TÜRKİYAT MECMUASI

The Poor Man in Byzantium. Fragments of an Old Uyghur Tale

Yoksul Bir Kişi Bizans'ta. Eski Uygurca Bir Öykünün Fragmanları

Peter ZİEME[1] ᴵᴰ

ABSTRACT

Two Old Uyghur fragments from Yarchoto in the Turfan Oasis can be assigned to a narrative that is not known to us in this guise from any previously known work. The manuscripts of the Berlin Turfan Collection were written sometime during the 10th to 12th century. The main topic of the text is the account of a caravan which brings merchants to Byzantium. A poor man wanted to join it but was rejected by the merchants whose purpose was to gain wealth and a luxurious life. The text culminates in a saying ascribed to the Buddha that one can achieve the fulfilment of all wishes only by listening to the Buddha's teaching.

Keywords: Old Uyghur, Berlin Turfan Collection, A caravan tale, Buddha's teaching

ÖZ

Turfan Vahası'ndaki Yarhoto'da keşfedilmiş iki Eski Uygurca bir hikayenin parçası, daha önce herhangi bir eserden bilinmeyen bir anlatıyla ilişkilendirilebilir. Berlin Turfan Koleksiyonu'nun el yazmaları 10. yüzyıldan 12. yüzyıla kadar olan döneme aittir. Fragmanların konusu, tüccarları Bizans'a getirecek bir kervanın hikayesidir. Fakir bir adam kervana katılmak ister, ancak lüks ve zengin bir hayat peşinde olan tüccarlar tarafından reddedilir. Metin, insanın bütün dileklerine Buda'nın öğretisini dinleyerek ulaşabileceğine dair öğütte bulunur.

Anahtar kelimeler: Eski Uygurca, Berlin Turfan Koleksiyonu, Kervan hikayesi, Buda'nın öğretisi

[1]**Corresponding author/Sorumlu yazar:**
Peter Zieme (Prof. Dr.),
BBAW (Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften), Berlin, Germany
E-mail: ziemepet@gmail.com
ORCID: P.Z. 0000-0002-8090-7707

Introduction

When it comes to the turning of the wheel which is one of the well-known symbols of Buddhism, in the famous book on the life of the Buddha entitled *Lalitavistara,* the Buddha speaks to the Bodhisattva Maitreya: "Maitreya, such is the wheel of Dharma that the Thus-Gone One turns. It is when the Thus-Gone One turns this wheel that he is called a thus-gone one. Then he is called a perfectly awakened buddha, the one who naturally manifests, lord of the Dharma, the guide, the perfect guide, the complete guide, the captain, the one with mastery over all dharmas, and the lord of the Dharma".[1] What is to mention here, is the epithet "captain", in Sanskrit *sārthavāha* "caravan leader". It appears quite often in the Old Uyghur texts.[2] There are forms like *sartavahe*[3] derived from Tocharian as well as *sartbaw*[4] derived from the Chinese rendering *sabao* 薩保. There are some scattered fragments from the life of Buddha, but the quoted passage is not among them.

After the Buddha's enlightenment, the merchants Trapuṣa and Bhallika were the first laymen whom the Buddha met, as the *Catuṣpariṣatsūtra* reports in its frame story.[5] The two merchants are the first to offer milk and honey as alms to the enlightened one. Not least because of this story, merchants belong to the repertoire of Buddhist narrators. The text presented here is literary in form, but a similar case may have a base in real events. As seen from the Pūrṇāvadāna, the caravan leader is described as follows: "A caravan-leader (sārthavāha [see Part V, n. 12, pp. 130-131]) is more than a merchant, however prosperous. The term refers to a man who organizes and leads long-distance, often foreign, trading expeditions, an expert not only in merchandise, but in men, pack-animals, trade-routes, trade-practices in different regions and countries, defense, etc. In the Pūrṇāvadāna, sārthavāha, by extension, is applied to one who organizes overseas trading expeditions, the most profitable and dangerous of all forms of commerce. The caravan-leader was at once a merchant and an adventurer, and the spread of Buddhism throughout Asia was intimately connected with his activities. Among the trading classes, the caravan-leader was a man who commanded great prestige."[6]

The two fragments from Yarchoto in the Turfan Oasis can be assigned to a narrative that is not known to us in this guise from any previously known work. The manuscript presumably belongs to the heyday of the Western Uyghur Kingdom, i.e., it may have been written in the period from the 10th to the 12th century. The two fragments U 1880 (T II Y 60n) and U 1884 (T II Y 63e) of the Berlin Turfan Collection[7] are small pieces presumably from one leaf, the former is from its

