

Dilnoza Duturaeva. *Qarakhanid Roads to China: A History of Sino-Turkic Relations*. Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section 8: Uralic and Central Asian Studies, Vol. 28. Leiden: Brill, 2022. xvi + 218 pp. \$ 131 (cloth); open-access e-book.

Dilnoza Duturaeva's *Qarakhanid Roads to China: A History of Sino-Turkic Relations* is an essential contribution to the understudied field of pre-Mongol Central Asian history, particularly the diplomatic and commercial interactions between the Qarakhanid Khaganate (840–1212) and the Sinitic world (Liao, Song, and Xi Xia dynasties). The book highlights the pivotal role of the Qarakhanid Khaganate, the first Turkic Muslim dynasty, in maintaining and reshaping Central Asian trade routes after the decline of the Middle Period East Asian empires in the ninth and tenth centuries. While the Mongol Empire's role in Eurasian connectivity has been extensively explored, the Qarakhanid period, often dismissed as a "nadir" in Silk Road history, remains marginalized in both Western and Chinese scholarship. Duturaeva's monograph challenges this narrative by meticulously piecing together fragmentary evidence from Chinese, Persian, Arabic, and Turkic sources, alongside archaeological data, to argue that the Qarakhanids played a decisive role in sustaining and even expanding overland trade networks between the Islamic and Sinitic worlds. The book's strength lies in its interdisciplinary approach, which combines textual analysis with material culture to reconstruct a dynamic era of cultural and economic exchange. The presentation of a substantial amount of translated material is especially valuable, with a portion of it included in four extensive appendices at the end of the book.

The book is organized into six chapters, each addressing a distinct facet of Qarakhanid diplomacy and trade. The introduction frames the Qarakhanids as a bridge between the Turkic steppes and China. The chapter highlights the pre-Islamic eastern heritage of the Qarakhanids,

who connected their legacy to the Tang, as did other tenth-century East Asian political entities. Chapter 1 contextualizes the khaganate's rise amid the advent of Islam in Central Asia and its relations with neighboring polities such as the Ghaznavids, the Saljuqs, and the Khwarazmshahs. Chapter 2 examines gift exchanges as a proxy for trade, using the Ghaznavid and Liao cases to illustrate the Qarakhanids' role as middlemen. Chapters 3–5 focus on envoy missions, trade routes, and alliances, while Chapter 6 expands the scope to include commodity flows like amber, frankincense, and tea. It examines the Qarakhanid trade networks, highlighting their innovation in routes beyond the traditional Silk Road. Using Song sources and archaeological findings, Duturaeva reveals how Qarakhanid caravans transported amber and frankincense to and tea from China. In the final part of the chapter, Duturaeva analyzes the Qarakhanids' role in the trade of tea and horses along the northwestern Qinghai Road, which connected Tibet to Sichuan and Yunnan. Duturaeva's central thesis is twofold: 1) The Qarakhanids developed new trade connections, particularly through the Hexi Corridor and Tibet, rather than simply inheriting Sogdian or Tang networks; and 2) Chinese sources are indispensable for understanding Central Asian history, a point often overlooked due to the traditional division between Turkology and Sinology.

The book's most original contribution is its analysis of Qarakhanid envoys to Song China, documented in *Song shi* and other Chinese dynastic sources. Duturaeva identifies over forty missions, many of which were led by women, a rare acknowledgment of female mobility in medieval Eurasia (69–77). She argues that these missions were primarily commercial, with “tribute” functioning as a pretext for market access. The inclusion of translated primary sources (e.g., imperial edicts, Appendix 2) and detailed itineraries (84–91) makes this section invaluable for historians of diplomacy. The discussion of Tibetan Tsongkha intermediaries (108–14) is

particularly novel, highlighting how the Qarakhanids leveraged local alliances to bypass the Tangut-controlled Hexi Corridor.

Duturaeva's analysis of trade goods highlights the diverse role of the Qarakhanids. Chinese silk and porcelain (81–83, 168–76) flowed westward, while frankincense (189–97) and amber (178–86) moved eastward, often via Qarakhanid caravans. Her analysis of the amber trade, linking the Baltic regions to China via Volga Bulgaria and Khwarazm, is a standout, supported by archaeological finds (e.g., Liao tomb artifacts). Initially, amber was brought to China by the Uyghurs in the Hexi Corridor, who obtained it through trade with the Qarakhanids. After the decline of the Tang, the Qarakhanids revitalized trade, directly engaging in the amber trade within China. Amber became a popular diplomatic gift to the Liao court, with increased demand noted at the Northern Song court. The Qarakhanids were also significant suppliers of frankincense and tea. Their trade practices, like those of the Sogdians, involved a diverse range of goods and complex trade networks, significantly influencing Sino-Islamic commerce.

