

## Lingua Franca or Lingua Magica?

### *Talismanic Scrolls from Eastern Turkistan*

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During the summer of 2010, I undertook fieldwork in Gansu and Qinghai among various Muslim minorities: Turkic-speaking Salar; Mongolian-speaking Dongxiang; Kargang Tibetans; and Chinese-speaking Hui. Accompanied by a Salar colleague, the ethnologist Ma Wei, I visited several holy places (called *gong-bei* in Chinese, from the Persian *gumbad*, “dome”). At the shrine of the Sufi saint Ma Taibaba (d. ca. 1680–90) in Linxia, we met Hui villagers from eastern Xinjiang who were performing a collective pilgrimage.<sup>1</sup> At a certain point of the ritual, which included Quran reading, prayers, incense burning, and cash distribution, I was asked to read aloud a Persian manuscript eulogy of the Prophet Muhammad, probably copied in the late nineteenth century. None of them could now read it, I was told, because it was written in Persian.<sup>2</sup>

This unusual experience raises a question on the status of Persian in western China: what happened to this language, which was no longer understandable but still so highly regarded that villagers carried with them a book written in it and wished to hear it read as a part of the ritual? My hypothesis is that Persian, at the height of its prestige, was read, spoken, and even sometimes written among the literate population, but then progressively became a “scriptural” language—that is, based exclusively on a limited number of written idioms—whose prestige verged on magic or devotions used by a large part of society. To flesh out this hypothesis and explain the paradox, this chapter limits its focus to Eastern Turkistan (designated Xinjiang since 1884), and explores two sources of information: manuscript catalogues of Eastern Turkistani collections and a corpus of talismanic scrolls, written either in Persian or in Chaghatai Turkish. Manuscript handlists and the fieldwork notes taken by their authors provide a rough but clear picture of the quantity and quality of Persian manuscripts that circulated throughout the Tarim Basin. A basic chronology can also be established. Less studied but more telling than the books, the scrolls allow an unusual insight into the everyday usages of Persian writing among not only the literate classes but also the lower strata

of society. The following sections introduce seven original scrolls several meters' long, produced at different times, and then analyze them in the light of both art history and linguistics.

PERSIAN MANUSCRIPTS IN EASTERN TURKISTAN:  
THE SOCIAL PRESTIGE OF A LINGUA FRANCA

Like Devin DeWeese's chapter 4 in this volume, this chapter's case study brings together specific manuscripts with manuscript catalogues so as to reach more general conclusions. Three catalogues of Eastern Turkistani manuscripts are of particular interest in providing a consistent survey of books used in the oases of Xinjiang over a period of two centuries, whatever the language in which they were composed. Abdulladzhan Muginov's classic *Opisanie uigurskikh rukopisei Instituta Narodov Azii* (Description of the Uyghur Manuscripts of the Institute of the Peoples of Asia), published in Moscow in 1962, does not help us much in this comparative endeavor, being focused only on Turkic material.<sup>3</sup> Chronologically, the first of the three catalogues under scrutiny here is the manuscript collection of Jules-Léon Dutreuil de Rhins and Fernand Grenard, which remains understudied, because its documents are scattered in different places in Paris and its catalogue—or rather the notes written during the expedition—is unpublished and not always accurate. Although the explorer and the orientalist were clearly more interested in Turkic books, they also collected a few Persian items during their tribulations in southern Xinjiang, which started in 1891 and ended brutally in June 1894 with the murder of Dutreuil de Rhins by Tibetan highwaymen in Qinghai. Among the fifty manuscripts they sent from China to France, there are only two in Persian (a *diwan* by Hafiz, copied in 1731, and, translated from the Arabic, Qazwini's medieval cosmography, *Aja'ib al-Makhluqat*, dated 1861), and two Chaghatai translations from Persian (a Sufi treatise of the late eighteenth century and a book on ethics copied in the first half of the nineteenth century). Persian manuscripts thus make up only 10 percent of the total, a figure that we will encounter again, although this is too small a selection to be representative. This collection of manuscripts will be discussed more closely in the second part of the chapter, devoted to scrolls.

The second catalogue under scrutiny is that based on the expedition of the German orientalist Martin Hartmann, who visited Eastern Turkistan in 1902–3 and came back with 133 manuscripts, all of which are now preserved in Berlin's Staatsbibliothek. In his catalogue, Hartmann did not provide dates, nor did he consistently identify the language of the books.<sup>4</sup> Yet it is possible to make a general evaluation based on the titles. For instance, we can safely assume that all professional manuals (simply called *risala*) (numbers 2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 25, 26, 27, 84, 87, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94); Mir 'Ali Shir Nawa'i's *masnawis* (numbers 15, 16, 68); Khara-bati's *masnawi* (numbers 22, 29); and even the recent hagiographies (*tazkiras*) (numbers 6, 14, 66, 122) are all composed in Chaghatai. Hartmann lists only eight

documents as being in Persian or including substantial Persian text (numbers 8, 28, 74, 75, 97, 102, 111, 131), but other books in the collection are certainly written in that language, such as ‘Abdullah Ansari’s works (numbers 28, 32) and Fayzullah’s *Rahat al-Qulub* (numbers 55, 62, 73). This means that there are at least thirteen Persian manuscripts in the Hartmann collection, again 10 percent of the total. Like Dutreuil de Rhins and Grenard, Hartmann discovered that Persian manuscripts mainly if not exclusively comprised classics of literature and Sufism, both being prestigious genres in Xinjiang.

