



## Manichaeism in the Uyghur written monuments

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### ABSTRACT

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The article is devoted to the study of Manichaeism in Uyghur written monuments. Manichaeism is a religious belief that emerged in the Middle East in the 3rd century AD. Manichaeism contained Zoroastrian, Christian, Judaic, Mithraic and Buddhist elements. However, it is a holistic, complex religious system based on the dualistic philosophy of the struggle between good and evil, darkness and light, bright and dark. After the demise of the Old Turkic Khaganates, the Uyghur Begyü Khagan made Manichaeism the state religion of the Uyghur Khaganate. One of the reasons for the adoption of Manichaeism by the Uyghurs was the Begyü Khagan's desire to establish relations with the Sogdians, the missionaries of Manichaeism, who were trying to spread it in East Turkestan, China and Mongolia.

The spread of Manichaeism among the ancient Uyghurs is attested by Chinese and Arabic sources, but especially by several Uyghur monuments. Among these monuments is the Karabalgasun inscription, found by N.M. Yadrinsev in 1889 during an expedition to Mongolia, Ordu-Balyk (Karabalgasun). The author of the article analyzes the content of the Karabalgasun inscription and other Uyghur texts, explores the essence of the ideas of Manichaeism and reveals its origin, spread and close connection with Buddhism.

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## Introduction

Manichaeism or Manichean is a syncretic religion that originated in the Middle East in the 3rd century AD (Baipakov, 2007: 468). The name comes from the name of the founder – Mani. Manichaeism absorbed Zoroastrian, Christian, Judaic, Mithraic, Gnostic, and later Buddhist elements. Nevertheless, it is an integral religious system with a rather complex cosmogony, a dualistic philosophy based on the struggle of good and evil, darkness and light, and a developed hierarchy (History of Kazakhstan, 2010: 387).

Manichaeism is based on the idea of the confrontation of Light and Darkness, Good and Evil. The personification of Light is the Father of Greatness. The Light is divided into twelve Aeons (Smagina, 2011: 134). According to Manichean ideas, people are created by demons of darkness, but they have a bright beginning in their souls. A bright deity named Jesus-Radiance gave man the way to salvation, but the dark principle is fighting for his soul. To enlighten people, an Apostle periodically appears among them. He founds the church and transmits divine truths to people. The line of the Apostles according to the Manichean doctrine is completed directly by Mani himself (Biruni, 1957: 212).

In the first millennium AD, Manichaeism became widespread in the territory of the Old World, but without becoming a state religion and often undergoing significant persecution.

Some exception is the fact that Manichaeism was adopted as the state religion in the Uyghur Khaganate, in which this religion had the greatest importance during the reign of Begyu-Kagan (759-780). This happens during the regular campaign of the Uyghurs to Tang China (Akhsanov, 2003: 76).

## Materials and research methods

The study was conducted based on the analysis of written sources on Uyghur Manichaeism. The main material for the study was the text of the Karabalgasun inscription.

The methodological basis of the research is general scientific methods such as analysis, synthesis, induction, and deduction, as well as historicism, the method of diachronic analysis, the historical-comparative method, and the method of hermeneutic analysis.

## The degree of research

There is no single point of view in modern historiography when Manichaeism penetrates the territory of Central Asia. Apparently, this happens in the second half of the VII century, during the reign of the third emperor of the Tang dynasty – Gao-Tsung (Aleksanyan, 2008: 61). The time when the Uyghur Begyu-kagan accepts Manichaeism is known with accuracy to the year – 762 A.D. Participation in the suppression of the An Lushan uprising, which at one time threatened the very existence of the imperial house of Tang, the Uyghur army captures the city of Luoyang. Here Begyu-kagan is acquainted with Manichaeism and after some time brings four Manichean preachers to Orda-Balyk, apparently, of Sogdian origin.

This is evidenced, in particular, by the Karabalgasun inscription found in 1889 by N.M. Yadrintsev during the expedition to Orkhon. The version of this inscription, made in

ancient Turkic runes, has practically not been preserved, but the version written in Chinese allows getting an idea of its content. The Chinese version was studied at various times by G. Shlegel, V.P. Vasiliev, E. Shavann, P. Pelio, A.K. Kamalov (Klyashtorniy, 2010: 22).

