is less the case for *iduq qut* as a title. Therefore, it is likely that this title reflects the weakening of the Uyghur kingdom during the Yuan-Chaghatai conflict. The ruler, isolated and disconnected from his land, failed in his prerogatives. He cannot use the title *iduq qut* anymore as he does not exercise the affiliated power.

Besides the presence of pre-Mongol features in titles, other forms of ideological continuity can be found in documents. For instance, Wilkens explains that the Buddhist historical account

(Memorandum) from the Yuan Dynasty, says about the Uyghur ruler: "He deigned to establish the lands belonging to him as well as the Ötükän people" (*özkä sanlıg yerin suvın ötükän bodunın ornatu yarlıkadı*) (Wilkens, 2024, p.94). Ötükän was a sacred space for the Türks and their successors; it mainly refers to Khangai mountain in present-day central Mongolia.[21] This blessed region (qualified as "ïduq" in Kül Tegin's inscription E23) was considered inhabited by the Sky and Earth gods themselves and regarded as a source of power. The one who rules the ötükan was granted Heaven's legitimacy. Later, after their migration, Uyghurs continued to call themselves "ötükän people." The reference to this sacred land survived the Mongol period and continued to be a source of legitimacy and power in the Kingdom of Qocho. This also connects with the idea that the land itself provided power to the iduq qut and could explain why an exiled rule could not truly be considered as legitimate.

Continuity with pre-Mongol features is also visible in structural and semantic similarities in documents. As an example, eulogies of Uyghur iduq qut persisted under the Yuan. For instance, a Buddhist colophon edited by D. Israpil recalls earlier texts.

> *[y]orımıš yer-tä h(a)nım(ı)znıŋ yolı yırgazun / [yu]t bolmatın yılkı kar-a yultuz täg köpädzün / [yu...]dyn uygur eli yogrut t(ä)g udızun / [yu...]nynk ärkligi ıduk kut hanım(ı)z miŋ tümän yašazun*.
>
> （29）愿我们的可汗走到之处其路畅通。（30）愿没有［风雪灾害］，（可汗的）牲畜像星星（数量）一样增多。（31）愿畏吾儿人像酸奶一样凝聚。（32）愿［ ］的统治者——我们的亦都护汗（宽阔）千万岁！（33）不能用手遮住［ ］（34）不是谁都能得到功德之善报。（35）［ ］
>
> Where he walks, may the way of our Khan be enjoyable! May destructive weather not occur, may the cattle become (as many) as the stars! . . . may the Uygur Realm coagulate like yogurt! May the Ruler of the . . . , our Idukkut Khan, live a thousand (years), ten thousand (days)!
>
> (Israpil, 2011, p. 59, ll. 29.32)

This colophon was probably intended for internal communication within the kingdom and illustrates the difference between official political submission and more flexible religious practice. Even after Uyghurs lost political independence, local rituals persisted and continued to praise the ruler. It also highlights the role of Uyghur iduq quts as donors under the Yuan in maintaining pre-Mongol traditions.

A memorandum to an iduq qut of the Kingdom of Qocho, identified by Zhang Tieshan and Peter Zieme as potentially written under the Yuan dynasty, pays tribute to events preceding the

[21] On details concerning the debated location of Ödükän see Barat, 2018.

Mongol invasion (Tieshan & Zieme, 2011, p. 129).[22] Again, its structure and vocabulary echo earlier steles praising the ruler's achievements. The content of the memorandum spans a young king's military conquests and actions to restore order within the realm. The ruler is called "*el xan*" (king) and "*täŋrikän*" used as a synonym for *iduq qut.* The text culminates with the affirmation that "the holiest of realms is the realm of the On Uygur. This Täŋrikän has emanated as the most significant ruler" (Tieshan & Zieme, 2011, p. 129). This sentence is interesting because it resembles earlier tributes to Uyghur kings that insist on their 'holiness' and 'bravery'. The symbolic and semantic terminology employed in this memorandum could be confused with earlier documents. The text also mentions the "people of Ötükän" as rightfully settled in the realm. The authors point out that this text is likely a fragment of a larger work, suggesting that this literary genre was still active under the Yuan in the Uyghur realm. Though to whom it was destined is unfortunately hard to tell.