Far richer, the third collection is that of the Swedish ambassador and Turkologist Gunnar Jarring, which is preserved in the University Library of Lund, Sweden. The collection was first established by Swedish missionaries, such as Gustaf Raquette, who stayed in the Kashgar region from 1896 to 1921, and then expanded by Jarring himself during the 1930s. It now contains about 575 manuscripts, of which only a small proportion do not originate in Xinjiang.<sup>5</sup> With sixty-nine texts either fully in Persian or including significant Persian parts, we have again 10 percent of the total. This contrasts, on the one hand, with the linguistic distribution of literary production on the western side of the Tian Shan; and, on the other hand, with the Persianate culture of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Eastern Turkistan. But Jarring’s detailed cataloguing helps us to go beyond this basic evaluation.<sup>6</sup> Based on a commonly accepted periodization of the history of Eastern Turkistan, we may distinguish between three phases of manuscript copying. These were, firstly, the sixteenth to eighteenth century, which corresponds to the Chaghataiid and Khwaja regimes; secondly, the early nineteenth century to the 1870s, which covers the *begs* administration under Qing imperial suzerainty and the emirate of Ya‘qub Beg (r. 1864–77); and thirdly, the 1880s to the early twentieth century, that is, the era of effective Qing domination. Generally speaking, we see a constant increase in the number of copies over time. This is of course due to the conditions of preservation of documents, which favor the most recent ones, as well as to the mass production and wide circulation of manuscripts in the modern times. Still, this upward curve shows that Persian did not end its career in the region as a dead language.

In the first period, from the sixteenth to eighteenth century, there are either practical documents, such as a marriage formula (Prov. 264) and a commentary on jurisprudence (*fiqh*) (Prov. 40), or quite sophisticated works such as the monumental philosophical poem of Nizami, *Makhzan al-Asrar* (Prov. 308), Jamal Husayni’s *Rawzat al-Ahbab* (Prov. 244, a Timurid biography of the Prophet, the People of the House, and the Companions), and Abu Nasr Farahi’s *Nisab al-Sibyan* (Prov. 350, a metrical Arabic-Persian glossary of the thirteenth century). As for the second historical period, from the early nineteenth century to the 1870s, while there are Sufi hagiographical dictionaries such as Lari’s *Takmil-i Nafahat al-Uns* (Prov. 168, a commentary on Jami’s famous fifteenth-century *Nafahat al-Uns*) and Badr al-Din Ishaq’s *Asrar al-Awliya* (Prov. 66, an Indian compendium), we also find many didactic treatises on religious duties and ethics, among which

the most worthy of mention are Sufi Allahyar's *Maslak al-Muttaqin* (Prov. 231 and Prov. 419, a classic on religious duties written in the spirit of Sufi beliefs), *Rahat al-Qulub* (Prov. 267), and a few other more obscure works (Prov. 192, Prov. 291).<sup>7</sup> Prov. 512 contains Arabic-Persian lexicons, and at least four manuscripts copied in Persian, but often including Arabic and Chaghatai segments, deal with devotion and magic (Prov. 75, Prov. 401 and Prov. 503 on prayers and amulets, and Prov. 193 on geomancy).

The third time period, from the 1880s to the early twentieth century, confirms this tendency toward less complexity and more ritualism. Linguistic material now includes Chaghatai and is reduced to short vade mecum (Prov. 306, Prov. 360, and Prov. 377). Sufi writings meanwhile are now limited to a few brief hagiographies (*tazkiras*) (Prov. 73, Prov. 307). Most of the manuscripts are devotional literature: books about or of prayers, mixing Arabic, Persian, and Chaghatai (Prov. 70, Prov. 71, Prov. 416, Prov. 157 and Prov. 505, both being Muhammad ibn Ahmad Zahid's *Tarhib al-Salat*); prayers with amulets (Prov. 393); prayers with magic (Prov. 425); and a talismanic scroll (Prov. 452).

In sum, during the early modern period, the elite of Eastern Turkistan mastered Persian. This is confirmed by the fact that the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries saw also a relatively important movement promoting Persian writings in the joint intellectual fields of historiography and hagiography, respectively patronized by the region's Chaghataiid sultans and Khwaja Sufi rulers. This is not the place to revisit a literary history that has partly been written, so it is sufficient to mention the following major works: Mirza Haydar Dughlat's *Tarikh-i Rashidi* (composed outside the Tarim Basin but by a Kashgari ruler of Kashmir); Mahmud Churas's *Tarikh* (a follow-up to Dughlat's historical work); the *Anis al-Talibin* by the same author; Mir Khal al-Din al-Yarkandi's *Hidayat-nama*; the anonymous hagiographical *Tazkira-yi Afaq Khwaja* (also known as *Tazkirat al-Hidayat*); and the Sufi oral commentaries on Rumi's *Masnawi-yi Ma'nawi* undertaken by experts known as *masnawi-khwan* (*masnawi-reciters*).<sup>8</sup> We may finally speculate that excerpts of Persian texts were quoted orally in sermons and preaching, as a recent if erratic survey of manuscript collections in Xinjiang suggests. Mozafar Bakhtyar found no fewer than three intriguing items comprising sermons in Persian: in Bishkiram, in the collection of the imam's Friday mosque, a text called *Firdaws al-Wa'izin*; in Yengisar's Friday mosque, a *Majmu'a-yi Khutbaha-yi Farsi Dawazdamahi*, and in Poskam, the *Khutba-nama-yi Dawazdamahi*.<sup>9</sup>

Evidently, Persian certainly did not disappear in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Xinjiang. But the mastery of this prestigious language does seem to have vanished with the regional ruling elite: the Chaghataiid court was dismantled by the Khwaja dynasty of Sufis with the help of the Junggar Mongols in the 1680s, then the Khwajas themselves and their followers were partly forced into exile in Ferghana after the Qing conquest in 1759. Yet Persian learning maintained its prestige and even expanded in terms of book production, albeit at the price of a kind

of leveling down. It was no coincidence that the high administration of Eastern Turkistan, led by *begs* (local governors) appointed by the Qing imperial authorities, commissioned translations of Persian classics into Chaghatai from the late eighteenth century on.<sup>10</sup> We find a comparable patronage of translations at the Khiva court in the nineteenth century, as seen in Marc Toutant's chapter 10 in this volume. In Xinjiang, there was for instance the case of an official named Khush Kipek Beg (d. 1781) who funded translations of Jami's *Nafahat al-Uns* and 'Attar's *Tazkirat al-Awliya*.<sup>11</sup> In the foreword of the former, the translator explained that "because of the use of Persian, profiting from this book has been easy for some people, possible for others, despite the difficulties, and completely impossible for most people [*'umum-i khala'iq*]. . . . This is why the knowledgeable and powerful Khwaja (Khush) Kifek Bek . . . asked me, the miserable one, to translate this work into Turki and continually to simplify [*asan*] its meaning for general readership [*khass-u-'am*]." Further examples are discussed in David Brophy's chapter 6 on the institutional use of Persian in Qing imperial China.