### Analysis

There is also a Sogdian version, preserved somewhat worse than the Chinese one. However, the Sogdian version of the Karabalgasun inscription has great importance, since it contains precise references to Manichaeism as the state religion of the Uyghur Khaganate. Here is a fragment of the translation of the Chinese inscription.

*[8] Zhuyi-xi and others, only four monks, [he] brought to [his] state. [They] spread two idols, penetrated three limits.*

*The preceptors of the law [Ma]ni have secretly reached the light gate and mastered the seven sections. [Their] talents surpassed the seas and mountains. [Their] eloquence was like a falling river [from heaven]. Therefore, [they] were able to reveal the righteous teaching to the Uyghurs. [They] rejected meat food, and dairy products were introduced into the rule. [By this they] established great merits. Then [they] were told: «You have combined all possible goodness.» At that time, Tutuki, chigili, internal and external ministers, Sima, all reported:*

*[9] «Now we repent of [our] former sins. We respectfully serve the righteous teaching. We accept the decree and declare [it]. We can obtain and retain the elusiveness and secrecy of this law! We repent three more times that we did not know [him] before, the demon was called a buddha. Now the misconceptions have already been corrected, it is impossible to return to misconduct. We hope...»... Since they had sincere aspirations, they went and received offerings. All the available cut-out and painted images of demons were ordered to be burnt. They rejected the supplications of spirits and the worship of demons*

*[10] and accepted the teaching of light. [A country] in which [there were] barbaric customs [to inhale] blood vapors have transformed into a country where they eat lean food. The state in which people were killed has turned into a state where good is encouraged. Therefore, officials of perfectly wise people acted at the top, ordered at the bottom [or: from above by personal example, from below by order?]. When the ruler of the law heard that [they] had adopted a righteous religion, he deeply approved of sincere aspirations... He wished to take all the monks and nuns to [his] state to order to spread his own path. He ordered zealous followers to be sent to the east and west» (Kamalov, 2001: 195).*

From this fragment of the text of the Karabalgasun inscription, we get information about those brought by Begyu-kagan to the capital of the Uyghur Khaganate, the city of Orda-Balyk (Karabalgasun) four Manichaean monks-preachers. The preachers and their way of life are described positively in the text. It is noted that the monks, as talented and eloquent servants of Manichaeism, were able to gain authority among the population of the Uyghur Khaganate. As it was mentioned, the monks constantly prayed and did not eat meat. As representatives of Manichaeism, they spread among people the righteous teaching about the light and goodness of man. Manichaeism, as a righteous teaching, pays attention to the lost who have departed from this teaching and makes calls for repentance, the forgiveness of sins. It also gives a description of the state in which barbaric customs and laws are violated (Grusse, 2005: 130).

According to Mani's teaching, a cruel state has to become a kind state. The text calls for the performance of good deeds by government officials who should contribute to the prosperity of the state.

Apparently, the fact of the adoption of Manichaeism in the Uyghur Khaganate as the state religion is explained by several factors. First of all, the new nomadic empire needed a religion that could unite the population of the steppe under the ruling house. Obviously, Tengrianism, traditional for Turkic-speaking community members, could not perform the function of ideological support of the state. At one time, the predecessors of the Uyghur ruling house faced the same problem. In particular, the attempts of the Ashin Kagans to establish Buddhism as such a religion are known. However, from the above text, it can be concluded that the Uyghurs reject Buddhism («we repent three times that we did not know [him] before, the demon was called a Buddha»). Indeed, Begyu-kagan persecuted Buddhists, ordered the destruction of Buddhist monasteries during Chinese campaigns.

Another reason for the adoption of Manichaeism is Kagan's desire to establish ties with the Sogdians (Stevleva, 2007: 74). The Sogdians were considered missionaries of this religion among the Uyghurs.