To put it simply, the evolution of Uyghur rulers' titulature after 1209 reveals that the focus shifted from the sacral elements to political ranks. The title was shortened and became a combination of a personal name and a political rank under the Mongols (e.g., Qočyar Iduq Qut (1266–about 1280)**;** Köncök Iduq Qut (1309/1318–1326/1334). Only two occurrences of pre-Mongol titulature are known under late Mongol rule (Arslan bilgä täŋri elig atam kirešiz iduq qut (r? 1305–1309/1318), and Arslan bilgä täŋri elig köncök iduq qut (r. 1309/1318–1326/1334)). (See Appendix 3) Structurally speaking, these titulatures blend pre-Mongol features such as *bilgä täŋri* that ressembles East Uyghur period's titles, and *iduq qut* preferred after 1209. Though it remains hardly possible to determine the context behind these titulatures, it shows that the continuity of traditions goes until the first half of the 14th century. This reflects a relative flexibility towards the Uyghur kingdom, or the need to return to roots to address political absorption into the Mongol Empire before the complete dissolution of the Kingdom of Qocho.

[22] The authors argue in favor of the Yuan period due to some linguistic features, especially word loans from New Persian and Chinese blended in the text, which correspond to the 13th or 14th century (Tieshan & Zieme, 2011, pp. 131–133).

4.4 Concluding remarks

After 1209, Uyghurs progressively integrated into the Mongol administrative and ideological system. This resulted in the tangible diminution of their political autonomy, which accompanied the downgrading of the iduq qut's sacral status. Nevertheless, the retention of pre-Mongol features in internal communications indicates that Uyghur kingship within the kingdom did not necessarily align with the external political status assigned by the Mongols to Uyghur rulers.

Conclusion

The above study attempts to establish a baseline for the evolution of Uyghur rulers' titles, showing that it was neither linear nor completely passive. The thesis specifically identifies which components were transformed (e.g., *iduq qut*, *tegin*) under Mongol rule and why. The study shows that what vanished in Uyghur titulatures are the components that were not compatible with Mongol hegemony, and that the title was symbolically and semantically adjusted to reflect a new political reality.

Chapter 2 demonstrates that Uyghur kingship developed in a fertile religious soil encompassing Turkic, Manichean, and Buddhist influences. It also underlines that these models, while succeeding each other at the state level, merged in practice, and these influences were visible in the titles themselves, especially through the modification of rulers' "intitulation".

Chapter 3 focuses on Täŋri as an example of the limits of Uyghur ideological adaptability. This part articulates why titulature reframing was inevitable under the pressure of Mongol expansion. Uyghurs could retain religious elements under the Mongols, but their direct connection to Heaven confined them to abandoning sacral claims and led to the progressive secularization of Uyghur titles.

Chapter 4 details reframing strategies as a consequence of Yuan power assertion. The secularization of titulature and the rise of *iduq qut*, alongside the decline of official legitimacy elements, enabled Uyghur rulers to preserve, to a certain extent, their religious and political identity.

Throughout the study, Täŋri constitutes a continuity marker. At the twilight of the Kingdom of Qocho, it remains as a political rank and a relic of the pre-Mongol period as exemplified by the two last rulers (see Appendix 3).

The Uyghur case illustrates the capacity of a Mongol vassal state to adapt and survive. Though it is difficult to comprehend their relation, to the best of my knowledge there is no direct evidence of Uyghur rebellion against the Mongols. It illustrates the reciprocity of the filtering process at work in the Mongol Empire. On the one hand, the Mongols borrowed many traits from the Uyghur kingdom; on the other hand, the latter also managed to preserve local practices and traditions, filtering out some aspects of Mongol ideology.