This translation process seems to have lasted until the mid-nineteenth century, as attested by the Jarring collection. Thus Prov. 334, copied in the late eighteenth century, is the Chaghatai version of *Shahr-i Gulshan*, a didactic religious treatise, which could correspond to Lahiji's *Sharh-i Gulshan-i Raz*, composed in the fifteenth century. Prov. 261, copied in 1841–42, is the Chaghatai version of the anonymous *Tazkirat al-Anbiya*. Prov. 341, copied around 1856–57, is a Chaghatai version of Fayzullah's *Rahat al-Qulub*. These are in addition to the two translations mentioned in the catalogue of the Dutreuil de Rhins and Grenard collection. Apparently, this translation process ceased abruptly with the emirate of Ya'qub Beg between 1864 and 1877, although these books still circulated in Khotan after 1863, according to Fernand Grenard.<sup>12</sup>

Whereas in the period stretching from the early nineteenth century to the 1870s, very few people seem to have been able to *write* Persian in Xinjiang, in the second period from the 1880s to early twentieth century, *reading* knowledge of Persian seriously declined. Hartmann and Jarring do not provide much detail about language learning among their local informants, but Grenard makes interesting observations about the language skills of his book suppliers and other literate people. According to him, there were schools (*maktabs*) attached to each mosque, but boys only attended classes episodically and merely learned Quran excerpts by heart. Very few people, even among officials, were able to read and write, except those whom Grenard calls "clergymen."<sup>13</sup> Given the general illiteracy in Xinjiang, the lower-class mullahs who constituted the majority of these "clergymen" not only served as public writers and gave public lectures, but also treated the sick, cast spells, and divined the future.<sup>14</sup> Among upper-class religious authorities—composed of muezzins, imams, qadis (Muslim judges), muftis, and the *'ulama*—only the latter could be considered highly educated.<sup>15</sup> In most serious madrasas, students learned the Quran by heart, studied some jurisprudence (*fiqh*)

and listened to commentaries on the Persian classics such as Sa'di's *Gulistan*. In more precise linguistic terms, Chinese learning was very uncommon, and qadis and muftis did not master Arabic and Persian. In fact for most of them, Chaghatai (known as Turki) was so much in use in the region that it was called the "Muslim tongue" (*musulman tili*).<sup>16</sup>

The manuscript collectors' notes are often written in a condescending tone that does not do justice to the intellectual history of Xinjiang. Nevertheless, they are based on field experience and tell us a lot about the lower layers of Xinjiang society. What is important here, and should be discussed in connection with the popularity of devotional and magical books, is the overlapping of mullahs' language practices. On the fertile ground of popular beliefs and recourse to the supernatural (which, for instance, led the local constabulary to wear epaulettes with amulets to guard them against bullets), mullahs used their linguistic skills to cultivate an everyday life in which words and sentences were not only for technical or pragmatic use but equally for curing, assisting, and enchanting bodies and minds.<sup>17</sup> Grenard wrote that "they sell all kinds of amulets, i.e., coins, pieces of jade, consecrated strips of paper full of scriptures (*tumar*), fruit, and consecrated pieces of bread, which have the power to captivate the indifferent (*isitma*) or conversely to calm overenthusiastic lovers (*suutma*). The various offices of witchcraft [*sic*] are held by irregular mullahs, incomplete as people say (*chala*), who always wear a turban, affect scrupulous orthodoxy, and are no less exposed to the suspicion and contempt of the clergy."<sup>18</sup> In this way, armed with its early modern prestige, Persian continued to survive, almost better than ever, albeit now only as a *lingua franca cum mundo spirituum*, to pastiche Swedenborg. Or more simply as a *lingua magica*.

#### TALISMANIC SCROLLS: THE ADVENT OF A *LINGUA MAGICA*

Vertical scrolls have existed in Eastern Turkistan since the medieval period. But it seems that their economic and juridical usages have been abandoned in modern times, though the format was still very much in use in western Turkistan until the early twentieth century, especially for endowment deeds (*waqf-nama*), genealogical charts (*shajara*), or other secular and religious decrees and acts, such as *yarliq* (royal commands), *wasiqa* (endowments), fatwas, and so on.<sup>19</sup>

Three documents suggest that in Xinjiang, genealogy was also a major subject of scrolls, often covering a strong devotional aspect. The first of these is a calligraphic genealogical scroll of the Khwaja Sufi dynasty, which ruled over the Tarim Basin from 1680 till the Qing imperial conquest of 1759.<sup>20</sup> Comparable in size to other genealogical trees found in Central Asia, the scroll measures 424 × 275 centimeters. Attached one to the other, the ten sheets of paper that compose it are pasted onto canvas. With the exception of the title, the calligraphy is in fine *naskh* script, usually in black ink, except on the occasion of the second rendering of