The Sogdians are an Eastern Iranian people originating from Sogdiana, the center of which was modern Samarkand. The Sogdians made a huge contribution to the cultural, economic, and religious development of the people who lived along the Great Silk Road. They founded many colony cities along all sections of trade routes from China to the Black Sea region. The Sogdian language was a kind of lingua franca throughout the Great Silk Road. In addition, apparently, it was through them that Manichaeism was transferred from the territory of Iran first to Central Asia, then to China, and then to Mongolia. It should be noted that the Sogdian-Turkic ties are not something new. From the beginning of the foundation of the First Turkic Khaganate, the Sogdians, one way or another came into contact with the Turks. S.G. Klyashtorny and V.A. Livshits claim that already in the III-V centuries, long before the conquest of Central Asia by the Turks there were close contacts between the Turks and the Indo-European population of East Turkestan, including the Sogdians. These connections were so obvious to China that the Chinese court made Anopanto, a Sogdianist from Gansu, the first ambassador who arrived in 545 at Bumyn's headquarters (Klyashtorniy et al, 1971: 143-144).

Thus, the first ambassador who was sent by Western Wei to Bumyn, then still Yabgu, was a Sogdian. Istemi-yabgu's envoy to the Byzantines was a Sogdian. The stele with written monuments of the first Turkic Khaganate was written in the Sogdian language. Apparently, Taspar-kagan also adopted Buddhism as a result of Sogdian influence. One of the closest advisers of Dulan Kagan (588-599) was the Sogdianist Ann Sui-tse, who actively opposed Chinese influence on Turkic politics.

From all this it follows that for the Uyghurs, who considered themselves the heirs of the Turkic Khaganates, ties with the Sogdians were a continuation of a practice that had been going on for many hundreds of years (Kyzlasov, 1969: 85).

From the text of the Karabalgasun inscription, it can also be concluded that representatives of the elites («*Tutuki, chigili, internal and external ministers, Sima*») adopted the religion most zealously new for the Steppe, while the bulk of the nomads continued to practice Tengrism.

Arab sources say that in addition to Manichaeism, there are other religions on the territory of the Uyghur Khaganate. Thus, Ibn al-Faqih al-Hamadani in his book «News of the Countries»(the end of the 9th – beginning of the 10th centuries), speaking about the journey of Tamim ibn Bahr al-Muttawa'i to the country of Toguz-Oguz, reports the following:

*«Then he marched for another twenty days in villages and numerous settlements, the population of which was entirely or mostly Turks, among them were fire worshippers and Manichean Zindikis. At the end of these twenty days, he finally reached the city of the king. And he mentioned that it was a large and rich city, around which there were an endless number of villages. The city had twelve iron gates, a lot of people, markets, and goods. The majority of the population are Manichaeen-Zindikis. He mentioned that the distance from the city to the country of as-Sin was about three hundred parasang. He said, «I think it's more than that.» He said: «To the right of the city of the king of the Tuguzguz is the country of the Turks, who are not mixed with others, to the left is the country of the Kimaks, and in front of him is as-Sin» (Asadov, 1993: 16).*

It should be noted, however, that, in our opinion, the interpretation of the ultimate goal of the journey of Tamim ibn Bahr al-Muttawa'i is somewhat controversial. Most researchers are sure that it is about the Uyghur Khaganate, and the capital mentioned in the text is the Orda-Balyk, located on Orkhon in Mongolia. However, the mentioned geographical landmarks, in particular, «on the left is the Kimak country, and in front of it is as – Sin», suggest that it was not about the territory of Mongolia, but about the territory of East Turkestan, from which China is actually in the east, and the Kimak country is in the north.

Having gained a foothold in the territory of the Uyghur Khaganate, Manichaeen clerics penetrate back into China. Thus, the Chinese chronicler, speaking about the rule of the Kulug-Bilge Kagan, reports the arrival with two embassies of Manichaeen preachers, for whom the Chinese emperor built a monastery in 806.