The Mongol conquest was a catalyst for change in the Uyghur kingdom, remolding its trajectory forever by enabling the spread of Islam in the 14th century. However, the above study hopefully highlighted that the region's history is rich and has been unfailingly influenced by multiple traditions. Uyghur kingship, until the kingdom's dissolution in the 14th century, was a vehicle for Sogdian, Turkic, and Buddhist traditions, among others. Rather than disappearing under the Mongol Empire, Uyghur kingship operated a unique religious and political syncretism still observable in present-day Xinjiang.

References

Primary sources

ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn ʿAtā Malik Juvaynī. (1958). *Ta'rikh-i-Jahan-Gusha*. *The History of the World Conqueror* (J. A. Boyle, Trans.). Harvard University Press. (Original work published ca. 1260)

Fazlullah, Rashīd al-Dīn. (1998). *Jāmiʿ al-Tawārīkh: Compendium of chronicles: A history of the Mongols (Part 1)* (W. M. Thackston, Trans.). Harvard University Press.

The secret history of the Mongols (C. P. Atwood, Trans.). (2022). Penguin Books.

Zhōngguó dà bǎikē quánshū zǒng biānjí wěiyuánhuì, yuánshǐ biānxiě zǔ, & Zhōngguó dà bǎikē quánshū chūbǎn shè biānjí bù (1985). *Yuán shǐ* [History of the Yuan Dynasty] (1st ed.). Zhōngguó dà bǎikē quánshū chūbǎn shè. (Original work published in Chinese)

Secondary sources

Akagi, T. (2010). *Jusseiki Tonkō no ōken to tenrijō'ō kan* [十世紀敦煌の 王権と転輪聖王; Kingship and the Idea of the Cakravartin in 10th Century Dunhuang], *Tōyō shigaku kenkyū 東洋史研究 [Oriental Researches*],*69*(2), 233–252.

Allsen, T. T. (1983). The Yüan dynasty and the Uighurs of Turfan in the 13th century. In M. Rossabi (Ed.), *China among equals* (pp. 243–280). University of California Press.

Allsen, T. T. (1987). *Mongol imperialism : The policies of the Grand Qan Möngke in China, Russia and the Islamic lands, 1251–1259*. University of California Press.

Allsen, T. T. (2001). *Culture and conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Allsen, T. T. (2023). Imperial ideology. In M. Biran & H. Kim (Eds.), *The Cambridge history of the Mongol Empire* (pp. 444–459). Cambridge University Press.

Arat, R. (1986). Idık-Kut ünvanı hakkında. *Journal of Turkish Language and Literature*, *24*(0), 23–33.

Asimov, M., & Bosworth, C. E. (Eds.). (1998). *History of civilizations of Central Asia, (Vol. 4, The age of achievement: A.D. 750 to the end of the fifteenth century).* UNESCO Publishing.

Atwood, C. P. (2021). *The rise of the Mongols: Five Chinese sources.* Hackett Publishing Company.

Barat, K. (2018). Some thoughts on Ötükän. *Journal of Old Turkic Studies*, 2(2), 7–25.

Biran, M. (1997). *Qaidu and the rise of the independent Mongol state in central Asia.* Curzon.

Biran, M. (2024). 8 Religions in the Mongol Empire revisited: Exchanges, conversion, consequences. In J. Rüpke, M. Biran, & Y. Pines (Eds.), *Empires and gods: The role of religions in imperial history* (Vol. 1, pp. 231–262). De Gruyter.

Bold, L. (2022). Polysemy of the word "Täŋri". In O. Corff (Ed.), *Religion and State in the Altaic World: Proceedings of the 62nd Annual Meeting of the Permanent International Altaistic Conference (PIAC), Friedensau, Germany, August 18–23, 2019* (pp. 19–28). De Gruyter.