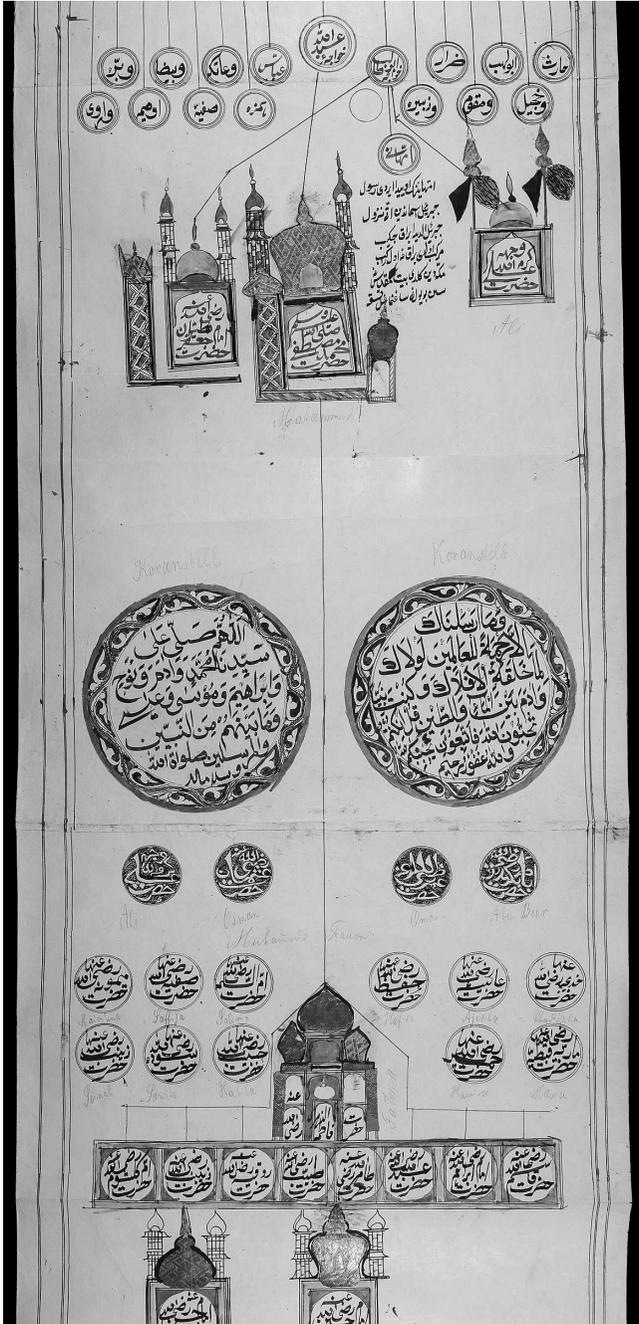


FIGURE 10. Sainthood inscribed: genealogical scroll of the Khwajas. Lund University Library, Lund, Sweden. MS Jarring prov. 561.

the Prophet Muhammad's name, which is instead given in white lettering. Verses 31–34 of the third *sura*, Ali 'Imran, along with the well-known *hadith qudsi* "Were it not for your sake, We would not have created the universe," close the section of the scroll devoted to the genealogies of the prophets who preceded Muhammad. The rest of the text is in Persian and is largely given over to short biographical notes of some of the people mentioned, including dates of death. The last section of the scroll repeats the prayers to Muhammad and quotes Quran 33:56, to wit "God and His angels bless his Prophet. O believers, do you also bless him, and pray him peace." Before concluding with a few last *salawat* (praises), the ending lines reveal the name of the scribe (*katib al-huruf*) as al-Hajji Isma'il Bukhari, a personage who has not yet been identified. The document is likely to have been produced at some point during the lifetime of the three last generations of Afaqi Khwajas, that is to say, between 1751 and 1826.

As for the work's geographical provenance, we have several clues. Together, the use of the Persian language, the quality of the calligraphy, the calligrapher's *nisba* (referring to his place of origin in Bukhara) and the fact that the Afaqi Khwaja Hasan left behind descendants after his exile and death in Transoxiana, suggest that the document may have come from that region. However, we know that Persian was still reasonably well known among members of a Xinjiang elite in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; that the *nisba* refers to an individual's birthplace or lineage, not to the place of a work's composition; and that, according to oral investigations, several families who claimed to be Khwaja Afaq's relatives long maintained themselves in eastern Central Asia, including southern Kazakhstan and the region around Kashgar. Therefore, a provenance from Xinjiang is also very possible.

Within the milieu of the Sufi order, meanwhile the production and exhibition of such a genealogical tree (*shajara*) may have served a number of more specific purposes. This is certainly the case in Eastern Turkistan, as I discovered during research in western China in July 2008 and August 2010. In both environments, I observed how *shajara* documents might serve in various ways to foster the workings of a particular Sufi order. Often, for instance, saintly genealogies perform a function in the initiation of new disciplines, their recitation from memory serving as a kind of initiatory devotional discipline. As consensually authoritative accounts of the past, genealogical documents also serve as a point of reference in the adjudication of controversies and conflicts within the order, particularly when relating to problems of succession. And as rich demonstrations of calligraphic skill, these documents are often presented to members as monuments of a Sufi order's aesthetic as well as spiritual achievements. We cannot be certain, of course, but the Khwaja Sufi scroll may very well have exercised a similarly diverse set of religious functions. Produced within a forum of competition with other aristocratic households, prestigious Sufi lineages in particular, the scroll served to highlight both the high-status Sharif origin of the family and the hereditary succession of its spiritual leaders. At the same time, the manuscript's remarkable aesthetic qualities

served to impress upon those who saw in it the numinous force of the Khwajas' supernatural authority.

The devotional and magical nature of the Khwaja Sufi *shajara* is visible in a second document produced by the same calligrapher. Put on sale in Paris in March 2014, the scroll presents the same contents as the first scroll, including the Quran and hadith quotations. The design and the size, however, are different (being 608 × 29 centimeters), and here and there we find some variations. Hajji Isma'il Bukhari signed as *li-mu'allifih wa katibih* (by the author and scribe), and there are more biographical explanations in Persian, as for example in the case of Afrasyab, the mythical king of Firdawsi's *Shah-nama*, about whom we read in Persian on the scroll that "he was king of Turkistan beyond Transoxiana and the lands of China [*maliki-yi Turkistan az hadd-i Mawarannahr wa Diyar-i Chin bud*]." What is striking about this manuscript is the repetitive use of large circles, symbolizing halos of blessing power (*baraka*) for the names *Muhammad Rasulullah* and *Hazrat-i Fatima*, along with the multiplication of blessings (*salla allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*). These are all graphic signs that manifest, and call for, devotion. If Arabic of course remains the language of Islamic sacredness on this second scroll, Persian appears as the language of Sufi devoutness.