*«The Khoykhu came to the Court with tribute, and the Moni arrived with them for the first time, for the premises of which a monastery was built. They came every year and committed various cases of abuse, that is why they were exiled to their state in the twelfth summer, in 817.»*

*«In the first summer of Yuan-ho's reign, 806, twice came to the Court with offerings. Then, for the first time, Moni brought their own law – to eat vegetables daily, drink water and buy koumiss. The khan gave them a government allowance: the Monies penetrated into the capital. Through them, merchants of Western markets, during the transportation and export of goods, made many forgeries in their travel luggage» (Bichurin, 1950: 331).*

This fragment proves that Manichaeen priests tried to use Uyghur influence on Tang China, trying to spread Manichaeen practices on its territory. However, the success of these intentions was variable, as soon as the influence of the Khaganate weakened. The Manichaeen monastery from the source after existing for 11 years was closed. Together with the final fall of the Uyghur Khaganate in 840, when it was defeated by the Yenisei Kyrgyz, there also happened a widespread closure of Manichaeen temples in China (Gumilyov, 1993: 189). This is stated, in particular, in his letter to the Uyghur ruler, dated 843, by the imperial official Li De-yu (Aleksanyan, 2008: 69).

About the events of 847, the Chinese chronicle says:

*«Han Enyan Dele. The emperor instructed De-yu to describe the exploits of this war, and to order to pass it on to posterity, carve it on a stone monument and put it in Yu-jeu. As the Khoykhu royal*

*House perished, then [Li] Si-jun and the others wished to come to the Court, and then returned to Gui-i-gyun. Si-jung received a military rank and a house in the Yun-lu-fan unit, and his army was stationed in different border corps. The nomads did not want to belong to different corps, therefore they occupied the Hu-tho-he River and settled down. Liu Mian killed 3,000 of them. It was instructed to give hats with belts to all [individuals] who proved themselves in the war and in both capitals. The government collected the books of the Monites (Manichaeans) and idols, and everything was burned on the road, and the property was taken into the treasury. Enyan Khan, with 5,000 souls from the disintegrated generations, received food from Shoshelan, the chief elder.»*

From this text, it can be concluded that during the reign of the Uyghur kagan Enyan, the Manichaean «books and idols» in China were significantly burned, the property of the Manichaeans was confiscated, i.e., the attempt to influence the teachings of Mani on China was unsuccessful and defeated.

With the collapse of the Uyghur Khaganate, Manichaeism practically outlives itself on the territory of Mongolia, but it persists among the Turks of Eastern Turkestan and Southern Siberia (Kalikov, 2022: 2575).

The Uyghurs defeated by the Yenisei Kyrgyz created several state formations. In particular, the Kuchar Uyghur Khaganate (847-870), the Ganzhou Uyghur Khaganate (870-1035), but in the context of this work, the Turfan Uyghur Khaganate, located in the northern part of East Turkestan and existed for more than five hundred years from 861 to 1368, deserves the most attention.

Even though Buddhism is coming to the forefront in this region, Manichaeism continues to be an important part of the religious life of the subjects of the Uyghur Khaganate and the state continues to support the Manichaeans (Klyashtorniy et al, 1988: 35).

Therefore, Muhammad ibn Ishaq an-Nadim in «Kitab al-Fihrist» says that when the Khorasan emir ordered the execution of several hundred Manichaeans in Samarkand at the beginning of the 10th century. «The ruler of China» (here we mean the ruler of the Uyghurs, since in China itself Manichaeism was persecuted and certainly had no support) ordered to tell the emir that if at least one Manichaeus was executed, he would order the destruction of all Muslims in his possessions. Thus, the Manichaeans were saved (Zhelobov, 2012: 8).

Gardizi in his work «Zayn al-Akhbar» («Decoration of News») cites the legend that the Uyghur Kagan Kur-tegin was almost killed by his own brother, the then Kagan, in his youth, but was saved thanks to the Manichaeans. He also writes the following below:

*«The Tuguzguz khakan belongs to the Dinaverian faith; but there are Christians, dualists and Buddhists in its city and possessions» (Bartold, 1973: 52].*

However, Manichaeism, which had absorbed many elements of Buddhism even at the time of its origin, gradually began to move towards peaceful coexistence with this religion, expressing itself in cultural and social forms that were almost indistinguishably similar. Gradually, even among the Uyghur elite, Buddhism began to play a role no less important than Manichaeism.