Brack, J. (2022). Chinggisid pluralism and religious competition: Buddhists, Muslims, and the question of violence and sovereignty in Ilkhanid Iran. *Modern Asian Studies*, *56*(3), 815–839.

Bregel, Y. (2003). *An historical atlas of central Asia*. Brill.

Brose, M. C. (2007). *Subjects and masters: Uyghurs in the Mongol Empire*. Center for East Asian Studies, Western Washington University.

Buell, P. D., & Kolbas, J. (2016). The ethos of state and society in the early Mongol Empire: Chinggis Khan to Güyük. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, *26*(1/2), 43–64.

Chavannes, É., & Pelliot, P. (1913). Un traité manichéen retrouvé en Chine, traduit et annoté, *Journal asiatique*, *11*, 186–190.

Clark L. V. (1975). *Introduction to the Uyghur civil documents of east Turkestan (13th–14th cc.)*(Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University). Unpublished PhD Dissertation.

Clark, L. (2013). *Uygur Manichaean texts: Texts, translations, commentary. Volume III: Ecclesiastical texts* (Corpus Fontium Manichaeorum, Series Turcica III). Brepols.

Clauson, G. (1972). *An etymological dictionary of pre-thirteenth-century Turkish*. Clarendon Press.

Dardess, J. W. (1972). From Mongol Empire to Yüan dynasty: Changing forms of imperial rule in Mongolia and central Asia. *Monumenta Serica*, *30*(1), 117–165.

Dunnell, R. W. (2023). The rise of Chinggis Khan and the united empire, 1206–1260. In M. Biran, & H. Kim (Eds.), *The Cambridge history of the Mongol Empire* (pp. 19–106). Cambridge University Press.

Erkoç, H. İ. (2025). Pre-Manichaean beliefs of the Uyghurs I: Celestial and natural cults. *Harvard Theological Review*, *118(*1), 41–60.

Esin, E., (2001). *Türk kozmolojisine giriş* [Introduction to Turkish cosmology], Kabalcı Press.

Fu-hsüeh, Y. (1995). Two new Uighur coins. *East and West*, *45*(1/4), 375–380.

Ge, L. (2022). On the Buddhist feature of the Uighur Pintung documents. In O. Corff (Ed.), *Religion and state in the Altaic world: Proceedings of the 62nd annual meeting of the permanent international altaistic conference (PIAC), Friedensau, Germany, August 18–23, 2019* (pp. 101–110). De Gruyter.

Geng, S. (1980). Huihuwen 'yidouhu gaochangwang shixunbei' yanjiu [回鹘文《亦都护高昌王世勋碑》研究; A study of the stone tablet in Uyghur script about the meritorious deeds of princes of Kočo], *考古学报* [*Acta Archaeologica Sinica*]*, 4*, 515–529.

Golden, P.B. (2006). The Türk imperial tradition in the pre-Chinggisid era. In N. Di Cosmo (Ed.), *The history of Mongolia* (Vol. 1, pp. 196–224*).* Brill.

Jones, T. (2023). The objects of loyalty in the early Mongol Empire (twelfth and thirteenth centuries). *Iran*, *61*(2), 196–220.

Kara, G. (2003). Mediaeval Mongol documents from Khara Khoto and east Turkestan in *the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies*. *Manuscripta Orientalia, 9*(2), 3–40.

Kasai, Y. (2004). Ein kolophon um die legende von Bokug Kagan. *Studies on the Inner Asian Languages*. 19. 1–25.

Kasai, Y., Meinert, C., & Sørensen, H. H. (2020). Uyghur legitimation and the role of Buddhism. In C. Meinert & H. H. Sørensen (Eds.), *Buddhism in Central Asia I:Patronage, legitimation, sacred space, and pilgrimage*. (pp. 61–90). Brill.

King Kwong Wong. (2021). All are the ruler's domain, but all are different: Mongol-Yuan rule and Koryŏ sovereignty in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. *Seoul journal of Korean studies*, *34*(1), 1–30.