A third document confirms this impression that genealogies of the Khwaja Sufis can be understood as magical scrolls. This is not in the technical sense of *simiya* (occult science) or *sihir* (magic), but in the broader meaning of enchantment and intercession, of rendering the paper document a written intermediary between its readers and God. In this regard, the paper document acted in a similar way to the architecture of a shrine. Previously preserved in the collections of the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden and offered to the Lund University Library in 2008, the third *shajara* scroll is mostly composed in late Chaghatai Turkish with some Arabic and Persian.<sup>21</sup> Probably produced in the early twentieth century—a time of declining knowledge of Persian in the Sufi circles of Xinjiang—the document once again displays the detailed Afaqi family line of the Khwaja Sufis. The interesting point here is not the language but the particular iconic signs surrounding holy names. The anonymous artist drew little cupolas, minarets, and columns on the names of the prophets and saints in order literally to enshrine the holy figures listed in the document. This was particularly the case with the names of Muhammad and Fatima, both objects of great veneration. This colorful iconography, with its circles, strips, and scriptural use of language, recalls that of other magical objects in Central Asia, such as the Sufi talismanic shirts called *libas al-taqwa*, an expression from Quran 7:26.<sup>22</sup>

The four other documents under discussion here are talismans *stricto sensu*.<sup>23</sup> Unlike the preceding items, they were composed by mullahs who probably came from the lower classes. Thanks to the ethnographical study of Islamic clerics in Turfan region undertaken by Jianxin Wang in the 1990s, we know precisely how these talismanic scrolls were produced:

Ismayil Qarahaji practices two kinds of amulet (*retname tomari*). The amulet is used for preventing illnesses and misfortunes, and curing light ailments and vexations. It has a large range of applications such as healing unknown ailments or repelling the incantations cast by evil-willed sorcerers. It is made of a long narrow piece of white paper, about ten centimeters wide and 500 centimeters long, rolling up in the size of a cigar. It is written fully with fixed spells and selected Quranic verses. It consists of an introduction paragraph, twenty main paragraphs, and a conclusion paragraph. The introduction explains its purpose and merits, each of twenty main paragraphs contains two parts to introduce troubles and desired results in Uyghur and some Quranic verses showing expelling power in Arabic, and the conclusion is composed of some hymns written in Arabic. An amulet can be effective only as long as the owner keeps it at hand. For maintaining its effectiveness after getting the desired result, amulets must be recited, preferably once every month, but at least once in a year. A simple rite will be held when giving amulet to a client. Since the religious importance of this ceremony lies in its recitation by the maker or an Islamic leader, neither observers nor any complicated procedure involved. As Ismayil Qarahaji introduced to me what he did in the past, he usually puts a teacup full of water on a table, and takes out a prepared amulet, unfolds it and writes down the client's name at the end of the text. After that, he starts the presentation rite. He recites all content of amulet. Then after his concluding prayer, he blows his breath onto the water of the teacup (a symbolic action of soaking the sacred power of Quranic verses into the water), and let the client drink the water and hands over that amulet.<sup>24</sup>

Grenard and Dutreuil de Rhins also collected two comparable scrolls in the course of their expedition. Called *asnad-i du'a* (or *asna-du'a*), which means "prayer document," they both measure 170 × 9 centimeters and are written in Chaghatai with Arabic prayers and some Persian specific vocabulary. They both date from the late nineteenth century. The first talisman targets the demon Ibn Sabyan and stipulates that anyone who keeps the paper talisman with him will be under God's protection against djinns, evil spirits (*diw*), male demon (*albasti*), and other evils. Women especially must keep the talisman with them every day. This is explained by the following story. During a battle, King Solomon encountered a giant and asked him who he was. The giant said his name was Ibn Sabyan and explained that he penetrated the bodies of pregnant women to kill their fetuses. On hearing this, Solomon composed a prayer so as to struggle against Ibn Sabyan's devilry. We can therefore understand that the talisman was made to protect women during pregnancy. Concerning its language precisely, beside the reference to Solomon, famously known in the Persian tradition as the one who masters the secret 'language of birds' (*mantiq al-tayr*, taken from Quran 27:15), we find a series of terms holding negative, even nihilistic, values, which were quite unusual in Chaghatai and here served an apotropaic function. These terms were *ziyandash* (noxious), *zakhm* (trauma), *gunahkar* (sinner), and *nabud* (annihilated). In the same way that amulets represent wild beasts, or parents give children apotropaic names (the name of a physical or moral defect, for example), in explicitly naming calamities the talisman resorted to Persian words to ward off evil powers.