---

1   Followed by more than 20 pages of further epithets in the translation: "The Play in Full. Lalitavistara". Translated by the Dharmachakra Translation Committee.
2   Zieme 2005.
3   HWAU 587b.
4   HWAU 588a.
5   Yakup 2006.
6   Tatelman 1988, 184.
7   Digitised images of the fragments can be viewed in the Digitales Turfan-Archiv (DTA) of the "Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften".

right-hand end, the latter one from the left-hand end. The verso side bears the leaf number 93. The leaf is one of an extensive book in *pustaka* format written in a variant of the classical type of Uyghur script used for *sūtras*. It is unclear so far whether there are other fragments from the same manuscript. Here, because of the presumed textual connections, I consider the two fragments belong to one sheet, although this could prove to be a mistake if a parallel manuscript turns up.

As far as the two fragments allow, one can assume that the main topic of the text is a journey of a caravan which is to bring the merchants to Byzantium. A poor man had heard that one could become rich through trade, which is why he wanted to join this caravan. The merchants of the caravan reproach him for not having any trade goods and for carrying only a hollow stick. They apparently suggest that he should rather go back to his country of origin, because the rich merchants only trade in luxury goods and do not welcome a poor man at all. But the text accuses the rich business men of not listening to the Buddha's teaching, because that way all wishes are fulfilled.

Transcription of the recto side

U 1884

(recto)

01 [bay] bolmakl[ı]g küsüš-läri kanar ärmiš

02 tep [ä]šidü birlä ol [čı]gay är äd[i] üküš

03 tälim s[atıgčı]-lar kuvrag[ı birl]ä kavıšıp

04 vorom elkä bargalı u[gra]tı anıŋ ok

05 nä ärsär satıglık [yu]ŋlak-lık ädi t(a)varı

06 yok ä[r]di : t(ä)k kurug eligin ök tayak

07 birlä barır ärdi : [k]ačan ol čıgay

08 är vorom el-kä [ ]

09 ötrü [ ] [ ]

(lacuna of uncertain length, at least 10 lines).

U 1880

(recto)

10 [ ]l[ ]

11 atı[ ] är[ ] inčä [el-tä]

12 uluš-ta ülgüsüz [ük]ü[š] bay b[arımlıg koti]

13 -švari bayagut-lar bar-lar[8] olar in[čä] ym[ä]

14 sansız sakıš-sız a[l]kınčsız tälim ärdini

15 yinčü äsriŋü üküš agı barım äd t[av]ar

16 -larıg barča tükäl bar : näŋ yänä satıg

17 -[s]ız boš bermäzlär : nätäg s(ä)n kurug elgin

---

8 In the samples quoted in ED 353 *barlar (bar+* Plural suffix) is not attested. Generally, in Old Uyghur the form is rare, there are examples in Zieme 2012. Brockelmann 1954, p. 268 mentions *barlar* with the meaning of "mehrmals", but this is not meant here. A special case can also be observed in Maue 2015, p. 349: *barlar antag.*

Transcription of the verso side

U 1884

(verso) üč öki[9]

18 [qo]vı tayakıŋ alınıp bärü k(ä)lti[ ]

19 anı [tä]g ök kur[ug] elgin kovı ta[yakıŋ]

20 /w// umtu[ ] öz eliŋk[ä u]luš-uŋ

21 -ka barır-s(ä)n [ ] ančulayu ymä kim-lär

22 -niŋ kužal ä[d]gü k[ılı]nč-lıg yuŋlak-lık

23 satıg-lık äd-läri t(a)varları yok [är]sär :

24 [ ] t(ä)ŋri burhan-nıŋ nomlug

25 [ ] ärigintä köni

26 [ ] ärür-lär katıg

U 1880

(verso)

27 [ ]p a[ ]

28 [ ]lzün-[l]är katıglanzun-lar ärdi

29 [t]ep [k]im kayu tınl(ı)g-lar yänä kaŋım(ı)z t(ä)ŋri

30 [bu]rhan-nıŋ küsüš-in sakınčın tapın

31 t[a]pl[ag]ın bütürüp bütkärip nom ärdinig

32 [ä]šitsär-lär tıŋlasar-lar : ol tınl(ı)g-lar-nıŋ

33 bütmägü kanmagu ymä nä küsüš-läri tapl[arı]