Already in 965, the Uyghur ruler sent an embassy headed by the Buddhist monk Fa Yuan to the court of the Chinese Song Empire, which presented the emperor with a relic - the tooth of the Buddha. In 981-984, the Sung ambassador Wang Yande visited the Gaochang-Uyghur

state and discovered about 50 Buddhist temples in the city of Gaochang, each of which contained a copy of the “Tipitaka”.

Most of the Uyghur texts related to Manichaeism date back to the time of the Turfan Khaganate. The history of their discovery is connected with a number of European expeditions of the early XX century, primarily German ones. Therefore, in 1904-1905, an expedition led by the German researcher Albert von Lecoq carried out large-scale excavations in the Turfan area. During the expedition, several Manichaean manuscripts in Sogdian and ancient Uyghur languages were discovered.

In 1907 M. Stein discovered in Dunhuang a fragment of the «Huastvanift» (Penitential Prayer of the Manichaeans), written in the ancient Uyghur language. He also discovered the «Yrk bitig» («Fortune-telling Book») written in Turkic runes in the «Cave of a Thousand Buddhas» (Kyzlasov, 1994: 152).

In general, there are numerous Manichaean manuscripts written in the Uyghur language, but fragmentary, relatively complete texts have practically not been preserved. There are such sources as «Iki iltiz nom» («Two Principles»), «Edgu tatiglig nom» («The Principle of good Taste»), a text about the economic life of the Manichean monastery, discovered in 1954, as well as Manichean letters and hymns (Li Tang, 2005: 20).

## Results

1. Manichaeism is a syncretic religious teaching that originated in the third century in the Middle East. The term «Manichaeism» comes from the name of the founder – Mani. In the VIII century, Manichaeism spread to the territory of the Uyghur Khaganate.

2. One of the main materials for the study of Uyghur Manichaeism in written sources is the Karabalgasun inscription.

3. The declaration of Manichaeism as the state religion of the Uyghur Khaganate was during the reign of Begyu-kagan.

4. The adoption of Manichaeism in the Uyghur Khaganate as the state religion is explained by the desire of the Begyu-kagan to strengthen ties with the Sogdians, because the Sogdians were considered missionaries of Manichaeism among the Uyghurs.

5. The Uyghur Khaganate needed a religion that could unite the steppe people. It was evident that during this period, Tengrianism and shamanism, traditional for Turkic-speaking communities, could not perform the function of ideological support for the state. Therefore, Begyu-kagan patronizes Manichaeism and brings monks to his capital Orda-Balyk (Karabalgasun).

## Conclusion

Thus, the analysis of the text of the Karabalgasun inscription and other sources allows us to conclude that Begyu-kagan contributed to the adoption of Manichaeism as the state religion in the Uyghur Khaganate. Begyu-kagan brings four Manichaean monks-preachers to the capital, who receive his support and are characterized positively in the text. It is believed that thanks to the teachings of Mani, a cruel state becomes a kind state that would

unite the whole people. As one of the reasons for the adoption of Manichaeism in the Uyghur Khaganate is the Kagan's desire to establish ties with the Sogdians, because it was the Sogdians who were considered adherents of Manichaeism. Supporting Manichaeism, Begyukagan at the same time showed a strong rejection of Buddhism. It is known that during the Chinese campaigns he ordered the destruction of Buddhist monasteries. After the collapse of the Uyghur Khaganate, Manichaeism practically outlives itself on the territory of Mongolia. However, it persists among the Turks of Eastern Turkestan and Southern Siberia. Gradually, Manichaeism and Buddhism begin to coexist peacefully, expressed in similar cultural forms.