The “Tea and Horse Road” is reexamined through Qarakhanid-Tsongkha interactions, with tea emerging as a key currency in Sino-Tibetan exchanges (81–83, 197–203). This crucial transportation corridor linked Central Asia to southern East Asia, facilitating exchanges among the Nanzhao (728–937), Tang, and Tibetan empires. By the eleventh century, Tibet had become the primary supplier of horses for Song China, giving rise to the “Tea and Horse Road.” In 1074, the Song court established the Song Tea and Horse Agency to control the tea trade and fund warhorse purchases, marking a significant instance of state intervention in regional economies. Duturaeva highlights the Qarakhanid involvement in this trade. In 1078, an imperial decree permitted Qarakhanid envoys to make tax-exempt purchases of tea, facilitating direct trade for

cavalry horses and aligning with the state's strategy to reduce costs and decentralize horse procurement.

Duturaeva's discussion of the tea-horse trade and the Qarakhanids' role in supplying horses suggests that the Song relied on Central Asian horses to bolster its cavalry. While the Tanguts (Xi Xia) and Khitans (Liao) were also major horse suppliers, the Qarakhanids offered an alternative source, reducing the Song's dependence on its enemies. The Song's military weakness was partly due to its lack of high-quality horses. The Northern Song army struggled against the Liao and Xi Xia cavalry, who were far more mobile and effective in steppe warfare. Duturaeva emphasizes that Qarakhanid envoys acted as diplomats and traders, while also offering military support to the Song court. This dimension of their role has been largely overlooked in the historical narratives of the Song and the early modern period. Qarakhanid retainers assisted the Song in defending the market in Xihe Circuit, located at the border with the Tanguts, where the Song exchanged Sichuan tea for horses (65). Chinese sources record more than forty missions to the Northern Song court from 1009 to 1124. Qarakhanid messengers were mentioned as *banci/banca* 般次/般擦 (65–66, 206). During the Northern Song period, this term applied to foreign envoys along overland routes from the west, who also had economic functions, including their diplomatic responsibilities. The Song court rewarded them for their services as traders, military retainers, and defenders of the border markets. For this reason, the Qarakhanids often sent military commanders as envoys. Moreover, the timing of Qarakhanid missions (Appendix 3, 223–24) often coincides with periods of Song-Liao or Song-Xi Xia border tension, suggesting a strategic dimension to these exchanges. Her broader arguments about Qarakhanid-Song diplomatic and military interactions allow us to infer that the Qarakhanids may have indirectly contributed to the Song's strategic defense, particularly against the Liao and Western Xia. The Qarakhanids'

military role in relation to the Song dynasty could be meaningfully compared with earlier interactions between the Tang and Inner Asian pastoral-military groups (such as the Göktürks, Uyghurs, and Sogdians, as well as Shatuo and Tuygun). While the Qarakhanids were not a direct military client or ally of the Song, their economic, diplomatic, and logistical contributions parallel how Turkic polities supported, or challenged, the Tang's border defenses.

The book effectively counters the assumption that overland trade collapsed after the Tang. Duturaeva demonstrates that the Song's economic activism (25–36) and the Qarakhanids' adaptive strategies (e.g., using multiple routes) ensured continuity. The marriage alliances between the Liao and Qarakhanid dynasties (49–59) and the coinage of the Saljuq and Qarakhanid dynasties (132–54) further highlight the political and economic connections between these groups. Her use of al-Bīrūnī's *Kitāb al-ṣaydana* to trace commodity flows (120–21) bridges Islamic and Chinese perspectives. The Qarakhanid female ceramic fragment (cover image) and amber plaques from Liao tombs (Figure 4) visually reinforce the text's claims about cultural hybridity.

Duturaeva's fluency in Chinese, Persian, and Turkic sources allows her to correct misidentifications (e.g., clarifying “Dashi” as Qarakhanids in Song texts, 61–63) and to uncover overlooked details (e.g., the Qarakhanid title “Tabghach Khan” as a claim to China, 28–29). Furthermore, the integration of texts, coins, and archaeology (e.g., Taraz pottery shards, 41) establishes a new standard for Silk Road studies.

Together with Xin Wen's *The King's Road: Diplomacy and the Remaking of the Silk Road* (2023), *Qarakhanid Roads to China* is a landmark study that reshapes our understanding of pre-Mongol Eurasia. By centering the Qarakhanids, as both heirs to Turkic traditions and innovators in transregional trade, Duturaeva challenges the focus on the Mongols as the sole agents of

Eurasian integration. Duturaeva's research enhances our understanding of recent studies on connectivity and trade prior to the Mongol era. Michal Biran's *The Empire of the Qara Khitai* (2005) focuses on the later Khitan dynasty and shares Duturaeva's emphasis on Sino-Islamic mediation. Valerie Hansen's *The Silk Road* (2012) covers broader themes but lacks Duturaeva's detailed focus on the Qarakhanids. It also connects with Angela Schottenhammer's research on Song maritime trade, providing a continental perspective.

While the book relies heavily on detailed descriptions rather than theoretical frameworks, it would have benefited from a more robust conceptual approach, which could have strengthened arguments regarding nomadic statecraft and trade networks. Moreover, the transition from the Northern to Southern Song after 1127 is abrupt, resulting in underdeveloped later interactions between the Qarakhanids, the Jin, and the Western Xia. Two minor quibbles: 1) the glossary of Chinese characters (Appendix 4) is helpful but could include transliterations for non-sinologists; and 2) some maps lack scale bars (e.g., Map 2), complicating spatial analysis.

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