Translation

(recto)

(01-09) As soon as he heard that the desires (of the people) [to become rich] would be fulfilled, that [po]or man joined a band of merchants who had many numerous goods, and [intended] to go to the land of From (Byzantium). However, he had no goods and merchandise to sell and trade with (?). Only empty-handed he went with a staff. When that poor man [for going] to the land of From, then [ ]

(lacuna)

(10-17) [ ] so in the land [ ] there are the [koṭi]śvara rich men[10] with immeasurable [many] goods. They do not give freely or without payment the numberless, inexhaustibly many jewels, pearls, the various many goods, and merchandise. How [will you] with empty hands [ ]

(verso)

---

9   ʾwyky > ʾwy<r>ky for *örki* is a special term for the numbers 91-99 (from *bir örki* to *tokuz örki*) according to the high rank counting system ("Oberstufenzählung", cp. Clark 1996), cp. Ehlers 1983.

10   In Geng & Klimkeit 1988, ll. 547-548 *bay barılıg sansız üküš kotišvar bayagutlar*.

(18-26) [ ] with your [hollow] staff you came hither, [what will you do with] empty [hands] [and with] your hollow staff? It is better for you to go [back] to your own country. Likewise, now if one does not have consumable and saleable goods of kuśala good deeds, [ ] of the divine Buddha's teaching according to the advice of the [ ] true [ ] they are, firmly [ ]

(lacuna)

(27-33) "[ ] if only they had made an effort!" Now further, if any living being will fulfil and accomplish wishes, thoughts, demands, and precepts of our Father, the divine Buddha, and hear and listen to the sūtra jewels, then such living being's wishes still unfulfilled and unsatisfied [will be granted].

Some remarks

Vrwm = Byzantium. Roman-Chinese relations are a special field of research in Eurasian history, closely related to the history of the Silk Road. And this includes the relations between Rome/Byzantium and the early Turkic empires. The historical sources testify that the latter were global players. Since our text cannot provide any new insights apart from the toponym, this question will not be dealt with further here. In our narrative, the name for Byzantium is *vwrwm* with a clear Sogdian origin. *Frōm* is the abundantly attested Sogdian form. The resulting form, *vrwm,* is also known from other Old Uyghur texts besides *vwrwm*. More recently, the spelling *ʾwrwm* has been added. In chronological terms, one could establish the following sequence: *frwm > vrwm > vwrwm // ʾwrwm*.

There is some evidence in the Old Uyghur texts known so far. They attest first to the mention of Rome only in a translation of the Chinese Xuanzang biography. The fourth fascicle of the biography contains the following episode: T.L.2053.243c03-06. The Old Uyghur translation follows the original very closely and reads as follows:[11]

Table 1. The original Chinese text, Old Uyghur, and English translations

No	Chinese Text	Old Uyghur translation	English translation
01	國東境有	balık öŋdünintä	East of the city
02	鶻秣城	[...] tep balık ol	there is the city [鶻秣].
03	西北接	balık ke[din] tagdın buluŋı	The area to the northwest of the city
04	拂懍國	vrom birlä tutšı ol	is bordering on Vrom.
05	西南	balık kedin künt[ün] buluŋınta	On the southwest of the city
06	海島有	taloy otrugınta	there is on sea island,
07	西女國	kedinki kunčuylar balıkı ol	the western city of women.
08	皆是女人	anta barča kunčuylar ol	There are all women.

11 HT IV (Edition Toalster 1977), p. 100, ll. 958-969. English translation of the Chinese original by Li: "On the eastern frontier of the country was the city of Ormus, and the northwest part bordered on the country of Hrom. An island to the southwest was the West Women's Country, in which there were only women without any men. It had many precious products. As it was a dependent of the country of Hrom, the king of Hrom sent men to mate with them once a year. It was their custom that when male babies were born, they were as a rule not brought up." (Li 1995, 124).