Klimkeit, H.-J. (1982). Manichaean kingship: Gnosis at home in the world. *Numen*, *29*(1), 17–32.

Kubatin, A. B. (2016). Sistema titulov T͡iurkskogo kaganata: genezis i preemstvennost′. [*Система титулов Тюркского каганата: Генезис и преемственность*; The system of titles of the Turkic Khaganate: genesis and continuity]. Yangi Nashr.

Lee, J.-Y. (2024). *The Turkic peoples in world history: A concise history*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Map 32. The Yuan empire. (1994). In H. Franke & D. C. Twitchett (Eds.), *The Cambridge history of China* (Vol. 6, plates). Cambridge University Press.

Matsui, D. (2023). *Old Uigur administrative orders from Turfan (Berliner Turfantexte XLVIII).* Brepols.

Moriyasu, T. (2009). Shineusu hibun yakuchū [シネウス碑 文訳注; Šine-Usu inscription from the Uyghur period in Mongolia: revised text, translation and commentaries], *Nairiku Ajia gengo no kenkyū, 24*, 1–92.

Moriyasu, T. (2015). New developments in the history of East Uighur Manichaeism. *Open Theology*, *1*(1), 316–333.

Moriyasu, T. (2019). *Corpus of the old Uighur letters from the eastern Silk Road (Berliner Turfantexte XLVI).* Brepols.

Osawa, T. (2011). Revisiting the Ongi inscription of Mongolia from the Second Turkic Qaghanate on the basis of rubbings by G. J. Ramstedt. *Journal de la Société Finno-Ougrienne*, 93, 147–203.

Pochekaev, R. Y. (2016). Törü: Ancient Turkic law "privatised" by Chinggis Khan and his descendants. *Inner Asia (White Horse Press)*, *18*(2), 182–195.

De Rachewiltz, I. (2007). Heaven, Earth and the Mongols in the time of Cinggis Qan and his immediate successors (ca. 1160–1260) - A preliminary investigation. In N. G. A. S. L. (Ed.), *A lifelong dedication to the China mission* (1st ed., Vol. 1, pp. 107–144). Leuven University Press.

Radloff, W. (1892). *Arbeiten der Orchon-expedition. Atlas der Alterthümer der Mongolei*. Buchdruckerei der Akademie der Wissenschaften.

Raschmann, S.-C. (2024). Old Uyghur Buddhist scrolls: A case study based on the Säkiz Yükmäk Yaruk scrolls. *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, *77*(1), 75–134.

Robinson, D. M. (2023). Koryŏ in the Mongol Empire. In M. Biran & H. Kim (Eds.), *The Cambridge history of the Mongol Empire* (pp. 679–706). Cambridge University Press.

Röhrborn, K. M. (1977). *Uigurisches wörterbuch: Sprachmaterial der vorislamischen türkischen texte aus Zentralasien.* Franz Steiner.

Ross, E. D. (1930). The Orkhon inscriptions: Being a translation of Professor Vilhelm Thomsen's final Danish rendering. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, *5*(4), 861–876.

Rybatzki, V. (2000). Titles of Türk and Uigur rulers in the old Turkic inscriptions. *Central Asiatic Journal*, *44*(2), 205–292.

Sneath, D., & Mongolia & Inner Asia Studies Unit (Eds.). (2006). *Imperial statecraft: Political forms and techniques of governance in inner Asia, sixth–twentieth centuries*. Center for East Asian Studies, Western Washington University.

Soucek, S. (2000). The Uighur kingdom of Qocho. In S. Soucek (Ed.), *A history of inner Asia* (pp. 77–82). Cambridge University Press.

Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Museum für Asiatische Kunst. (n.d.). *Drei uigurische Fürsten.* https://recherche.smb.museum/detail/463684/drei-uigurische-fürsten

Strathern, A. (2019). The two forms of sacred kingship: Divinisation and righteousness. In A. Strathern (Ed.), *Unearthly powers: Religious and political change in world history* (pp. 155–218). Cambridge University Press.