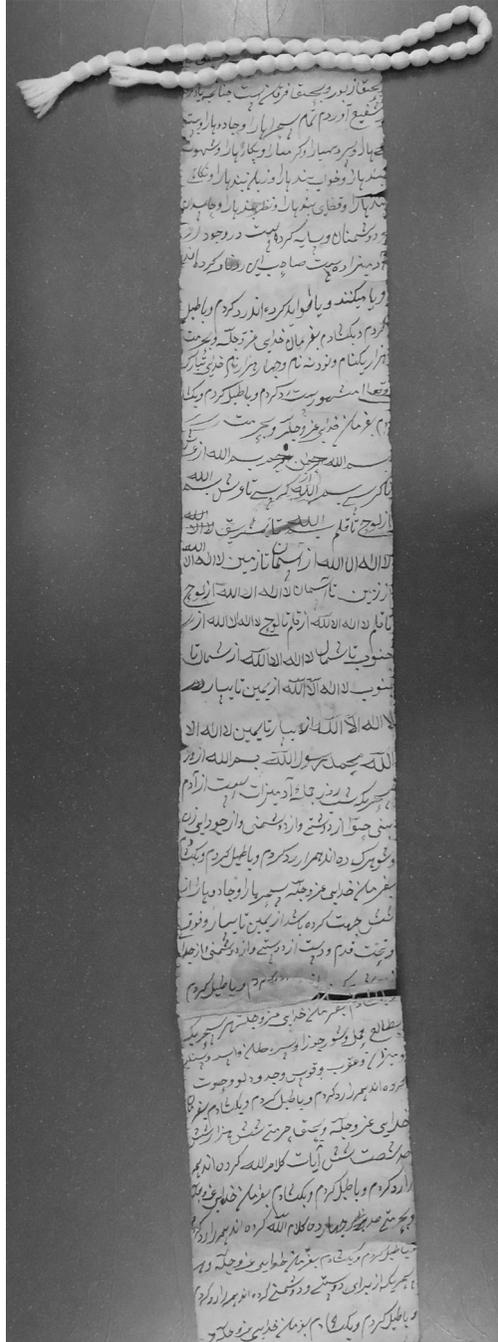


FIGURE 11. *Lingua magica*: talismanic scroll used as a countercharm. Lund University Library, Lund, Sweden. MS Jarring prov. 452.

The second talismanic scroll is dedicated to Kithmir, the dog of the Companions of the Cave (*ashab al-kahf*, from Quran 18:7–26). The text does not provide any explanation about this attribution. Like the first talisman, it is said that anyone who keeps the document with him will be under God's protection against evil forces. The bearer will likewise be cherished in both worlds, and protected against afflictions, the devil's oppression, the wrath of kings, false accusations, and all manner of other calamities. The second half of the scroll is more precise and focuses on love affairs. If someone was in love with someone else, the scribe would read this amulet and blow on either an apple, candy, or anything sweet and edible, and then the lover would give it to the beloved, rendering the latter madly in love with him or her. If a husband did not behave correctly with his wife, the scribe would write this amulet, and she would then keep it with her: the couple would live thereafter in happy tenderness. If a woman wants to bind (*öru bol*) someone, she would blow three times to the left of the beloved and he would become mad with love for her. For a man, the procedure would be that he blows three times to her right. As regards the uses of Persian what is interesting in this second section, and in the invocation at the end of the scroll, is the rich lexis of love and pain (quite common in Chaghatai), which comes from Persian elegiac poetry. It includes syntagmas like *dard-i firaq* (pain of separation), *diwana-yi shayda* (love madness), *khun-i jigar* (deep affliction), *'ashiq-i biqarar* (passionate lover), *khar khar* (anxious desire) and so on. Clearly, the language of love is Persian, which here serves the purpose of reification. Inspired by the technique of elegiac poetry, objectifying its heroes, the talisman makes a diverse and comprehensive use of the poetic vocabulary of passion to arouse that same passion and make it a reality rather than a literary fiction.

The third item in this talismanic corpus deals also with love stories, using the same idioms in a different way. Preserved in the Jarring collection in Lund (Prov. 14), the scroll measures 110 × 12 centimeters and can probably be dated to the early twentieth century. The text is in Arabic and late Chaghatai/early Uyghur, mixed with Persian.<sup>25</sup> Explicitly called a talisman (*tumar*), the scroll is made for both men and women and should be kept on one's person in order to be effective. Its aim is to awaken love and unite couples, either by drawing a lover to their beloved or by maintaining long-term relationships. In the latter case, it is stipulated that the lover must carry the talisman on a Thursday and whisper to the right of the beloved three times, "By order of God." Other magical techniques are also described. Then, in the final invocation (which mentions God, Adam and Eve, the archangels, Muhammad and Fatima), reference is made to the legendary literary couples Layla and Majnun and Yusuf and Zulaykha, who thus appear less as inaccessible mystical allegories than as embodiments of the vicissitudes of ordinary emotional life. Here again, the talisman maker had recourse to the Persian elegiac tradition. At the linguistic level, the text on the talisman mainly repeated the expression "passionate lover" (*'ashiq-i biqarar*), used in lines 9, 11, 17, 35, and 50,

which characterizes the overall usage of Persian in that scroll. By recurrence and anaphora rather than by the literary synonymization of the preceding case, this locution assumes a performative function similar to the more usual ritualistic iterations of Islamic talismanic scrolls. It is this repetition of specific phrases, whether Quranic or not, that empowers the efficacy of the written talisman.<sup>26</sup>

To focus more squarely on their shared linguistic features, all of these documents were written in Chaghatai Turkish with Persian usages. This does not mean that Xinjiang did not issue talismans in Persian. In fact, the Jarring collection features a very long scroll of approximately five meters in length that was composed in Persian and Arabic sometime between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is more precisely a counter-charm (*radd-nama*) against all kinds of magic, which ends with a series of invocations in Arabic. Against each of the magical actions listed extensively in the text, using astrology, horoscope, divination, spells, the Quran, hadith, and the names of God, the prophets, the martyrs and the saints, the scribe wrote the same formula: “all of them, I rejected I dissolved I subdued by God’s order the Mighty and Majestic [*hama-ra radd kardam wa batil kardam wa bikushadam bifarman-i khuda-yi ‘azza wa jalla*].”<sup>27</sup> The Persian sentence is repeated over and over in order to draw on divine power and to activate the counter-charm in a way that is comparable with other crucial phrases used in Islamic talismans to activate the text by means of verbal incantations in the first-person singular (e.g., the Arabic *as’aluk*, “I ask you,” and *a’udhubik* “I take refuge in you”).<sup>28</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Overall, we have seen four talismanic scrolls that manifest not only the survival of Persian until the early twentieth century, but also its transformation into a *lingua magica* in Xinjiang. This *lingua magica* functioned through a rhetorically limited but socially widespread set of linguistic functions that the scrolls performed by way of apotropaic reification, performativity by recurrence, and verb activation.