09	無男子	är yok	There is no man.
10	多珍貨	üküš ärdini yinčü	(On) many jewels and pearls
11	附屬拂懍	vromluglar birlä satıglašur	they trade with the Vrom people.
12	拂懍王	vrom hanı	The Vrom emperor
13	歲遺丈	yılıŋa är ıdur	annually sends a man
14	夫配焉	olarnı birlä kavıšgalı	to join[12] them.
15	其俗産男	olar birök urı tugursar	When they give birth to a male child,
16	例皆不擧	igidmäz	they do not raise (it).[13]

In line 1, the previously described country (Chinese) / city (Old Uyghur) is *bolasi guo* 波剌斯國 = Pārsa, the central province of Persia. Xuanzang's travelogue says of the region: "The country of Pārsa is several myriad *li* in circuit, and is capital city, named Surasthāna, is over forty li in circuit. Since the territory is vast, the climate is different at different localities; generally speaking, it is warm. Water is channelled into the fields, and the people are rich and prosperous. The country produces gold, silver, brass, quartz, crystal, and other precious and unusual substances. Large pieces of brocade, fine ramie cloth, woolen carpets, and the like are exquisitely woven. There are many good horses and camels. Large silver coins are used for currency. The people are hot-tempered by nature and have no etiquette by custom. Their spoken and written languages are different from those of others (...). In the eastern part of the country is the city of Ormus, the inner city of which is not wide; the outer city is more than sixty *li* in circuit. The inhabitants are numerous and wealthy. The northeast region borders on the country of Hrum (...) To the southwest of the country of Hrum is the West Women's Country, which is an island. In it there are only female inhabitants without a single male. It produces various valuable goods and is a dependency of Hrum. Thus the king of Hrum sends men to mate with the female inhabitants every year, as it is their custom not to bring up any male baby born to them."[14] The city of *humo* 鵠秣 is Hormuz, the island of Hormuz which lies to the east of the Persian mainland. The name is missing in the Old Uyghur version.

In line 4, the country *Fulinguo* 拂懍國, the old form for the toponym Rome / Byzantium, in a sense Persia's neighbour from a broad perspective, occurs. The Old Uyghur translation faithfully reflects the Chinese text and basically offers nothing new. As far as I know, there are no independent data on this subject in Turkish sources.

---

12 The meaning "to copulate" is mentioned in ED 588a (data from SYY).

13 A detailed documentation on the "Island of Women" according to Chinese and other Asian sources has been given by P. Pelliot (Notes on Marco Polo, II, 671 (sub femeles)): "According to Polo (Vol. I, 424-425), there were two islands near together, one called «Male» the other «Female», located 500 miles south of Kesmacoran, and another 500 miles south of these islands was Socotra. The inhabitants of the Male Island (and of the Female) were «baptized Christians», with a bishop placed under the authority of the archbishop of Socotra. The men of the Male Island only spent March, April, and May with the women of the Female Island. The women would bring up the children, but boys, when they were fourteen years of age (or «twelve» according to Z, VB, and R, a more likely age of puberty in tropical countries), were sent to the Male Island."

14 Li 1996, 349-350.

In Iranian studies, there is a discussion whether beside Byzantium (Eastern Rome) in Central Asia another Rome existed or not. H. Humbach discussed Phrom Gesar and the Bactrian Rome[15.] J. Dan writes: "In early Bon sources, From Gesar is always a place name, never a name of a person. (…) numismatic evidence (and also from the records of the T'ang Dynasty) (…) Fromo Kesaro, 'Caesar of Rome', was an epithet used by an eighth-century Turkish ruler in the larger area of Kabul".[16]

In addition to the edited text from a Buddhist collection of stories, there is also an Old Uyghur Manichaean text which contains the term *vrwm*. It is a kind of a fairy-tale about an encounter of a Byzantine Emperor (*vrom hanı*) with a certain Bar Han. In his catalogue, J. Wilkens calls the text "Historicizing narrative of the visit of a Byzantine ruler to a certain Bar Han."[17]

Enriched by different sources, mainly through Xuanzang whose biography was translated into Old Uyghur, literati in the Uyghur Kingdom had knowledge of Rome / Byzantium as the westernmost Asian region.

Older records are the Old Turkic inscriptions from the period of the Second Türk Empire. On the occasion of the funeral service for a deceased Kagan even envoys from Byzantium come to the imperial centre to the nomadic centre of Ötükän.[18] In a Christian text, not Rome, but Fars (Pars) is named as the westernmost country: " ... in the grace and blessing [of the God Messiah may ...] in the east from the Tangut lands, in the west from the Fars lands".[19] Unfortunately, the context is too poor to give an understandable explanation.

It is thus not surprising that we encounter the name of Rome/Byzantium in completely different texts from the Old Turkic inscriptions till the end of the Yuan dynasty when the Old Uyghur period coined by the world religions of Manichaeism, Buddhism and Christianity had ceased.