Tan, Q. (Ed.). (1982). *Zhongguo lishi dituce* [中國歷史地圖冊; Historical atlas of China] (Vol. 6). Zhongguo ditu chubanshe.

Tazaka, K. (1940). Kaikotsu ni okeru Manikyō hakugai undō [回紇に於ける摩尼教迫害運; The movement to persecute Manichaeism among the Uighurs]. Tōhō Gakuhō (Tokyo) *11–1,* 223–232.

Umemura, H. (1996). A Qočo Uyghur king painted in the Buddhist temple of Beshbalïq. In *Turfan, Khotan und Dunhuang.* Vorträge der Tagung "Annemarie v. Gabain und die Turfanforschung," veranstaltet von der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin (9.–12. December 1994), (pp. 361–378). Akademie Verlag.

Vér, M. (2019). *Old Uyghur documents concerning the postal system of the Mongol Empire (Berliner Turfantexte XLIII).* Turnhout: Brepols.

Vér, M. (2021). 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*. (pp.435–448). Department of Altaistics, University of Szeged.

Vermeersch, S. (2020). Who is legitimating whom?: on justifying Buddhism's place in the body politic. In C. Meinert & H. H. Sørensen (Eds.), *Buddhism in Central Asia I: Patronage, legitimation, sacred space, and pilgrimage* (pp. 15–39). Brill.

Wilkens, J. (2020). Sacred space in Uyghur Buddhism. In C. Meinert & H. H. Sørensen (Eds.), *Buddhism in Central Asia I: Patronage, legitimation, sacred space, and pilgrimage* (pp. 189–203). Brill.

Wilkens, J. (2024). Uyghur Buddhism and the impact of Manichaeism and native religion: The case of religious terminology. In L. Doney, C. Meinert, H. H. Sørensen, & Y. Kasai (Eds.), *Buddhism in Central Asia III: impacts of non-Buddhist influences, doctrines.* (pp. 90–122). Brill.

Yingsheng, L. (2005). War and peace between the Yuan dynasty and the Chaghadaid Khanate (1312–1323). In M. Biran (Ed.), *Mongols, Turks, and others: Eurasian nomads and the sedentary world* (pp. 339–358). Brill.

Zieme, P. (2014). The West Uigur kingdom: Views from inside. *Horizons, 5*(1), 53–81.

Běitíng Gāochāng Huíhú Fósì Bìhuà [北庭高昌回鶻佛寺壁畫; Murals of the Huihu Buddhist temples in Beiting and Gaochang]. (1990). Liáoníng Měishù Chūbǎnshè.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Abbreviations

COUL + number: *Corpus of the Old Uighur Letters from the Eastern Silk Road* (Moriyasu, 2023)

M + number: "Manichean" documents from the Turfan collections.

P + number: "Pelliot", documents collected by Paul Pelliot during his expedition to Dunhuang and Turfan in 1906–1908.

TM + number: "Turfan Manuscripts".

U + number: "*Uigurisch"* (Uyghur) as categorized by the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities for the Turfan documents.

Appendix 2. Chronology of Uyghur iduq quts

This chronology is mainly based on the works of Rybatzki (2000), Kasai (2020), and Wilkens (2020).

East Uyghur Kingdom (740–840)

Yaylaqar clan

Qutlugh Bilgä Kül Qaghan = köl bilgä qaghan (r. 744–747)

El-Etmiş Bilgä Qaghan (r. 747–759)

Bögü Qaghan (r. 759–779)

Tun Baga Tärkän or Alp Qutlugh Bilgä Qaghan (r. 779–789)

Külüg Bilgä Qaghan (r. 789–790)

Qutlugh Bilgä Qaghan (r. 790–795)

Ediz clan

Alp Qutlugh Uluy Bilgä Qaghan (r. 795–805/808)

Alp Külüg Bilgä Qaghan (r. 805–808)

Alp Bilgä Qaghan (r. 808–821)

Küclüg Bilgä (r. 821–824)

Alp Bilgä (r. 824–832)

Alp Külüg Bilgä (r. 832–839)

Alp Külüg Bilgä Qaghan (r. around 856)

West Uyghur Kingdom (840–1209)

Bokug Khan, Founder of the dynasty? (r. ?864–874?)