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### **Ұйғыр жазба ескерткіштеріндегі манихейлік діні**

**Аннотация.** Мақала ұйғыр жазба ескерткіштеріндегі манихейлікті зерттеуге арналған. Манихейлік – зороастрылық, христиандық, еврейлік, митраистік және буддалық элементтерді біріктіретін біздің заманымыздың III ғасырында Таяу Шығыста пайда болған діни наным. Автор манихейлікті жақсылық пен зұлымдық, жарық пен қараңғылық, ізгілік пен зұлымдық арасындағы күрестің дуалистік философиясына негізделген тұтас, күрделі діни жүйе ретінде қарастырады. Ежелгі түркі қағанаттары құлағаннан кейін Бөгү-қаған манихейлікті Ұйғыр қағанатының мемлекеттік діні ретінде жариялады. Зерттеушілер ұйғырлардың манихейлікті қабылдауының бір себебі – оны Шығыс Түркістанда, Қытайда және Моңғолияда таратумен

айналысқан соғдылармен, манихейлік миссионерлермен Бөгү-қағанның байланыс орнатуға деген ұмтылысы деп санайды.

Ежелгі ұйғырлар арасында манихейліктің таралуы туралы қытай, араб деректерінде жазылған, сондай-ақ ұйғыр ескерткіштерінде мәліметтер көптеп кездеседі. Мұндай ескерткіштердің қатарына Н.М. Ядринцевтің 1889 жылы Моңғолиядағы Орхон өзенінің жағасында жүргізілген экспедициясы кезінде Ұйғыр қағанатының ежелгі астанасы – Орда-Балық (Қарабалғасұн) қаласының қираған үйінділерінің арасынан тапқан Қарабалғасұн бітіктасы жатады. Қарабалғасұн бітіктасына жазылған көне түркі руникалық мәтіні түгелдей дерлік жойылған, сондықтан жазудың мазмұны туралы ақпарат жақсы сақталған қытай тіліндегі нұсқадан алынды.

Мақала авторы Қарабалғасұн жазуы мен басқа да ұйғыр мәтіндерінің мазмұнын талдай отырып, манихейлік идеялардың мәнін зерттейді, оның пайда болуын, таралуын және буддизммен тығыз байланысын айқындайды.

**Кілт сөздер:** манихейлік, Ұйғыр қағанаты, Бөгү-қаған, мемлекеттік дін, дереккөздер, ұйғыр ескерткіштері, Қарабалғасұн жазуы.

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### **Манихейство в уйгурских письменных памятниках**

**Аннотация.** Статья посвящена исследованию манихейства в уйгурских письменных памятниках. Манихейство – это религиозное верование, зародившееся на Ближнем Востоке в III веке нашей эры, которое соединило в себе зороастрийские, христианские, иудаистские, mitraистские и буддийские элементы. Автор рассматривает манихейство как цельную, сложную религиозную систему, основанную на дуалистической философии борьбы добра и зла, тьмы и света, светлого и темного. После падения древнетюркских каганатов уйгурский Бегю-каган сделал манихейство государственной религией Уйгурского каганата. Исследователи полагают, что одной из причин принятия манихейства уйгурами является стремление Бегю-кагана наладить связи с согдийцами. Отметим, что миссионеры пытались распространить манихейство в Восточном Туркестане, Китае и Монголии.

Распространение манихейства среди древних уйгуров запечатлели китайские, арабские источники, но больше всего ряд уйгурских памятников. К числу таких памятников относится Карабалғасунская надпись, найденная Н.М. Ядринцевым в 1889 году среди руин древней столицы Уйгурского каганата – Орду-Балык (Карабалғасун) во время экспедиции в Монголию на берегу реки Орхон. Древнетюркский рунический текст Карабалғасунской надписи был почти целиком уничтожен, и информация о его содержании извлечена из китайской версии, достаточно хорошо сохранившейся.

Автор статьи анализирует содержание Карабалғасунской надписи и других уйгурских текстов, исследует сущность идей манихейства, раскрывает его зарождение, распространение и тесную связь с буддизмом.

**Ключевые слова:** манихейство, Уйгурский каганат, Бегю-каган, государственная религия, источники, уйгурские памятники, Карабалғасунская надпись.

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