Abbreviations

ED	Clauson
HT IV	Toalster
HWAU	Wilkens 2021
SYY	Oda
T	Taishō Daizōkyō

---

15   Humbach 1983, 303-309.
16   Dan 2011, 127.
17   Wilkens 2000, no. 59 (p. 84).
18   Sertkaya 1993.
19   Zieme 2015, 81.

References/Kaynaklar

Brockelmann, Carl. 1954. *Osttürkische Grammatik der islamischen Litteratursprachen Mittelasiens*. Leiden.

Clark, Larry. 1996. The Early Turkic and Sarig Yugur counting systems, in R. E. Emmerick et al. (eds), *Turfan, Khotan und Dunhuang. Vorträge der Tagung "Annemarie v. Gabain und die Turfanforschung", veranstaltet von der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin (9-12.12.1994)*. Berlin, 17-49.

Clauson, Gerard. 1972. *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish*. Oxford.

Dan, Martin. 2011. Greek and Islamic Medicines' Historical Contact with Tibet: A Reassessment in View of Recently Available but Relatively Early Sources on Tibetan Medical Eclecticism. In: *Islam and Tibet – Interactions along the Musk Routes*. Surrey/Burlington, 117-143.

Dobrovits, Mihaly. 2021 Byzantium in Asia - Pur(u)m and Fulin. In: *Altaic and Chagatay Lectures. Studies in Honour of Eva Kincses-Nagy*. Edited by I. Zimonyi. Szeged, 143-145.

Ehlers, Gerhard.1983. Notabilia on the Old Turkic Upper Census, in: *Ural-Altaic Yearbooks* 3 (1983), 81-87.

Geng Shimin & Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim in Zusammenarbeit mit H. Eimer und J. P. Laut. 1988. *Das Zusammentreffen mit Maitreya. Die ersten fünf Kapitel der Hami-Version der Maitrisimit*, 1-2. Wiesbaden.

Humbach, Helmut. 1983. Phrom Gesar and Bactrian Rome. In: P. Snoy (ed.), *Ethnology and History. Festschrift für K. Jettmar. Beiträge zur Südasienforschung 86*. Stuttgart, 303-309.

Li, Rongxi. 1995. A *Biography of the Tripitaka Master of the Great Ci'en Monastery of the Great Tang Dynasty*. Berkeley.

Li, Rongxi. 1996. *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions*. Berkeley.

Maue, Dieter. 1996. *Alttürkische Handschriften, Teil l. Dokumente in Brāhmī und tibetischer Schrift*. Stuttgart (VOHD XIII,9).

Maue, Dieter. 2015. *Alttürkische Handschriften, Teil 19. Dokumente in Brāhmī und tibetischer Schrift, Teil 2*. Stuttgart (VOHD XIII,27).

Oda, Juten. 2010. *A Study of the Buddhist Sutra Called Säkiz yükmäk yaruq or Säkiz törlügin yarumïš yaltrïmïš in Old Turkic, Text Volume*. Kyoto.

Oda, Juten. 2015. *A Study of the Buddhist Sutra called Säkiz yükmäk yaruq or Säkiz törlügin yarumïš yaltrïmïš in Old Turkic*. Turnhout (Berliner Turfantexte XXXIII).

Pelliot, Paul. 1959, 1963. *Notes on Marco Polo*. I-II. Paris.

Sertkaya, Osman Fikri. 1993. Göktürk tarihinin meseleleri: Büyük Roma (İmparatorluğu) = BİZANS'ın Göktürk yazıtlarındaki adı. *Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Dergisi*, XXVI, İstanbul, 1993, 147-156.

Tatelman, Joel Howard. 1988. *A Translation and Study of the Pūrṇāvadāna*. (Dissertation). Hamilton.

Toalster, John Peter Claver. 1977. *Die uigurische Xuan-Zang-Biographie. 4. Kapitel mit Übersetzung und Kommentar*. Inaugural-Dissertation an der Justus Liebig-Universität Gießen.

Wilkens, Jens. 2000. *Alttürkische Handschriften Teil 8. Manichäisch-türkische Texte der Berliner Turfansammlung.* Stuttgart.

Wilkens, Jens. 2021. *Handwörterbuch des Altuigurischen. Altuigurisch - Deutsch - Türkisch*, Göttingen.

Yakup, Abdurishid. 2006. *Dišastvustik. Eine altuigurische Bearbeitung einer Legende aus dem Catuṣpariṣat-sūtra*. Wiesbaden.