El Bilgä Täŋri Elig (r. around 954)

Arslan Bilgä Täŋri Elig = Sügülüg Qan ? (r. around 981–984)

Arslan Khan (r. ?981–985?)

Bügü Bilgä Täŋri Elig (r. about 996–1007 or 1003 according to Kasai)

Kün ay täŋritäg küsänčig körtlä yaruk täŋri bügü täŋrikänimiz (r. 1007–1008)[23]

Kül Bilgä Täŋri Khan (r. about 1007–1019/24 or 1031 according to Kasai)

Kül Bilgä Täŋri (r. after 1019/24–?)

Täŋri Uygur Khan (first half of the 11th century)

Täŋri Bügü El Bilgä Arslan Täŋri Uygur Tärkänimiz (r. after 1068)

"Yuan" iduq quts

Barchuq Art Tegin (iduq qut ca. 1206–ca. 1230)

Kesmez (r. during the first half of the 13th century, he was "removed by order of the regent Töregene (r. 1242–1246)" (Rybatzki, 2000, p.253))

Salïndï (r. ?–1253/1254)

Ögrünc (r. 1253/54–1257)

Mamuraq (r. 1257–1265/66)

Qočyar Iduq Qut (r. 1266–about 1280)

Ne'üril Tegin (ruler 1280–1318, iduq qut 1308/09–1318)

Temür Buqa Tegin (r. 1318/1323–1329)

[23] This ruler only appears in Kasai's timeline (Kasai, 2020, p.67).

Senggi Tegin (r. 1330/1331–1332)

Taypinu Tegin (r. 1332–?)

“Chaghatai” iduq quts

Ürlüg? (died in 1305)

Kirešiz Iduq Qut (r?1305–1309/1318)

Köncök Iduq Qut (r. 1309/1318–1326/1334)

?? Iduq Qut (ca. 1338–1339)

Čingtemūr Iduq Qut (Civ. 1352; 1348 or 1360)

Appendix 3. Categorization of Uyghur rulers' titulatures

The categorization and chart are my own work based on titulatures taken from Kasai (2020) and Rybatzki (2000). The transliteration has been adapted to the system applied throughout the thesis. The subsequent chart does not aim to restore the chronology of the rulers *stricto sensu* (for the timeline, see Appendix 2), but rather to classify the titulatures according to their structure.

Structure	Titulature	Period
Epithet + *bilgä qaghan*	Köl bilgä qaghan (r. 744–747) Alp qutlugh bilgä qaghan (r. 779–789) Qutlugh bilgä qaghan (r. 790–795)	East Uyghur Qaghanate (744-840)
Intitulation + epithets + *bilgä qaghan*	Täŋridä bolmıš el etmiš bilgä qaghan (r. 747–759) Täŋridä qut bulmıš el tutmıš alp külüg bilgä qaghan (r. 759–779) Täŋridä bolmıš külüg bilgä qaghan (r. 789–790) Täŋridä ülüg bulmıš alp qutlugh ulug bilgä qaghan (r. 795–805/808)	East Uyghur Qaghanate (744-840)
Intitulation with references to *ay* or *kün* + epithets + *bilgä qaghan*	Ay täŋridä qut bulmıš alp bilgä qaghan (r. 808–821) Kün täŋridä ülüg bulmıš alp küčlüg bilgä qaghan (r. 821–824) Ay täŋridä qut bulmıš alp bilgä qaghan (r. 824–832)	East Uyghur Qaghanate (744-840)