In contrast with a top-down historiography of Persian that tends to focus on high literary production to observe the social realities of a language and the culture it carries, this chapter has taken another methodological path by looking at both the quantity of that production in the pre-print age and its most popular, albeit overlooked, documents, namely, talismans.<sup>29</sup> As Thibaut d’Hubert shows in his chapter 2 in this volume, on eastern Bengal, recognizing the ritual usage of Persian refines our understanding of the literary economy of this lingua franca as it operated at the level of masses across the frontiers of Eurasia. On the basis of a brief survey of what Persian texts were actually copied, written, and understood in Xinjiang from the eighteenth century to the early 1900s, it appears that Persian learning experienced a paradoxical fate in the region. As if the prestige of Persian had given birth to a lingua franca and then killed it because of its confinement to

a small elite, that prestige also generated a linguistic aura that transformed poetic vocabulary into magic tricks.

The social profile of Xinjiang's Persian-speakers, or rather Persian-users, remains difficult to identify with precision. Yet for the majority of them, an ideal-type can still be recognized. Far from being a cosmopolitan *homme de lettres* and citizen of a republic of letters, the Persian-user in Xinjiang was generally a mullah or an *akhund* (cleric) who had been trained in a local *maktab* school, sometimes in a more senior madrasa, and who had been appointed to a mosque or shrine in a village or urban neighborhood. His circle of acquaintances was composed of Muslim men and women from various backgrounds. But it was limited to a local scale, obeying rules of spoken sociability that were expressed exclusively in the Chaghatai Turkic language.

#### NOTES

1. Ma Taibaba was one of the three representatives (*khalifas*) of the Naqshbandi Sufi master Hidayatullah/Afaq Khwaja (d. 1694) in northwestern China (excluding Eastern Turkistan at this period). The famous Abu al-Futuh al-Sini/Ma Laichi (d. 1753) was among Ma Taibaba's successors. See Alexandre Papas and Ma Wei, "Sufi Lineages among the Salars: An Overview," in *Muslims in Amdo Tibetan Society: Multidisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Marie-Paule Hille, Bianca Horlemann, and Paul Nietupski (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 109–34.

2. For a recent discussion on the disappearance of Persian learning in China proper, see Masumi Masumoto, "Secularization and Modernization of Islam in China: Educational Reform, Japanese Occupation and the Disappearance of Persian Learning," in *Islamic Thought in China: Sino-Muslim Intellectual Evolution from the 17th to the 21st Century*, ed. Jonathan Lipman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 171–96, which shows that Persian, perceived as the Sufi idiom par excellence, came to be considered a barrier to modern reform and eventually disappeared in Reformist curricula in favor of Chinese and Arabic. Persian learning was nonetheless preserved in a few villages of northern China until the Cultural Revolution.

3. Neither *Uyghur, özbek, tatar qadimki äsärklär tizimlik* (Kashgar: Qäshqär Uyghur Näshriyatı, 1989) nor Amina Abdurahman and Jin Yu-Ping, "Une vue d'ensemble des manuscrits tchagatay du Xinjiang," *Cahiers d'Asie centrale* 8 (2000): 35–62, help much here either. The *Sobranie vostochnykh rukopisei Akademii Nauk Uzbekskoi SSR* (Catalogue of Oriental Manuscripts of the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek Soviet Republic), edited by Aleksandr A. Semenov et al. between 1952 and 1987, and cited below as SVR, is not representative, but it includes little-known Persian references from Eastern Turkistan such as Nasir 'Ali Sirhindī's *Takhmis-i Diwan-i Hafiz* copied by Rahim Baqi Yarkandi in 1712 (1124) (SVR, 2: 149, MS 176); a collection of Sufi texts copied in Tashmaliq (outside Kashgar) by Mulla Genje-yi Kashghari in 1844 (1260) (SVR, 3: 270, 288 and 4: 39, MS 586); and *Nawadir al-Ma'arif* by Muhammad Dabhibdi al-Naqshbandi (d. 1776), copied by Mulla Muhammad Nazar Qaraqashi in 1846 (1262) (SVR, 8: 439–40, MS 8590/1). See also the composite volume of Sufi poetry and prose copied by Ibrahimjan ibn Mulla Fayzi Ishan in Kashgar in 1858 (1275) described in *Katalog sufijskikh proizvedenii XVIII–XX vv. iz sobranii Instituta Vostokovedeniia im. Abu Raikhana al-Biruni Akademii Nauk Respubliki Uzbekistan* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2002), 54, MS 9884/2.

4. Martin Hartmann, "Die osttürkischen Handschriften der Sammlung Hartmann," *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen zu Berlin* 7, 2 (1904): 1–21.

5. Officially 560 but recent discoveries increased the amount.

6. Lund University Library: Jarring Collection, <http://laurentius.ub.lu.se/jarring/browse/idno/1.html>. Call numbers start with "Prov." (provisional no.). A current project aims at updating the

catalogue, electronically digitizing, annotating, and editing a part of the collection; see “Chaghatai 2.0,” <https://uyghur.ittc.ku.edu>. Both catalogue and manuscripts themselves provide, from time to time, names or titles of ownership (mainly *akhunds* in fact), but it remains extremely difficult to trace the itinerary of books. E.g., Prov. 73 gives Qadir Akhund (fol. 1a), Sabit Akhund (fol. 93b, misspelled Sa’it by Jarring) and, in Chinese (cover), “This book is the property of Han Ziyuan of Yarkand East Gate trading [*Shache Dongguan shangye Han Ziyuan shu*].” Thanks to Arienne Dwyer and Akbar Amat for these last data. The name Niyaz Agha Khan also appears on the cover, apparently as an agent (*katim*, miswritten *katam*?).