Zieme, Peter. 2005. Notizen zur Geschichte des Namens *sart*, in: *Studia Turcologica Cracovensia* 10, 531-539.

Zieme, Peter. 2012. Some Notes on Old Uigur Translations of Buddhist Commentaries. In: *Annual Report of The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University for the Academic Year 2011* [= ARIRIAB], vol. XV, March 2012, 147-160 + pl. 10-11.

Zieme, Peter. 2015. *Altuigurische Texte der Kirche des Ostens aus Zentralasien / Old Uigur texts of the Church of the East from Central Asia*. Piscataway.
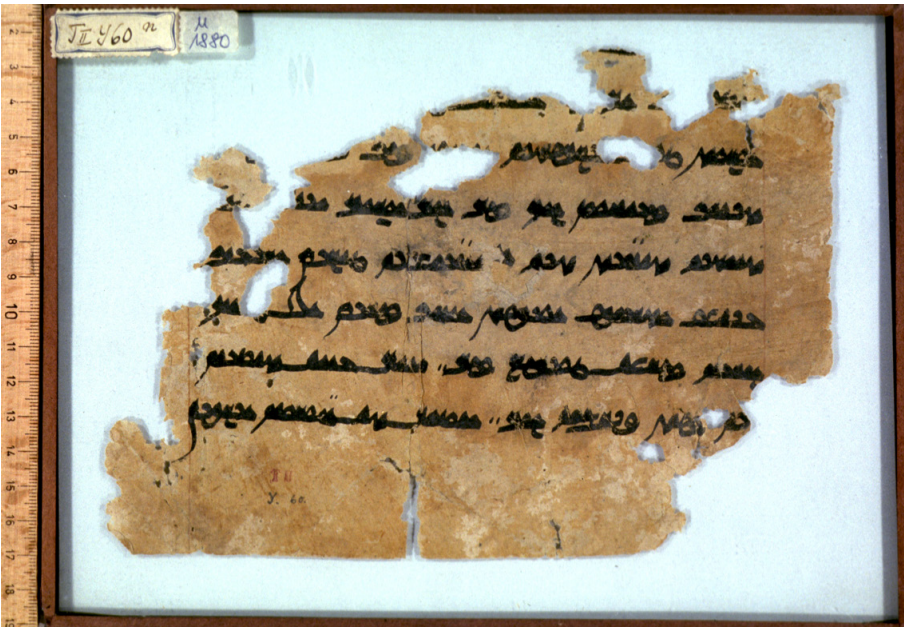
FIGURES

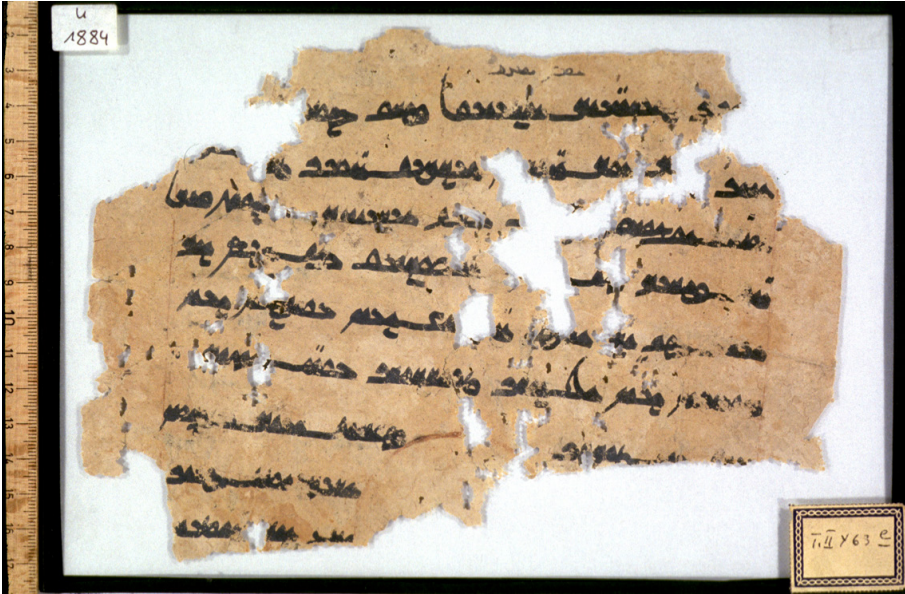**Figure 1:** U 1884 recto

Figure 2: U 1880 recto

Figure 3: U 1884 verso

Figure 4: U 1880 verso