	Ay täŋridä qut bulmıš alp külüg bilgä qaghan (r. 832–839)	
Intitulation *täŋridä qut/ülüg bulmıš* or with references to *ay/kün* + epithets + political title	Ulug täŋridä qut bulmıš alp külüg bilgä qaghan (ca. 856) Kün ay täŋridä qut bulmïs uluy qut or-nanmīš alpin erdemin el tutmiš alp arslan qutlugh kül bilgä täŋri khan (r. about 1007–1019/24 or 1031) Kün ay täŋritäg küsänčig körtlä yaruk täŋri bügü täŋrikänimiz (r. 1007–1008) Kün ay täŋriteg küsenčig körtle yaruq täŋri bügü täŋrikän kül bilgä täŋri (r. after 1019/24–?) Kün täŋridä qut bulmıš ärdämin el tutmıš alp qutlugh ulug bilgä uygur täŋri uygur khan (first half of the 11th century)	West Uyghur Kingdom (840-1250)
Epithets + *täŋri elig/khan*	El bilgä täŋri elig (r. around 954) Arslan bilgä täŋri elig (r. around 981–984) Bügü bilgä täŋri elig (r. about 996–1007) Täŋri bügü el bilgä arslan täŋri uygur tärkänimiz (r. after 1068)	West Uyghur Kingdom (840-1250)
Name + *iduq qut/tegin*	Uygudun khan inu Barchuq Art Tegin iduq qut (iduq qut ca. 1206–ca 1230)	West Uyghur Kingdom under Mongol rule (1209-1368)

	Kesmez (first half of the 13th century) Salïndï (r. ?–1253/1254) Ögrünc (r. 1253/54–1257) Mamuraq Tegin (r. 1257–1265/66) Qočyar Iduq Qut (r. 1266–about 1280) Ne'üril Tegin (ruler 1280–1318, iduq qut 1308/09–1318) Temür Buqa Tegin (r. 1318/1323–1329) Senggi Tegin (r. 1330/1331–1332) Taypinu Tegin (r. 1332–?) Ürlüg? (died in 1305) ?? Iduq Qut (ca. 1338–1339) Čingtemūr Iduq Qut (Civ. 1352; 1348 or 1360)	
Epithets + *täŋri elig* + *iduq qut*	Arslan bilgä täŋri elig atam kirešiz iduq qut (r?1305–1309/1318) Arslan bilgä täŋri elig köncök iduq qut (r. 1309/1318–1326/1334)	West Uyghur Kingdom under Mongol rule (1209-1368)

Appendix 4. Glossary

Bodhisattva: an 'enlightened' individual on the path to becoming a Buddha.

Cakravartin: universal ruler who spreads the *dharma*.

Daruga or ***darugachi*** (Mongolian): from the root -daru meaning 'to press'. It describes a governor appointed by the Mongol Khan who collects taxes and supervises local vassals.

Iduq qut: title of the Uyghur ruler of the West Uyghur Kingdom.

Il ögäsi*:* high-ranking official (e.g., prime Minister) in the West Uyghur Kingdom.

Khan/qan **(**Turkic/Mongolian): a designated ruler who rules over several groups of people.

Maitreya: the future Buddha who will descend on Earth to teach a new *dharma*.

Qa'an/qaghan (Turkic/Mongolian): title of greater importance than *khan* used by the Türks and the Uyghurs during the Qaghanate period.

Qut (Turkic): divine charisma, blessing, favor.

Tajik (Middle Persian *tāzīk* 'Arab'): designates a Muslim sedentary. Used by the Turks of Central Asia to refer to their adversaries.

Törü (Turkic): "Turco-Mongol term for customary law or principles" (Jones, 2023, glossary).

Ulus (Mongolian): appanage given to a member of the Chinggisid family.

Urugh (Mongolian): refers to the lineage, in this context, to the Chinggis lineage.

Yasa (Mongolian): Mongol law.

Yarliq*:* imperial decree.