7. Jarring did not correctly identify these two hagiographical dictionaries; on the impact of Sufi Allahyar (d. 1723) on madrasa education in Eastern Turkistan, see Abudurehemu Wubuli, “Doğu Türkistan medreselerinde islam düşüncesi: Süfî Allahyar’ın Sebâtîl-âcizin adlı eseri ekseninde inceleme” (PhD diss., Ankara Üniversitesi, 2015).

8. See esp. Oleg Akimushkin, introduction to *Sha-Mahmud Churas khronika* (Moscow: Nauka, 1976); Minoru Sawada, “Three Groups of *Tadhkira-i khwājagān*,” in *Studies on Xinjiang Historical Sources in 17–20th Centuries*, ed. James Millward, Shinmen Yasushi, and Sugawara Jun (Tokyo: Toyo Bunko, 2010), 9–30; Alexandre Papas, introduction to *Soufisme et politique entre Chine, Tibet et Turkestan* (Paris: Jean Maisonneuve, 2005).

9. Mozafar Bakhtyar, “China,” in *World Survey of Islamic Manuscripts*, ed. Geoffrey Roper, vol. 4 (supplements) (London: Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, 1994), 88, 113–15.

10. Less significant but worthy of note, there is also the commission of rewritings of Chaghatai classics into late Eastern Chaghatai, as when the poet ‘Abd al-Rahim Nizari (d. ca. 1850), with the support of Kashgar’s district governor (*hakim beg*) Zuhur al-Din, himself a versifier, recomposed parts of ‘Ali Shir Nawa’i’s pentalogue (*khamasa*). See *Nizari Dastanliri*, ed. Ghulam Ghopuri (Urumqi: Millätlär Näshriyati, 1985), 2–3, 123, and 382; *Nizari Lirikliri*, ed. Muhämmättursun Bahawidin (Urumqi: Shinjang Khälq Näshriyati, 1995); *Diwani Zuhuri*, ed. Qurban Barat (Urumqi: Shinjang Khälq Näshriyati, 1995) with a facsimile of the *diwan*.

11. For more details, see Alexandre Papas, “Individual Sanctity and Islamization in the *Ṭabaqāt* Books of Jāmi, Navā’i, Lāmi’i, and Some Others,” in *Jami and the Intellectual History of the Muslim World*, ed. Thibaut D’Hubert and Alexandre Papas (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 378–423.

12. Jules-Léon Dutreuil de Rhins, *Mission scientifique dans la Haute Asie, 1890–1895, troisième partie par F. Grenard* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1898), 2, 86.

13. *Ibid.*, 132.

14. *Ibid.*, 161.

15. *Ibid.*, 232.

16. *Ibid.*, 273, 235, 168, 188, and 10.

17. *Ibid.*, 121.

18. *Ibid.*, 257.

19. Bakhtiyar Babajanov, “About a Scroll of Documents Justifying Yasawi Rituals,” in *Persian Documents: Social History of Iran and Turan in the Fifteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Nobuaki Kondo (London: Routledge, 2003), 53–72; *Mazar Documents from Xinjiang and Ferghana*, ed. Jun Sugawara and Yayoi Kawahara, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2006); *Mazar Documents from Xinjiang and Ferghana*, ed. Ashirbek Muminov, Nodirbek Abdulhatov, and Yayoi Kawahara (Tokyo: Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2007); and El’ior Karimov, *Kubraviskii vakf XVII–XIX vv.: Pis’mennye istochniki po istorii sufijskogo bratstva Kubravia v Srednei Azii* (Tashkent: Fan-Institut français d’étude sur l’Asie centrale, 2008).

20. Here I summarize the results of Alexandre Papas, “Joining the Dots between the Ḥwājas of East Turkestan: A *Şağara* Scroll Preserved at the Louvre Museum,” *Der Islam* 88 (2012): 352–65.

21. I was able to consult this scroll briefly in June 2015 in Lund. A full study will be available on the website of the “Chaghatai 2.0,” project mentioned in n. 6 above.

22. *Heaven on Earth: Art from Islamic Lands: Works from the State Hermitage Museum and the Khalili Collection*, ed. Mikhail B. Piotrovsky and J. Michael Rogers (Munich: Prestel, 2004), 98–99;

Elena Tsareva, “Talismanic Shirts of Central Asia,” *Manuscripta Orientalia* 17, 2 (2011): 54–58. Cf. Alain Epelboin, Constant Hamès, and Anne Raggi, “Cinq tuniques talismaniques récentes en provenance de Dakar (Sénégal),” in *Coran et talismans: Textes et pratiques magiques en milieu musulman*, ed. Constant Hamès (Paris: Karthala, 2007), 147–74.

23. Yasmine Alsaleh, “‘Licit Magic’: The Touch and Sight of Islamic Talismanic Scrolls” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2014), 3, 12–13, and 81–83, shows, however, that talismans are tools of devotion.

24. Jianxin Wang, *Uyghur Education and Social Order: The Role of Islamic Leadership in the Turpan Basin* (Tokyo: Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2004), 213–14 (the entire description). See also Abdurāhim Hābibullah, *Uyghur Etnografisi* (Urumqi: Shinjiang Khālq Nāshriyati, 1993; rev. ed., 2000), 249–50, 393–98.

25. More details, including pictures, on that document in Alexandre Papas, “Un rouleau talismanique du Xinjiang musulman,” *Eurasian Studies* 12 (2014): 555–59, xxiv–xxvi.

26. Alsaleh, “*Licit Magic*,” 56, 59, 64, 124, 128, and 139–40.

27. This formula is repeated on lines 9–10, 12, 26–27, 34–35, 36–37, 40–41, 43–44, 47–48, 53–54, 81–82, 83–84, 88–89, 91–92, 93–94, 96–97, 101–2, 103, 105, 108, 110, 113–14, 124–25, 130–31, 134–35, 156–57, 158–59.

28. Alsaleh, “*Licit Magic*,” 202.

29. Lithographs from Tashkent and India had circulated in Xinjiang since the late nineteenth century by the time printing started there in the 1910s.